

More solidarity with Lebanon



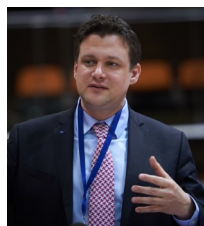
After one and a half years of work as rapporteur for Lebanon we have achieved our first major success. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has adopted our resolution "The situation in Lebanon and challenges for regional stability and European security" - based on my report - in this session week.

The oldest democracy in the Middle East is an excellent example of peaceful co-existence of people from different faiths and we should support them. The Assembly would like to develop its relations

with the Lebanese Parliament, first by inviting Lebanese parliamentarians to follow its work and then by encouraging the Lebanese Parliament to consider applying for Partnership for Democracy status with the Assembly.

The Assembly also provides the experience of the "Venice Commission" to the Lebanese Parliament to assist in revising the electoral law.

Tobias Zech,
MdB, Germany



Agramunt re-elected as PACE President



Following his re-election as PACE President for a second one-year term at the opening of the winter session, Pedro Agramunt outlined his political priorities with a plea for parliamentary

diplomacy. Agramunt wants to place the #NoHateNoFear initiative at the centre of the activities and contribute to a comprehensive European approach to migration management, based on solidarity, responsibility and respect for international commitments.

Europe - an isle of the blissful?



Dear Reader,

for most people from different parts of the world who come here it seems to be like this, however the perception of us Europeans varies: For instance the events, which take place in the Middle East for years now, touch, move and affect us quite essentially.

The counseling of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg this week reflect these considerably. The situation in Syria, in Lebanon, Gaza and the European migration policy filled the agenda of the whole Thursday-session.

Furthermore, problems in Europe are not misremembered: Attacks on journalists and the freedom of press, online media problems, cyber discrimination, for example. The last divided country in Europe, Cyprus, and the attempts for its reunion is drawn attention to through the discourse of the state president in front of the Assembly.

What currently happens in Turkey will be a hot topic in a broadly based debate in April accounting a monitoring report.

Axel Fischer, MdB

President, EPP/CD Group Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Support the Ukraine and its reforms

By Axel Fischer, MdB

Germany

In the past few years the Ukraine has made remarkable efforts in modernization of state and administration and has therefore taken the chance to work closely with the Council of Europe. Thus one is on a good track concerning constitutional reforms in the judicial system, concluding the subject of the nomination of judges and prosecutors as well as in the field of transparency and the fight against corruption.

However, I expect especially the reforms in the judicial system to be implemented quickly. There are still a lot of insisting executives. Unfortunately, this also applies for the fight against corruption where the results are still insufficient and disappoint the Ukrainian citizens.

Additional efforts are necessary to enact reforms in the fields of health care, retirement and electoral law. The increasingly harsh political climate and certain over-



reactions of Ukrainian public authorities as travel bans of Russian journalists, cause troubles.

Certainly, the crisis in the Eastern Ukraine is a permanent source of irritation. The Ukraine has obligations due to the treaties of Minsk which constitute to the duties of reforms and which are related with the implementation of the agreements of Minsk. And yet, Russian

behavior and the crisis in the Eastern Ukraine mustn't be used as excuse for deficient steps of reforming.

Both Government and Parliament have to react independently concerning constitutional legality and modernization of state and administration no matter the rise of expectations of people after the protest on the Maidan.

Meeting with Commissioner Thomas Hahn



On Tuesday the EPP-CD Group had a very focused discussion with the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations Thomas Hahn from Austria.

The postmonitoring experiences of Bulgaria

By Zsolt Németh

Hungaria

In 2016, I took part in the preparatory work of the post-monitoring process of Bulgaria getting an insight into the legislative amendment procedure in the preparatory work of the legal reform, the anti-corruption measures, the case of minorities and the condition of human rights.

I was not able to complete my task: the right wing government resigned and early election became necessary. Internal instability took over: seven Bulgarian governments between 2012 and March 2017 with different programs to be realised and followed. Legal reform stepped forward during the Borisov government.

But the general truth is: the benchmark of a legal system lays not only in the legal text itself but also in its efficient enforcement. The adaption of the anti-corruption law is still a debt to be paid by the country. However, actually the present law also gives enough room to step up effectively against corruption. In general, the problem of the Bulgarian jurisdiction system is the distrust of the Bulgarian society in the system. The first benefit of new laws could be to amend or re-establish the

trust of the society in the state.

I also had to monitor the election law, media freedom and the institution of the ombudsman. The country does not seem to have any special problems in these questions. Media in Bulgaria is colourful and plural but the basic problem remains: the owner prevails over the media. But this is not a uniquely Bulgarian phenomenon.

There is a significant Muslim minority and also a large Roma ethnic group. The situation is well known: there is a disadvantaged condition due to social and cultural background. Overcoming this can take decades. The Roma issue is an existing problem, as it is almost anywhere in Europe where larger Roma communities live.

Muslim minorities raise different questions. There is a cautious attitude of the mainly Orthodox Slavic society with the Turkish minority. Turkey with its growing ambition makes Bulgarian people watch each motion of this minority closely. The Bulgarian political elite honestly faced the grave heritage of communist dictator Zivkov's anti-Turkish measures.

No party had crossed the thin red line of the Turkish ethnic question in hope of profit in internal politics. Bulgaria

became an exceptional country in the Balkan Peninsula where ethnic war has never broken out. My own observations point to the direction that we might forward with recommendations and proposals but the Borisov government kept the ethnic peace in mind.

We need to take into account two



Zsolt Németh (Photograph: E. Véssey)

more realities. One is the demographic data. In 1980, the population was 9 million. Today, it is 7.2 million. And those who left the country are from the young generation with skills and qualification. If I wanted to word a critical note, it was that the government does not really make any step to help the demographic situation.

The other reality roots in the geographic location of Bulgaria: the country is the natural conflict-zone of the American-Russian-Turkish interests which puts the country under constant pressure. On the top of all, this is combined with the challenges the illegal migration brought.

I could acknowledge that Bulgaria does not work perfectly. But, despite all this, a question arises, how appropriate it is to keep Bulgaria practically in an ever ongoing monitoring system. Bulgaria is not one of the main problems of Europe today. I hope the next government will stand up quickly and I will be able to finish my monitoring task.



The Bulgarian Parliament in Sofia

Impressions from the Session



Legal notice

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