

## **MALTESE PARLIAMENTARIANS ATTEND THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN STRASBOURG**

The Hon Francis Agius MP, leader of the parliamentary delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, together with the Hon Joseph Debono Grech MP (member), and the Hon Marie Louise Coleiro Preca MP, the Hon Joseph Falzon MP, and the Hon Beppe Fenech Adami MP (substitute members) recently attended the Second Part of the 2009 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, held in Strasbourg.

During the first plenary meeting, a celebration was held to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe. The celebration involved a short film featuring extracts from speeches made to the Assembly in the last 60 years, a statement by Mr Lluís Maria de Puig - President of the Assembly, and a musical interlude from the brass quartet "Zythos" of the Strasbourg conservatoire, who played the European anthem "Ode to joy".

In his address Mr de Puig remarked that through its action, the Council of Europe has challenged the theories that dominated political life for centuries, according to which some peoples, cultures and socio-economic conditions were predestined for democracy, and others not. He also recalled what he described as "so many good reasons for the Council of Europe to persevere in its mission". Mr de Puig stressed that "Our first duty is never to forget the slogan of the pioneers of European integration – never again. Nobody is ever proof against fresh excesses, which is why we must keep alert so as never to allow a recurrence of the ills that the founders of our organisation set out to eradicate," (The full text of the speech may be accessed on the following webpage: [http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http://assembly.coe.int/President/dePuig/Discours/2009/20090427\\_60-anniversary-CoE.htm](http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http://assembly.coe.int/President/dePuig/Discours/2009/20090427_60-anniversary-CoE.htm) )

Following a request by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Maltese delegation met Mr Thorbjorn Jagland – former prime minister and current president of the Norwegian Parliament. As one of the candidates for the position of Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Jagland put forward his proposals for the better functioning of the Council and the effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights. One of the proposals that featured prominently in the cordial discussion that followed referred to the importance of placing the issue of human trafficking and illegal migration on the Council of Europe's agenda.

During their stay in Strasbourg the Members of the Maltese delegation also met with the Parliamentary Delegation of Georgia following a request by the latter. The discussion concerned an item on the Agenda of the Plenary Session with regard to the review of the action taken by Georgia and Russia on Resolution 1647 (2009) adopted by the PACE in January 2009. Mrs. Choira Taktakishvili – Vice Chair of legal issues committee, Parliament of Georgia – and Mr. Giorgi Gabashvili - Chairman of Education, Science and Culture Committee, Parliament of Georgia - remarked on the report submitted by the co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee which concluded that while Georgia has not yet fully complied with all of the Assembly's demands, Russia has failed to comply with most of the demands and might even be seen as moving further away from the minimum conditions for meaningful dialogue. The ensuing discussion focused on the situation on the ground in Georgia, the importance that dialogue should be the only solution to the political crisis and that any further proposals for a solution should focus on issues that are undisputed by both Russia and Georgia.

During a meeting of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, the Hon Francis Agius MP underlined the emphasis on the preventive aspects of health when referring to the right to health, the application of the 'polluter pays principle' to industry in the causation of occupational diseases, and dietary improvement as exemplified by the fresh fruit scheme in all schools.

At another meeting of the above-mentioned Committee which was considering a report on gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and children, the Hon Marie Louise Coleiro Preca MP stressed the importance that any integration measures aimed at immigrants arriving in Europe from counties with diverse traditions and cultures, must adhere and be in line with the legal, moral and cultural traditions of the adoptive host country. During the same part-session the Hon Coleiro Preca also took part in a Socialist womens' working group wherein she referred to the gender

equality principle with regard to both the issue of the nomination of judges to the European Court of Human Rights and to the forthcoming election of a new secretary general of the Council of Europe.

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