

PRESS RELEASE - PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE - AUTUMN SESSION, STRASBOURG

Climate change, water management, population development, migration, the Mediterranean state of health and small national economies all featured in the contributions made by the Maltese Delegation during the Autumn Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) between 28 September and 2 October 2009. The Members who attended this part-session at the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg were Hon Joe Debono Grech, Hon Beppe Fenech Adami, Hon Joseph Falzon and Hon Marie Louise Coleiro Preca.

At the opening of its autumn session, the Assembly decided to hold a current affairs debate on the situation of human rights defenders and the growing violence in the North Caucasus region. Parliamentarians also had the opportunity to discuss the reconsideration of the already ratified credentials of the Russian delegation, the challenge of the credentials of the Moldovan delegation and the situation one year after the war between Georgia and Russia.

Following an election held on Tuesday 29 September 2009, the President of the Assembly declared Mr Thorbjørn Jagland (Norway) as the new Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Mr Jagland thanked all Members of the Assembly for their support and promised to continue to promote the dialogue between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, the reason being that one "cannot achieve anything without close contact with all the governments of this great organization".

Contributions by the Maltese Delegation

The Members of the Delegation attended both the Assembly where they took part in the election of the new Secretary General, and also a number of Committee Meetings.

During the debate on "The challenges posed by climate change" Hon Joseph Falzon MP and Hon Marie Louise Coleiro Preca MP addressed the Assembly. Hon Falzon brought to the Members' attention the crucial climate negotiations in Copenhagen later this year where all countries are key players in efforts to "seal the deal", which event he described could be an admirable exercise in global citizenship. He stressed that the issue of climate change is not some vague possibility far off in the future but rather a real risk that could easily accelerate and outpace forecasts. Hon Marie Coleiro Preca brought to the fore another area of socio-economic activity, this being the tourism industry which is considered to be a highly climate-sensitive sector. She said that this sector should be given its due importance as it has the potential to lift people out of poverty through employment and the entrepreneurial opportunities it provides. Hon Falzon also had the opportunity to address the Assembly on "Water: a strategic challenge for the Mediterranean basin". He noted that the concentration of population in littoral states around the Mediterranean is resulting in water resources being over-exploited. Hon Falzon commented that it is very unfortunate that we lack tangible actions to achieve targets set out by the Kyoto protocol and numerous conventions and treaties which are all focused on this particular topic.

During his stay in Strasbourg Hon Falzon attended a panel discussion organized by the Council of Europe Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage with the support of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education. The discussion was organized as a contribution to the above

mentioned debate on "The challenges posed by climate change". He also attended a debate set up jointly by the PACE and the Alsace Regional Council on "How best to do green business in Europe and the United States".

The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee met during the session to, amongst other items, vote on a number of amendments arising out of an opinion report prepared by Hon Francis Agius MP on behalf of the Migration, Refugees and Population Committee. The Migration Committee was asked to formulate an opinion on the McCafferty Report - "Fifteen years since the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action". The report includes issues relating to family planning, assisted childbirth, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, family planning, abortion services and gender equity and equality in primary and secondary education. Initially this item was scheduled to be discussed also in the Plenary Assembly but was dropped at the last moment following a request by the PACE Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Committee so that it may have more time to submit its contribution on the subject matter.

The challenges faced by small national economies is the subject of a Motion for a Resolution submitted by Hon Marie Louise Coleiro Preca MP. The motion was accepted, and the Assembly approved the decision of the Bureau to refer it to the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development for its consideration and report. The document speaks about costs borne by small peripheral economies, which costs may be attributed to inability to benefit from economies of scale, a higher reliance on strategic imports such as food and fuels, limited absorption capacity, the issue of indivisibility of costs and exposure to external shocks. Hon Coleiro Preca calls on the Assembly to raise awareness of the vulnerability of small economies. (*PACE Doc. 11975 may be accessed on the following* *webpage:*
<http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/workingdocs/doc09/edoc11975.htm>)

Following a request from the European Friends of Israel, the Members of the Delegation met with Ms Meital Goor, Israeli Affairs Officer, and with Mr Nuno Martins, European Affairs Officer. The purpose of the meeting was that of formally extending an invitation to the delegation for a two day mission to Auschwitz in January 2010 in commemoration of the international Holocaust Remembrance Day. This date was officially established by the Council of Europe in 2002 and subsequently also by the United Nations.

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