

Press Release

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Free and fair elections are the basic condition of democratic development, says PACE President in Baku

Strasbourg, 09.07.2007 - Lasting prosperity and sustainable development are not possible without respecting the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, declared René van der Linden, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, at the end of his visit to Azerbaijan on 8-9 July 2007.

The President stressed, in particular, the importance of free and fair elections which are the basis of every democratic system. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that the 2008 presidential elections take place in accordance with Council of Europe (CoE) standards and mark a striking difference with the 2005 parliamentary elections.

Mr van der Linden urged the authorities to intensify cooperation with the CoE in order to improve election legislation, in particular as regards the composition and functioning of electoral commissions and the rights of observers.

Freedom of demonstration, of the media, unrestricted functioning of political parties and independent justice are the pillars of democracy, underlined Mr van der Linden. The authorities must very seriously examine concerns over existing problems in this area and take the necessary measures to comply with CoE standards.

Particular attention must be given to the cases of journalists in prison and other persons allegedly imprisoned for political reasons. Those which are in bad health should be released on humanitarian grounds.

In Resolution 1416 (2005), the Assembly stated that "considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces". Regrettably, this situation has not changed since my last visit in 2005, said the PACE President. Political leaders on both sides must show determination to give a new political impetus to the negotiations. In any case, Armenia and Azerbaijan must respect their commitment taken upon accession to the CoE to use only peaceful means for settling the conflict.

The Assembly contributes to democratic reform in Azerbaijan through its monitoring procedure, which is a privileged tool of assistance and dialogue between PACE and the authorities of Azerbaijan, concluded Mr van der Linden.

The visit to Azerbaijan was the last part of PACE President's trip to the South Caucasus, during which he also visited Armenia and Georgia.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).