

AVRUPA KONSEYİ PARLAMENTER MECLİSİ GENEL KURULU

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26 Ocak 2015, Pazartesi

Communication from the Committee of Ministers

Ms Tülin ERKAL KARA (*Turkey*)* – At the end of January, a Turk, Cemil Kaya, was killed by the police in Belgium by a tear gas canister which hit him near his heart. We must make sure that we avoid the growing polarisation that is threatening social cohesion in Europe. In that context, what measures are you intending to take to calm social tensions and to prevent polarisation and hate acts of any kind?

Progress report

Mr Şaban DİŞLİ (*Turkey*) – One positive result of the Arab Spring was the emergence of Tunisian democracy. In the last three months of last year, Tunisians took part in parliamentary and presidential elections. The parliamentary elections of 26 October 2014 and the two rounds of the presidential elections were free, inclusive and transparent. The electoral administration was favourable, in that its interaction with international observers and civil society demonstrated a high degree of professionalism, which served the integrity of the electoral process. However, the low participation of young people, women and disadvantaged groups in the electoral process was concerning, as was the poor coverage of the elections in the Tunisian media.

The two rounds of the presidential elections on 23 November and 21 December 2014 marked a crucial stage in Tunisia's post-revolutionary transition. It is evident that the two rounds of voting in the presidential election were completed in accordance with democratic standards. The Independent High Authority for Elections contributed to the peaceful and precise conduct in both stages of the election. A culture of democracy was shown not only by the electoral administration body but by the people of Tunisia, who went to the polls with the spirit of democratic maturity. That manifestation of the will of the Tunisian people through free and fair elections is an exemplary development both for the country and for the entire region. It takes us towards a secure, stable and prosperous future. The major obstacle to progress is the state of the Tunisian economy, especially as tourism is struggling and the burden of the huge number of Libyans in Tunisia is piling up. However, I am confident that the process of democratic transition will be successfully concluded in Tunisia.

27 Ocak 2015, Salı

Address by Mr Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland

Mr Ömer SELVİ (*Turkey*) – In 2009, Europe entered the deepest recession since the end of the Second World War, and Ireland was among the countries that were shaken by the crisis. The economic assessments of international institutions indicate that Ireland is on the way to returning to a pre-recession level. The pace of the Irish economy's recovery and its exit from the bail-out programme over the past two years is impressive. I congratulate you on it, and ask you for your comments on the speed.

Debate on The humanitarian situation of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons

Mr A.K. TÜRKEŞ (*Turkey*) – I thank the rapporteur and the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons for their timely effort to draw the attention of the international community to the plight of Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

The ongoing efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, based on Ukraine's territorial integrity and international law, should be supported by the international community and the relevant parties, and the illegal annexation of Crimea should not be recognised. Despite violations, the Minsk cease-fire agreements are the only agreed framework to advance further with the peace talks. The recent Minsk contact group meetings should be welcomed. I firmly hope to hear more news of progress towards a solution from new rounds of peace talks.

The difficult conditions faced by Ukrainian refugees and IDPs have been well observed by many international and non-governmental organisations. The report shows that the capacity of the local authorities to deal with such an intense influx of people fleeing from conflict has been exceeded. International assistance is of the utmost importance in addressing this humanitarian crisis. The activities of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons will without doubt provide fresh impetus to the current efforts.

The security and protection of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people, put under growing pressure by the de facto authorities in Crimea, deserve particular attention. Clear manifestations of a policy of pressure and intimidation against the Crimean Tatars have been observed. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights notes that there is increasing intimidation towards Crimean Tatars under the false pretext of combating terrorism. The current situation in the Crimea is alarming because of ongoing human rights violations, including restrictions on the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association and religion. The human rights situation in Crimea should be at the top of the agenda of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

In order to demonstrate our sensitivity and concern, we emphasised to the Russian leadership that their current stance on the conflict in Ukraine and Crimea is against everyone's interests, including theirs.

The humanitarian situation of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons – resumed debate

Mr SELVİ (*Turkey*) – We tabled the amendment because of the systematic discrimination against, intimidation of and intrusive searches of the homes, businesses and public and religious organisations of Crimean Tatars, which have been going on since the annexation of Crimean territory. The raids by local security forces on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis building in Simferopol on 16 September and the Yalta mosque on 22 September are cases in point.

The humanitarian situation of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons – resumed debate

Mr SELVİ (*Turkey*) – There are clear manifestations of police oppression and intimidation against Crimean Tatars. Respecting the rights and freedoms of the Tatar community is essential for the preservation of peace and stability on the peninsula. The international community should continue to follow the situation there closely.

Free debate

Ms BİLGEHAN (*Turkey*)* – Today, as we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, I would like to share with you an anecdote and a letter from the historical archives of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Turkey managed to remain at the margins of the Second World War but, as we heard yesterday in the tragic testimony of a survivor, in France, as in other countries of Europe, under the occupation, a number of Jews were arrested, among whom there was even a Prime Minister, Léon Blum, the famous President of the Council in the Popular Front. He was imprisoned and his son was sent to a concentration camp in Lübeck. Desperate, Léon Blum called the Turkish ambassador in Paris, asking for the assistance of the President of the Republic, İsmet İnönü, who enjoyed a good reputation internationally. Blum asked whether he could help him to save his son. Miraculously, İnönü intervened and managed to have Léon Blum's son released.

Blum wrote a letter of thanks to the Turkish ambassador from his prison cell in Bourrassol. It is dated 22 February and says: “Ambassador, please accept my warmest thanks for the care taken to communicate the good news brought by President İnönü. I would like you in particular to express my profound gratitude to President İsmet İnönü. It comes as a great relief to me in my present circumstances. What further adds to my satisfaction is that his friendly intervention benefited not only my son but all his comrades, with whom he shares a common fate. Yours

gratefully and most sincerely, Léon Blum". Léon Blum's signature is on the letter. This rather touching letter has particular meaning for me, because President İnönü was my grandfather.

This evening, we pay our respects to all victims of the Holocaust and all those who survived, who lived through difficult times, who resisted and who managed to save lives. Thinking of them once again, I think that we would all join in saying, "Never again".

Free debate

Mr BAĞIŞ (*Turkey*) – For centuries, Turkey has been a safe haven for victims and the destitute, and today it remains so. There are 1.6 million Syrians in Turkey and we have spent \$5.5 billion to set up 230 000 tents and containers, while the international community's contribution has been only \$250 million. Turkey has so far assumed an unfair share of the humanitarian burden of the Syria conflict and should not be left alone to handle this humanitarian crisis.

Turkey also continuously delivered humanitarian assistance to the Kobani region through the zero point operation facilitated by the Turkish Red Crescent. To date, Turkey has sent 721 trucks of humanitarian equipment: the total value of the official humanitarian assistance channelled to the region has reached \$11 million.

Likewise, in response to aid appeals made by the Iraqi authorities as a result of Da'esh atrocities, Turkish agencies have delivered humanitarian assistance to populations in need: 725 trucks containing medical equipment, food and tents have been sent into northern Iraq to be distributed to all Iraqi IDPs without any discrimination. Furthermore, humanitarian aid was extended to Iraqis who have fled into Turkey due to the Da'esh advance, and three IDP shelters were built with a total capacity of 37 500.

Terrorism cannot be in any way justified and poses a great threat to international peace and security. With this understanding, Turkey actively contributes to regional and international endeavours. Any attempt to affiliate terrorism with any religion or ethnic group is utterly wrong and we do not use the terms "Jihadist", "Islamist", "Sunni", though some may think them convenient, for terrorist groups exploiting religion.

On foreign terrorist fighters, priority should be given to stopping them travelling to conflict zones at their country of departure. Our authorities are taking necessary measures to prevent third-country citizens from joining radical groups. More than 7 000 people have been included in the no-entry list and more than 1050 foreigners were deported between 2011 and 2015. We expect all source countries to take necessary steps to prevent individuals from travelling beyond their borders. The case of Hayat Boumeddiene demonstrates the importance of timely and efficient

intelligence sharing; had our authorities been previously informed about her, we could have prevented her entrance and deported her.

Mr DİŞLİ (*Turkey*) – I would like to touch upon a serious problem, that of racism and xenophobia, as I believe the right time has come for us to think about what measures will need to be taken in order to tackle these menaces that are threatening the core values on which Europe has been built.

At times, it is argued that the rising trends in racist and xenophobic sentiments in Europe are a result of economic crises and unemployment, yet surely they have ideological backgrounds. The rise of the far-right movement Pegida is a concrete example of a new type of racism. As the logic of Pegida argues that Germany belongs exclusively to Christians, this purely neo-Nazi racist approach not only poses a threat to Muslims, but represents a huge risk for Germany and Europe. That shows that xenophobia and neo-Nazism have turned into anti-Islamism in many cases.

Migrants, especially Muslims, have been the main target of violent racist attacks and hate crimes in Europe, yet hate crimes are under-reported and insufficiently classified and investigated. Recent developments in the Middle East, as well as the terrorist attacks in Paris, have the potential to strengthen anti-immigrant, racist and Islamophobic trends in Europe. Of particular concern are the extremist parties that represent a serious challenge in many European democracies. We all have to take a firm stance against hate speech, intolerance to differences and attempts to present religious and cultural differences as ground for enmity.

Likewise, in such a period when prominent world leaders meticulously avoided associating the terror acts in Paris with Islam, linking these attacks with Islam by using the term “Islamic terrorism”, which is an Islamophobic attitude, is unacceptable. I stress that terrorism has no religion or nationality and no excuse can be given for it.

European societies are pluralistic communities in which people from different nationalities and with different religions are used to living together, thus governments should again concentrate on policies to represent this pluralist social structure. We should be aware of the fact that prohibitions, limitations and pressures on values, beliefs, religions and cultures have never served any purpose other than to destroy peace in society.

Mr TÜRKEŞ (*Turkey*) – I take this opportunity to raise my concerns about the lack of dialogue – the main barrier to peace – that prevails in world politics. A hundred years has passed since the start of the First World War which swept the world into great sufferings, leaving nearly 37 million dead or wounded and not solving any problems. Despite the fact that the end of the war raised hopes for a just and

durable peace, it was followed by the Second World War and many other conflicts in the 20th century, including the ones in Europe.

Since the end of the First World War, violence has continued to dominate world politics and now we face new challenges. The persistence of violence demonstrates that, unfortunately, the bitter lessons of the past have been completely forgotten or not given enough importance. In order to solve all the problems of the past, the tool we have to use is dialogue: a constructive approach and goodwill in trying to understand each other will enable us to create a peaceful environment.

I observe with dismay that some parliamentarians are exploiting this august platform with unfounded allegations concerning the historical controversies that took place during the course of the last century, where there certainly is no scholarly consensus. Parliaments should not try to legislate on historical events and should avoid giving verdicts as courts and tribunals. If they do so, they will not serve the idea of justice, only ethnic lobbies and the politicisation of history.

While commemorating the lives lost in the conflicts of the last century, we should again be alarmed by the new threats to world peace and avoid biased attitudes towards each other.

Mr DENEMEÇ (*Turkey*) – I need to stress that, regrettably, during recent part-sessions, we have heard accusatorial and biased speeches by our Armenian colleagues about controversial historical events – this goes against the spirit of the Parliamentary Assembly. I preferred not to respond to those speeches so as not to hinder the proceedings of the Assembly by sparking a debate on an issue that should be a matter for historians. However, unabated verbal attacks by certain colleagues have prompted me to clarify some points concerning the sufferings of Armenians and Turks during the First World War.

The final years of the Ottoman Empire represent a tragic period for the peoples that made up the empire. Millions of people, regardless of their ethnic origin, suffered immensely. However, these sufferings have been presented by some Armenians in a selective way and without any legal and historical consensus. In the face of this one-sided presentation of common sufferings, Turkey adopted an approach open to dialogue and called for the establishment of a joint historical commission to study the controversy over the historical events of 1915. As politicians, we should try to find solutions to problems, not make them more complicated. Existing problems should not be politicised and emotionally abused; those who do this may benefit in the short term, but they lose in the long term.

Moreover, the President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr Erdoğan, delivered a historic message in April last year during his premiership. In his message, he expressed respect and compassion for those who lost their lives; he emphasised that millions of people from distinct ethnic and religious groups had lost their lives,

making it a collective pain. He also stated that the sufferings of the First World War should not obstruct the establishment of amicable relations between Turks and Armenians. I reiterate those calls for sympathy and dialogue and stress that we should avoid offensive discourses and adopt a more empathetic approach in this Chamber so that we can have more fruitful meetings.

28 Ocak 2015, Çarşamba

Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response

Mr DENEMEÇ (*Turkey*)* – I reiterate our condemnation of the horrible attack against *Charlie Hebdo*, which resulted in the sad deaths of not only its artists, editors and staff, but Parisian policemen. The attack was clearly aimed at the heart of freedom of expression. The intention was to divide cultures and create public outrage and an atmosphere of fear and hostility. Ultimately, the goal of such attacks is to disrupt social cohesion across Europe and alienate certain segments of society.

A disheartening development is that, following the terrorist attacks, we unfortunately observed numerous xenophobic attacks in some European countries, targeting innocent people and places of worship. However, I believe that there are also many encouraging developments that we can, and should, focus on. The unequivocal and unanimous denunciation of the attack through the unity march in Paris, which brought together world leaders, including the Turkish Prime Minister, and people of all creeds and colours, was a grand display of solidarity against terrorism.

Following the horrendous attacks, the Muslim community in Germany, with the participation of the German President and Chancellor, rallied to condemn them and declare that no act of terrorism can be attributed to any religion, ethnicity or social group as a whole. The attacks have been denounced strongly by all segments of society in Turkey and in other Muslim countries. That strong stance and solidarity is encouraging and demonstrates that these dreadful acts have been disowned by the vast majority of Muslims around the world.

I am convinced that such acts of terrorism, and rising intolerance and xenophobia in Europe, underline the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly's work. The need for co-operation in the struggle against hate speech is absolute. We must improve our efforts to tackle instabilities before they have regional and global repercussions. Again, as a parliamentarian from Turkey, which is a secular country with an Islamic majority, I express our condolences to the families of the victims and our solidarity with those who seek a peaceful world governed by mutual tolerance of different cultures and based on the values of the Council of Europe.

Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response

Mr A. K. TÜRKEŞ (*Turkey*) – I start by expressing my shock at the terrorist attacks in Paris and my sympathy for those who lost their lives, their families and all those who were hurt by this inhuman crime in one way or another.

Terrorism is a crime against humanity and cannot be justified in any circumstances. However, in order to be able to comprehend the nature of such acts of violence, we have to look beyond the surface and at the sources. Unfortunately, we have had the sources of the problem right here for too long: underdevelopment, inequality, unemployment, lack of education, mismanaged migration, failed integration policies, economic crises and deterioration of social cohesion and, most importantly, a lack of empathy.

I fear that this mix will continue to cause problems, unless reason and empathy, together with tolerance, respect and understanding other people, take its place. This is, and must be, where the Assembly steps in, and we are preoccupied with these issues. We, as parliamentarians, must do more. But most importantly, we must strive to make empathy a cornerstone of the functioning of societies, and notwithstanding the categorical denunciation of any form of violence, that includes striking a balance between freedom of expression and respect for other people's values.

We must not allow these events to lead to the stigmatisation of certain segments of European societies, as that would in turn lead to greater insecurity and isolation. We must resist biased portrayals fuelled by populist rhetoric. We must not allow terrorism to achieve its perverted aims by driving a wedge between segments of society, but counter it by finding new ways of increasing social cohesion and solidarity throughout Europe and the world. In the hope that we will eventually achieve that long sought after goal, I would like to thank you all very much.

Joint debate: Equality and the crisis and Protection of the right to bargain collectively, including the right to strike

Ms BİLGEHAN (*Turkey*)* – This debate has given us an opportunity to discuss the impact of the economic crisis and austerity measures on equality in society, which is a very important issue that we have overlooked for far too long.

I congratulate Mr Villumsen on his report, on his work in bringing together its different threads and on making specific recommendations to our governments and parliaments. Since Mr Villumsen's nomination as rapporteur in September 2013, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has discussed his report on a number of occasions during hearings and fact-finding visits. The members of the committee worked with the rapporteur in drawing up the report. Committee members provided information on the situation in their respective countries, and in

that way contributed to fleshing out the report. The report is the result of a consensus following a number of discussions.

The rapporteur was keen to take on board the comments and information provided by individual members. I want to underscore that effort, with a view to reaching a broad consensus on the text, which pulls no punches in seeking to ensure equality, a high level of social protection and social justice. It promotes a participation-based approach in the fight against corruption, discrimination, intolerance, hatred and racism in times of crisis and economic prosperity. It is a perfect report. I also congratulate Mr Hunko. I hope you will all support the draft resolutions and show this Assembly's commitment to upholding public freedoms.

29 Ocak 2015, Perşembe

Protection of media freedom in Europe

Ms BİLGEHAN (*Turkey*)* – I think that Mr Flego's report was already ringing alarm bells about the safety of journalists even before the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks on 7 January this year, and according to a number of reports from international non-governmental organisations, the state of media freedom is a grave concern. Freedom House has placed five countries of the Council of Europe into the category "not free", and 19 countries into the category "partly free" – not a very complimentary assessment. Assassinations, arrests, physical violence, intimidation, arbitrary dismissal, interference by governmental authorities in editorial independence, self-censorship – very few countries are free from those sorts of attacks.

According to Mr Flego's report, many European states apply laws on freedom of access to information that are not effective or that are too restrictive, as well as excessively constraining laws that cover state secrecy, national security and combating terrorism. Under those conditions, journalists in certain countries are particularly vulnerable to the hostility of the powers that be, or to prosecution by authorities when they seek to report on sensitive issues that are in the public interest. Investigative journalists, for instance, have a very important role when it comes to revealing corrupt practices, and in a number of member states they are threatened when they start to report on certain major interests or eminent personalities of state.

According to the report, however, there is something even more serious, which is that there is impunity for serious crimes committed against journalists, including murder, and that that is endemic in Europe. The message that we heard from the Secretary-General of the United Nations is a good reflection of that grave concern. He said: "Nine out of ten cases go unpunished. As a result, criminals are

emboldened. People are scared to speak out about corruption, political repression or other violations of human rights. This must stop.”

There are other forms of softer intimidation. Many journalists in the press and audiovisual media practise self-censorship because they are afraid of losing their jobs and of being summarily dismissed by their employers apparently as a result of direct intervention or under pressure from highly placed officials in government. Increasing the transparency of media ownership is important and will be the subject of another report to be submitted shortly to our Assembly. I am certain that there will be others, too, and we will closely follow the impact of the Flego report.

My country is among the countries most severely criticised. There has been some improvement. For instance, the number of detained journalists has dropped from 100 to about 10, thanks to close co-operation with the Council of Europe in particular. I know that Mr Flego and the secretariat have prepared this report carefully and in the full spirit of impartiality. They have been in touch with not only press representatives but governments. Thank you for that, Mr Flego. I will certainly support the report when it comes to the vote.

Protection of media freedom in Europe

Mr DENEMEÇ (*Turkey*) – I thank the rapporteur for his work and the co-operative dialogue that we engaged in throughout this process. I reiterate our condemnation of the horrific attack on *Charlie Hebdo* and express our solidarity with the French people. The attacks targeted the heart of freedom of expression and were intended to create an atmosphere of fear and hostility. The ultimate goal is the disruption of social cohesion and alienation of certain segments of society. These facts remind us of the importance of media freedom, the safety of journalists and a media environment that is functioning healthily.

In this context, I would like to touch upon certain criticisms made against the situation in Turkey. It has been widely stated that, on 14 December, the offices of media organisations in Istanbul were raided by the police and many journalists were arrested. The police operations were portrayed as a crackdown on media. However, this is not true, as the people involved were taken into custody on suspicion of falsifying evidence as part of a terrorist organisation. Out of 31 suspects, most were police officers and only two of them were media executives. Currently, only one TV executive is in custody. Furthermore, no media office was raided by the police. Nearly all the suspects, including the TV executive in question, were detained by invitation, rather than by the use of force. Only one suspect, who chose not to turn himself in, was taken by police officers for questioning.

Regarding the allegations that the press cards of 94 journalists have been revoked in Turkey, I would like to assure you that this is not the case. Not a single

journalist has been blocked from using his or her professional privileges by any authority. Notwithstanding the importance of media freedom, the sensitivity of this issue should not be used to provide de facto immunity for those who seek to abuse the privileges of journalism for illegitimate purposes.

Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians

Mr SELVI (*Turkey*) – Mr Ghilechi’s report touches on a crucial issue of discrimination. However, intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion remain challenges for European countries and not only for Christians but for Muslims as well. Taking the recent tragic events into consideration, it is unfortunate that the scope of the report is limited solely to Christians.

Racism and the extreme right have recently been on the rise in Europe. Rallies are staged under the banner of "Stop Islamisation of Europe" and the number of people joining them is increasing every day. In Sweden and other countries, acts of vandalism and arson have been carried out against mosques and worshippers.

The recent rise of anti-Islamic groups and demonstrations across Europe are an increasingly common pattern. The extreme right and other extremist groups are engaged in a systematic campaign to denounce minority Muslim communities using a selective and distorted image of Islam. Anti-Muslim movements identify Muslims as anti-Christian, anti-modern and anti-humanist.

Far-right religious and secular groups in Europe, while disagreeing on almost all major issues, unite against what they perceive to be the threat of Islam and demonise Muslim minority communities. We all need to be vigilant against these campaigns of hatred and racism. People of conscience from different faith traditions and cultural backgrounds should be able to unite against the xenophobic and Islamophobic groups, which are in the minority. That is how one should cherish the religious and humanistic values to which we can all aspire.

In October, I signed a motion, tabled by Ms Erkal Kara, on rising Islamophobia in Europe. Given these circumstances, it is unfortunate that the Bureau has decided not to refer this motion for a report.

Ms BİLGEHAN (*Turkey*)* – Mr Ghilechi presented a report which required a lot of preparatory work and gave rise to some very lively debate in our committee. This is in the logic of things, because the report concerns some delicate points, such as conscientious objection and religious freedom in education, and potential conflicts between the fundamental rights of different groups of people.

When we talk of religion and fundamental rights, we cannot refrain from thinking about the tragic occurrences in Paris a few weeks ago. Since then, we are constantly questioning ourselves about, among other things, the limit between freedom of expression and freedom of religion. We find this topic in Mr Ghiletchi's report, prompting us to ask other questions. What is the place of religion in today's Europe? How can we guarantee that there will be no discrimination based on religion? All Europeans should be able to practise their religion and fully participate in public life. We have also to ask ourselves how to define the principle of secularism today.

To find the right answers is not an easy matter, but we are convinced that it is very important that we are able to discuss these topics in an open, constructive manner within this Assembly, as we do already. The Parliamentary Assembly confirms its nature as a discussion forum for democratic exchanges between representatives of European peoples.

I congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Ghiletchi, on adopting an exemplary attitude of reasonable accommodation during discussions in the committee. I ask you to adopt this report.

Post-electoral shifting in members' political affiliation and its repercussions on the composition of national delegations

Mr KOÇ (*Turkey*)* – I thank Mr Xuclà for his excellent report. He has done a wonderful job. The report deals with a very sensitive issue that we often come across in national parliaments of Council of Europe member states. When a member switches affiliation during their term, it of course gives rise to lots of questions on the ethical side of things. The committee and the rapporteur have looked at this issue in parliaments in Europe. Mr Xuclà has tried to categorise various proposals, and asked members to focus on this phenomenon because it sometimes leads the electorate to lose trust in MPs. Mr Neill put his finger on it when he said that GRECO needs to look into this; that would apply to quite a few cases that I have witnessed in Turkey. I congratulate Mr Xuclà once again, and thank the secretariat of the committee, especially Ms Clamer and Ms Gayevska, for their co-operation and extra effort.

30 Ocak 2015, Cuma

Witness protection as an indispensable tool in the fight against organised crime and terrorism in Europe

Mr DIŞLI (*Turkey*) – Everything has already been said. The report was very timely, because all week we have talked about terrorist attacks, organised crime and so on, and it binds technicality and legality together. After all the hearings, sending

out questionnaires and putting all the evidence together, the rapporteur has done a great job. I ask colleagues to support the report and individual member states to put its recommendations immediately into effect.

Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities

Ms BİLGEHAN (*Turkey*)* – Ms Quintanilla has said everything already. Any one of us may be affected by a disability in the future. I have a nephew who became disabled after an operation that went wrong, and, as we know, there are more than 80 million disabled people in Europe.

The report constitutes an important and novel phase in the work of our Assembly. For the first time, the topic of disability is being dealt with exclusively as a human rights issue, rather than a purely medical or social matter. Like other international organisations that have looked into this matter in recent years, we are convinced that our priority should be to consistently apply the principle of equality for people with disabilities. We can include those people in our society by acknowledging that their rights are equal to those enjoyed by all others in their jobs and in every other sphere.

Our committee dealt with the issue of disability several times last year, which enabled us to understand that the inclusion of people with disabilities is possible, provided that resources are earmarked, adequate efforts are made and political will is shown. During a meeting of our committee in Vienna last March, we spoke to a deaf parliamentarian who actively participates in the work of the Austrian Parliament, thanks to sign language interpretation, which is guaranteed by the Austrian Constitution. I recall that there was a blind colleague in the Turkish delegation some years ago. Therefore, it is possible for people with disabilities to actively participate in political life.

The report and its recommendations come at the right time. The Council of Europe's plan for disabilities is coming to an end, so the Parliamentary Assembly has the opportunity to point out to the Committee of Ministers that we need a new plan and set out our priorities. I congratulate Ms Quintanilla, and I invite colleagues to express their support for the report.