

Support the Motion for Dismissal of the PACE President Pedro Agramunt

Open NGO letter to members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

5 October 2017

We, members of the NGO coalition the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP) and other NGOs across Europe, welcome the recent motion for dismissal of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Pedro Agramunt put forward by 158 members of the Assembly¹. We urge all its members to support this motion at the forthcoming session of the Assembly on 9 October 2017.

The no confidence motion marks a historic opportunity to start the process of rebuilding PACE's reputation as a defender of human rights and the rule of law.

The Assembly has, for far too long, tolerated unethical and corrupt behaviour by some of its members, as exposed in a number of credible investigative reports by several highly reputable NGOs and the media, most recently in "The Azerbaijani Laundromat" report² by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and publications in over a dozen of media outlets in a number of European countries in September 2017. Unethical fostering of interests and corruption lasting for many years in PACE have strongly damaged the credibility of the Council of Europe.

The Assembly has allowed corrupt practices by certain governments of its member states, in particular Azerbaijan, to undermine its commitment to uphold fundamental values of human rights and democracy in the Council of Europe member states. This has dismayed human rights defenders in the Eastern Partnership states and beyond who looked to PACE and other representative bodies such as the European Parliament for support in defending these values.

The recent establishment of an independent external Investigation Body by PACE³ and plans to overhaul the PACE Code of Conduct for Members and to adopt declaratory requirements⁴ give us

¹ Dismissal of Mr Pedro Agramunt, President of the Parliamentary Assembly. Motion for Dismissal. 30 June 2017. <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-EN.asp?FileID=23996&lang=EN>.

² The Azerbaijani Laundromat. Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 1 September 2017. <https://www.occrp.org/en/azerbaijanilaundromat/>.

³ Independent external investigation body to look into allegations of corruption, http://website-pace.net/en_GB/web/apce/external-investigation-body.

⁴ Follow-up to Resolution 1903 (2012): promoting and strengthening transparency, accountability and integrity of Parliamentary Assembly members. Draft resolution and a report by rapporteur Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger. 28 September 2017. <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=24035&lang=en>.

hope that the much needed renewal of the Assembly will be irreversible and will not stop with the departure of the disgraced President. It also serves notice to all current and former members of PACE that corrupt practices will no longer be tolerated and enjoy impunity. This process must continue after the end of 2017 when the Independent Body is due to report and should lead to investigation of allegations of corruption by the law enforcement bodies at the national level.

The investigations by OCCRP and others show that democratic parliamentary assemblies in the free world must remain vigilant against threats to their integrity from unscrupulous and cynical governments. Otherwise, the hope and support that these assemblies can extend to political prisoners and democrats who are working for human rights, free and fair elections, and the rule of law in the Council of Europe countries and elsewhere will continue to be undermined.

Signed by the following organisations:

1. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
2. Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)
3. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
4. Human Rights Movement “Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan” (Kyrgyzstan)
5. International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)
6. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)
7. Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)
8. Regional Center for Strategic Studies (Georgia/Azerbaijan)
9. Promo LEX (Moldova)
10. The Netherlands Helsinki Committee (Netherlands)
11. Centre de la Protection Internationale (France)
12. Citizens' Watch (Russia)
13. Committee Against Torture (Russia)
14. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
15. Human Rights Centre “Viasna” (Belarus)
16. Association UMDPL (Ukraine)
17. Index on Censorship (United Kingdom)
18. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (Belgium)
19. Helsinki Committee of Armenia (Armenia)
20. Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (Belarus/Lithuania)
21. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor (Armenia)
22. Institute of Public Affairs (Poland)
23. Freedom Files (Russia/Poland)

24. Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights (Germany/Switzerland)
25. Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (Bulgaria)
26. Kharkiv Regional Foundation “Public Alternative” (Ukraine)
27. Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)
28. Legal Transformation Center (Belarus)
29. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (Serbia)
30. Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)
31. Public Association “Dignity” (Kazakhstan)
32. Human Rights Information Center (Ukraine)
33. “Protection of Rights without Borders” (Armenia)
34. Crude Accountability (USA)
35. DRA - German-Russian Exchange (Germany)
36. Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (IRFS) (Azerbaijan)
37. Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)
38. Albanian Helsinki Committee (Albania)
39. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Ukraine)
40. Sova Center for Information and Analysis (Russia)
41. Kosova Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (Kosovo)
42. Truth Hounds (Ukraine)
43. Article 19 (United Kingdom)
44. Human Rights Matter (Germany)
45. Helsinki Association for Human Rights (Armenia)
46. Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
47. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Ukraine)
48. Office of Civil Freedoms (Tajikistan)
49. Women of the Don (Russia)
50. Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
51. Media Rights Institute (Azerbaijan)
52. Batory Foundation (Poland)
53. International Youth Human Rights Movement
54. Institute for Peace and Democracy (Netherlands/Azerbaijan)
55. Monitoring Centre for Political Prisoners (Azerbaijan)
56. Democratic Civil Union of Turkmenistan (Turkmenistan/Netherlands)
57. Public Alliance “Azerbaijan without Political Prisoners” (Azerbaijan)
58. Humanrights.ch (Switzerland)