

Autumn Session | 3-7 October 2011

PACE grants 'Partner for democracy' status to the Palestinian National Council

Strasbourg, 04.10.2011 – The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) today voted to grant "Partner for democracy" status to the Palestinian National Council – only the second time such status has been accorded.

Presenting the report at today's debate, Tiny Kox (Netherlands, UEL) said the status "created new opportunities for the Palestinian people" and could be seen as part of the Arab Spring. The Speaker of the Palestinian National Council Salim Al-Za'noon hailed the decision as "historic" and said it could contribute to establishing peace in the region.

A six-member delegation of Palestinian elected representatives will be able to speak in the Assembly and most of its committees, and propose subjects for debate, but cannot vote.

In return, the Palestinian National Council – in a letter from its Speaker – has pledged to pursue the values upheld by the Council of Europe, hold free and fair elections and work towards abolishing the death penalty, among other commitments.

The Assembly will monitor other key issues such as concluding negotiations for a government of national unity, and making the Palestinian National Council a democratically-elected body. Other points include refraining from violence, rejecting terrorism, recognising the right of Israel to exist and freeing the soldier Gilad Shalit. The Assembly will review progress on these points within two years.

In June this year, the Parliament of Morocco became the first to be granted the new status, which is intended for parliaments from regions neighbouring the Council of Europe who wish to benefit from the Assembly's experience of democracy-building and to debate common challenges.

The President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, is due to address the Assembly on Thursday.