Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Madame President,

I thank Nicole Trisse for the quality of her presentation and also the report from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. One of the most important parts of your report is that we are gradually coming out of a difficult period step by step. The debates in this assembly were frozen because, I would say, the Russian situation was not evolving. We experienced a major crisis in the institution and, after the difficult decisions we made in June, we gradually see the elements of a new situation.

I will not dwell on the budget situation, although I have a message for the new Secretary General, whom I congratulate: just because we are gradually returning to normal, it doesn't mean that we have to abandon the reflections on the necessary management reforms, in order to make the best use of our resources and also to make the organization less dependent on external budgetary pressures. I want to come back to an important part of the report, which is the consequences of Russia’s return to our organization.

This return, as you have said, was marked by fears. The fear of a retreat of the Council of Europe in its role of defending our values, the rule of law and Human Rights. However, when I look at your report, what has happened in the past three months shows some encouraging signs that our organization is willing and committed to this challenge. I speak of course about the mission mentioned by our colleague Frank Schwabe, who makes a fact-finding visit to the North Caucasus and Russia. I will also highlight the exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, including the Ukrainian sailors and Oleg Sentsov. Lastly, I see the vote we had a few moments ago as an important sign, as we have put on the agenda of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group's initiative a current affairs debate on the violation of democratic rights and the repression of peaceful demonstrations in Moscow.

These first steps should definitely be followed by other ones. I am thinking, in particular, about the visit of the Commissioner for Human Rights to Crimea and the high level peace talks.

You have underlined, dear colleague, Mr Stefan Schennach, the commitment of the French authorities in this matter. I think we will have the confirmation today and tomorrow that this commitment will not falter. Last but not least, our group is very committed to the speedy implementation of the new procedure for Member States that do not respect their statutory obligations. This is a very important step for us and we really hope that it will come into effect in 2020. We naturally trust Madam President, as well as the French Presidency and the future Georgian presidency, to speed up the work on these matters.

Thank you.