



POLITICS

Ex-Council of Europe head under fire for corruption

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Luxury gifts, money and prostitutes: a report concluded that Pedro Agramunt likely accepted bribes from Azerbaijan in exchange for silencing criticism. He denied the charges — though he wished in part it were otherwise.



The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) will vote on Thursday whether to sanction current and former members, including its former president Pedro Agramunt, for corruption and breach of its code of conduct.

The emergency proceeding in the parliamentary arm of the Council of Europe — an international organization dedicated to defending human rights, law and democracy in Europe — is the fallout of a **10-month-long independent investigation** into alleged corruption by PACE lawmakers related to Azerbaijan, one of PACE's 47 members.

After **the investigation's report** was released on April 22, the group's Procedure Committee called for those suspected of "activity of a corruptive nature" to be punished, as well as those who had breached PACE's code of conduct.

"The failings of some members and former members clearly involve corrupt practices extending far beyond the scope of the Parliamentary Assembly itself," the committee wrote, calling on member states to "take appropriate action."

'Caviar diplomacy'

The corruption allegations revolve around lobbying activities undertaken by Azerbaijan to silence criticism from the human rights body in exchange for gifts and money in what the report termed "caviar diplomacy."

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The investigation indicted more than a dozen current and former members of PACE, including Agramunt.

The conservative Spanish lawmaker was found to have violated the code of conduct. Additionally, the report concluded, "There is a strong suspicion that Mr. Pedro Agramunt was party to activity of a corruptive nature."

Among other things, Agramunt has been accused of accepting €200,000 (\$243,665) to assure his election as PACE president, luxury gifts including vacations, jewelry and watches, and prostitutes as bribes during an electoral mission to Azerbaijan in 2015.

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Prostitutes? I wish...

Agramunt denounced the report's findings as "219 pages of total lies" in statements made to Spanish broadcaster SER on Wednesday. With the respect to the prostitute allegations, he replied, "I wish I were able to do those things." He then clarified that the "I wish" referred to sexual capacity and not relations with prostitute.



Agramunt (with scarf) met with the Dalai Lama in September 2016 while serving as PACE president
Image: picture-alliance/NurPhoto/E. Cegarra

He also accused the **Open Society Foundation**, headed by billionaire George Soros, of being the origin of the "campaign" against him and other PACE members.

Agramunt has said he will not step down as an MP in PACE. He resigned from the group's presidency in October, pre-empting a motion to boot him.

The Spanish politician also drew anger from his fellow assembly members after he traveled to Syria to visit with President Bashar Assad, triggering a **vote of no confidence** and resulting in a ban on official visits on behalf of PACE.

Agramunt is expected to appear Thursday before the Procedure Committee in a closed-door session before the plenary vote.

PACE is the parliamentary arm of the Council of Europe (CoE). It is made up of 234 members from the CoE's national parliaments.

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Report of the Independent Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly

PACE investigation into corruption

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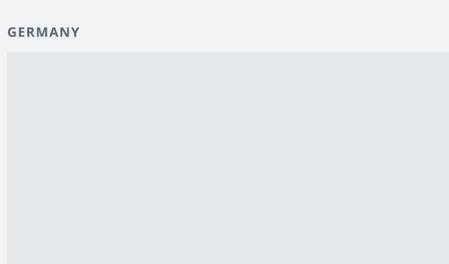


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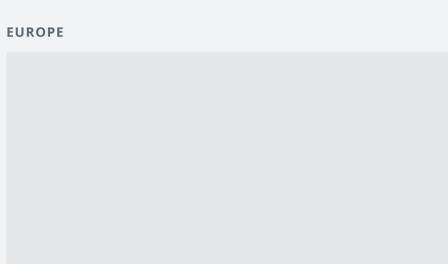


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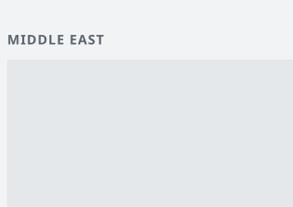


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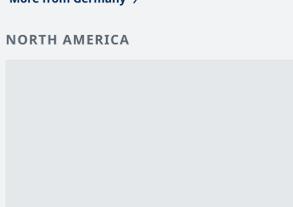


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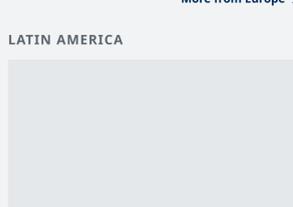


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