

Provisional edition

Friday 4 October 2019, morning

Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting No 35

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Ladies and gentlemen.

Dear friends, please take your seats. Of course this is a Friday, but this is the opening of the meeting. I invite all Members to take their seats. We are starting.

The seating is open.

Yes please?

Ms Doina GHERMAN (Republic of Moldova, EPP/CD): Ladies and gentleman,

Please kindly note that I accidentally voted the wrong way on the resolution on obstetric and gynaecological violence? document 14965 and for the record please accept my request to reconsider my vote from "against" to "in favour".

Thank you.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

As I understood this is a point of order.

According TO our rules, of course will take your statement into account, but we can't change the result of the voting.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are coming to the question of Jewish cultural heritage preservation. The Committee Chair is here and the rapporteur is also here.

This is our item for discussion, Doc. 14960 presented by Mr Raphaël COMTE on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media.

I call Mr Raphaël COMTE, the rapporteur.

You have 13 minutes in total, which you may divide between the presentation of the report and reply to the debate.

Please, the floor is yours.

In this report:

1. Speeches in English, French, German and Italian are reported in full in English.
2. Speeches in other languages are summarised from the interpretation and indicated by an asterisk (*).
3. Speeches in German and Italian are available in full on the Assembly's website.
4. The text of the amendments is available at the document centre and on the Assembly's website. Only oral amendments or oral sub-amendments are reproduced in the report of debates.
5. Corrections should be handed in at Room 1081 not later than 24 hours after the report has been published.

Debate: Jewish cultural heritage preservation

Mr Raphaël COMTE (Switzerland, ALDE, Rapporteur): Thank you, Madame President.

Ladies and gentlemen, parliamentarians.

Few people in the history of Humanity have been as often persecuted as Jews, the height of horror having been reached during the Holocaust. All our beliefs, all that makes humanity was challenged by the planned extermination of the Jewish population during the Second World War.

The foul beast of anti-Semitism is unfortunately very much alive. Even today, many anti-Semitic acts are perpetrated, and it seems that history has a terrible tendency to repeat itself, as if the human being was not able to learn from the past. Hatred of the other, intolerance does not fade so easily.

To combat prejudices, education and culture are powerful tools. Admittedly, they are only effective in the long term, which is extremely frustrating for policy makers who want to provide immediate solutions. Long time has become a rare commodity in politics.

But to achieve this goal, we know that we must act today, assuming that the effects will not be fully realized until tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

If we want to combat anti-Semitism through education and culture, then we must pay special attention to Jewish cultural heritage. This heritage is an excellent way to make the history of Judaism known in Europe and to make the whole population understand that Judaism is an integral part of the history of Europe. This is the history of Europe.

And there is urgency. Compared to 1939, over 80% of existing synagogues have disappeared. And of the 3,237 historical synagogues that have survived in Europe, nearly a quarter are in jeopardy. We must save them, and we can not wait.

To preserve this heritage, we need to bring together several actors: local authorities, civil society, the Jewish community, heritage preservation organizations. In short, we need concerted action.

Very often, the Jewish cultural heritage is an orphan heritage. One figure shows this clearly: in the 19th century, 9 out of 10 Jews lived in Europe; today it is 1 out of 10. We went from 90% to only 10%.

If there is no longer a local Jewish community, then it is up to the whole community to seize the Jewish cultural heritage and appropriate it to defend it as its own heritage. Every city, every village must understand that a synagogue, even if it is no longer assigned to worship, is an element of its history. To let a synagogue disappear, is to accept to forget our history and it is therefore to commit a new injustice.

These abandoned places deserve better than silence. We must give them a breath of life, give them a vocation: a place of memory, a meeting place, a place where the joys and sorrows of the whole community can be expressed.

Public authorities are responsible for ensuring the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage. Strong political will is needed at the national, regional and local levels. In each country, action plans should be designed to ensure that Jewish heritage receives an appropriate level of protection, conservation and maintenance, and to provide the financial means necessary to save sites in need of protection.

The protection of the Jewish cultural heritage goes beyond the purely patrimonial framework. It also has an educational vocation, especially in regard to youth. The development of this heritage is an excellent way to create a dialogue with the local population, to question our history, including its darkest pages, to reflect on the relationship between different religions. The educational value of this heritage should be recognized and educational programs should be widely developed, involving schools, universities, museums and the cultural sector.

Dear colleagues,

The fight against anti-Semitism can only be conceived as a permanent struggle, a fight against ignorance and blind hatred. The preservation of Jewish cultural heritage –and thus the preservation of our history– is essential to give future generations the tools that will enable them to foster dialogue among religious communities and to remember the tragedies of the 20th century.

In conclusion, I invite you to adopt the draft resolutions and recommendations proposed to you and to give a strong signal for the preservation of the Jewish cultural heritage. A strong signal, too, to fight prejudice and intolerance.

Thank you.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Raphaël COMTE.

You have seven and a half minutes remaining.

Now we are coming to the speakers on behalf of political groups.

I invite first the representative of the socialist group Mr Martin WHITFIELD from the United Kingdom.

Please, the floor is yours.

Mr Martin WHITFIELD (United Kingdom, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): I'm very grateful President, And I welcome this report and also the hard work of the rapporteur in composing it.

This began back as a report in January 2018 when my colleague Angela SMITH and others put forward a motion based on the work that the Foundation for Jewish History had done in identifying, cataloguing, mapping the various synagogues and other historic buildings across Europe.

And I stand here as a representative from East Lothian in Scotland, where as a constituency we've always viewed tolerance and outward-looking as so important in creating the right atmosphere, the correct atmosphere and the way forward for our communities to thrive. It was in January 1939 that Viscount TRAPRAIN arranged for 69, and then up to 160 Jewish refugee children, to come to Whittingehame estate in East Lothian where, primarily, they found safety, but they also found education, support and faith.

And I raise this because of the importance that Jewish cultural heritage plays in all of our heritage; that thread that runs through all of our communities in history is so intertwined with Jewish heritage that it is a significant part of why we are a pluralist society, and to forget that is extremely dangerous.

This connection with the Jewish people goes back millennia; a migratory group of people who've always come to an area and sought to help, assist and to leave their mark in the monuments and buildings that they do.

I want to mention the synagogue in Salisbury Road, Edinburgh, Scotland. I want to mention the burial grounds in Braid Place and at Newington Cemetery in Edinburgh, and I do so with pride. Because to remember these places, to visit these places, to care for these places is an important accolade to Jewish colleagues at a time when as the rapporteur has rightly said anti-Semitism still runs rife throughout our communities, and that is a plague and intolerance and injustice that we must stamp out.

Jewish cultural history encompasses the history of migration, and it encompasses it in a deeply sad way when so many of the empty synagogues and buildings are just the shadows and all the evidence that remains of thriving societies. And we across Europe must do everything we can, with a host of partners, to ensure that, firstly, these areas are noted and identified; secondly, that they are preserved; and thirdly, they form part of the education as we go forward into the future to make sure that the horrors of the past are learnt from and never, never again repeated.

My compliments lastly again to the rapporteur for this excellent report.

Thank you, Mr President.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. The next speaker, also from the United Kingdom, Mr John HOWELL.

Please John, the floor is yours.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you Mr President.

I think this report is very important and I would certainly agree that we should preserve the cultural heritage of the Jewish communities. But I do want to stress that there is something that we need to avoid here, and that is seeing Jewish cultural heritage as if it belongs to a dead civilisation. It doesn't belong to a dead civilisation. It belongs to a very live one, that is still part of our communities today.

I stand here as a trustee of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in the UK, which has as its motto for next year "Stand Together", because that is an important slogan to be able to gather together the thoughts and actions of everyone in taking a stand against anti-Semitism.

Of course next year is very important because it's the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and I hope that we will all be able to commemorate that occasion.

I mentioned the Holocaust Memorial Trust because it has education as one of its major activities. That education is there with three objectives: to encourage children to learn more, it's to encourage children to feel empathy, and it's also in there to encourage children to be inspired – to be inspired by the story of what happened during the Holocaust and to take action.

I just say in passing that it's not just about the Jewish Holocaust, it also remembers the tragedies of the subsequent holocaust in places like Srebrenica.

But there is something that we can all do to help Jewish communities and to help keep this culture alive.

When I went with the Council of Europe to Lisbon I was eating out one night, in a little restaurant by the side of the road. I saw a whole lot of very well-dressed people coming into a building at the side of the road, so I asked what this was. They said it is the local synagogue and there were a huge number of heavies – really big big men – at the gates, who were who were making sure that the people were genuine members of the Jewish Community to be able to go in. This is in a country where there is virtually no anti-Semitism: Portugal is a bastion of no anti-Semitism, but we have got the Jewish community so worked up that they see the need to spend their money on synagogues to be able to keep them safe by employing their own people there.

I do think that we should do a lot more to be able to see that Jewish communities are not saddled with that enormous cost of being able to preserve themselves for the future.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr John HOWELL.

The next speaker, on behalf of the ALDE Group from France is Mr Sylvain WASERMAN.

Mr Sylvain WASERMAN (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr President.

On behalf of the ALDE Group, I would first like to congratulate Mr Raphaël COMTE on his report.

I believe that, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, your report, the rapporteur, perfectly illustrates that there are issues that we must take up because if we do not do it, I think they will stay well below public debate. I would like to emphasize in your report, your analysis of the orphan heritage, the appropriation by surrounding societies of a heritage that may exist where Jewish communities no longer exist in this specific place and show you the sociological and societal dimension of the subject. I believe this is a strength of your report.

I would like to add two points that seem important to me. First, we are here in Strasbourg. Strasbourg is a very intercultural city, a city of transmission. In your report, you talk about the issue of pedagogy and, in particular, about the new generations. I believe that there was no better place than here in Strasbourg to address the topic of the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage, in a region of Great East, which is the one in France which is probably the richest in terms of Jewish cultural heritage.

I would also like to say, of course, that –and we all know this– it is above all a subject of fundamental rights and also of anti-Semitism, because the Jewish cultural heritage crystallizes against it all the lowest and the most dangerous hatreds we have in our societies.

I do not tell you this just in theory. I was mayor of the village of Quatzenheim for 10 years. The village of Quatzenheim is a beautiful village, 20 minutes from here. The President of the Republic went there some time ago because the cemetery of Quatzenheim was desecrated. And I guarantee you that when you've been a mayor of a village for 10 years, and you go back to a Jewish cemetery that has been there for generations,

and you see these 94 blue swastikas on the graves, you realise the violence that these heritage crimes imply, which go well beyond the value of heritage. It is a profound attack on the values we believe in and bring us together here.

So your report, sir, counts. The topics and issues you raise are of utmost importance, and wholeheartedly, on behalf of the ALDE Group, I would like to thank you for your very important work.

Thank you very much.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Sylvain WASERMAN.

The next speaker will be on behalf of the United Left Group from Greece, Mr Alexandros TRIANTAFYLIDIS, please.

Mr Alexandros TRIANTAFYLIDIS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group)*: President, Ladies and gentleman,

The United European Left strongly endorses this particular report. Jewish cultural heritage is an integral part of Europe's common cultural legacy and the responsibility for protecting and safeguarding requires a sense of shared responsibility and taking initiatives. I come from the city of Thessaloniki, the capital of the North of Greece, the metropolis of the Balkans, which at the beginning of the previous century, was known as the Jerusalem of the Balkans, as it was referred to by writers of the period and the politicians of the time.

So it is in the spirit of this particular report that a Holocaust Museum and memorial park have been set up in Thessaloniki, where the city has been trying to move forward in the protection of Jewish heritage.

Within the spirit once again of this particular report, Thessaloniki ought to become a city for all Jews throughout the world. And for this purpose, the Holocaust Museum is being built near the old railway station of the city, where, during the German occupation of July 1942, we had the horrific departures of the trains of death, which transported our brothers and sisters, Greek jews, from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz and to Birkenau and to other concentration camps as well. Fifty thousand Greek jews died in those camps.

In January 2018, the president of Syriza and former prime minister of Greece, along with the President of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, planted two olive trees on that spot and set the foundation for that particular Holocaust museum.

We have to point out that France and the Jewish community of Thessaloniki are closely linked. Thousands of our Jewish citizens sought refuge in France and they now play an important part in France. I'd simply like to mention Edgar Morin, Patrick Modiano, Nicolas Sarkozy and the Dassault family.

So, my friends, by strongly endorsing this draft resolution we make it clear for all political groups fighting for democracy and justice that there is a necessity to have a single stance with regard to this particular issue. And not only that, but other issues. Never again. No to fascism and Nazism, no to racism and xenophobia, no to intolerance, yes to hope for a Europe of peace, yes to understanding and working together. And yes to one's homeland and not only to one homeland but to the homeland of others. It is only through dialogue that we will be able to truly achieve something on this continent.

Thank you.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

The next speaker on behalf of the EPP is Mr André REICHARDT from France.

Mr André REICHARDT (France, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

I, too, would like to commend the quality of the work done by our colleague Mr Raphaël COMTE who highlights a real problem, that of the conservation of the Jewish cultural heritage, scattered in the European countries. In fact, Mr Rapporteur, we should even talk about religious (cult) and cultural heritage, the two adjectives unwilling –and you can be sure– to mean the same thing. But anyway, this question concerns us all. This heritage is an integral part of the common heritage of each member state where it is located but also of the common heritage of Europe. It is in today danger, as you have said, and if it were to disappear because of the passage of time, of course –but also because of the deliberate degradation, as rightly indicated by our colleague Sylvain WASERMAN just now– it is an entire part of our history, of our civilization which would disappear with it.

This situation, of course, is the consequence of the displacement of populations such as those that the Jewish people has known throughout its history. The totalitarian regimes of the 20th century have resulted in an exodus of the Jewish people to Israel and the United States, among others. But, as our rapporteur has said, the communist persecutions against religions and the anti-Semitic massacres of Nazism have meant that today only 1 out of 10 Jews still lives in Europe; they were 9 out of 10 in the 19th century. These figures alone show the importance of the problem.

From then on, it is a whole heritage composed of synagogues but also of schools, monuments, cemeteries which is abandoned.

Communities still on the ground generally do not have the means to maintain and restore this heritage. Today, it is necessary to intervene to save it. First, the issue of legal ownership needs to be addressed to determine how financial support can be provided for its conservation. Then, of course, we must be able to release funds for this purpose. We have this joy in France to have a foundation, which is particularly active in this respect but this is not enough. By far, any restoration must of course be preceded by a research work to identify the specificities of the building to be restored. Finally, of course, the restoration of buildings must be done in accordance with the techniques used for their construction. Contributors must of course take care not to distort the restored heritage.

In my opinion, the preservation of Jewish heritage has two main advantages as it has been said. The first is cultural and educational: the objective is to make discover Jewish culture to the greatest number, and in particular, to let the younger generations know that the Jewish culture is deeply European and rooted in the history of our continent, Europe. This will certainly contribute to the fight against anti-Semitism, which unfortunately remains a reality on our continent.

The second benefit I see in this conservation work is of course economic. It will promote tourism and the development of all these wonderful communities that will have the chance to have such a restored heritage, as is particularly the case, as Sylvain WASERMAN said just now of the Alsace region, where you are. Unfortunately so many buildings are also in conservation levels that are not acceptable.

My dear colleagues,

These draft resolutions and recommendations are essential and the EPP Group, naturally, will support them without reservation.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Merci beaucoup.

This is the end of the speakers on behalf of the political groups.

On this stage the rapporteur can reply or he can preserve his response for the end of the speaker's list.

In this case the next speaker is Lord Donald ANDERSON from the United Kingdom.

Lord Donald ANDERSON (United Kingdom, SOC): Mr President,

I join enthusiastically in the chorus of approval of this work by Monsieur COMTE and agreement with his conclusions.

I was struck, when on Tuesday we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Council in the Opera House that we ended with a part symphony by a great Jewish composer Gustav MAHLER, part of that wonderful flowering of Viennese culture just before the First World War. But when we celebrate MAHLER, when we think also of those of Central Europe as a whole, let us not forget – and perhaps the report didn't mention this enough – the

fact of the 1492, the expulsion of Jews from Spain by the Catholic Kings, and Girona, which is a wonderful example of the restoration of a Jewish urban village, and the dispersal of that Jewish population – yes, to Morocco, yes to Istanbul – but as our Greek colleague has just reminded us, also to Thessaloniki where so many of the Jewish population were massacred.

The report well answers the question: why should we preserve what is in many cases often dead buildings? We should preserve it because it is an essential part of our heritage, it helps us understand who we are. Of course, much Jewish history is shared across the way. Of course, we have to deal also with the congress of local authorities and regions and with the European Union. But there is a major role for the Council of Europe in countering anti-Semitism and in educating our people. Anyone with any empathy who has visited the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem must come away on the point of weeping, the Bakkah weeping for her children, see it beginning that Jewish choir from Poland in the 1930s almost totally massacred: a children's choir. Then, of course, the fact they did in the first Knesset, I understand, Polish was the lingua franca.

There is a wonderful heritage to preserve and also to be ashamed of, because of what we have done to our Jewish colleagues. Yes, we look at cemeteries that are often now abandoned, but more often as it said in report at the synagogues: a vital part of education. And I hope that schools, universities, research institutes will use other synagogues for those purposes.

One final thought, paragraphs 43 to 45, refer to a synagogue in my part of the world, South Wales, in Merthyr Tydfil. I hope I can update in a very positive way the report because there is good news. That synagogue was bought last month by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage who are now considering its future. I hope it can be developed as an education centre for future generations and also as a model for other synagogues and other countries. Who knows it might even qualify for the award proposed in this valuable report.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you Lord Donald ANDERSON.

The next speaker, from Azerbaijan, is Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA.

Please, the floor is yours.

Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA (Azerbaijan, EC): Thank you, Mr Chairman, Ladies and gentleman

To preserve cultural heritage means to respect it, first of all.

Jewish heritage is one of the most valuable and most preserved ones in my country Azerbaijan. The history of Jews in Azerbaijan is about 2 000 years old. Today, the Jewish community is one of the most active and influential religious communities in my country. A number of joint organisations were founded for the purpose of preservation of Jewish heritage in Azerbaijan. In particular, the Azerbaijan-Israel Friendship Centre, the Jewish Agency "Sokhnut", the committees for the protection and preservation of Jewish traditions "Joint" and "Vaad-L-Khetzola", religious schools, the Jewish cultural heritage, are actively operating in the country as well as women's societies, charity societies, youth clubs, student organisations, and a number of newspapers published. They, with the assistance of the Jewish community, hold many cultural events and publish Jewish literature. In 2010, under the project of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation "Azerbaijan-Address of Tolerance", the Khabad-Or-Avner educational centre for Jewish children living in Baku was constructed. The centre for 450 students teaches the basics of Jewish culture.

Today in the capital of Azerbaijan, as well as in the cities of Guba and Oguz, several synagogues are functioning. The synagogue opened in 2003 in Baku is one of the largest in Europe.

Another vivid example of preserving Jewish heritage is a settlement located near Guba city of Azerbaijan which is called Red Village. With a number of synagogues Red Village is recognised as the centre for the development and preservation of the material and spiritual culture of mountain Jews in Azerbaijan and beyond. It is no accident that this village is called "Jerusalem of the Caucasus."

The preservation and development of the traditions of Judaism is inextricably linked with the life of the Jewish community. The six-domed synagogue, currently functioning, has a large collection (about 70) of instructions for reading the pages of the Torah.

The obligations of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the protection and development of the Red Village Jews community are reflected in the Constitution and laws adopted by the parliament. In 1991, the Azerbaijani government resumed work on the study of Jewish traditions in Red Village. In recent years, in addition to the

general education programme, several educational institutions have been established where they study the basics of Judaism. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education, adopted in 2009, provides for the right of ethnic minorities of Azerbaijan to establish educational institutions in their native language. These all show that preservation of Jewish heritage is both a tradition and a part of state policy and also in our minds in Azerbaijan. We believe that If we don't respect the culture and heritage of others, we won't respect ours.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA.

Dear friends, this is the last speaker from the list of speakers.

Of course, given that we have not used all the time allocated for the debate this afternoon, I would now like to invite spontaneous contributions from the members who have not spoken in this debate.

Would anyone like to speak please?

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV from Azerbaijan.

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan, ALDE): Thank you, Chair.

Dear Colleagues.

The European Union put forward a very noble initiative by having declared 2018 as the Year of European Cultural Heritage. However, cultural heritage is such a system of values that must be protected and preserved by Europeans and all of humanity, that in fact every year, every month, every new week, every new day, should be a year, month, week and day of preservation and development of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is the most universal and most respected bridge that unites people. The Jewish cultural heritage, with ancient and rich traditions, holds a special place in this series of resources. I want to talk about the centuries-old history of preserving Jewish cultural heritage in the image of the country, thus attracting an attention to the serious role of historical traditions and a systematic approach in cultural heritage preservation.

The famous 12th century Jewish traveller Benjamin TUDELA writes that there were 1 000 synagogues in Azerbaijan at that time. However, this figure is clear evidence of how closely Jews had been integrated into Azerbaijani society in the Middle Ages. Historical sources tell us that Jews lived in Azerbaijan from the Achaemenid time, that is, from the 6th century BC. In the 13th century, Azerbaijani scholar Nasiraddin TUSI founded an academy and observatory in Maraga, where thousands of scholars from various countries of the world had been invited by him. Most of them were Jewish. From the earliest sources to the authors of the 20th and 21st centuries, the idea firmly asserts that Azerbaijan, throughout the all periods of history, has been the place of self-realisation for Jews where they have been living on the most comfortable and secure terms. Notwithstanding this, Jews and their cultural heritage have been harassed, oppressed, and persecuted at certain periods of history in certain places of the world, but there has never been without exception a ground for such a concern in Azerbaijan. It is no coincidence that today synagogues are operating not only in Baku, but also in such various regions of Azerbaijan. Jewish graves dating back hundreds of years are respectfully preserved throughout the country.

The high position held by Jewish community in ethnic mosaics of Azerbaijan, the care for Jewish historical and religious monuments and burials, as well as the preservation of their cultural heritage as the national wealth of Azerbaijan appears to be a manifestation of very significant and thought-provoking truth.

The fact that cultural diversity, tolerance, and interfaith and intercultural dialogue are so harmonious in the life of a country is not a subject of propaganda, challenges or official decisions. When this quality is based on a habit and tradition of history, in every new era it naturally finds its new form of expression. The centuries-long history of Jewish life in Azerbaijan is a clear indication of this. The successful fate of the Jews and their cultural heritage in Azerbaijan can be seen as a striking example of interrelated co-existence of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reproduce this experience through accepting them as models. This attitude gives the desired benefits solely when it turns into your lifestyle.

I, once again, congratulate Mr COMTE and the Committee on Culture on their excellent report.

Thank you.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV.

Do we have any one more?

Yes, Mr Aleksei KONDRATEV from Russia.

Mr Aleksei KONDRATEV (Russian Federation, NR)*: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, friends,

Our delegation would like of course to support this particular report and to express our greatest solidarity on this particular point.

In our country and in the Soviet Union prior to us, the issue of the Holocaust has been dealt with with great seriousness and depth. We have suffered terribly from this. We suffered from the occupying forces, from Hitler overall. Let's not forget, of course, that in many of the former Republics of the Soviet Union for example in Belarus and Ukraine, Jews suffered terribly.

One out of three Belarusians were murdered during this particular period. Many of them were Jews. This is something we remember with great pain indeed.

Right now there is an attempt to provide the necessary support to the Jewish community, focusing specifically on support for the Jewish community and Jewish youth organisations. In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, there are Jewish museums, there is a Jewish theater as well. Jewish culture is widely recognised and supported.

There have been a number of different pieces of legislation which have been passed in order to create the necessary legislative framework for this type of support for the Jewish community and for other minority groups in the Russian Federation.

The Russian delegation would like to express its support for this excellent report and we thank you for all the cooperation on this particular front.

Thank you.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much

Now we conclude the list of speakers.

I call Mr Raphaël COMTE, the rapporteur, to reply.

You have seven and a half minutes.

Mr Raphaël COMTE (Switzerland, ALDE, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mr. President.

I would like to thank everyone for their interventions and for their support of the report.

I would like to remind you that this report is not the only one to concern Jewish culture, since in 1987 we adopted a resolution on the Jewish contribution to European culture, in 1996 a recommendation on Yiddish culture, in 2012 a resolution on Jewish cemeteries and in 2014 a resolution on endangered heritage in Europe, which also included aspects of Jewish heritage. It is a constant and regular concern of our Council. We can congratulate ourselves, as this subject is important.

The report contains a number of concrete examples: in Poland, Germany, Wales or Turkey. The list is not exhaustive, and I thank some colleagues who have contributed to extending this list by mentioning sites that exist in their country, in Thessaloniki, for example, and we could have talked about Spain, as has been mentioned where there are several extremely interesting examples. I think this shows that there are a number of models from which we can draw, positive models. There may also be cases that are more negative, things that should not be done, but, ultimately, all that is done to preserve the Jewish heritage in Europe can inspire us to see what are the good practices that exist and what can we implement in our different Member States.

Of course, one of the most important points is the financial aspect. It requires financial means. They exist at European level, but it is also important for states to allocate resources. We are here in France where there is for example a lottery on heritage, which has been launched and which will allow –especially in Alsace– to be

take care of the fate of the synagogue of Benfeld, which is in a state of peril. We must allocate resources to the preservation of this heritage. It is not enough to have a very general budget, we need a special assignment.

Finally, it was mentioned, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an equally important place. This is why in point 5 of the draft resolution we mentioned the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Of course, at the national level there are actions that can be carried out, a framework must be set, but the local authorities must invest particularly in the preservation of this heritage.

I would like to thank everyone for their contribution. I thank all members of the Committee, too, who contributed to this report. I also thank the secretariat of the Committee, which has done a very important job and without which this report could not have been published. And I also thank our experts and those who accompanied us in the report and, in particular, the Director General of the Jewish Heritage Foundation, Mr. Michael Mail, who also accompanied me during my fact-finding visit to Lithuania, and who provided scientific insight and is extremely familiar with the dossier on the current state of Jewish cultural heritage in Europe.

Finally, I wanted to thank everyone for your cooperation in recent years, since this is my last intervention today. I leave the Parliament of my country after the next elections. We have elections in a few days in Switzerland and I am not a candidate, I have chosen to no longer sit in Parliament. And so, I'm leaving and I'm leaving the Parliamentary Assembly too in the coming weeks. And I want to thank you for the collaboration we have had for many years.

I wish our institution a very bright future.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Raphaël COMTE for your contribution and for your ideas.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, would you like to speak on behalf of the Committee?

You have three minutes.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): Thank you, Mr Chairman,

It is a special honor for me today that the Culture Committee has chosen me to represent the Committee here today. Maybe because I am the rapporteur for *Illegal Trafficking of Cultural Heritage*, and have a lot to do with the issue of cultural heritage protection.

At the very beginning I would like to thank Mr Raphaël COMTE for his work. We have met here throughout the years. Of course, it is always regrettable when someone who has done so much leaves. But leaving with such an important report may make it a bit easier. The debate was very, very exciting. Some were very, very emotional. Our Greek colleague has told us about the treasure of the Sephardic Jews in Thessaloniki. Mr WASERMAN has pointed to the cemeteries. That came up for debate several times.

But the rapporteur also mentioned the Holocaust. After all, the Holocaust is the reason why we bear this major responsibility to make sure that those responsible for these events be brought to justice, and that we continue to bear this in mind, that it be in our memories for the future, part of our collective narrative and memory. The issue of the Jewish cemeteries, they are part of the cultural heritage, but they are also very important symbols and sacred sites. Unfortunately, these cemeteries are repeatedly attacked, and desecrated by neo-Nazis.

Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA raised the situation in Azerbaijan. Yes, there is a very, very old Jewish culture, and this culture is also very much protected in Azerbaijan, I can say that as a rapporteur for this country. I would also like to thank Michael Mail for the committee from the Foundation for Jewish Heritage. His expertise was like a journey, an adventure. He pointed out to us, despite the disaster and the Holocaust and Nazi reign of terror, how many synagogues still exist. But also how many synagogues are used as fire stations, as stables and so on. You could have a fantastic debate with him.

I would perhaps like to remind you once more of Mr COMTE's important recommendations, for example, to prepare a guidance system for the Protection and Preservation of the Jewish Heritage Sites, together with the Council of Europe and what it has to offer on cultural heritage protection; but also that we need a program for the schools to bring this to schools, universities, museums, as well as the cultural sector, in cooperation with the European Union.

Let me add a few words. Yes, I hope that, hopefully, we will unanimously adopt this resolution today. Thanks again to our rapporteur and the secretariat for their support. That was a really great collaboration.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, thank you very much.

Now we really come to the last stage of our discussion.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft resolution to which no amendments have been tabled.

At the same time, the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has also presented a draft recommendation to which no amendments have been tabled.

Now we will proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Doc. 14960.

The vote is open.

Thank you very much. The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Congratulations. The draft resolution is adopted unanimously.

Now we will proceed to the vote on the draft recommendation contained in Doc. 14960.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Again unanimously.

Congratulations to the rapporteur and all speakers.

For me it was a great honour as a representative of Azerbaijan to chair these discussions.

Thank you very much.

Vote: Jewish cultural heritage preservation

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr Andrea ORLANDO has a point of order, please Mr Andrea ORLANDO.

Mr Andrea ORLANDO (Italy, SOC): Thanks.

I wanted to put it on the record that I made a mistake in voting on Amendment 7 and that I voted for rather than against it; I refer to the resolution on Moldova yesterday.

Furthermore, the final result was for rather than against.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

We cannot change the result, but your statement will be put in our minutes. Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, the next item of business this morning is the debate on the report titled *Labour migration from Eastern Europe and its impact on sociodemographic processes in these countries*, Doc. 14956, which should be presented by Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE but he is not here so I suppose Mr Martin WHITFIELD will present it on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.

So I call Mr Martin WHITFIELD to present the report.

You have 13 minutes in total which you may divide between the presentation of the report and the reply at the end of the debate.

Debate: Labour migration from Eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries

Mr Martin WHITFIELD (United Kingdom, SOC): I'm very grateful Madam President.

It is a great pleasure to present this report on behalf of my colleague Mr STROE, who unfortunately cannot be here today

So I present to you this draft resolution and report on labour migration from Eastern Europe and its impact on sociodemographic processes in these countries.

The rapporteur Mr STROE was held back by his parliamentary obligations in Romania today and the draft resolution was approved in committee unanimously in June, and yesterday the committee took position on 3 amendments.

This report highlights the challenges countries face as a result of labour migration, i.e. "brain-drain", declining populations, falling social security contributions and the social problems within families and communities that it causes. This phenomenon is complex and therefore requires specific measures to be taken both by the countries of origin of migrant workers and by the European countries where they come to work.

European countries should work together to reduce the negative impact of labour migration, while of course preserving the positive aspects.

Measures could include strengthening assistance to families left behind in countries of origin – especially children – and providing clear information on the opportunities and risks for migrant workers, as well as measures to help those who wish to return home.

For the part of receiving countries, they should do all they can to stop "unofficial" labour migration, while of course helping migrant workers who come officially to integrate more fully.

In this report and in the draft resolution, concrete actions are proposed.

Those proposals stem from the positive experiences, showing that it is possible to find a way to help families left behind by targeted social initiatives. More specifically, countries of origin could:

- . improve social protection and support systems to prevent and address the abandonment and neglect of children left behind by their parents who go abroad to work. Systems such as "SOS families" should be supported. And I take this opportunity to stress that all measures that are taken must do so in the best interests of the child;
- . We could ensure that children left behind by the employment of parents abroad do not drop out or reduce their levels of education. Psychological support and specific counselling should be provided in this context, if necessary;
- . We should consider other specific actions and good practices, such as: local focal points for migration, so they can act as connectors between diasporas and their communities of origin; etc.

As regards the receiving countries, there are many examples that show that successful integration of migrant workers leads to greater social cohesion in these countries and better co-operation with the neighbouring states.

Bringing the example of labour migrants arriving to Europe from non-European Union neighbours, we should call on the EU institutions to pay greater attention to this matter. Specific measures could be taken to assist the Council of Europe member states from which migrant workers come from.

As far as host countries are concerned, they should strive to intensify their efforts to fight against illegal labour migration, to promote social integration of labour migrants, to promote diversity, including, for example, language learning support programmes.

Finally, we should strengthen cooperation between the Council of Europe, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the OECD and, of course, the European Union, to promote a positive image of migrants in Europe and by developing joint activities in the fields of human, economic and social development.

Dear colleagues, on behalf of the rapporteur and the Committee, I invite you therefore to support this report and to act in your respective parliaments to implement the resolutions that are being put forward.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Martin WHITFIELD. You have eight minutes remaining in the debate.

I call first the speakers on behalf of political groups, and the first is Mr John HOWELL of the United Kingdom, on behalf of the European Conservatives.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

I congratulate my fellow colleague Martin WHITFIELD for taking over this report and for presenting it.

And I'm sure, having looked through it, there is a lot of interest to all of us in this report. In particular, I was struck by the amount of time that was given to the provision of language training and I think that that is an important part of this report and of the agenda that is here. So there is a lot that we can learn from this report and a lot of good that comes out of it.

But I was also struck by how this report was perhaps a bit late in coming forward. In particular, I could not see how it fitted with what was actually happening in Central and Eastern Europe and in Western Europe. In particular, there was no mention in it of freedom of movement, and I do think that there needs to be some mention of freedom of movement and how that operates with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in order to ensure that what is a key part of the European Union continues to play that role in the future.

Now I know that the report and indeed this Council is much broader than the EU and, of course, this report looks at Ukraine, it looks at Moldova, it looks at a whole range of different countries, but it also looks at a country that is a prominent member of the European Union, it looks at Poland. And I do think that we should we should concentrate a little bit on that, because in the UK, in 2016, there was something like a million Polish residents. And they had come to the UK for better pay, for higher living standards and most importantly, for more rewarding work.

So one of the things that we need to ensure is that in the countries from which these people come, that we spend and that they spend a lot of time increasing better pay and increasing the number of more interesting jobs which can be applied for. And in this context, it should be recognised that in the past 25 years the Polish economy has almost doubled in size and that I think is a very important part of that. But one of the other reasons why I say this is a bit late is because between 1990 and 2012, 20 million people moved from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe to the countries of Northern and Western Europe, so there is already a long history of these people being involved.

And in addition, I'm not sure how much more can be done to this because there is an element of human nature in this, that people will always see the grass is greener on the other side.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr John HOWELL. The next speaker is Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI of Estonia, on behalf of the ALDE Group.

Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI (Estonia, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Honoured President of the Assembly,

Dear Colleagues,

First of all I would like to thank the rapporteur for raising awareness about the alarming issues that plague labour migration from Eastern Europe to Northern and Western Europe. Recently, it has become an acute problem and its peculiarity is that it has a strong impact on sociodemographic process in the countries of Eastern and Western Europe. These impacts can be both positive and negative for the countries concerned. While speaking about labour migration from eastern Europe, we are looking at countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Poland.

According to Eurostat data, the majority of labour migrants come from Ukraine with 4.5 million, followed by 3 million Romanians, 2.5 million Poles and almost 1 million Belorussians. Our main concern is the future of families and children of those migrants. Mainly, we can notice three major trends.

The first one signifies these labour migrants who left their homeland and never come back, abandoning their families and children. This is the greatest problem which has a huge influence on sociodemographic process and puts into question the future and well-being of those abandoned children.

The second one marks the labour migrants who leave their homelands for temporary work and afterwards will come back. This is not a big problem but can be perceived as a normal process.

The final tendency is connected to those labour migrants who move to some host countries with their families. We see for the sake of families and children that this is the most appropriate and positive option as children will grow up in two-parent, so-called "full families".

I would like to give you an example. In Estonia, we have faced such a situation where labour migrants from Ukraine are not aware that their families have to register their place of residence. As they are not well informed enough about all the rights and obligations, these labour migrants families will not have all the same access to the social services.

Therefore, their children will be finally the ones who suffer in the long-term because they will not be accepted to enter any school or childcare. There are some cases that children are studying at Estonian schools without having any legal grounds and this is possible only thanks to the goodwill of local schools, administration and municipal authorities.

Unfortunately, this is only a temporary situation. If the parents do not manage to register their children, schools have to exclude them by 1 November. This is the deadline when all schools I applied to complete and submit the list of registered pupils to the Minister of Education.

I would like to draw your attention to the urgent need for better collaboration between the labour migrant families' original country and their host country in order to solve such issues, as mentioned previously in terms of all the legal requirements they have to fulfil.

Taking into consideration the current report, in my opinion despite all these sociodemographic issues and important challenges, this is a truly positive side of this phenomenon. Many labour migrant families usually try to adapt to their host countries. Therefore, I agree with the rapporteur that we need to take together specific measures for supporting better integration as well as promoting a good image of labour migrants in Europe. Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI. The next speaker is Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE, on behalf of the Socialist group.

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Madam President.

Let me start by reminding us what this report is truly about. It's not about refugees, it's specifically on labour migration. So it's about migration that has economic incentives in it, that seek employment and work. It's a report not about the receiving countries, which the focus is usually on, but it's about the countries that are sending millions of people abroad.

Now, I'd like to take the attention to a wider issue, the main question we're asking. As Mr HOWELL has rightly pointed out, there have been millions who have already moved in this context, but we also know that there is still huge potential out of changing the rules of the game to ensure that labour migration benefits the people.

So the main question, I think is, how do we redraft the global order and the rules that define it? So far, the rules of globalisation has focused on those that are related to capital. We have not yet well defined the rules that should define and benefit the movements of labour and the people. So I think the true question we should be asking is: how can we ensure that these cross-country relationships that are extremely valuable do not contribute to economic and social inequality as they have done before? And the answer, I think, lies in writing the draft rules that focus more on labour and people rather than sheer capital and trade in goods. Therefore, this report is extremely timely in focusing on the rules about labour migration, which is an issue that is extremely important. The prominent scholar, Dani RODRIK, has long been arguing that if we were to change the rule of the games to focus not on capital but on labour, we would actually have huge welfare benefits that would accrue in total.

The question is, to ensure that the redistribution of those large welfare benefits actually feeds into equality, which is sought out in this report, and therefore, this report and resolution are extremely important.

We have to underline that, unlike the rhetoric that is fed but the by the populist politics, migrants actually contribute positively to public finances, to technology and human capital and to the ageing population of the receiving countries, but they could also benefit the countries from where they originated from. And to ensure that benefit, rightly this report identifies, economic convergence in managerial practices, in corruption issues, but we should take note that we also have to ensure a convergence in democracy, a convergence in rule of law, a convergence in freedom, where people who actually experience cross-culture, demand more and are ready to participate more.

So while we should focus on the economic convergence needs to ensure remittances work properly, to ensure entrepreneurial activities can cross across borders following experience, we also should ensure that democracy is fed through Europe and its geography, and this is a role that our task actually fits into.

So, in closing, a world of equality will only be possible if we redraft the rules of the game, focusing on the benefits for the people not just on the benefits of capital just like this report takes the right step in the right direction for, so I supports it strongly.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE.

That concludes the list of speakers on behalf of political groups.

The rapporteur will reply at the end of the debate, but does Mr Martin WHITFIELD wish to respond to this stage?

Please Mr Martin WHITFIELD, you have four minutes.

Mr Martin WHITFIELD (United Kingdom, SOC): I am very grateful for the opportunity to respond and I do so because of the questions that have been raised and the ideas that have been put forward. And I do so, obviously, on behalf of the rapporteur who has, unfortunately, not had the chance to listen to this.

Firstly, I would very much welcome and draw attention into the report about the need for language training. This is something that is identified and, of course, plays a very positive role towards it.

There was also mentioned made of course of the right of the freedom of movement, which –with all due respect– is the vehicle by which the economic migrants are moving around the EU, rather than the consequences that are suffered by the departure country or the recipient country. And this timely report was looking very much at that, rather than actually the vehicle that was used to occasion the movement, but, of course, as always, I welcome the contribution.

And also, from Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI, can I say, to raise the question of the abandonment of families is so important and this has been addressed in the report. It is a great tragedy for children to lose contact with their parents because they have been forced to move or choose to move and it is too difficult to maintain contact.

But also with regards to the comments on the education, I very much welcome the suggestion, which again is contained in the report of the close co-operation of both countries that is needed to make the movement of workers achieve the best results.

And, finally, to Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKEM, she is of course absolutely right, that this is a report that is talking about individuals who are moving for work. And, we too often, forget, perhaps, the effect on an individual and the individuals family.

This is a timely report and maybe it is one step closer to looking at a more realistic view of how we should consider the movement of people, rather than as financial or economic units, but as individuals.

Thank you, Madame President.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Martin WHITFIELD. You have six minutes and 30 seconds left for a reply at the end of the debate.

In the debate I call next Mr André REICHARDT from France, EPP Group.

Mr André REICHARDT (France, EPP/CD): Madam President,

My dear colleagues,

Displacement of persons has always been part of the history of our continent. In the European Union, the free movement of workers is a right recognised by the European treaties, especially within the Schengen area. The idea is that labour is considered a necessary resource for the production of goods and services and to promote an efficient allocation of it within the European area.

But EU countries also welcome people from other European states such as Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova. This cheap labour is moving into the EU member states where the growth rate is higher and the conditions of employment are better.

The report presented to us today points to the economic, social and demographic imbalances brought about by this situation. It also highlights the situation of the children left behind by parents who went to work abroad. This situation has harmful consequences on their upbringing with greater educational difficulties, even problems of juvenile delinquency. The fate of these children is particularly worrying in Ukraine or Moldova, as the report shows.

Therefore, my dear colleagues, it is unrealistic to consider work as an economic resource like any other. It is about women and men who move and this is not without consequence on the families, but also on the countries, whether the countries of origin or the host countries.

Thus, the countries of origin are deprived of the human resources necessary for their economic development. In addition, the long-term demographic consequences will contribute to lasting impoverishment in some rural areas of these countries. In the host countries, conversely, the arrival of cheap labour can cause social tensions, particularly in terms of employment and housing.

Faced with this situation, it is necessary that the Eastern European countries take strong measures to encourage their population to stay. If migration is essentially of an economic nature, it is necessary to create a political context that favours development. The fight against corruption or the strengthening of the independence of the judiciary should help to increase investment in these countries. Social measures must also be taken to ensure decent wages and genuine social protection for workers. It's up to us to help them!

On the political front, the Council of Europe must play its role in helping these countries to create institutions that guarantee the legal security of investors. On the economic level, the role of the European Union is indispensable. The European Neighbourhood Policy must foster inclusive growth that creates jobs.

The future of these countries is of course in their hands, but we should worry about it too.

Thank you to our rapporteur and the Committee for the report and their draft resolution.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr André REICHARDT.

The next speaker is Lord Donald ANDERSON, United Kingdom, Socialist Group. Please Lord Donald ANDERSON.

Lord Donald ANDERSON (United Kingdom, SOC): Madam President,

I congratulate my colleague Martin WHITFIELD on his presentation, and particularly on his realistic approach.

My starting point is clear: we may bewail the migration from East to West Europe but it is the most natural thing in the world for individuals, families, young people in particular, to seek a better living and a more prosperous life for them. There are many other examples, of course, in the world. In the Americas, the lure for those in Central America of the lure of *el norte*, the north. We have the problems of the Maghreb countries and the sub-Saharan countries, who, although the Mediterranean is much deeper than Rio Grande, seek a better life for themselves in Europe as migrants. This is quite natural, and of course, these pressures are likely to increase, in part, because of the climate change, in part, because of the demographic explosion in Africa.

We, in Europe, do not have Africa's population boom nor its climatic challenges, nor the wars and the violence, but the pressures with us are intense. Even in Germany, think of all the monies which have been spent by Germany to East Germany to try to bring the former Deutsche Demokratische Republik up to the standard of living in the west; save for Saxony in the far south-eastern corner, the rest of East Germany is relatively poor compared with the countries of the West. So it is extraordinarily difficult to rebalance the position. On the other hand, the Czech Republic, which is relatively prosperous and with a good economy, does not have the same problem.

Mr WHITFIELD set out the balance of advantages and disadvantages and the report probably emphasises the positive aspects of this migration, the fact that people will receive training, the impact of remittances, people would learn languages and so on. But, probably, in my judgement, the negative effects outweigh the positive. The point is made about children left behind with relatives at a vital formative stage of their development, the risk the brain-drain, of people who've been trained at public expense.

So, therefore, realistically, let us accept that migration will take place. How do we respond? How do we mitigate some of the adverse consequences? Obviously helping those countries to improve with their economies may help and is important in itself but the gap is the important thing and it is shown, for example, in a number of studies of African countries, as in East and West Germany, that that is not enough.

The report covers many of these problems and the problems are indeed formidable, the point of individual countries was set forth very well by Mr HOWELL: that there are no easy solutions but whatever we do, we must be ready to cooperate very closely, both the receiving countries and those countries who send some of their brightest and best to the West.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Lord Donald ANDERSON.

The next speaker on the list is Mr Mikayel MELKUMYAN, Armenia, European Conservatives.

Mr Mikayel MELKUMYAN (Armenia, EC): Thank you, Madame President.

Dear colleagues,

First, I want to say that for every country in the former Soviet Union, this problem is very current. Why current? Because we have to understand the main cause that creates labour migration, this is very important. I think, in my opinion that the great cause for labour migration is the difference between the standards of living and between average and minimum wages and this is natural. But the size of labour migration depends on the position of each country and we need to have the instruments to estimate this process.

I think, at the same time, that this report does not confront all the issues concerning the regulation of labour migration. Every citizen is still waiting, needs our energy, our new approach, our decision and I think that we must adopt a very complex decision.

Colleagues, this is also a current problem for the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. It is no secret that several hundred thousand migrants leave each year for seasonal work in the Russian Federation.

There are also sometimes problems with the free movement of work here, but I am sure they will be solved soon. As chairman of the specialized standing Committee of the National Assembly of Armenia, I am aware of these problems and the process of their solution.

It is also very important for migrant workers to be legally protected when working in other countries.

This is linked to the growth in the legislative and administrative efficiency of the institutes that distribute temporary residence permits, and the defense of the labour legislation of the host countries.

It should also be noted that migrant workers also provide substantial financial transfers to their countries. However, it is clear that all countries aspire to develop their economies, to ensure higher minimum and average wages. Our assembly should only contribute to these processes through its decisions.

Colleagues, we have to make a complex decision and we still need to work on this issue.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Mikayel MELKUMYAN.

The next speaker on the list is Mr Jacques LE NAY, France, ALDE Group.

Mr Jacques LE NAY (France, ALDE): Madam President,

My dear colleagues,

Our colleague, on behalf of the rapporteur, presents us with a very well-documented report, with significant figures, which illustrate the demographic and economic difficulties caused by labour migration from Eastern Europe. The examples described in the report, relating to Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine, are interesting and informative.

The consequences of this phenomenon are felt both in the countries of origin and in the host countries. The rapporteur is right to point this out.

It seems to me, however, that the negative effects outweigh the positive effects for both parties.

Admittedly, the movement of workers is a fundamental principle, guaranteed in particular by the treaties of the European Union. The benefits are obvious, even beyond economic issues. French culture was thus marked by the arrival of Polish, Italian or Portuguese workers.

Nevertheless, this free circulation, to produce its beneficial effects, must be exercised reciprocally. It is through this exchange that the functioning of the internal market will be improved.

However, the current situation is not satisfactory: the figures quoted in the report illustrate above all a significant and ongoing imbalance, which does not bode well for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Many of them are being drained of their population, the youngest in the first place. The unemployment rate is no doubt reduced, but the financing of the social system, and that of pensions in particular, suffers strongly, in a context of demographic ageing. This evolution turns this phenomenon into a vicious circle. In my opinion, relying on remittances from diasporas has only short-term benefits; it may even delay the essential reforms that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe need to undertake.

As for the European host countries, they too often suffer from unfair competition, social and fiscal *dumping* caused by shortcomings and circumvention of European regulations on the secondment of workers. I regret, moreover, that this question is hardly mentioned in the report, since the term itself is referred to as a footnote on the last page.

Solutions to the problems posed by labour migration are mainly to be found within the countries of Eastern Europe, which, in order to make themselves more attractive to their own population (young people in particular), must carry out reforms to modernise their economy and infrastructure, but also political reforms, such as the fight against corruption and organised crime. Because I believe that many of the working migrants do not leave their country with light hearts; firstly, they flee from difficult living conditions, and no doubt also, in some countries, a repressive context.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Jacques LE NAY.

The next speaker is Lord Richard BALFE, on the behalf of... sorry... United Kingdom, European Conservatives.

Lord Richard BALFE (United Kingdom, EC): Thank you, Madam President.

We're within a few days of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. That recalls to me a conversation I had in this very chamber where the European Parliament used to meet with Jacques Delors, probably the greatest president Europe has ever had. And we referred to Ronald REAGAN's statement "tear down this wall Mr GORBACHEV" and one of the things that we agreed on was that the consequences of tearing down the wall would be a very fundamental change in Europe.

And that is what has happened. I never thought that I would ever employ a cleaner who had a first-class degree from a Polish University. Whether a degree in politics has helped her be a cleaner, I don't know, but she's a valued member of our family entourage.

What we're seeing though is the results of capitalism. Freedom of movement, the desire to get away from societies, where often jobs are seen as being in the gift of politicians, to societies where jobs are seen as being won on merit and in this report – this is a very Eastern European report, I thought, when reading it – if you look at the points about children, the fact of the matter is that if people's children are back at home, wherever home may be, it's more likely that the parents will move back.

The people in my city of Cambridge who have children there, are probably never going to go back to their countries which they came from because they're integrated; often their children don't even speak the language of the parents. So we need to look at this very carefully. We also need to look very carefully at paragraph 5.6 where we say "it proposes that governments adopt policies to facilitate labour migrants return and resettlement in their countries of origin". Is the rapporteur seriously asking for discrimination against migrants? What do we want to do? Send round vans like Theresa May sent round saying "Go home" to migrants?

I think this is a very dangerous report, frankly. And, when we look at the statement, that given that most sending countries are not members of the European Union, the only one that's not a member of the European Union that gets a major mention is the Ukraine, and that gets a mention because a lot of Ukrainians are now in Poland! Any Moldovan citizen has a right to a Romanian passport and can have freedom of movement within the EU.

So, I will be voting against this report for the very reason that I think it is illiberal and it is dangerous. And I would invite other people to read carefully the resolution before they vote for it.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Lord Richard BALFE.

The next speaker is Mr Jean-Pierre GRIN, Switzerland, ALDE Group.

Mr Jean-Pierre GRIN (Switzerland, ALDE): Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Labour migration has always existed since the beginning of time.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Switzerland, my country, experienced significant emigration to various countries in Europe and America, dictated by the lack of local work.

Around the middle of the 20th century, the opposite happened. Following the construction of major road and rail infrastructures, in particular dams to produce electricity, many foreigners came to work in Switzerland during the summer months. Also, before its mechanisation, agriculture employed many foreign workers from Italy and Spain, who then returned to their country during the winter months.

When a country has a high unemployment rate, emigration is a sort of valve to relieve the public authorities of these countries of certain financial constraints, but it also helps to avoid serious social problems.

The report by our colleague Mr STROE highlights the different challenges posed by labour migration from Eastern Europe. This has a double impact: economic and demographic.

At the economic level, this emigration limits entrepreneurial activities in the eastern countries, which weakens their economic potential and limits the number of jobs in these countries and, on the other hand, at the demographic level, it causes a strong imbalance between the age groups, because those left in the country are children and the elderly.

It is important that coordinated action, as proposed in the report, be put in place between the countries of origin and the host countries, in order to mitigate the negative consequences for the countries of origin of migrant workers.

For the countries hosting these labour migrants, they must step up their efforts to integrate these new workers by establishing standards based on the European Social Charter and labour law. The efforts must be reciprocal. On the one hand, for host countries, which must recognise the qualifications of third country nationals. On the other hand, migrants must also make efforts to integrate through a certain professionalism in their work.

One thing that is not mentioned in this report is the political and economic governance of the countries of origin of these labour migrants. These countries must promote the establishment of framework conditions that encourage local entrepreneurship by developing and building public infrastructure, roads, public buildings and also strong support for the local economy, among others. For these investments, the Council of Europe Development Bank, which was mentioned last Wednesday, could grant financial loans.

All of this would encourage the creation of local jobs, to enable nationals of these countries who have left to return and, for those who wish to leave, to encourage them to stay by providing them with a job that would allow them to live and to support their families through their work.

This point concerning the economic development of the countries affected by emigration could reverse these departures, as was the case in Switzerland between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Thank you for listening.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Jean-Pierre GRIN.

The next speaker is Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV, Russian Federation, United European Left.

Please, Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV.

Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV (Russian Federation, UEL)*: Thank you very much President.

Colleagues, I would like to support this particular report.

This particular report specifies and underlines something very important. The fact that this democracy, that exists in Europe, that provides so much to people throughout the continent. But irrespective of this, there is great inequality in the continent. This leads to the phenomenon which is mentioned in this report.

A number of different points have been brought up, with regard to how this problem can be dealt with. I do feel that every point that has been made is extremely important, but we have to make it quite clear that this is a serious problem that has to be dealt with.

How are we going to deal with this particular problem? What sort of measures are to be taken? What sort of receipt is to be provided to those individuals, that go abroad to work, and what happens upon their return? These are all different issues that have to be touched upon within the framework of all of that.

Let's not forget that we have numerous different issues that come to the forefront as well. In the movement of people we also have criminal activities which are taking place. Trafficking is all part of this as well.

We also have issues as far as qualification. The qualifications of individuals that work abroad frequently are not properly scrutinised, and frequently, in order to have cheap labour, people hire individuals which are not properly qualified for the jobs they take on. So these are numerous different facets that have to be taken into consideration.

We need proper control, and I'm not speaking about control of a police-type control, I'm talking about a society which helps to put together the necessary structures to make sure that qualifications are met, that these people's rights are protected. And, of course, when dealing with issues of juvenile delinquency, as well as in the instances of abandoned children.

Now let's look at the countries of the Baltic region. We have numerous different people, which have come to the Baltic region from the south, that are working there. I'm referring here to the Ukraine and to Moldova as well. People have travelled to the Baltic states. Many people who are working there are not qualified to do the work that they're doing. Many Ukrainians travel to Estonia. It is not infrequent. And, of course, through Estonia they have access to other countries of the European Union, to work in certain categories of labour. Frequently, these individuals are not properly qualified.

One of the issues that really ought to be emphasised here is that, unfortunately, Europe is west-centred. The focus is on the problems of the west. So I do indeed greet this particular report, that shifts that particular focus a bit, and looks at some particular problems of the east as well.

The examples provided by my Armenian colleague were very valuable as well. The mention of the Armenian migration to the Russian Federation, and the issues there. Indeed, all of these issues have to be touched upon with great sensitivity.

Thank you very much.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV.

The next speaker is Mr Claude KERN, France, ALDE Group.

Mr Claude KERN (France, ALDE): Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Labour migration from Eastern European countries to Western European countries has a significant impact and I thank our rapporteur for exploring this complex and sensitive subject.

The demographic, social and economic consequences for the countries of departure are particularly important. Indeed, these migrations have a significant impact on the population, especially in rural areas. In some of these countries, we can go through "ghost towns", and the phenomenon is not over.

In addition, a country is obstructing its development prospects if all its living resources emigrate. The lack of job opportunities and career opportunities push the most educated to work in other countries. This brain drain is all the more detrimental as it will have long-term consequences.

Of course, these migrants send money back to their home country, which helps reduce poverty and boost investment. But, in my opinion, this is not enough to counterbalance the negative effects. If we consider the budgetary impact, the emigrant workforce helps to sustain the balance of payments but does not allow to increase tax revenues, while these states must finance the infrastructure necessary for economic development.

It is therefore essential for the future of these states to create the conditions for the return of this emigrant workforce. The first condition is to allow entrepreneurs to work and enjoy the fruits of their work. This primarily involves fighting corruption. GRECO makes proposals for this and it assists states to implement them. In Moldova, the coalition currently in power intends to make the fight against corruption a priority. I hope that its efforts can bear fruit. In addition, the European Social Charter must be applied to guarantee Europeans the necessary social protection and decent incomes. For this, it is essential to strengthen the fight against illegal labour and human trafficking.

Among these states of emigration, the case of Poland is peculiar. While many Georgians or Ukrainians will work in this country in sectors such as agriculture or construction, many Poles go to work in Germany or the United Kingdom. This shows that in these sectors of activity, working conditions are unattractive. Measures should be taken to improve social protection and raise wages in these sectors. Moreover, when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, what will happen to Polish nationals? Will they have to return to their country? And under what conditions? Ambitious programs to support the return of the diaspora will therefore have to be put in place.

Finally, while it is essential for the countries of origin to find adequate solutions to limit emigration, this does not exempt the Member States of our organisation, which have ratified the European Social Charter, from applying Article 19 concerning hosting migrant workers.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Claude KERN.

The next speaker is Mr Koloman BRENNER, Hungary.

Mr Koloman BRENNER (Hungary, NR): Thank you, Madam President.

Firstly, I would also like to express my thanks for this very important report. I mean, this is one of the most recent and urgent problems in our continent, Europe. It is very important that we examine how, 30 years after the political change, as my dear colleague Lord Richard BALFE mentioned earlier, we have come to the point where, in the Eastern and Central European Member States of the European Union, as is presented here in the report in great detail, very precisely, but also in the eastern neighbours of the European Union, we have this mass labour migration taking place.

If we look for the causes, I would like to point out the wage differences. Namely, it cannot be that 30 years after the political change, for example, in my hometown Ódenburg-Sopron —located 60 km from Vienna— Hungarian border - people go to Austria, because there is cheaper gasoline. And, by the way, they are shopping in Austria too, because they really get Milka, and not a lower quality Milka. Not like in the Eastern Central European peripheral countries, not to say colonial countries.

This migration, the mobility of the younger population, is already a big problem, even in my native Hungary. My party, the conservative Jobbik Party, has therefore launched a European citizens' initiative, to address this issue of wage differentials. We should also be a wage union — not only should prices be united, in the European Union area, but also wages, over time. Of course we need an economic basis for that.

I think that this would be a very, very important issue for the European Union. Now, with the budget debates before us, for the next seven years in the European Union, this is the opportunity to take action, to take active measure. Because, that is what this report says, as well as the recommendations, that this is an important policy. The aim is to bring these migrant workers back to their countries of origin over time, because these people, in the medium term, should be contributing towards the social insurance systems, the health system, in the countries of origin, but they are missing. And that is surely not in any of our interests, our common interest. Because some of these people will integrate well in the Western and Northern European countries, of course, but it would be better if in a higher number they return.

And we would have to contribute together.

I warmly welcome this report.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Koloman BRENNER.

The next speaker is Mr Mohamed-Iqbal RAVALLIA from Canada.

Please Mr RAVALLIA, could you put on your microphone.

Mr Mohamed-Iqbal RAVALLIA (Canada): I'll begin again.

I want to thank Mr Martin WHITFIELD for presenting his draft report, which highlights the impact of labour migration from Eastern European countries to the other countries in the European Union and beyond.

The report speaks to the negative impact on the countries of origin who lose a portion of their labour force, but also about the need for integrating and supporting these individuals in their new country of residence.

On this last point, let me share Canada's experience as a country of immigration. Today, Canada is a pluralistic society that is defined, not only by its founding peoples, but also by people from countries throughout the world who come with their families to live, work and participate in Canadian society.

Through different immigration waves in the 20th century, Canada welcomed tens of thousands of persons from Central and Eastern Europe. More recently, in our last census of 2016, more than 3.4 million individuals living in Canada identify their ethnic origin as Eastern European.

Canada's immigration success is due to three key elements: targeted immigration to meet Canada's goals, such as labour market needs. Two, positive integration so that immigrants remain in the new communities. And finally, a strong public support for the immigration system. To ensure smooth transition to Canadian life, federal, provincial and territorial partnerships allow the settlement and long-term integration of newcomers to Canada by delivering a range of programmes, such as language training, employment assistance, foreign credential recognition, pre-arrival orientation sessions, and other integration support.

An example of this partnership can be found in Atlantic Canada, where I am from. In order to mitigate lower natural population increases, lower immigration levels and higher labour needs in the region, the different levels of government have set up the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Project which requires that the employer support the settlement of the hired immigrants to facilitate their integration and retention in the region. By addressing the barriers newcomers face when they arrive in a new country, we ensure that they succeed in the country of residence and are welcomed by the new communities, which is a win-win for all.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Mohamed-Iqbal RAVALLIA.

Given that we have not used all the time allocated for the debate this morning, I would now like to invite spontaneous contributions from members who have not spoken in the debate.

Would anyone like to speak?

No.

I call Mr Martin WHITFIELD to reply. You have six and a half minutes.

So please, Mr Martin WHITFIELD.

Mr Martin WHITFIELD (United Kingdom, SOC): I'm very grateful and thank you

And, first of all, can I congratulate everyone who's contributed today in this debate. And it has been a welcome input, to see that discussions are not just being centralised in one aspect of the European continent, but looking across. And, on behalf of the rapporteur, can I again thank everyone for their contributions, and I know that he will take the opportunity to look back at the records to address and influence his own opinion.

I, of course, stand here to present the report, and there have been a number of challenging areas that have been raised, and rightly so. I will take, in my own inadequate way, the opportunity to try and address some of them, and I do so, obviously, as the presenter of this report.

In the first instance, there has been a lot of discussion about the mechanics of migration, and I fully appreciate the importance of this, both for the countries from which people leave, into the countries to which people go. However, the purpose of this report—and I do so humbly remind people—the purpose of this report was to look at the impact on the socio-demographic processes within these countries. The questions that have been raised are of huge validity, but, perhaps, the answers and the discussions should lie elsewhere.

There were also a number of speakers that emphasised the fact that there are more negative effects than there are positive effects in this migratory pattern. And a number of people rightly raised—as I drew highlight on—the effect of children back in the home countries. And this is, of course, of vital importance, and sits at the heart of much of what this report talks about. I think it is fair to say, however, that the report does look at both departing countries and receiving countries, and the obligations that rest both on governments, NGOs, and other organisations, to look and to raise the questions, and to identify what they can do.

Indeed, in paragraph 5.1 and 5.2, much is made of the fact that Member States, with regard to labour migration, and to mitigating the negative effects of the migration, including through job creation in sectors where labour migrants are employed abroad, fighting bad management practices, corruption, and introducing legislative reforms, encouraging the return of skilled workers and prevention of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, especially women.

So, there is the vehicle within the report for those things to be looked at, and they are hugely important. And to pick up on my colleague Lord BALFE's comment, to answer one about education and qualifications later on, it is frightening, the level of qualification that a number of people have when they leave a country to do a job. And, in the submissions from the group's, there was much discussion about considering these as individuals rather than as a monetary unit.

And indeed, one question that I think needs to be asked across the continent, is: do we want people who hold doctorates and master's degrees, doing jobs that they could perhaps do better in their own country, or indeed another country, to work to the benefit? We are not so gifted that we can afford to lose skilled, experienced and intelligent people. And one of the things that this report does invite people to do is to address that.

Can I welcome the contribution from Canada, and indeed, the experience that Canada has had, on how you go about integrating people who come to your country. And, indeed, again the report makes emphasis on the fact that steps need to be taken in recipient countries, in order to do that. It is hard enough to cross a border and leave your children because you need the money, it is maybe doubly so if you are unwelcome to where you are going.

And I think, just as time ticks down, I would quote the President that we heard here earlier this week, "the European continent is a continent of translation, and at the basis of that, there is understanding, expertise and intelligence, made more so by the ability, sometimes, to have to think and understand what someone is saying." Language lies at the root of the European continent. It is frequently seen as a problem, maybe we should address that actually as a gift, that allows us to look differently and walk with other people.

And, finally, Madame President, can I just thank the rapporteur in his absence. I have achieved my best in presenting his report, but can I also thank the Committee and especially—and genuinely, from the bottom of my heart—the Secretariat, that has supported me in the past 24 hours, to be able to stand here before you. I recommend this report to the hemicycle.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Martin WHITFIELD.

Does Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ, the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee wish to speak?

You have three minutes.

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Madame President.

I have many acknowledgements to make today.

The first is thank you very much to one of the members of our Committee, who at the last moment kindly presented the report on behalf of the rapporteur Mr STROE, who had to stay in Romania because of national political developments.

I thank him in two respects, for the Committee and for myself, since we are both substitutes –I am vice-chair of the Committee– and as such, we share this important work in the hemicycle today.

That this does not make me forget to thank our absent rapporteur. He worked energetically on this report, he went on the ground in Poland, where there is, at the same time, immigration and a very strong emigration. He investigated the situation in his own country. The report is the result of a lot of interesting information and descriptions of situations that vary according to the countries chosen for the study.

It is a complex subject and the report and its resolution show it. As long as the job offers, the working conditions and the remuneration will be higher or lower depending on the country, people will migrate to these countries, especially neighbours, to take advantage of them to live better and better support their families. This is normal and it can very well happen. This provides a labor force that is lacking in the host country. This distributes the job market better. It makes the economy work and can bring back wealth to the country of origin.

But it can also create individual, social and family dramas. This can divide families, isolate both the migrant worker and his relatives, who have often stayed in the country. Sometimes a family member finds work but others who have accompanied him abroad do not have the opportunity to work, study, integrate, and socially, they are victims of some stigmatisation.

The resolution proposes a series of measures to take these issues into account, to improve the positive aspects of labour emigration and to reduce the negative ones. It calls on the authorities of the countries of origin to urgently take measures to help vulnerable populations.

I salute, therefore, this necessary work, and remind you of the importance of promoting measures and policies in your different countries, because all our countries are impacted in one way or another by this phenomenon.

Thank you for supporting this report.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

The debate is closed.

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has presented a draft resolution to which three amendments have been tabled.

Amendment no. 1. I call Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV to support amendment no. 1.

You have 30 seconds.

Vote: Labour migration from Eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries

Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV (Russian Federation, UEL)*: The word "Western".

Since we're speaking of migration throughout Europe, I would propose that we not only focus on this particular issue of "Western", because we are speaking also about Poland, the Russian Federation, etc.

So delete the word "Western".

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

No.

What is the opinion of the Committee?

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

Amendment No. 1 is agreed to.

Amendment No. 2.

I call Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV to support Amendment No. 2.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV (Russian Federation, UEL)*: Something is not mentioned here, which is very, very key; the labour right of pension.

So, I propose that this particular key point, of a provision of retirement pension, be included.

More specifically: "Provision for extending national retirement pension systems to cover migrants, migrant workers and guarantees for the preservation of the labour rights they acquire".

In other words, the national system of the country of origin would provide to them.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

What is the opinion of the Committee?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC): The Committee is in favor.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment No. 2 is agreed to.

Amendment No. 3.

I call Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV to support Amendment No. 3.

Mr Sergey KALASHNIKOV (Russian Federation, UEL)*: Now, where we are speaking about the programmes of the European Union, there are certain countries, for example, Switzerland and the Russian Federation, which are not Members of the European Union.

So, why ought we have these particular norms, instituted here for countries that are not Members of this particular Union.

So, we would propose to delete the following words, "European Union", to be more inclusive in the spirit of the text.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment? No.

What is the opinion of the Committee?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC): So, I confirm that my country, Switzerland, is not a member of the European Union.

The Commission is in favor.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment No. 3 is agreed to.

We all now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Doc. 14956 as amended.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft resolution in Doc. 14956 is adopted.

Congratulations.

We now come to the free debate.

I remember Members that this debate is for topics, not already on the agenda, agreed on Monday morning.

Speaking time will be limited to three minutes.

I call Mr Paul GAVAN, Ireland, United European Left.

Free debate

Mr Paul GAVAN (Ireland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Hi there.

Thank you, Chairperson.

Two years ago this week, on 1 October 2017, against massive provocation of the Spanish State, a referendum was held on Catalan independence. Millions of Catalans came out to vote and to democratically decide their future.

It should have been a triumph for democracy, no matter what the result was. Sadly, the world witnessed shocking scenes of Spanish police brutality in various parts of Catalonia that day. Peaceful citizens who were protecting the integrity of polling stations were struck down and savagely beaten. Over 900 people were injured. The disturbing images of frail, elderly citizens being assaulted by heavily armed Spanish police will be impossible to forget. My party Sinn Féin had four elected representatives who were there as international observers and they witnessed this.

Today, I want to raise the case of 12 Catalan and political and civil leaders that are currently imprisoned in Madrid, awaiting judgment on politically motivated charges for their alleged role in facilitating this referendum. This is one of the most pressing political issues in Europe. We cannot ignore this important issue of citizens being prosecuted for pursuing purely peaceful and democratic means in determining their future. Some of them have been imprisoned for nearly two years on pretrial detention. They include two civil society leaders, the former Catalan Vice-President, the former speaker of the Catalan Parliament and eight former ministers.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention carried out reports into the detention of three of these prisoners and concluded that their detention is arbitrary and called for their immediate release. The former Catalan President and other ministers have been forced into exile. The Spanish State has tried to have them arrested and extradited but they keep losing these cases because the charges they're facing have no basis.

They are all part of what has been all the trappings of a political trial. They are being prosecuted on ludicrous charges of rebellion and sedition. The former speaker is facing 15 years in jail for allowing a debate on Catalan independence in parliament. Imagine that! Fifteen years in jail for allowing a debate! The Vice-President is facing up to 25 years for facilitating a democratic vote on self-determination. Their prosecution is politically motivated and they are political prisoners. Facilitating people to vote is not a crime. But preventing them by force should be. This is a political issue not a legal one.

I must also mention the two million Catalan voters who have been denied representation at the European Parliament because the Spanish government is blocking their three MEPs from taking their seats. The Spanish government needs to enter into meaningful dialogue with the Catalan government and find a political solution. It needs to stop using the police and the legal system to attack the Catalan independence movement, which is a legitimate political movement.

Colleagues, the silence on this issue must end. We must talk openly about Catalonia and justice for the Catalan people and human rights for the Catalan people.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr GAVAN.

The next speaker is Mr SCHENNACH, Austria, Socialist Group.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madame President.

Today I would like to address a topic that is particularly regrettable. The Assembly has decided to make a report on the Human Rights situation of the Tatar population in the Crimean peninsula. We have chosen a rapporteur. And as always in areas that we call the so-called gray areas, it needs the approval of both sides. In this case of Ukraine and the Russian Federation. To date, our rapporteur Mr Manuel TORNARE from Geneva has not been able to travel there because these two confirmations are not available.

I think the Council of Europe needs to insist that we get this access from both sides, and that an elected rapporteur can make a report on the Human Rights situation of a population group that has been resettled, persecuted and discriminated against for centuries.

Within the assembly, this decision was taken by the Sub-committee for Conflicts between Member States back then, and it was taken unanimously, so now you just have to accept that. It is the right of the Council of Europe to do an observational mission in the member states, in the name of Human Rights and the Rule of Law. We have also found solutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the past. But it is important that both sides agree here and that our rapporteur can travel to Crimea and that we finally get this report on the situation of the Crimean Tatars. Thanks.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr SCHENNACH.

The next speaker is Mr SEYIDOV, Azerbaijan, European Conservatives.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Madame President.

This is really very important to take into account, that for 70 years, this organisation has been in favour of the sacred values, which are shared all over the world: democracy, human rights and the rule of law. For 70 years, countries from Europe —and not only from Europe—, because of these values, gain very visible achievements and progress.

But, sometimes, we can see that these very, very important values, could be used in a very appropriate way. And this kind of attempts, this kind of approach, discriminates not only these sacred values, but the organisations which preserve these values. From this point of view, we can see that, in the current Europe, not only within the Council of Europe, but in different international organisations, we can see that these values could be used in an absolutely appropriate way. And that's why, from my point of view, and from the point of view of my political party, we think that we should do our best, in order to increase our efforts to bring these values back to this Assembly, and to all international organisations, especially in Europe.

First of all, I am talking about the rule of law. Rule of law is the number one, and the current Europe is suffering because of the violation of the rule of law. We can see this everywhere in Europe. And, from this point of view, I think, we should do our best in order, not only to protect the rule of law, but to explain that with the rule of law, we can create a better future than we have today. And the majority of the problems which, unfortunately, we can see in Europe, are because of the violation of the rule of law.

The second, very important problem, which, unfortunately, we can see within the international organisations, and at the same time, sometimes here in this Council of Europe, is the double standards towards these sacred values. From one point, we can see declarations that we are ready to protect these values. From another side, sometimes, we can see an absolutely different approach to these values. And this creates a lot of tension, a lot of misunderstandings.

And that's why, I think, from this point of view, we should do our best in order to explain, to bring more information that, with the protection of human rights, with democracy and the rule of law, we will be much more united, we will be much more open to the rest of the world. And what is really very important, much more attractive, because sometimes, these double standards created some tensions, which expelled those who want to be together with us.

And from this point of view, I think, again, I call my friends and colleagues from different international organisations and from the Council of Europe, to do their best in order to protect these sacred values.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

The next speaker is Mr Viorel Riceard BADEA, from Romania, EPP Group.

He is not present and the next speaker is Mr Martin WHITFIELD, the United Kingdom, Socialist Group, please.

Mr Martin WHITFIELD (United Kingdom, SOC): I'm grateful Madam President.

And I rise today to discuss two aspects from my own constituency, but which have European, and indeed worldwide, repercussions.

The first is to talk about a young person Erin CAMPBELL. Erin is a parliamentarian in the Scottish Youth Parliament. And Erin has led a social media campaign known as "#KeepInMind". The campaign was set up to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and to encourage young people to open up a conversation about it. One in four people struggle with their mental health at some aspect during their lives, yet 38% of school pupils say they do not know where they would turn if they had such a problem. Erin's mission is to make sure that they have a vehicle to have a voice. Her campaign to KeepInMind asks young people to, firstly, be brave enough to speak about it, and secondly, have the empathy to listen to their friends, colleagues and those that surround them, when people open up to them.

Erin and other young people are pioneering in breaking the stigma and to create a safe space for young people to talk about mental health. The campaign is not a solution, but it is a start, it's a step to making young people's futures more secure.

And in that vein, I would like to make mention of a charity, the Teapot Trust, which is based in Musselburgh, East Lothian, but works across the whole of the United Kingdom. Their aim is to enrich the lived experience of children with chronic health conditions, to support the mental health and well-being, not just of the child, but also the family, and they do so through art. They provide creative experiences that help build resilience and encourage self-expression. And they are great and strong advocates for the public health authorities to recognise and to fund the proven cost-effectiveness of therapeutic art. They simply take people experienced

in art into hospitals to work with young people who are suffering. The space that is created through that art allows some young people to express, for the first time, the turmoil, the pain, the anger, but also the hope and joy that fill all of our young people.

The Teapot Trust and Erin are two examples. There are examples across the European continent where giving space for young people to talk, with young people, means that we can get the best for those that are most important to us, because like those that forced climate change back into the headlines when adults were ignoring it, young people do have the answers.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr WHITFIELD.

The next speaker is Ms GAFAROVA, Azerbaijan, European Conservatives.

Ms Sahiba GAFAROVA (Azerbaijan, EC): Thank you very much, Ms President.

Ladies and gentleman,

During this session, we had different debates. We talked about a number of issues that threaten the countries of Europe, particularly regarding the issues of terrorism and discrimination.

I believe that one of the most important issues in the modern world is energy security. The energy landscape has undergone profound shifts on a worldwide scale in recent years. Some of the main factors are increased hydrocarbon consumption in emerging countries, a rise of the non-conventional sector in North America, debates on energy transition, and many others as well.

In other words, in recent years a cataclysm around the world, including political crises, has forced European countries to think more seriously about energy security. It's well known that the heads of state and government of European countries have repeatedly expressed their concern in this regard. Considering the fact that energy security is one of the main components of the many European countries' national security, I think today we should pay more attention to energy issues and support the work in this direction.

In this regard, I'd like to share the information about the energy policy of my country. In view of the above-mentioned change, the role of Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly important in ensuring the future of European energy security due to its extensive oil and gas resources. I'd like to mention that the energy policy and the foreign policy of Azerbaijan are intrinsically linked to supporting the balance of power in the region, as well as national development and stabilisation.

Dear colleagues, the strategy for energy security in our country started from the signing of the Contract of the Century in 1994 with major oil companies in the world. Just a few days ago, the people of Azerbaijan celebrated their 25th anniversary of it. The Contract of the Century has an undeniable place and extraordinary role in the economic development, in the process of ensuring fuel and energy needs, not only for our country's economy but also for the world energy supply.

The reliable supply of oil and gas security of the pipelines, diversification of energy sources, consideration of environmental requirements, and efficient usage of energy resources form the principles of energy security in my country. Azerbaijan has become a central player in international projects of regional and global importance, and one of the main strategic points is that the pragmatic energy policy of Azerbaijan is a strategic factor in strengthening the security and deepening cooperation in the region. Increased mutual investments, creation of new cooperation platforms, transformation of energy, hydrocarbon resources on accessible and safe roads are the most effective results of multilateral cooperation.

In fact, today Azerbaijan plays an important role in reaching the energy map of Eurasia. Azerbaijan has appeared as a new contributor in the European markets buoyed by its hydrocarbon reserves and I'd like to say, in conclusion, that with full responsibility that Azerbaijan is changing the energy map of Europe with its energy potential and fair energy policies.

Thank you very much.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Ms GAFAROVA.

The next speaker is Ms FATALIYEVA, Azerbaijan, European Conservatives.

Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA (Azerbaijan, EC): Thank you, Madame Chairman.

Ladies and gentleman,

This session is marked by the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, an organisation fighting for peace, prosperity and security in member states. But one of the issues damaging the image and the spirit of this organisation is hate speech being voiced in this Assembly and beyond.

Unfortunately, still remaining unresolved, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of the aspects of those hate speeches, in some hands becoming an instrument of manipulation. Unfortunately, recently, official Yerevan made many provocative statements, with an inadequate approach for the Armenian side that causes tension and conflict. Starting from August this year, Prime Minister Pashinyan has tried to change the regional agenda, declaring that Karabakh is Armenia, which was obviously done in order to strengthen his positions in the country on the eve of municipal election to be held this year, and also next year's parliamentary elections. On the eve of the foreign minister meetings, in the UN, it seemed to be a provocation aimed to bring a breakdown of the negotiation process. Later, Prime Minister Pashinyan went to the USA and repeated this statement there. Thus, the main aim is reached. He gets the support of the Armenian diaspora in the United States, which results in the visit of a US Congressman on the military helicopter to Nagorno-Karabakh.

This all is a continuation of a planned series of provocations. But the reality is that it is a very dangerous tendency. The leadership of Armenia chooses a wrong way of strengthening their position within the country because this action will bring to tension and afterwards to war. We have to stop it.

Another example of provocation is on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Military training started in a quite aggressive manner. Everyone –European countries, the entire world, international organisations– admit that Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan. But we have to condemn the aggressive statement of the Armenian side because no one can guarantee that after this aggressive rhetoric there won't be actions leading the region to the brink of war. Armenian leadership must determine what is the official position of the state and what is part of PR campaign, at least for the sake of Armenian people.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Ms FATALIYEVA.

The next speaker is Mr ŠEŠELJ, Serbia.

Mr Aleksandar ŠEŠELJ (Serbia, NR): Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty years ago, the NATO coalition brutally bombed my country, the Republic of Serbia, and during the campaign of aggression killed more than 2500 people, and inflicted material damage estimated at more than 100 billion US dollars. This action represents a violation of international law because there was no consent of the United Nations Security Council for this intervention. For more than twenty years NATO and their partners in crime, the terrorist organization KLA –Kosovo Liberation Army– are occupying the Serbian region of Kosovo and Metohija. This is an unprecedented case in modern history that is against all international acts, first of all the United Nations Charter and the Final document from Helsinki.

During this time, Albanian terrorists from the KLA have declared the independence of the so-called Republic of Kosovo and continued with the exodus of the Serbian community living in Kosovo. Ethnically motivated crimes are being committed on a daily basis. Last month, a Serbian boy was stabbed and barely survived in the town of Kosovska Mitrovica. The so-called Kosovo special forces –KFOR– are molesting Serbs in Kosovo, arresting them without any charges. Leaders of this terrorist gang are Hashim Thaci, president of the so-called Republic of Kosovo, who was the key person of the organ trafficking mafia in Kosovo, a fact proven by the Dick MARTY report in the Council of Europe, and Ramush Haradinaj, the prime minister, ex leader of the KLA. Both of them criminals of war.

Their current plan is to erase not only the Serbian community from Kosovo, but to deny any proof of centuries old Serbian presence in Kosovo and Metohija, declaring all Serbian monuments, churches and monasteries as Albanian heritage. They have stolen Serbian territory and now want to steal Serbian history as well.

The so-called republic of Kosovo is now trying to enter the UN as a full member and in that way become a member of INTERPOL and UNESCO as well, and in that way make it possible to charge all Serbian police and military officers by the so-called courts of a terrorist organisation. They are now trying to legalise the occupation of Serbian territory.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the negotiations between Serbia and the European Union the most important condition for membership is signing the legally obliging document agreement with Kosovo, which should be the ground for recognising Kosovo by Serbia and open the door to United Nations membership for the so-called Republic of Kosovo. These facts show us that the European Union is blackmailing the Republic of Serbia, and we can now see that the European Union is supporting terrorists over a sovereign European country. The Republic of Serbia has no place in such a Union.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Ms Marta GONZÁLEZ VÁZQUEZ, Spain.

Ms Marta GONZÁLEZ VÁZQUEZ (Spain, NR)*: Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The comments made by colleague Mr Paul GAVAN about Catalonia requires a convincing response from the Spanish colleagues here, like myself. A very calm response.

Spain is a democracy, an advanced democracy. A state under the rule of law where the separation of powers is clearly established in the constitution, voted in 1978, with a very broad majority. It is a decentralised country where the different autonomous regions which – Catalonia is one of them, Galicia, my own – have great autonomy of governance. The Spanish constitution establishes that national sovereignty lies in the people of Spain as a whole. It proclaims the indissoluble unity of the country, one of the oldest in Europe. We have overcome terrorism, the assassinations that claimed so many lives as a result of perserving with our rule of law and the force of the law.

We joined the European Union over 20 years ago. We've had very difficult moments, but thanks to the strength of our democratic structure, we have overcome the various problems. So do not be influenced by the fake news that is disseminated intentionally by certain sectors.

The independence politicians who are in prison right now waiting to be sentenced are there for two reasons: because they are suspected of having committed crimes against the state – rebellion, sedition – and embezzling public funds, conspiring to create the independence of a particular region in the country and the fragmentation of the territory of the nation, declaring the independence of part of the territory in the Catalan parliament, thus going against the constitution democratically approved by the people of Spain.

Some are also imprisoned because well, other suspects escaped to Belgian and Swiss territory as well, to avoid justice. Indeed there was fear that they would do the same if they were to be released.

In the weeks to come we will find out how the Spanish court rules against these politicians. If they were truly democrats, which they are not, they would persuade by means of words and democracy, not force, the other political parties in the country to organise the referendum they so desire. But they need to convince them and achieve the majority all democrats know is required.

But while they may have had the power of words, they have lost it since they have used numerous populist, anti-democratic and totalitarian methods in order to pursue their aims, which they have not achieved thankfully.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Miljan DAMJANOVIĆ, Serbia.

Mr Miljan DAMJANOVIĆ (Serbia, NR): Madam President.

Honourable colleague parliamentarians,

Speaking about the current situation in the Serbian region of Kosovo and Metohija, twenty years after the criminal aggression on my country by NATO, and the occupation of Kosovo and Metohija by the forces of NATO, and the KLA terrorist organisation, problems in Kosovo and Metohija are numerous.

Today's Europe turns the blind eye when it comes to Albanian crimes, and dreams of Greater Albania. Instead of having a discussion about facts, we are forced to listen to the language of ultimatums, that goes hand in hand with unbelievable cynicism, and it all comes from people who claim they are our friends.

And this is coming from somebody who was born and raised in Prizren, a Serbian imperial city in Kosovo and Metohija, and being forced to leave my home with my family before the strikes of Albanian terrorists, and as a refugee settled in Belgrade.

Problems in Kosovo and Metohija should be solved by dialogue. Resolution of Security Council of United Nations number 1244, guaranties the return of thousands of Serbian policeman and soldiers back on our territory, the territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

If the international community has sincere intentions of continuing the dialogue, this is the first precondition that must be observed.

Twenty years have passed in which the UN resolution has been violated, and now it's time for Europe to respect the signature and official documents of the UN Security Council.

The second thing that we can negotiate is the withdrawal of three sets of laws that the so-called Kosovo's parliament adopted in 2018, when they started the transformation of the so called Kosovo security forces into the so called Army of Kosovo.

They don't need an army, since all border crossings must be under control of the Serbian police and army forces. Also, symbols of Serbian sovereignty, must be shown across the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. That is international law.

We want to sit down and negotiate the degree of autonomy, and we don't want to influence Albanian cultural institutions, their political life, and political processes that are ongoing in the territory of the autonomous region of Kosovo and Metohija, because the Serbian Radical Party, is committed to democracy with respect for the state borders of Serbia.

From the European Union Member States that call Serbia a friendly nation, we expect them to withdraw recognition of the so-called independent Kosovo, in the shortest period of time. With that move they will prove that they see Serbia as their ally and serious partner.

Modern Europe must understand, once and for all, that friends don't stab each other in the back. And everybody who works on taking away the cradle of Serbian people, Kosovo and Metohija, doesn't only stab Serbia in the back, but kills one proud nation, by creating the first internationally recognised terrorist country in the world.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The next speaker is Ms Susana SUMELZO, Spain.

She is not present... Oh, sorry.

Ms Susana SUMELZO (Spain, SOC)*: Good afternoon.

First and foremost, I wanted to say that this morning here, in Strasbourg, we've been talking about fundamental rights, but there are thousands of Spaniards demonstrating right now back in my country. These people are calling for equal opportunities, wherever they may live. They want a worthy future for their peoples. They want fair rights for people who live in rural areas and in sparsely populated areas.

Aragon is where I'm from. That is a part of the country that is very, very much affected by sparse population figures. At the moment, we've got people in our cities who are demonstrating, asking for politicians to come up with better solutions to the problem of rural exodus, or depopulation in Spain or elsewhere in Europe. It's a very serious problem, and we need to come up with a solution. We need to also remember that particular debate in our European institutions.

Residents in smaller municipalities are also residents of Europe, just like people who live in Paris or in Berlin. We need to really do something for them. We need to really find a solution to this big, big problem. I know things have been done, but it's not enough. Europe needs to get on board here. That's why we'd like to ask Europe to address this issue. It's a shared problem, and we need to come up with joint solutions in order to stem this rural exodus. It's a demographic challenge, and it needs to be addressed at a continental level, I would argue.

Furthermore, If I may, I would like to refer to some of the comments made by a Member of parliament, here in this chamber, regarding political prisoners in Spain. We don't have political prisoners in Spain. We have politicians in prison because they have not abided by the law. That's why.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Susana SUMELZO.

The next speaker is Ms María Luisa BUSTINDUY, from Spain.

Ms María Luisa BUSTINDUY (Spain, SOC)*: Thank you very much, President.

Good day to all.

As my colleague just mentioned, we find ourselves in a forum for development, and for the equality of individuals who are disadvantaged.

I come from the region of Andalusia. It's an autonomous region of Spain that has had much support from the European Union over the last couple of years. With this particular help, and with the work done by the autonomous authorities, the economy of Andalusia has grown. Thanks to the work of the government, investments in the production sector and in agriculture as well, which has moved from being a traditional sector, to one characterised by innovation in the food production sector.

We've also developed our aeronautic industry, particularly in Seville in an industrial centre which is focusing on aeronautics in general.

These are sectors which, of course, play a very important role, and as the World Trade Organisation has stated, these sectors have been pointed out as particularly important. Now, with what's going on with Trump and the particular issues that have come up right now, it is being threatened. Not only the aeronautic sector, but also the table olive sector. The olive sector and the olive oil sector will be affected as well. These are major export products of Andalusia. The aeronautic sector has not been active in export up until now, the focus is Europe for the time being, so it will be indirectly affected undoubtedly.

I would like to express our concern with regard to this particular issue of exports, and how they are to be affected by the measures adopted by the United States. Particularly focusing, once again, on olive oil and olives. Other countries will suffer the same fate as we, for example Italy and Greece. The autonomous government is working, together with the state authorities, to find some sort of effective way to deal with this imminent threat.

We do feel that, the European Union, must do whatever it can to protect our agricultural products, and we hope, indeed, that the European Union will protect our agricultural sector and do away with those threats. We're speaking about thousands of jobs that are under threat.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker on the list is Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV, Azerbaijan.

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan, ALDE): Thank you Madame Chair.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to talk about the barriers created during the negotiation process between two Member States and on the continuation of constructive dialogue.

For nearly 30 years two Member States have been in a state of constant war that has not yet been officially declared. For almost 30 years coffins have been regularly arriving to Armenia and Azerbaijan from the forefront. The fearful mothers who first met those coffins in Azerbaijan and Armenia, they want above all the damned war to end as soon as possible.

The internationally recognised form for ending the conflict is negotiation. This is also one of the key obligations of Azerbaijan and Armenia undertaken 19 years ago when they joined the Council of Europe. However now a very difficult and even desperate situation has emerged in this direction. The main reason for this is the Armenian leadership, it's non-constructive statements and the impulsive steps they are taking. These are so obvious truths that the people have already started intuitively talking about this, both in Armenia and in the international community.

When the Armenian change of government took place, the people whose hands were covered with the blood of the Karabakh war left their positions, and everyone began to look forward to the negotiation process hoping for progress. But unfortunately this hope did not prove true. The head of the Armenian state makes contradictory statements incompatible with every international legal document on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan which is officially recognised by the international community. Prime Minister Pachinian has repeatedly declared that Karabakh belongs to Armenia. That is the point. That is not a matter of conversation.

Dear colleagues, only those who live in a world of illusions can make such statements. As an immediate reaction to the information disseminated by the head of the Armenian state to the world media, Matthew Bryza, a former United States co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, who is well-versed in the essence of the problem said that such a statement completely undermines the negotiation process. Instead of making conclusions from the warning of a professional diplomat or an experienced person who is directly involved in the negotiation process, the Armenian leadership takes this statement more...

[time expired - interrupted by Chair]

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker on the list is Ms Melisa RODRÍGUEZ HERNÁNDEZ, Spain.

Ms Melisa RODRÍGUEZ HERNÁNDEZ (Spain, ALDE)*: Thank you very much colleagues.

I wanted to take the floor to defend the interests of Spaniards and of all citizens in my country.

I speak in defence of the truth and in defence of the constitution, which of course was a constitution drafted after a transition period which was exemplary and allowed us Spaniards, all Spaniards to defend equality. The Spanish constitution has something that many other do not in the countries represented in this chamber. The fact that there is the possibility to modify it if there is sufficient consensus.

I wanted to respond to one of my colleagues. I do apologise. You talked about the issue of the political prisoners. There are no prisoners in Spain that are in prison because of their political thought. No. There are prisoners behind bars in Spain because they have broken the law.

Just because you are a politician, does that mean that you can rise above the law? That you don't have to respect the law? Rise above the constitution and the Rule of Law? No.

I want to respond to what you said because you said that it seems absurd that we have these charges against these people for sedition and rebellion. I'm sorry, but I actually think that such charges are not absurd. Far from it they are actually very very serious charges.

Also earlier on a colleague was talking about the independence movement. In Catalonia my colleagues from my political group have to be escorted by bodyguards every single day. The spokesperson for my political party has day in day out people positioned outside his door, by the entrance to his house, because of threats.

I've also been accompanied by bodyguards because of people throwing things at us. So I think you need to be aware of that as well.

All these people that have to be protected.

I think there needs to be an investigation into certain developments that have taken place recently. For instance, where did the money come from for those so called international observers that have been travelling to certain places to give speeches?

I think it is important for us to talk about this but be honest about the truth.

Another example. Members of independentist commands, the CDR, because they had plans concerning the Guardia Civil, and all of this has been acknowledged in their statements. We've also got people in the Generalitat right now, who were giving orders to clamp down, clamp down...

This is not the solution. This is not the way out. I don't think it's either appropriate to say things which are inaccurate about my country. I'm very very fortunate to be able to represent my country and my constituents and we have a position in the national congress and I'm very lucky to be able to do that. But again, I think it's very important to always remember the truth.

Thank you.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Mikayel MELKUMYAN, Armenia.

Mr Mikayel MELKUMYAN (Armenia, EC): Madame President,

Dear colleagues,

I must note something very unacceptable for the culture and standards of our organization.

Mr. Rafik HUSSEYNOV and Ms FATALIYEVA present something that is very provocative. The territory, the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, now Artsakh, is the origin, the region, the country of Armenians who lived in Nagorno-Karabakh, who now live in Nagorno-Karabakh and who will still live in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The proof of this question, of this problem, are the churches, the monuments, the various proofs that there are now in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Now, concerning the position of our government to regulate the problems of Nagorno-Karabakh: firstly, it is still a problem for Armenia, for its government, for its population. It is always a problem that needs to be solved peacefully.

Secondly, it has been 30 years –28 years– since the Azerbaijani Government and the Government of Armenia have given and delegated the Nagorno-Karabakh problem-solving function to the President of the mixed group of Russia, France and the USA.

What do you want? Why, in all the frontier lines of Nagorno-Karabakh, do not the different instruments for fixing the problem exist?

The last thing is the latest statement by the Azerbaijani Defense Minister, Zakir ASANOV, who said: "Mr. Minister of Defense of Armenia, we must meet in the war room." As a position of the government this is very provocative and unacceptable.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Ladies and gentlemen, I want to remind you that you have to put your name on the list if you wish to speak.

But since today is Friday, Mr Aleksei KONDRATEV, you have one minute to express yourself.

Mr Aleksei KONDRATEV (Russian Federation, NR)*: Thank you very much. I'll be very brief.

Colleagues, President, at the beginning of our work four days ago, this wonderful poster was distributed by Mr Pieter OMTZIGT with regard to a press conference. It was an invitation to all. What we have here is essentially a kind of accusation –that is what took place in the framework of this particular presentation– of the individuals that were implicated in the MH17 downing.

What I want to say quite simply is that we have an investigation that is going on. The investigation is not finished. So presenting things in this *fait accompli* fashion is totally unacceptable. I simply wanted to point that out. This particular press conference was based on information that was not complete.

Thank you.

Ms Boriانا ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): That concludes the list of the speakers.

The debate is closed.

Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (Switzerland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues,

We will now take a position on the other decisions of the Bureau, contained in its report of activity, in Doc.14968, Addendum 3.

Are there any objections to the adoption of these decisions?

There is no objection.

The decisions of the Bureau are therefore accepted.

Before declaring the fourth part of the ordinary session of the 2019 Parliamentary Assembly closed, I give you the list of the best voters.

The most popular member of parliament this week is Mr. Momodou JALLOW, from Sweden. He has already gone; I can only send him my remote congratulations and, if necessary, he can always contact us for the little present that was planned for him.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have come to the end of our work. I thank those of you who are still here, as well as all the rapporteurs of the committees who have done a great deal of work.

I would also like to thank the Vice-Presidents, who contributed to the smooth running of our sessions. They are: Ms Boriانا ÅBERG, Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR, Mr Roger GALE, Mr Çağatay KILIÇ, Mr Joseph O'REILLY, Mr Samad SEYIDOV, Ms Elisabeth SCHNEIDER-SCHNEITER and Ms Nicole TRISSE.

My thanks also go to all the staff and the interpreters, who faithfully reflect our work.

I inform the Assembly that the first part of the 2020 Ordinary Session will be held from the 27th to the 31st of January 2020.

I declare the fourth part of the ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for 2019, closed.

THE MEETING IS ADJOURNED.