



**Provisional edition**

Monday 27 January 2020, morning

## Official report of debates

### Opening of the part-session

#### Sitting No. 1

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** I entered this hemicycle as a member in the previous millennium. During those years, on many occasions I felt proud of the Assembly's work. However, I must candidly admit that on some occasions I also felt ashamed. Our Assembly reflects the political evolution of the national parliaments and of European politics in general. We all face major challenges emerging in Europe and beyond.

The mission of this body is to re-affirm and uphold the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This task is not easier today than it was 20 years ago. It is rather the opposite.

Dear colleagues, after a long break, parliamentarians of all member states are present in this hemicycle. I ought to say I have mixed feelings about this. On one hand, I do appreciate the resumption of dialogue with all delegations. I fully agree that dialogue is indispensable and that exclusion is not a proper way to solve urgent problems. On the other hand, dialogue is a tool, rather than a goal per se. If genuine dialogue is replaced by mere teaching others "my truth" at the Assembly rostrum to produce propaganda statements for domestic consumption, then the very idea of a dialogue is discredited. The choice is in our hands.

The coming months will show how wise the decisions we have taken were. Once again I'm asking the key question, "Is the Council of Europe just another UN, an OSCE-type, a round table where everybody can participate or is it rather a club based on clearly defined common values and specific criteria for membership?" I am strongly convinced that one OSCE is enough and that the Council of Europe must preserve its unique nature and mission.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot but recognise that in today's Europe we are facing growing opposition to the basic values of the Council of Europe. This opposition is both explicit and hidden, coming from outside and from inside Europe. Under the circumstances we must set clear priorities in our work and concentrate on key issues.

First, this is the universal nature of modern human rights. The concept of non-discrimination and equality is a cornerstone of the international human rights system developed after World War II. In this regard, our organisation is still lagging behind. Protocol 12 to the European Convention of Human Rights, an advanced

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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.

and effective instrument for general prohibition of discrimination, has been ratified by fewer than half of the member states and only two new ratifications occurred in the last ten years. A selective approach to equality seems to dominate the European political agenda nowadays.

On a positive side, a lot has been achieved in the field of women's rights and gender equality. Many problems still persist but we are actively dealing with them. Substantial progress has been achieved with regard to the rights of LGBT persons. However, here we clearly see a dividing line between old and new democracies. In the meantime, major backsliding is obvious in other areas. Independence of the judiciary, freedom of the media, the rights of civil society, NGOs and academia are under threat in a number of member states.

The protection of national minorities is a particularly painful issue. This very Assembly played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for the modern system of minority protection in the early 90s. Thirty years later we witness growing nationalism and neglect of the commitments and, indeed, obligations to protect cultural and linguistic diversity in accordance with our own standards. Regrettably, some member states, again, misuse protection of minorities as a pretext for intervention and even aggression as has happened in Europe in the past. I strongly believe that democratic Europe should not surrender to the abusers, should not play into their hands by departing from established standards but rather the opposite, it should uphold our principles of minority protection as an integral part of fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, our lofty rhetoric is not always accompanied by political will and resolute action. We have created an excellent mechanism based on the framework convention for the protection of national minorities and its monitoring bodies. But do these bodies always receive strong support from the Committee of Ministers and even our own Assembly when, for example, a political leader of a member state publicly defends archaic concepts, for example, declares that minority schools must be eradicated in the interest of the children belonging to minorities? This fundamentally contradicts the standards and values of our organisation and our Assembly should stand up for the values it undertook to defend.

Dear colleagues, for all of us, the duties in this Assembly are a second mandate. Our primary obligations are at home and it is not often that we can successfully sell our work here to our voters. Nevertheless, we should not surrender to populist temptations. We ought to focus our work on key problems relevant to our mission, rather than on issues which mean more publicity for you back at home. I very much hope that the Europe of human rights, democracy, equality and solidarity will prevail and that our Assembly will resolutely contribute to this, including the 2020 Session we are opening today.

Thank you.

The next issue on our agenda is examination of credentials of members for the 2020 Ordinary Session of the Assembly. The names of the representatives and substitutes are in Document 15039. If no credentials are challenged, the credentials will be ratified. Are any credentials challenged?

I see that some members want to challenge the credentials. Therefore, before calling a member to speak at this point, I remind the Assembly that the rules on challenges to credentials require the member challenging credentials to state which credentials are being challenged, whether the challenge is under Rule 7 (procedural grounds) or Rule 8 (substantive grounds), and the reasons for the challenge.

I call Ms Petra BAYR to challenge the credentials. Please, Madame BAYR.

**Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC):** Thank you very much.

The representation of women at the Swiss delegation is not in line with the requirements of the Rules of Procedure according to Paragraph 62.A.

It's not only nice to have a legal requirement to include women in an appropriate numbering in our delegation. It's a political failure not to do so. The Swiss delegation lacks 17 percent of women, which is a shame for a country where recently one million women were actively on strike to fight for their rights. And I therefore challenge the accreditation of the Swiss delegation.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you Madam BAYR.

So I remind that under Rule 7, a challenge must be supported by at least 10 members. This is a challenge on procedural grounds from at least five national delegations present in the chamber. Would those members supporting this challenge please rise in their places and remain standing while we check whether the requirement is met.

I see that this challenge has necessary support, so accordingly the credentials of the Swiss delegations are referred without debate to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs. The committee should report back within 24 hours if possible since objection relates to gender balance of the delegation, so it will also be referred to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for opinion.

Are any other challenges?

Okay, let's take them one by one, so I will not repeat the rules. So who is the next? Madam LOVOCHKINA.

**Ms Yuliya LOVOCHKINA (Ukraine, SOC):** Dear colleagues, I believe that gender equality goals are very important for this organisation and all our societies across Europe.

To follow the rules is a matter of principle in these premises. Making sure gender equality while composing the delegation is a matter of principle for our organisation. This is why our group decided to challenge the credentials and I challenge the credentials of Sweden on procedural grounds according to Rule seven due to a violation of the Rule 6.2.a.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms LOVOCHKINA

There's a credential, so the delegation of Sweden are challenged on procedural grounds. Again, this challenge must be supported by at least ten members. I invite those members who support this challenge to rise from their places. Yes, can we see it? Okay. So we have the necessary support, the required support envisaged by the Rules of Procedure so accordingly the credentials of the Swedish delegations are also referred without debate to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, and also to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

I see there are some further challenges. Ms SAYEK BÖKE, please.

**Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC):** As my colleagues have already mentioned, there are two issues at stake: the rules and our principles. And we have to stick to both of them, so according to the official delegation sent by the national Parliament we would like to challenge the credentials of the Portuguese delegation on procedural grounds because the composition of the delegation is not in accordance with the rule 6.2.a. regarding the percentage of women representation in the delegation, it says less by five per cent almost compared to the National Parliament so we'd like to challenge the credentials.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE. So again it's a challenge under Article 7 on procedural grounds so again I ask Members who support this challenge, could you please rise and stand?

It's okay. We have enough sufficient support. Thank you.

So it means that the credentials of the delegation of Portugal are referred without debate to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs for the report and to Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for opinion.

So the next... Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR please, the floor is yours.

**Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR (Iceland, SOC):** Thank you Mr President.

As we all know the representation of men and women in Europe is 50/50. Nevertheless we have 1/3 here women and the rest are men. There's a reason we have procedural rules to ensure the minimal participation of women in this assembly, which is simply the low number that already exists in many of our member states in terms of the representation of women. I do not believe that we have majority anywhere. So on these grounds and on Rule 6.2.a I challenge the Polish delegation for not fulfilling the criteria therein on procedural grounds, Mr President.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms ÆVARSDÓTTIR.

I asked those members who support the challenge of the credentials of the Polish delegation and the rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure: could you please rise and remain standing for a while?

Yes, thank you. We have the necessary support. It means that the credentials of the Polish delegations are also referred to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs for the report and to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for opinion.

So, the next is Mr LIDDELL-GRAINGER. Please, the floor is yours.

**Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** I challenge the credentials of Spain on procedural grounds. All parties in the Spanish parliament are represented in the Spanish delegation except Vox.

Vox has repeatedly asked to be on the delegation and last year in June the Spanish delegation leader gave a solid undertaking to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs they would be included. Since then, new elections have taken place with Vox becoming the third largest party in Spain. Vox specifically asked for its speaker to be included but yet again this has been refused.

We therefore challenge the credentials of the Spanish delegation on procedural grounds.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

The credentials of the Spanish delegation are challenged on procedural grounds.

I ask those Members who support this challenge, could you please rise up and remain standing?

Just a moment. We see that the number of Members is sufficient but we are checking whether five national delegations are represented by these Members.

Yes. Thank you colleagues. This challenge has sufficient support. So the credentials of the Spanish delegation are referred without debate to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs for the report.

Thank you, and the next is Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS on my list.

**Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS (Lithuania, EPP/CD):** Yes, it is. Thank you, Mister CILEVIČS. On behalf of my colleagues here, I would like to challenge the credentials of the Russian Federation delegation on substantial grounds. As you know, a few days ago a doubtful referendum was declared inside Russia about international law and the balance of its internal load. That means a very substantial issue that the human rights courts will be not acting on anymore and that all resolutions, 1990, 2034, 2063, 2292, were not implemented in relation to the Russian obligation to Georgia and Russia. So, please join me in this appeal on substantial grounds. Thank you.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS. The credentials of the Delegation of the Russian Federation are challenged on substantive grounds. Under Rule eight this challenge must be supported by at least 30 members from at least five national delegations present in the chamber.

Would those members supporting this challenge please rise in their places and remain standing while we check whether the requirement is met.

Thank you colleagues. The requirement is met. The credentials of the Russian delegation go without debate to the Monitoring Committee, in this case, for the preparation of the corresponding report.

Colleagues, next is Ms Zita GURMAI.

**Ms Zita GURMAI (Hungary, SOC):** Thank you very much. I would like to challenge the Macedonian delegation because of the composition, which I think is -6%. Therefore it is not compliant with Rule 6.2.a. That is why it is important to take into consideration our own rules. I'm quite proud that we have a Secretary General who's a woman. Thank you very much.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

The credentials of the delegation of North Macedonia are challenged on procedural grounds, so I have to ask whether there are ten Members from five national delegations who support this. Please rise and remain standing for a while.

Yes, yes. Thank you. It seems that the challenge has sufficient support, so the credentials of the delegation of North Macedonia are sent to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs for the report. And since the challenge is related to gender equality, it is referred also to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for opinion.

The next is Ms Yuliya LOVOCHKINA again. Yes, please Ms Yulia LOVOCHKINA.

**Ms Yuliya LOVOCHKINA (Ukraine, SOC):** Dear chair, dear colleagues, I am sorry I have to take the floor again, but that's the rules: one by one.

So, once again, the core value of this organization is human rights and women rights are no exception. The San Marino delegation is underrepresented again. Women are underrepresented by 6.67% from our calculation, maybe the Rules Committee will correct this. However it is not a matter of numbers, it is a matter of principle.

So I challenge the credentials of San Marino delegations based on rule 7 with regards to violation of rule 6.2.a.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you Ms Yuliya LOVOCHKINA. Are there ten Members from at least five delegations who support the challenge of the credentials of the San Marino delegation on procedural grounds?

Please, could you rise up and stand?

Yes. Thank you. It seems the challenge has sufficient support, so the credentials of the San Marino delegation are referred without debate to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs and also to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for opinion.

So, any other?

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER please.

**Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** Thank you very much.

We are challenging the credentials of Moldavia on procedural grounds. All parties in the Moldavian parliament are represented in the Moldavian delegation. However, the Shor Party, "S", "H", "O", "R", who has exactly the same amount of members as the other parties on the delegation, has been deliberately kept out of the delegation. The Moldavian delegation has a free seat on its delegation but despite numerous demands refuses to give the Shor Party a place.

Therefore, we challenge the Moldavian credentials.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Sir LIDDELL-GRAINGER, are there at least ten members of the assembly from at least five national delegations who support the challenge of the credentials of the delegation of Moldova on procedural ground?

Thank you, it seems that this challenge has sufficient support, so the credentials of the Moldovan delegation are referred without debate to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs. That's all.

The next is Ms GOLUBEVA. Please, the floor is yours.

**Ms Marija GOLUBEVA (Latvia, ALDE):** Thank you Mr President.

I challenge the credentials of the Russian delegation on procedural grounds under Rule 7.

The election of parliamentarians from nationwide party lists in Russia includes votes from the illegally occupied and annexed territory of Crimea.

In international law individuals residing in this territory are entitled to continue to participate in elections in the state to which the territory lawfully belongs. Instead the votes are illegally counted in the elections of the Russian Parliament.

Moreover, several Members of the Russian delegation have been placed under European Union sanctions in March and September 2014 for actively supporting the use of Russian armed forces in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea and for voting for Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms GOLUBEVA.

Are there any 10 members of the Assembly who support the challenge of credentials of the Russian delegation on procedural grounds? Could you please rise and stand up for a while.

Thank you, colleagues. It's enough, the support is sufficient, so the credentials of the Russian delegation are sent to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs only.

Are there any other challenges? I see none so it seems that this is absolutely highest number of challenges this Assembly ever survived, so I wish good luck to the Committees who will have to deal with all these challenges. I remind that members whose credentials are challenged may sit provisionally with the same rights as other Assembly members until the Assembly has reached a decision. However, those members shall not vote in any proceedings relating to the examination of credentials which concern them.

Since there are no other challenges, the other credentials set out in document 15039 are ratified. I welcome our new colleagues.

The next item on the Agenda is the election of the President of the Assembly as set out in Document (2020) 03. I have received only one candidate, that of Mr Hendrick DAEMS from Belgium, Chairperson of the ALDE group. I therefore declare Mr Hendrik DAEMS elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for this Ordinary Session.

Mr DAEMS I congratulate you on your election and welcome you to your legitimate chair.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Ladies and gentlemen, Members of Parliament,

I would really like to thank you all from the bottom of my heart, for trusting in me, for honouring me and also for issuing me a challenge. I hope I'm up to the task of earning your trust. In any case, I'll do everything I can, with the whole team, to deserve it.

You do me great honor. Let me explain why: I am Belgian, as many of you know. My credentials have not been challenged, which is a good start! It should however be noted that the very first President of our Assembly was a great Belgian, Mr Paul-Henri SPAAK, one of Belgium's great statesmen and also one of the founding fathers of our institution and of Europe itself. Unless I am mistaken, it seems to me that one day he said: *"if I have to choose between a perfect Europe and a better Europe, I will choose the better Europe, because the perfect Europe does not exist, but the better Europe we can create ourselves"*. I do indeed think that this is something that suits this Assembly well, namely that, at all times, every day, every week when we are going to work together, we must try to make a better Europe for the 830 million citizens in the 47 countries of this Assembly.

I'm going to be a full-time president. I should therefore thank certain people, three ladies: the President of the party, the President of the Belgian Senate and my group sister in the Senate. You see, three women. All three have decided to give me the flexibility and freedom to be your full-time president. I must also thank someone else: my wife, Sophie, who has also given me the freedom to be able do so. It will be well written in the report: Sophie, I love you.

There you go. Having said that, let's get back to the matter at hand.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** I hope that this will be translated in the right way. So it's not about sheep, it's about getting back to business.

Ladies and gentlemen, Madam Secretary General, ladies and gentlemen Ambassadors, president of the Committee of Ministers of Georgian Ambassador, Mr Secretary General of the Assembly, and all 85 people who are in the team of the Assembly, my fellow Members in Parliament.

They say it takes two to tango, Madam Secretary General, I say: it takes three to dance. Why? Because in the Council of Europe we are not two, we are three. We are the Committee of Ministers, we are the Secretary General, and we are the members of the Assembly. And we have proven in recent past, and we will do so this week and next week, you will do so in the Committee of Ministers, that we can achieve the important issues if we work together. So, yes, it takes two to tango but here it takes three to dance. And if I would translate that into some type of political language it is going from dialogue into trialogue.

So I would like to ask the Georgian presidency of the Committee of Ministers: look into, an all of you in the Committee of Ministers, yourself Madam Secretary and ourselves in the Assembly, to what extent we can institutionalize this trialogue. Why? Because it has given us a result, it will give us a result this week, it will give us a result next week. And I do believe that, whatever we do of substance in the Council of Europe, at the end of the day it needs to be the result of all three of us, not just of one, all three of us.

This is why I believe that indeed, today, we need to work on this complementary procedure. Not because it will be some kind of a procedure to sanction on the country. It is a procedure that would allow a country deviating too much from our principles to get back on track: that's what it's all about.

It also means that the three of us we should cherish, protect, uphold all the conventions, all the protocols and European Conventions of human rights that exist. We should do that together. It is not the only responsibility of the Secretary General or of the Human Rights Commissioner. It is not the only or sole responsibility of the Committee of Ministers. It is not our own and only responsibility as a Parliamentary Assembly. We should do that the three together.

And so, yes, there's more than 200 conventions and protocols, not only the European Convention on Human Rights. And if I may take one out of it, well, I would take the Istanbul Convention out of it as being an example of what we should defend, service, uphold at all times. Equality between men and women, gender equality, will be high on the agenda of the coming next year, at least if the assembly would do, would choose to follow me on that one.

But we also need dear colleagues to do new things. I do believe that any presidency, any Assembly activity should have results. And I believe that the Georgian presidency is taking a very good example of a very good initiative in February coming, when they will have a high-level conference on the connection between human rights and environment. So I do believe this is an issue we should address. I do believe that at the end of the day we should not let the Court rule on the basis of connecting human rights to environmental issues without a basis. I do believe we should have a protocol on climate allowing the court and giving the court a fundamental base on which to have rulings concerning these issues. It'll be a controversial one, Madam Secretary General, but we need to do it, because otherwise we will have some kind of an organic growth of jurisprudence of which we do not know where it goes, with no support of the Committee of Ministers and at least not supported by a large majority of this Assembly. I know that this normally is something the Committee of Ministers do themselves.

So let me get into the logic of the trialogue again. If I may, if I'm allowed to do so, next week, I will put on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers a recommendation that has existed already for 10 years in our Assembly. 10 years ago already, this Assembly by more than a two-thirds majority asked you, Committee of Ministers, to start the procedure on the protocol concerning climate or environment. So I will do so again: I hope you will allow me.

But at the end of the day, I also hope that we can do that together, Committee of Ministers, Secretary General, and also we as an Assembly. Why? Because at the end of the day, ladies and gentlemen ambassadors, at the end of the day, whatever comes out of it needs to be approved by the national parliaments out of which we come. For the Parliamentary element, it is important to have it up front instead of maybe having a problem at the end of the day for some delegates as not having supported this very important potential protocol among others.

I also, dear colleagues, will change a little bit the way we work. I've discussed a little bit with Mr Wojciech SAWICKI. As always, he is severe to me and to all of us, but we will discuss this in the coming weeks: how to potentially change the way we work. Not only on the trialogue, but also how we work in order to have results! It is not enough to talk, we need results. Politics by results. We need to have a relevant impact on the daily life of these 830 million citizens within the 47 countries. I like a lot to talk, but I like more having results that really change the daily life of people.

So, in that sense, as Mr Boriss CILEVIČS said in the beginning of the seating, I think that implying all of the national parliaments is very important. It is very important and I think that, if it is possible, I would like to go and visit all 47. So I will need you, ambassadors, to assist me in that. I will need a vice-chair to be appointed

shortly after this small allocation, as I say, to help me on that. Why not have some kind of an expedition into the 47 countries in order to show how important the Council of Europe is in terms of daily life in each and every Member Country. We need to do that. We need to do that because we are relevant, we have a lot of impact. Only, people do not know. If we are able to show it, maybe then the relationship between the Council of Europe and our National Parliaments will become closer, and we will have more results as a result of that.

Let me end with just one general thought. And I try to capture it in, like, a chiasmus, which is a Latin figure of speech, you know. I would like to share a thought being "interests divide but values unite". We are all here, sent by our national Parliament, but I doubt that we are sent here only to defend our national interests. Interest, by definition, between countries will divide them, because they cannot always be the same. Values, on the contrary, are something that unites us, because we have all signed the European Declaration of Human Rights. So we all here to the same values. So, yes, at some point of time, interests will divide. But at all times values will and have to unite. So I would like to concentrate at least also on uniting our Council of Europe, defending, upholding the values that sit within the European Convention of Human Rights and all the other ones: democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

After all, and I said there's a few months ago in this hemicycle, as far as I'm concerned, I do not feel that the Council of Europe is the Council of European countries. My feeling is that we are a council of Europeans defending the same values. And maybe something which may sound strange, but when we are all equal to these values, it doesn't mean that we are the same. Being equal does not mean being the same, but it does mean cherishing, defending, upholding the same values. That is what is called unity in diversity. This is what the Council of Europe is all about. This is what I would like to uphold, this is what I would like to defend. This is, dear colleagues, what I would like, in the coming two years, to work together with you in order to have results in order to uphold indeed our values, but to have, as I said before, results.

And who knows that maybe a protocol on climate might be one of them. Maybe other ones also. We'll cherish any initiative coming from the Committee of Ministers, but above all I hope many initiatives will come from you as members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Thank you, again, for the incredible honor that you're giving me. Thank you, again, for the confidence that you're giving me. It is a challenge and let me end by one thing. It is a challenge and I know, because together with the group's leaders we've had a rough time, but I really would like to end with one word to Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER. She has had a rough time being the president of this Assembly, but she has done so in an incredible good way. She has navigated through some storms and she even brought us at the point of the three of us being able to agree on initial elements.

So in French I would say: chapeau, Liliane! Really: chapeau, Liliane. For the way you did this. Vous êtes une grande dame. I just hope that maybe after two years you might say 50% of that on my account when I will end my presidency. Thank you, again, and let's go to work.

Dear colleagues, as I said let's go to work. The next item on the agenda, if I'm right, Mister Wojciech SAWICKI, is the election of the Vice President of the Assembly. We've got 19 nominations for vice president. You've got the list in your documents. Is there a request to vote on any of them? I see a colleague. You have the floor.

**Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA (Ukraine, EPP/CD):** Good afternoon dear colleagues.

On January 23 one of the nominees, Mr Piotr TOLSTOY made an anti-Semitic statement in Russia, which the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Russia has said that was clearly anti-Semitic. Mr Piotr TOLSTOY, in his TV shows, also regularly spreads hate speech against European values. There is no place for hate speech or anti-Semitism in this house and on the sub-continent of Europe. Therefore, under Rule 16.4 of the Rules of Procedure we request a secret ballot.

Thank you dear Chairman.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA.

I do apologise with all the names. I will need a little bit of time to pronounce them well.

As requested, the vote on respect of the candidature of Mr Piotr TOLSTOY as a vice-President, I need to know if this request is carried. We need at least 20 Members to support it.

Can I see the 20 Members that support it?

So you have to stand up in order for the count to be possible.

So the request is valid under Rule 16. There will therefore be a secret ballot in respect to the candidature of Mr Piotr TOLSTOY. I propose that the ballot will take place this afternoon. Is that okay for everyone? Then it is agreed.

Are there any other requests for votes?

The gentleman to my left.

**Mr Dominik TARCZYŃSKI (Poland, EC/DA):** Just a technical question about the countries which are challenged: do we vote today?

I'm not sure if we'd get it right.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Well, we will have a vote on one candidate vice-chairman, the vote will take place in the afternoon by secret ballot.

Okay, are there any other challenges or any other requests for the vote?

No. In that case, I declare the other candidates elected as Vice-President of the Assembly. In accordance with Rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure, they will take precedence by age.

Then we have the appointment of Committees.

The next item on the Agenda is the appointment of members of Committees. The candidatures for the general committees of the Assembly have been published as Commissions (2020) 01 rev and Addendum 1.5.

Are these proposals approved?

Okay, then the proposed candidatures are approved and the Committees are appointed accordingly.

*Voilà.* Now we come into the proposals for current affairs and urgent affairs debates.

Now before we examine the draft Agenda, the Assembly needs to consider requests for debates under urgent and current affairs procedures. We will first consider requests for debate under urgent procedure and then proposals for current affairs debate. We will reconsider these in the following order:

First, request from the Socialist group for a debate on the "Urgent procedure on international obligations concerning the repatriation of children from war and conflict zones". Then, we will have the request of the EC/DA group on "Widespread recurring violence against security, fire and medical services on New Year's Eve", and a second request from the EC/DA group for a debate on the "Urgent procedure on the Russian Federation and the lack of democracy in the political process".

We also have, am I right here? A proposal from the Italian delegation for a current affairs debate on "Recent developments in Libya and in the Middle East: what consequences for Europe?" Now only if the current affairs debate on Libya is rejected - I mean I'm already getting to the current affairs - only if the current affairs debate on Libya is rejected, a proposal from the UEL group for a current affairs debate on "Ongoing violation of the rule of law, human rights and democracy in Turkey: what to do best to help Turkey to get again in line with Council of Europe core values and standards to be considered".

So, we will now first consider requests for debates under the urgent procedure and its meaning. This is correct?

At its meeting this morning the Bureau took note of the request from the Socialist group for an urgent debate and agreed - so the Bureau agreed - to support the debate on "International obligations concerning the repatriation of children from war zones", and therefore recommends to the Assembly that this matter be debated during this part-session.

Now, does the Assembly agree to this recommendation?

Thank you.

The Bureau's recommendation is accepted and request for urgent procedure is therefore approved. The timing of this debate will be considered as part of the adoption of the Agenda once we have considered all requests for debates.

Okay then, the Bureau proposes that the topic of the debate we just agreed upon, we refer to the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development for report.

Is this okay for everyone? Is this adopted?

Yes.

The reference is agreed to.

Then we go to the next item. At its meeting this morning the Bureau agreed to recommend to the Assembly that a request from the EC/DA group, for a debate under urgent procedure on "Widespread recurring violence against security, fire & medical services on New Year's Eve: how to restore trust and the rule of law" be rejected.

Is the Bureau's recommendation accepted?

Yes, it is accepted then the request for an urgent procedure based on this topic is therefore not approved.

Okay and then I have to go to... Okay, well I do apologise, we need to go through all of this sorry, Ian, did I miss you out?

**Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** No, no, Mr President, I put my hand up.

I'm sorry, Mr President.

Mr President, I would ask that we can have a vote in this plenary session on the two debates we put forward.

The first, as you remember, Sir, just to remind you, was on car burning across Europe at New Year and the second was on the democratic process in the Russian Federation. We would ask at the procedure if we could have a vote on both of those in the hemicycle.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** I need to come back to the former point where I asked whether everyone agreed and you didn't stand up.

At least I didn't see you but I don't have a problem with having a vote on it.

How does it work? We need to have two speakers: one who speaks in favour and who wishes to speak against.

You have spoken in favour, I suppose Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER for the first one. Is that fine with you?

Who wishes to speak against for 30 seconds?

Mr Frank SCHWABE.

**Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC):** For sure we discussed it in the Bureau of the Assembly in the morning and we had a vast majority who thinks we should have one urgent debate this week.

Due to our time limitations, it should be about the question of the children and repatriation.

I think the other one is a very interesting topic, but it is not something we should put for urgent debate here.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you Mr Frank SCHWABE.

The Bureau of the Assembly as I said is against.

We shall now vote on the request for an urgent procedure as asked by Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER.

The decision requires a two-thirds majority. Those who are in favour of holding this urgent debate should vote yes. Those who are against holding such a debate should vote no. Okay?

The vote is open now.

Please vote. I mean the number here is going down. It's a very special thing here. Okay?

The vote is closed. Maybe display the result.

This is not carried. So the urgent debate will not take place.

Then we have the other debate. So at its meeting this morning the Bureau of the Assembly agreed to recommend to the Assembly that the request from the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance for a debate on the urgent procedure on the Russian Federation and the lack of democracy in the political process be rejected. I understand Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER that you asked for a vote, so we will need someone who speaks in favour for 30 seconds and someone who speaks against for 30 seconds. So Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER, you've got the floor.

**Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** Thank you Mr President.

Sir, you are no doubt seeing in all the newspapers across Europe that the Russian Federation, the entire government basically has resigned. This is I believe to allow the President of the Russian Federation to reinvent himself after 2024. I don't see how this can be democratic. Surely the way you deal with this is you stand before the electorate and if your time is up surely you stand aside to allow other people to do this. I believe we do need to discuss this and I'm sure the Russian Federation will come up with explanations.

Thank you.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you. Who wishes to speak against? I have Mr Frank SCHWABE.

Mr Frank SCHWABE.

**Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC):** Again dear colleagues, I know a lot of you are new here but at the end we have some time restrictions in such a week and usually we decide about one urgent debate and we decided about one urgent debate already.

I'm always prepared to discuss the human Rights and democracy situation in all the Member countries and especially in Russia but again we took a decision in the morning. We took a decision here already to have one urgent debate. If we had others we would destroy our timetable this week and we could not speak about other important reports we have to discuss.

So I ask you to vote no.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I inform you that the Bureau of the Assembly is against.

We shall now vote on the request.

The vote is open.

Okay. The vote is almost closed. I mean, it's going up and down here. It's very strange.

Okay, the vote is closed.

The request for an urgent procedure has failed to achieve the required two-thirds majority.

Then we go to the current debates.

No, we have others. What is this?

I'm fairly new dear Colleagues so abide me a little bit to get acquainted with this.

Okay, now we have the proposal for a current affairs debate. Recent developments in Libya and in the Middle East.

As I told you, if this is carried, then another request by the Group of the Unified European Left will not be discussed. So the Bureau of the Assembly can approve only one request for a current affairs debate today, and at its meeting this morning, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to approve the request from the Italian delegation for a current affairs debate on "Recent developments in Libya and in the Middle East: what consequences for Europe?"

Does the Assembly agree to the recommendation of the Bureau of the Assembly?

Okay. The proposal is agreed to. The current affairs debate will therefore be held during this part-session and the proposal is to hold this on Thursday afternoon as the first item of business. It will be open by Mr Piero FASSINO.

Okay. Next item of business is the adoption of the agenda for the first part of the 2020 ordinary session.

Document 15013 Provision 2. The draft agenda submitted for the Assembly's approval was drawn up by the Bureau of the Assembly on 13 December and was updated this morning. I remind you that we just agreed on holding an urgent debate and we agreed on holding a current affairs debate. We also have challenges of credentials adopted this morning, so we need to organise all of that. So we check.

So, within our agenda, the debate on international obligations concerning the repatriation of children from war zones would be on Thursday morning. The current affairs debate, the Italian proposal, will be on Thursday afternoon, the beginning of the afternoon. And the challenge to credentials accepted this morning will also be on Thursday morning.

Is the draft agenda agreed upon? Thank you.

Okay. Where do we go now?

We go to this one.

So we have got the adoption of the meeting of the Standing Committee, correct? In Strasbourg on November 29 2019. It has been distributed. I invite the Assembly to take note of these minutes.

Is there any objection?

No.

One additional information on the agenda. The sitting on Thursday morning will be from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., in order to accommodate the debates.

You have the floor.

**Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS (Greece, EPP/CD):** Would it be possible to have the current affairs debate sooner, on Tuesday or on Wednesday? To have all the discussions on Thursday might be a problem for some delegations. Is it possible that at least we bring the current affairs debate to Tuesday or Wednesday as was always the case?

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Well, I understand from the Secretary General this is about the only way of getting everything in there because we got so many people who want to intervene on a number of reports, we've got these new elements, urgent current debate on the Agenda, we've got the challenging of the credentials, so, unfortunately, from a practical point of view I understand it is not possible to organise it in a different way. I am very sorry.

I have Mr TOLSTOY.

**Mr Petr TOLSTOI (Russian Federation, NR)\*:** A procedural question:

I wanted to say that, unfortunately, by Wednesday a large section of our delegation will have to leave.

With regard to the issues of approval of credentials and other similar issues, we would like those issues to be discussed before Thursday because a large section of our delegation will unfortunately not be present.

I'm ever so sorry to have to make this particular request.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** For the same reason, dear colleague, that I gave to the other colleague, it is almost impossible to do so. However, if you obviously want the vote, you are of course entitled to have a vote on the matter, namely the request to transfer the debate on the credentials of the Russian delegation from Thursday to Wednesday. That's your question, isn't it?

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Is that a regular vote that we need, a normal majority?

We have a request from Mr Piotr TOLSTOY, although it will be practically very difficult, to move the current credentials debate from Thursday to Wednesday. We'll put it to the vote. If it carries a majority, then we will probably need to move some other reports. As I am informed, it will probably mean that the reported cases of political prisoners in Azerbaijan will move to Thursday or even later.

We will now proceed to vote on the question from Mr TOLSTOY. Who is in favour of moving from Thursday to Wednesday, votes YES. Who is not in favour, votes NO.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

The result is 92 in favour. It is agreed that the item will be put on the Agenda on Wednesday. The reported cases of political prisoners Azerbaijan will move from Wednesday to Thursday.

Are there other elements of this agreement on the Agenda? I do not believe so. Is the Agenda approved the way it is modified? It is. Thank you.

We have the minutes done. We come to the Progress report of the Bureau and Standing Committee.

The next item on our agenda, dear colleagues, is a debate on the Progress report of the Bureau and Standing Committee presented by Mr Tiny KOX. This will be combined with consideration of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau on the Observation of Early Parliamentary Elections in Belarus, which will be presented by Lord David BLENCATHRA.

The debate must conclude by 1 p.m. and will continue this afternoon at 3 p.m.

I call now Mr Tiny KOX to present the Progress report. You have 30 minutes in total. As a group leader, you know well that you may divide the time between presentation of the report and the reply to the debate.

Mr Tiny KOX, you have the floor.

## **Debate: Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee**

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, Rapporteur):** Thank you very much, Mr President.

May I first start by congratulating you for your election. You will be our president for the next two years and that means you will be our president. You have been elected by all of us and I wish you well. It will be challenging times. I will come back on that later.

May I begin by thanking the assembly for granting me the honour to present the progress report on the activities since the end of our last part-session. The report adopted by the Bureau of the Assembly in its meeting this morning contains an overview of activities and decisions of the Bureau of the Assembly Standing Committee since our last part-session.

Part of the report are decisions taken by our Bureau of the Assembly in its meetings in November, December, and January which still have to be ratified by our assembly to this Progress Report.

One of the items is the Bureau of the Assembly's decision on the guidelines on external relations of the assembly. May I refer to Appendix 6 of the progress report and may I advise you to take note of these most relevant guidelines which concern all of us.

Mr President, since 2012 the progress report of January includes statistics on the gender breakdown of assembly positions in order to enhance transparency and raise awareness. May I advise you all colleagues to take note of these statistics. They show amongst other facts that last year only one out of three of our assembly members was female. These figures are somewhat higher than the overall average of our national parliaments, which is 29%. Nevertheless there is still a long way to go to really balance figures.

This can also be said with regard to the rapporteurships as only one out of three of our rapporteurs was female last year. The same goes for female vice-chairs of committees.

Mr President, may I compliment Albania, Andorra, Finland, Georgia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, and Slovenia for having realised that at least half of their assembly members were last year female. And may I especially warn Armenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and the United Kingdom that their delegations had last year less than one out of four female

members. May I kindly invite these delegations to perform better this year. I wish wisdom to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs which were just asked to look into this matter of under-representation during this week.

Please allow me, Mr President, to spend the rest of my time on some observations based on recent events and developments.

May I start to congratulate ourselves that for the first time in many years today our family is complete. After the Russian Parliament finally returned last year, I'm now most happy to see also our colleagues from Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina back again in the hemicycle. Being here as the assembly stipulated last year when adopting my *Report on the Role and Mission of the Assembly* is a clear obligation for all member states. The same goes for being present in the intergovernmental part of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers. Only then Europe's oldest and broadest treaty organisation creates the best possible circumstances in which it can contribute to the aim of the organisation formulated in the Statute of the Council of Europe. This is to create greater unity amongst our members on the basis of common values and principles you mentioned in your speech, Mr President, in order to meet major challenges and resolve issues amongst our member states as well as to avoid creating new dividing lines.

May I congratulate us with the decision that this week we will decide upon proposals developed in the past months by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and its reporter Mr Frank SCHWABE on the complementary joint procedure between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly in response to a serious violation by a member state of statutory obligations. The substance will be debated tomorrow Wednesday, but let me here emphasise that with this new joint procedure the assembly indeed improves its possibilities in case of a blatant violation of the *Statue* by any member state. When this assembly supported last year my initial proposal on the creation of such a new mechanism I promised that it would strengthen the assembly's soul, and by now there is a general understanding that it indeed does so.

May I use the opportunity to thank the Committee of Ministers for the close cooperation last year with our Assembly and its Presidential Committee and its preparedness to hand over for the first time in 70 years some of its powers to our assembly to the benefit of the whole organisation.

Mr President this new joint procedure will hopefully not often have to be applied as this is up to us and to all our governments to prevent that we have to make use of it. It is far better to take steps that prevent or solve issues and problems in or between member states.

During the past month we saw a good example when the President of Ukraine and the President of Russia decided after a far too long and unfruitful period of silence to talk to each other in order to try to overcome major problems which have dominated their political agenda, and ours as well, during the past five years. In the presence of the President of France and German Bundes Chancellor, President Zelenskyy and President Putin have shown statesmanship and restarted the Minsk Process, which eventually should lead to a solution to the huge problems Ukraine has been confronted with since 2014.

After the meeting in Paris a major prisoner swap was realised where another is in the preparation. New contact between Ukraine and Russia on gas deliveries have been agreed upon. Armed troops are disengaging in east Ukraine and other elements of the Minsk Accords are on the move. Still, a long and challenging road has to be walked before peace and stability in and around Ukraine might be secured. But we should congratulate the involved member states and governments and their parliaments for these first important results.

Many other challenges are on the table of Europe, Mr President. Due to the preparations by the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) in the past years we will finally be able to have this week a major debate on the functioning of democratic institutions in Poland.

As we all know there are a lot of worries with regard to this big member state in the heart of Europe as was expressed by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission in its urgent opinion earlier this month, in which it concluded that recent amendments to laws on the judiciary may further undermine judicial independence in Poland.

Mr President, after fact-finding missions of our assembly's rapporteur Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR and the hard work of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights we will be able this week to decide on a resolution on reported cases of political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Next week the assembly will observe early elections in that country and our pre-electoral mission was already on the spot last week. Unfortunately we

already know by now that against the clear call of the Committee of Ministers, Azerbaijan authorities have refused to implement judgements of our Court to ensure that Ilgar Mammadov and other former political prisoners could stand as candidates in these elections.

Overall, Mr President, this assembly should emphasise time and again that politicians belong in parliaments and not in prisons not only in Azerbaijan but also, for example, in Turkey. There, so many of our colleagues have been put behind bars whereas they should be in the Turkish Parliament, the municipalities, and other levels to which they were elected by the citizens of Turkey.

Mr President, during the past month we saw dramatic developments in our member state Malta, where finally the Prime Minister and others stepped down because of a shocking testimony which directly implicated the office of the Maltese Prime Minister in the plot to murder the famous Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia according to the assembly's rapporteur Mr Pieter OMTZIGT.

May I, Mr President, pay my compliments to my compatriot and colleague Mr Pieter OMTZIGT for the great job he is doing in this respect on behalf of our assembly. And may I draw your attention to the debate Tuesday afternoon where our rapporteur Lord FOULKES will present his *Report on Threats to Media Freedom and Journalist Security in Europe*, which has been prepared in the past months by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media. By the way at 1 p.m. today there will be a side event on the Assange case which is also related to media freedom and journalist security.

Last remark, Mr President, the most important development during the past months was the adoption by the European Union Council of supplementary negotiation directives in the swift resumption of negotiations with the Council of Europe on EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. When meeting last spring with then President Jean-Claude Juncker of the European Commission together with the Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN, I was most pleased to learn from President Juncker that he would do his utmost to get these far too long halted negotiations back on track and this Autumn delivered on that promise for which I thank him very much.

Together with our rapporteur on EU accession Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN I made a statement to complement the EU and to express the hope that EU accession would now be realised as soon as possible. EU accession will contribute to a better protection of human rights, rule of law and democracy of the citizens of the European Union. Bringing the EU under the umbrella of our court would cause a tremendous improvement of our court's leverage and the whole system of protecting human rights throughout Europe from Reykjavik to Vladivostok and from the North Pole to the Mediterranean. EU accession will also contribute in my opinion to a stronger appreciation of this unique legal system in some of our member states when nowadays questions are being made regarding the relation between the court verdicts and national constitutions. When the EU, the combined biggest economic power of Europe, sees a place for itself in the Council of Europe Human Rights system they surely will positively encourage our member states in their ideas about the Convention and the Court. When discussing EU accession later this year on the basis of the report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy we should surely pay attention to this specific issue.

To conclude, Mr President, may I wish all the best to our new president, who takes over in surely challenging times. Let us hope that the best years are still to come for Europe's oldest and broadest treaty organisation and let us hope that our assembly will manage to become again its political engine as we stipulated last year when we spoke about the role and mission and our main challenges for the future. Mr President, there's a lot of work to be done. For you, for us, for the whole organisation, let's do it.

Thank you very much.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr KOX.

You've got about 50 seconds remaining, you can say a lot in 50 seconds, as you know.

Okay, I now call Lord David BLENCATHRA to present the observation of the early parliamentary elections in Belarus. Let me, first of all, say that I am a bit sorry that we do not have the possibility of having you down here maybe we can find a solution in the coming weeks and months because I do think it is important.

Lord David BLENCATHRA, you have the floor.

## **Observation of the early parliamentary elections in Belarus (17 November 2019)**

**Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** May I give congratulations on your splendid election as our President and thank you for the good wishes that wheelchair people may one day get onto the floor of the Plenary.

First of all, I want to thank the 18 members of the Assembly representing all political groups of the Assembly and 16 Council of Europe member states which did such an excellent job of observation in Belarus. The delegation was accompanied by legal experts from the Council of Europe Venice Commission, who gave us some superb advice. I also want to thank the authorities of Belarus for the invitation which can be considered also as a sign of their political will to work with our Assembly. This Assembly observed the last presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus. Our main conclusion was that the 17 November elections proceeded calmly but did not meet important international standards for democratic elections. Fundamental freedoms were disregarded and the integrity of the election process was not adequately safeguarded.

Among the many shortcomings identified were: the unbalanced composition of the electoral commissions, restrictions on voting and candidate rights and inadequate safeguards for voting and counting. Our delegation was disappointed that Belarus –a valued member of our European family– has still not implemented our recommendations made in 2016. The delegation believes that electoral law changes are essential for the long-term political stability of Belarus. Our report highlights obstacles to political party registration, the administration's use of discretionary power to deregister candidates on minor grounds and criminal sanctions for defamation, which led to excessive self-censorship by the media. 6.8 million voters were registered to cast their ballot according to the central electoral commission but voter lists were not public, nor was there a central register so that multiple registrations were possible. The significant number of state-subsidised media outlets limited independent media coverage of candidates, leaving voters uninformed about candidates on the campaign.

The Assembly delegation noted that both early voting and election day were calm. While the opening and voting procedures at polling stations were mostly followed, there were significant shortcomings during vote-counting such as no reconciliation between those signing the voting register and the number of ballots cast. We did comment favourably on the spirit of openness and cooperation of members of the polling stations with international observers on polling day.

Mr President, Belarus is an associate member of the Venice Commission and the Commission stands ready to work in partnership with the authorities of Belarus to effect lasting democratic change and consolidate the democratic process in the country. We urge Belarus to do that.

Finally, let me say Mr President, that having done five election observations in the last two years, that this whole Assembly really should increase its output with regard to electoral observations. We sit here and pass reports on democracy, the rule of law and human rights, which many governments in Europe ignore, but without free and fair elections we cannot have these essential pillars. We are exceptionally good at observing elections but we must send more members and cover more elections. Our observation reports are not ignored by the host governments; they might not like them, they often criticise them, but they don't ignore them.

Mr President, in your opening remarks you said this Assembly should make an impact. We make an impact when we do electoral observations, Sir. Let's do more.

Thank you.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Sir David.

We now go to the speakers on behalf of political groups.

As I informed you at one o'clock sharp we need to interrupt our proceedings. I give the floor to Mr NÉMETH on behalf of the EPP group.

**Mr Zsolt NÉMETH (Hungary, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Mr President, first of all, allow me to congratulate you for your election, and to express my gratitude to your predecessor, Madame PASQUIER, who has really played a very important role in a difficult time of our life. I would like to congratulate the Georgian presidency for its activity and know that with thrill in my heart that the Hungarian presidency is coming up in the next year.

The Bureau has approved, as it was said by Mr Tiny KOX, the guidelines and external relations of PACE, which I would like to welcome and to underline how important it is that we promote the Council of Europe instruments all over the world, especially in our immediate vicinity, to underline the importance of signature and ratification of our conventions and the importance of parliamentary diplomacy between the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and other parliamentary bodies of the international diplomatic life.

Concerning Belarus, I would like to quote the report in front of us, "proceeded calmly but did not meet important international standards for democratic elections", one point, and secondly, "the electoral law changes are essential for a long-term stability of Belarus".

Dear colleagues, still I would like to underline that bringing back Belarus into the work of the Council of Europe should be an important priority of our future President because we are missing one important country of the European family in our activities. Concerning the reactionary mechanism debate, I think we can state now that it has resulted in a few very important results, especially I would like to underline that we have got a dialogue between the Committee of Ministers, PACE and the Secretary General which we haven't had before. It is an extremely important consequence of this process.

Secondly, we have been able, really, as it was said by Tiny KOX, to re-establish the pan-European character of our organisation.

And thirdly, I hope that we have been able to maintain our solidarity with the victims of political and military aggression of Russia with its neighbourhood, the intimidation also, like countries the Ukraine or the Caucasian.

And finally, I would like to subscribe to what our rapporteur has finished with, great and very important result that the better and better cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union is taking place, good news that the EU accedes to the European Convention of Human Rights, this is also I think in the near foreseeable future a very important priority for our activity.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** I call upon Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN on behalf of the Socialist group.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC):** Mr President, may I first also congratulate you for your election on behalf of the Socialist, Democrat and Green Group of this Parliamentary Assembly. Congratulations, we will support you in your important job.

Secondly, I would also like to congratulate the new Vice President of the organisation, but in particular I would like to say thanks for the outgoing President Lillian PASQUIER. You've made a very, very, very great job in very difficult times. We will continue the same job in terms of, particularly, developing the joint complimentary procedures as we have discussed quite a lot.

Mr President, maybe you allow me to concentrate on the early parliamentary elections in Belarus. I was part of the Parliamentary Assembly delegation there, and I must say to you, that it was a somewhat bizarre situation. First of all, Belarus is not a member of the Council of Europe. Nevertheless, we observe the elections, thanks for that. But there were early elections. Why early elections? There are speculations that they were early because there will be a presidential election in 2020 and they try to avoid overlapping. That was obviously an important aspect to recognise.

Unfortunately, the election procedure early campaign was very low standard – not low standards, but not intensive – which actually indicated that the elections were not very important indeed. Party structure in Belarus is very weak and, as a result, out of 110 members of parliament, only 21 belong to any parties and not a single one belongs to opposition parties. Not a single one. Earlier in Parliament there were two deputies who were actually opposition parties, but now they couldn't participate in elections. Good luck and, nevertheless, all the non-Party independent members and deputies now expressed their loyalty to President LUKASHENKO.

One surprise for me was clearly the turnout, 77 per cent turnout. We observed throughout the country lack of voters in polling stations. What was observed there were a lot of observers, even from opposition parties. But, unfortunately, we recognised that some of them were kicked out from doing their work. It was interesting that on election day, the President LUKASHENKO made a press conference and used quite hard words about

some of the observers, saying that they were provocateurs and suggesting punitive actions after the vote. He stated clearly, "if the observers are not happy with the elections, which the president of the republic organised, change the president". The Internet was full of supportive notes concerning of that one.

I was not surprised that this election didn't meet the international standards, as well as already indicated. Unfortunately, pity to note, Belarus has a long, long way still to go to becoming a member of the Council of Europe.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** I call Mr Jacques MAIRE, the new president of the ALDE Group. He is speaking of course in the name of the ALDE Group.

**Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE):** Thank you, Mr. President.

All my best wishes for your term that you have before you and which, at the same time, faces a difficult context but, at the same time, with new sources of repositioning for the Assembly and the Council of Europe, as you said, in connection with the Secretary General and the Council of Ministers.

I would also like to pay tribute to the impressive work done by our President, Mrs Liliane MAURY PASQUIER. We were together a few weeks ago in a sled drawn by Arctic reindeer in the context of the Arctic crisis review, which today brings together countries that were previously on a path, I would say, of scientific cooperation and in which we see, here and elsewhere, the rise of nationalisms and issues of security at the expense of cooperation.

I would like to focus, Mr President, on the continuation of the dialogue on Ukraine and the joint mechanism that has been linked to the resolution of the issue of Russian powers. It is extremely important for us — and on this occasion I welcome the return of the Ukrainian delegation with us — to continue the work, to ensure that this joint mechanism is not weakened and that it can be implemented as quickly as possible. I say this in a context where, on the one hand, there are efforts being made between Russia, Ukraine, and the parties to the Normandy dialogue, with Chancellor Merkel and President Macron, which have led to some improvements, some progress, for example on the issue of prisoners. This is a gesture of appeasement and, at the same time, I would also like to point out the "provocation" of President Putin's statement a fortnight ago, when he indicated as a kind of general statement that, from now on, all treaties would be subject to Russian national law. I think that this kind of message should concern us and make us react. If this message is being delivered today, even though Russia is once again returning to its full rights within the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly, it augurs future difficulties. On the other hand, it also sets a precedent which I find extremely dangerous for other countries which, in the same situation, would take the same direction.

I obviously congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Tiny KOX, on all the points raised. I will take up the subject of Belarus, of Malta, where we are relieved to see the political consequences of an action that originated, indeed, in large part, in this Assembly. This shows us that when the Parliamentary Assembly is united in its questioning of political responsibilities, it can have an effect and we welcome it.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, we'll now move on to the speaker for the European Conservatives Group. Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER, you have the floor. May I say that we will go a few minutes over one o'clock in order to treat all groups equally. So if Ian and the next speaker could be within the three minutes, because I'll cut you off in at three. You've got the floor.

**Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** Mr President, thank you very much indeed. Mr Hendrik DAEMS, it's great to see you there and congratulations, also to Lord David BLENCATHRA, who made a very good speech indeed.

Mister President, we were talking, if you remember, about what you were going to do for the next two years. And one thing I said is: what is the role of the Council of Europe? And the reason I said that is because every single thing we do, other than the Court of Human Rights, are done by other organisations. Democracy is no longer the fiefdom of what it was in 1946. The role of the Council of Europe has to be progressive and it has to open up its doors to many more ideas. If you look, we tend to get bogged down. If you look at the debates today, yet again we have Turkey, yet again we have children, migratory children, yet again we have Libya.

Yes, these are all important, don't get me wrong: they're vital. But we have to look at a wider agenda. I am not suggesting we go outside our brief. Of course not. But there is so much going on in Europe in the 47 countries that we can embrace in a much better way because we are a Parliamentary Assembly. We are the only body in Europe that is actually a Parliamentary Assembly. Therefore, the legitimacy of all of us is very different to every other European system.

And I would say to you, Mr President, that we need to think about where we are going to be in the next 70 years. What are we going to look like? Do we have more countries coming in? Do we lose some? Do we see ourselves as part of the European Union through the Court of Human Rights? Do we see ourselves as a champion for much more and more diversity across what we try and achieve?

Some of the reports we do, and if you read them carefully, are mind-blowingly boring. I know I shouldn't say that, because I've done quite a few of them myself. That is not because they're bad reports, it's that they're not relevant reports. The best reports I read and I know, Mr Hendrik DAEMS, you're the same, is you read the front, which is the bit you want and the conclusion. What goes on in the middle is a little bit more dodgy. So, maybe, we need to look at doing less but better. In other words, not quite so many reports, not quite so many monitorings, not quite so many elections. But let's see if we can do what we do as a core business which is championing democracy, champion human rights, which, by God, is important now more so than ever.

And I just wonder if we shouldn't be looking at the way we structure ourselves. Now, we've gone through a very difficult financial situation. Hopefully it's moving on and thanks to everybody that was part of it. But therefore it leaves us with more responsibility to get this right. And therefore I'm going to finish early, Mr President, for once in my life. And say thank you for your attendance and thanks to my colleagues.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ian.

I will not keep those 24 seconds for the next time, okay?

So now we will have our last speaker for this morning on the UEL behalf, Rosa... I'll just say Rosa, if you allow me to do so.

You have the floor.

**Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL):** President and dear colleagues, as I congratulate us on a new President and wish him all the best I want to thank Lillian PASQUIER for her splendid work and my deepest thanks for her and I also want to thank the rapporteur for his progress report which is very good.

I want to focus on the gender equality chapter in the progress report and what the annual preparation the breakdown shows us. It is sad and disappointing to see that the number of women members of the Assembly stays the same as in 2018 when the percentage of women members lowered 3% since 2017, when it was 37%. And despite the fact that the number of women members of the Parliament of the Council of Europe member states is lower than here, we see that as a clear effect of the rule 6.2.a of the Assembly Rule of Procedure, namely that national delegations should include members of the underrepresented sex at least in the same percentage as in the national parliaments, has had a positive impact since many of the delegations have a higher representation rate of women than national parliaments.

So that shows us clearly that rules on gender representation does matter and they should work. But they should work better and we should all work better in the direction of increasing women members of the Assembly. The rapporteur mentioned some national delegations that should do better and I agree with him, but I also want to mention that the unequal statistic when it comes to rapporteurship, Vice Chairs of Committees and Presidents of political groups.

Balancing these figures of gender equality and increasing them quickly and effectively is not only a matter of broadening the spectrum of voices and views, but it is also tightly linked to human rights because gender equality is human rights. But the rapporteur also talked about hugely important events in development in recent times that have concluded the five years of heavy debate here in the Assembly. The return of member states is a sign of how the Assembly can resolve the toughest issues but remain clear in its loyalty towards our obligation to the Statute of the Council of Europe at the same time.

Dear colleagues, today we remember the 75 years of the liberation of the horrible prison camps of Auschwitz. This day is therefore a good day to reflect on the reasons why European states decided to form the Council of Europe and the European human rights statutes and the the European Court of Human Rights: to safeguard

human rights and the rule of law, and not the least to prevent that the horror of World War II will reoccur, to prevent hate crimes and prejudice in our societies. And we should always remember that and the values that this institution is based upon.

Thank you.

**Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Now the Assembly will hold the next portion of this debate starting at 3pm.

Those who are still here and maybe already outside I would like to invite you to the handover of Presidency with Lillian PASQUIER and we also have a glass of wine there so if you want to have a glass of wine, Madame Secretary General with us and all the other ones, you're very welcome invited to do here in the lobby of the Chamber of the Assembly.

Now the sitting is adjourned.