



**Provisional edition**

Thursday 22 April 2021, morning

## Official report of debates

### Opening of sitting num 14

#### Address: Communication from the Committee of Ministers

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Dear colleagues, the sitting is open. Please be seated so we can start with our work.

We will head off with a communication from Minister Michael ROTH, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Herzlich willkommen, Herr ROTH.

As you know this will be followed by parliamentary questions for oral answer.

I invite Mr ROTH to address the Assembly.

I could start with giving a big hallo and explaining why we are so happy to have you here, which is the case, dear Minister, but that would take away time from questions and I... since you're quite straightforward we kind of like you answering questions.

Voilà, so, without any due delay, dear colleagues.

The floor, Minister, is yours.

**Mr Michael ROTH (Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe):** Good morning, Mr President,

Good morning, Members,

It's good of you to invite me. I consider it a great honour and I would very much like to be with you in Strasbourg, but the pandemic is, of course, a very special test for all of us, wherever we have responsibility, and it has, of course, had a special impact on our Presidency. But with your support, too, we have succeeded in setting important priorities.

---

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.

I was also very moved yesterday by the statement by the Commissioner for Human Rights, who once again made it clear that the past year was a tragedy for human rights worldwide, but also in Europe. This is one of the reasons why it was important for the German Presidency to strengthen the Council of Europe in precisely those areas where it has its core competences. In the defence of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. That is precisely what we must now focus on. At a time when democracy is coming under pressure and nationalism, populism and authoritarianism are on the rise, the Council of Europe is more important than ever. We must all play our part in ensuring that this forum is also strengthened in these central principles.

I could not have imagined that our Presidency would be dominated by preventing the worst from happening. We had actually set out to strengthen and promote the Council of Europe's legal instruments, and I would particularly like to remind you of the Istanbul Convention, which will be celebrating its tenth birthday in a few days' time. We actually wanted to convince other states to finally accede to the Istanbul Convention, to finally ratify it, but with Turkey's withdrawal by presidential decree from Mr Erdogan, we have lost an important partner. That is a tragedy for us all.

It is a tragedy above all because the pandemic made it clear how dramatically domestic violence against women and children has increased, and it is precisely during this pandemic that it would be much more important to put up a firewall. And the Istanbul Convention continues to be a very central instrument in this respect. I have heard a lot of nonsense, this is not about ideology. Protecting women from violence and protecting children from violence is a human right, it is indispensably linked to the defence of human dignity.

I would therefore ask you all to use the coming days, weeks and months to remind people of the Istanbul Convention as an instrument of protection. We must strengthen it and not weaken it. And I am also very grateful to you, Mr President, to my colleagues in the Parliamentary Assembly and to the Secretary General, for the fact that we have issued a joint opinion to remind ourselves once again that the institutions of the Council of Europe are standing together closely and unwaveringly.

What is the rule of law actually about? The rule of law comprises many elements. I would like to allude to the most important ones.

Protection and independence of the judiciary, this is the alpha and omega of the rule of law. One of the great privileges of membership of the Council of Europe is that millions of people in Europe are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights and by the European Court of Human Rights. It is more than worrying that we have a growing number of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights that are not being implemented. This is a matter of substance, of the substance of the Council of Europe.

We can discuss and argue about everything, but membership of the Council of Europe always presupposes that the judgments are implemented and that monitoring missions have access to wherever the monitoring missions want to go. Wherever human rights are being violated, wherever there is danger, wherever light needs to be shed on a situation.

I would like to appeal to all of us once again to make a concrete contribution to ensuring that the Council of Europe gains credibility in this area. Above all, it is the duty of all member states to contribute to this. We have tried to make our contribution over the past few weeks looking at prominent cases, but not only. We have also looked wherever we have seen cases make a splash in the media.

Let me remind you of the two most prominent Turkish cases, Selahattin Demirtaş and Osman Kavala. There is now an official letter from the Presidency to the Turkish Foreign Minister. The Kavala case is now regularly raised in the Committee of Ministers and we will not rest until Kavala is freed, is released. This also applies, incidentally, to Mr Selahattin Demirtaş, who has been innocently held in pre-trial detention for three and a half years. It also applies, of course, to Mr Alexei Navalny, whose health we are very concerned about.

This is not about a generous gesture, it is about the fact that it is imperative that obligations are met and we are making this an issue. And the Committee of Ministers is also taking its responsibility most seriously.

But what else is the rule of law about? It is also about treating minorities with respect. We all want to be different in Europe without fear. It must not matter who you believe in, where you come from, who you love, and here too the Council of Europe must play its part. I would like to thank you, honourable members, for your personal commitment.

During our Presidency, we have focused in particular on Europe's largest ethnic minority, the Roma, by also making it clear through a wide range of events: the Roma do not belong in the margins of our society, they enrich us. We need an end to stigmatisation, exclusion and discrimination. We need more participation, more

inclusion; everywhere in Europe. And above all, we have tried to make the cultural enrichment of the Roma clear, because far too many people, when they hear Roma, first think only of problems. No, it's also about inspiration. It's about the cultural dimension, of what an ethnic minority can contribute to Europe.

I would also like to remind you about the situation of LGBTI people. In too many Council of Europe states, they are the first victims of authoritarianism, of intolerance. We must not allow this to happen. When we talk about a forward-looking Council of Europe, it is particularly important that we win over young people, who are, after all, everywhere trying to stand up for the very values that are also the subject of our joint deliberations. In all our formats, we have repeatedly extended a very direct invitation to young people from all Council of Europe member states, and I am very grateful that so many young people have accepted these invitations, which should continue in the months and years to come.

There is something else I want to promote, and for that we also need your support, honourable members. That is the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights. Since the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union has been obliged to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights. However, we have experienced a virtual standstill in recent years and we have managed to revive the negotiations. It is not only the EU and its member states that benefit from European Union membership, from accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, but also the Council of Europe, because it makes clear once again what a great gift the European Convention on Human Rights is for citizens throughout Europe in terms of human rights. I would ask you to play your part in bringing these negotiations to a successful conclusion.

What else is the rule of law about? I would like to emphasise a third aspect. The rule of law includes an effective and determined fight against corruption. The Council of Europe in particular, but also my own country, has been involved in various allegations of corruption, and I would like to start by thanking you for your contribution to making it clear that corruption is a fundamental sin in a society governed by the rule of law and that corruption has no place, especially in politics. These accusations must be dealt with in a constitutional state, they must be brought to justice. I would also like to assure you once again that my own country is trying to make a contribution to ensuring that light is shed on these accusations, because they undermine the credibility of institutions, bodies and communities. I believe that the Council of Europe must also be protected from these serious accusations and you can rightly expect the member states to make their own contribution here too.

I started with the Istanbul Convention and made it clear, once again, that the Council of Europe must now discuss the instruments at its disposal to enforce what the Council of Europe has been advocating for during so many decades. But we also know that the world and Europe have changed dramatically. That is why we, as the Presidency, have also ventured to look to the future in order to better cope with the trials and tribulations of the present. We have done so above all in relation to two major issues.

One is a problem that you all probably have to deal with, which challenges us all. That is hate speech, that is the increase of lies, hate, denial, threats online, which is sucking in many people who had not been politically engaged. We organised a major conference on the subject of hate speech, which was attended by 20 000 people from all over Europe. This also made it clear how much people are concerned about this issue, and here, too, we have taken a major step forward in terms of which legal instruments we can use and implement.

The second issue is artificial intelligence. The main issue here is to develop an ethical foundation. We all long for progress, for innovation. It's about the freedom of science, but it's also about setting limits in this sensitive area. Both hate speech and artificial intelligence are issues that cannot be dealt with at a national level, but must be discussed at a global level. I see the Council of Europe playing a central role here, as an institution that provides guidance, encourages people, sets limits and stands up for freedom time and again.

Without you, we would not have been able to do any of this. I would have loved to have had a much more direct and frequent exchange, but I would like to thank you once again from the bottom of my heart for the invitation. Also, for the very privileged opportunity today to engage in dialogue with you.

Now I look forward to your suggestions, your criticisms and your ideas on how we can improve the work of the Council of Europe in these difficult times.

Thank you.

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

We will now head into the questions.

Just one small remark on your address. You did mention the Istanbul Convention and the substance to it, namely to protect women and children, but to me it's not only a question of protecting human rights.

Personally, to me, it's just a question of common decency. But that's just the way I feel it.

Okay, let's head into the questions.

First in my list is Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

Stefan, are you online?

Oh, he's here.

Stefan, you have the floor.

**Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear Minister of State,

Thank you once again. Thank you also for this determined and dynamic leading German Presidency in these difficult times.

Thank you for also putting the Istanbul Convention right up front. Pope Francis was here once with a statement. He did something very remarkable: he passed on to us the core competence of the Church and of faith by saying the European Court of Human Rights is the conscience of Europe. That is remarkable because normally the Church says we have the conscience.

In this sense, Minister of State, we regret more and more to see that some States believe they can act with or ignore the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. This must be of concern to all of us and I hope that we will act decisively in this way and also that we will defend the key conventions accordingly.

On that note, thank you very much again, and I hope, Minister, that you will not be lost to us, even if that was your last speech today.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Mr Minister.

Mr Minister, you have to ask for the floor I think.

OK. You've got the floor.

**Mr Michael ROTH (Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe):** Excuse me, Mr President,

I suggest that we take a few contributions together. That might give an opportunity for more members to take the floor.

That is just a suggestion from my point of view, but I do not want to get to interfere.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Would I be capable of refusing what you say although it's a bit against our habits, but we will comply.

So, we will take the political groups together.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS is online. You've got the floor.

So, we will take five questions at a time and then we'll take five after that. Complying obviously with the remark of the minister.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS.

**Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS (Lithuania, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mr Chairman,

Thank you, Mr Michael ROTH,

We are living in an age beyond Checkpoint Charlie. I have been in Belarus and I have seen a country in which people are fighting for their freedom. We have the feeling that in Vilnius we are Checkpoint Charlie and our Polish colleagues also have the same feeling. We must show courage.

Mister Michael ROTH, we need to have the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General make a joint statement.

We have drafted such a statement. We are seeking to make a united appeal in respect of Belarus as well as Mr Alexei Navalny. We have got the reports, we will be holding a vote today on Navalny, we did so yesterday on Belarus. It is important that we have a joint line agreed between the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General and we should have a joint text, that really would be wonderful. Finally, I support you with the Istanbul Convection, Mister Michael ROTH, and about LGBT rights. There again, it is most important that we work together. But, from your perspective, I think that we need to have certain courage to make a general statement together with the Parliamentary Assembly. In this and also in Ukraine, when it comes to the Russian army concentration in the border, we have to have an opinion as well.

Again, as I say, we have to show courage and work together in the case of Ukraine, Navalny and Belarus.

Thank you very much.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** We'll now go to Ms Liliana TANGUY, who I believe is in the room.

Ms Liliana TANGUY, you have the floor.

**Ms Liliana TANGUY (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Mister Speaker,

Mister Minister,

I wanted to ask you about environmental rights and the recognition of a right to a healthy environment. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, a safe, healthy and clean environment is a prerequisite for the exercise of human rights. A report on this right is currently under way in the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, of which I am a member.

In 2009 the Assembly invited the Committee of Ministers to draw up an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights recommending recognition of the right to a healthy and viable environment. However, this initiative was not successful. This subject has a particular resonance for the ALDE group in the French delegation, as the National Assembly voted a few days ago on a law on climate and resilience in the face of climate change.

Would the German Presidency be in favour of drawing up a convention to ensure the right to a healthy, safe and sustainable environment for the present and future generations?

Thank you very much.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Merci, Liliana.

Now we go to Lord Alexander DUNDEE.

I hope it works because yesterday we had a little problem.

Lord DUNDEE, are you online?

Can we have Lord DUNDEE, please?

Okay, Lord DUNDEE, can you request for the floor again?

Here we go. Let's hope it works.

**Lord Alexander DUNDEE (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** Mister ROTH, in the United Kingdom Parliament over the past 12 months I've had the pleasure of organizing a series of European web conferences on refugee issues.

Your colleague, State Secretary Stephan Mayer from the German Interior Ministry participated. Migration and refugees were not a priority of the German Presidency of the Committee of ministers. I know you follow the subject of very closely.

What is your ministry's position on greater European co-operation in refugee and migration matters?

Thank you.

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

Now we go to our fifth question of this series, which is from Ms Nina KASIMATI.

Is Nina online?

OK. You have the floor, Nina.

**Ms Nina KASIMATI (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, thank you, Mister President, Minister Michael ROTH, welcome to our Assembly on behalf of the Unified European Left, too.

It is common sense that Turkey chooses to be on the fringes of international legal order by challenging the norms and values of both the Council of Europe and the European Union.

With no time for a lengthy analysis on the issue, I would like to address you as an honourable decision-making member of the Bundestag and the government that holds the current Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. A question of utmost reference to these organisations that statutory aims, principles and history: does the German foreign policy, being naturally reflected into the German Chairmanship of this Organisation, envision or not concrete measures, apart from EU sanctions, for Turkey's violations of Council of Europe's legal standards, as well as of international law and of European acquis, suppressing freedom within its own borders and putting in turmoil the south-eastern Mediterranean region and the Aegean Sea, thus compromising peace and progress in their respective societies?

Also, we heard you on the Demirtaş and Kavala cases, but I am not sure we heard you on the on the issue of the Varosha opening in Cyprus. What is your remark on this?

Thank you.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister Minister, for these 5 questions.

**Mr Michael ROTH (Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe):** I am very happy to do so and I would also like to thank you personally once again for your appeal with regard to the Istanbul Convention.

I fully agree with this and I am also pleased with the words of appreciation from Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

I would like to state again very clearly what I said at the beginning, perhaps in a somewhat abbreviated form: we all need the Council of Europe, above all because it protects over 800 million people: protects them from arbitrariness, protects them from exclusion, protects them from injustice. But this protection can only be granted if the Council of Europe's instruments are upheld and respected, and of course – let me say this once again – the European Court of Human Rights plays the central role in this. That is why we have repeatedly put these unimplemented judgments on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers and also taken a clear public stand on them.

It is a difficult balancing act, because on the one hand, of course, I know and feel that impatience is growing: something must be done now. On the other hand, however, we always have a duty to protect our citizens as best we can. But once again, protection presupposes respect for the instruments, and we need a commitment to this that encompasses all the member states of the Council of Europe. That is why I am grateful to you, too, for repeatedly putting your finger on the problem and formulating clear expectations. We should do this together. And that brings me to the next question, which we have discussed several times: I am very open to even closer co-operation between the institutions of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. As I said, we have done this because the individual institutions should not allow themselves to be divided, but rather, as far as possible, a unified signal must go out on the central issues – Secretaries-General, Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly represented by the President – and I know, of course, how difficult that is for a Parliamentary Assembly as heterogeneously composed as yours. But you will also concede that it is not quite so easy in the Committee of Ministers, where of course states come together that sometimes have quite different views. Particularly on the issues we are discussing today.

Once again, I am very grateful to the honourable Member for raising the issue of Belarus. Belarus is, after all, the only European country that is not a member of the Council of Europe. I have a very emotional relationship with it, because I was the first representative of the German Government to visit Belarus after the easing of the EU sanctions, in order to find out where the opportunities for closer cooperation lay, and I had really high hopes at the time that we would also be able to point to the prospect of Belarus becoming a member of the Council of Europe. But the big insurmountable hurdle is still – was and is – the death penalty. The situation has now changed dramatically and I can only agree with you; it must be in our common interest to keep sending out a signal to the citizens of Belarus who are standing up for freedom, human rights and democracy; we are standing by your side.

We demand an immediate end to violence against peaceful demonstrators. We expect free elections to finally be held in Belarus. We expect institutions to be strengthened in this country. There must be an end to violence and repression against people, and the most dangerous thing is for us to forget that we are getting used to the situation in Belarus, that we are coming to terms with it. That is why it is important – and here, too, I agree with you in principle – that we should repeatedly make a clear statement to the effect that the values for which the people of Belarus are taking to the streets are our common values and that we should do everything in our power to support these people.

Mrs Liliana TANGUY mentioned a very important aspect – and I agree with you on this – a clean environment, biodiversity, functioning ecosystems and climate protection are essential prerequisites for the realisation of human rights, and it is precisely with regard to man-made climate protection that we are seeing conflicts increase worldwide. With regard to food, but also with regard to other resources. Without intact environmental conditions, various rights, such as the right to life, the right to health, the right to food, self-determination, housing or the rights to safe water and sanitation, are massively endangered. That is true. That is why, in May of last year, we joined with Georgia and Greece in calling for an instrument on environmental and human rights to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, if possible by the end of this year.

We also welcome the work of the Steering Committee on Human Rights, which has drawn up a draft and is still working on it. So we support that. The only unanswered question is: what is the quality of this instrument? Is it legally binding? There are still very different views on this at the moment.

I am also very grateful to the honourable Member who has once again turned his attention to another difficult, I might even say tragic, issue, namely how Europe deals with migration and refugees.

I do not want to invite you now to talk to me about our work in the European Union. However, I would like to remind you once again that we used our Presidency of the Council of the EU last year to finally achieve a breakthrough in a common integration policy based on humanity, solidarity and shared responsibility. We need joint and determined European action here. Otherwise the nationalists and populists will have prevailed. Migration and flight are global tests of endurance, and I would like to remind you that there are far more people fleeing outside Europe and having to endure in neighbouring countries, sometimes under inhumane conditions, than what we are currently experiencing as a test of endurance in Europe, too, of course.

People and states need to know that they are not alone in dealing with these issues and that we must finally make progress there, but that presupposes that all states are also prepared to cooperate in this joint work. To participate actively. Without foaming at the mouth and always in the knowledge that it is about people.

This brings me back to the Council of Europe, which, as the protector of human rights, naturally also has a very special responsibility here.

Perhaps that is all, Mr President, an attempt to answer the most important questions.

Thank you very much, Mr President.

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

We will continue with the next five questions.

In order, we have Mr. Dara CALLEARY, Ms. Laura CASTEL, Lord George FOULKES, Mr. Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ and Mr. Rafael HUSEYNOV. May I ask you to get ready when it is your turn?

We begin with Mr Dara CALLEARY.

You have the floor.

**Mr Dara CALLEARY (Ireland, ALDE):** Thank you, Mister President.

Thank you, Minister.

Thank you for your remarks to reaffirming the values of the Council of Europe.

I asked you in the context of the pandemic, how the pandemic has affected and potentially undermined those values. How the threats that you identified, populism, nationalism, hate speech, have been accentuated by the effects of the pandemic. And the dangers to your mind of an uneven and inequitable vaccine distribution across Europe. How that might accentuate all those challenges and embolden all of those actors who seek to undermine the values of our organization.

Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mister President.

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

We continue with Ms Laura CASTEL, our most active colleague in this session, I think.

Ms Laura CASTEL, "you have the floor" [in Spanish].

**Ms Laura CASTEL (Spain, NR):** *Merci*, Mister President.

Thank you for your speech, Mister ROTH.

Between the German presidency priorities, there is the fight against hate speech, as you have told us, as a predominant threat to human rights and democratic integrity and a global phenomenon facing all European countries.

I am a member of No Hate Parliamentary Alliance and I am very concerned about the rise of neo-Nazism everywhere, including in parliaments.

What specific steps has your presidency has done or will do to address hate speech? You have told us a hate speech conference. Maybe you can develop something more about that.

There are political parties, including members of this Parliamentary Assembly, that use hate speech to promote their horrible ideology for winning elections, destroy democratic values from the very core of the institution, and destroy democracy itself.

Thank you very much, Mister Minister, and thank you very much, Mister President.

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

We now continue with Lord George FOULKES.

Lord George FOULKES, if you are on the line, you have the floor.

**Lord George FOULKES (United Kingdom, SOC):** Thank you.

Returning to Belarus: Minister, as you will be aware there are many hundreds of political prisoners currently illegally detained in appalling conditions in prisons in Belarus. Could you tell the Parliamentary Assembly what practical action the Committee of Ministers is taking to get the conditions in those prisons improved and, even more important, to get the political prisoners released as quickly as possible?

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

Next on my list is Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV.

May I ask Mrs Fiona O'LOUGHLIN to prepare to speak after Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV?

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV, you have the floor.

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

Dear Minister,

Over the past 20 years we have constantly asked the Committee of Ministers about the fate of 1 million Azerbaijani IDPs, displaced from the territories occupied by Armenia. Azerbaijan finally had liberated its occupied territories. Unfortunately, one occupation gave way to another. Armenia completely destroyed about 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan, which it has been controlling for almost 30 years. However, this was not enough. All these areas have been mined from very beginning. Armenia refused to transfer maps of mine territories to Azerbaijan. As a result, in a short period of time, more than 20 military and civilians were killed and 87 wounded in mines. Will the Committee of Ministers finally take action and put pressure on Armenia to make this country hand over the maps of mined areas and does the Committee of Ministers intend to mobilise effort to resolve this issue which pertains the serious humanitarian catastrophe?

Thank you.

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

We'll now go to Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN.

Fiona, are you online? You have the floor.

**Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE):** Good morning, Mister President.

Good morning, Minister Michael ROTH.

Thank you for your engagement this morning.

I noticed that one of your previous political mottos was about heart and about steadfastness. I think that's good because you clearly show understanding and compassion, and resolute and commitment also.

I think that the topics that you touched on this morning were important around the whole area of enhancing social cohesion within Europe and looking at the whole area of populism. I think you know, in order to counteract some citizens' loss of confidence in the Union, anything that we can do in that area is hugely important.

While tackling the area of hate speech, the area of hate crime is equally as important. As a country we are only starting to look at legislation for that now.

Interestingly, during this week the results of a poll in Ireland in relation to being a member of the European Union was released. We saw that 71% of people believe that the EU should do more to regulate digital media platforms and 77% of people revealed linking EU funding to member States within the rule of law principle such as democracy human rights and equality was really really important.

I would like your comments in relation to those.

Thank you very much, Minister.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN.

Minister, if you could be concise, we've got five more colleagues who wish to have a question so that we can have them on board.

You have the floor.

**Mr Michael ROTH (Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe):** Thank you, Mr President.

I have understood your question, but of course these are also very complex questions and I do not want to give the impression that I am avoiding a question. That is why I would also like to answer a question that I have not yet answered, namely the assessment of developments in Turkey.

I had, of course, focused in my speech on the failure of Turkey to execute judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The situation is, of course, even more worrying, and here too we have repeatedly taken a clear stand and, of course, reminded Turkey, like all the other Member States of the Council of Europe, of its relevant obligations.

In recent years, there has been massive backsliding in terms of democracy, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and freedom of the media in Turkey. That must also be addressed, along with the fact that we are all obliged to resolve conflicts without resorting to military means, but returning time and again to the negotiating table and to seek diplomatic and political solutions, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey has pursued a policy of aggression and provocation. I am therefore delighted that there are now channels of communication again between Greece on the one hand and Turkey on the other. But our messages here are clear; as a community of democracy and the rule of law and freedom, everyone – including Turkey of course – is obliged to comply with what Turkey has bound itself to by treaty.

The pandemic has been mentioned: I am also very grateful for this question. First of all, I would be very frank in saying that there was no blueprint or master plan anywhere for this pandemic, which is a global trial and not a purely national or European one. We all tended to be somewhat overwhelmed and had to look for ways to protect our citizens. In doing so, a few important aspects have been identified that we also argue about in all democracies. Namely, to what extent do we have to impose restrictions on freedom in order to protect the health of citizens?

Our message here is quite clear. All measures in the fight against the pandemic must be proportionate, must be transparent, must be democratically legitimised and must, of course, be limited in time. A health state of emergency must not be the pretext for a political state of emergency or for undermining democracy. This is something that we in the European Union are discussing very extensively and exchanging views on, and the principle of learning from each other and with each other is particularly important, and it is certainly something that the Council of Europe is looking at. And the big question for the future is where and how we need to cooperate even more closely on health protection issues.

Vaccination is of course the number one tool central instrument in the fight against the pandemic. Only vaccinating will help and it will not help if we only develop national vaccination strategies. We can only protect our citizens if people around us, in the wider region, indeed worldwide, have access to vaccines. My government has been working very hard to make the Covax platform a central distribution tool. We are one of the biggest donors: we have given billions of euros to Covax to make sure that people in countries that do not have the funding can get vaccinated as quickly as possible.

I can only appeal to everyone to make appropriate use of these international platforms, such as Acta or Covax, because only together can we fight the global pandemic – and yes, we are experiencing that too, particularly in these times, Corona is still being denied, incited by nationalists and populists. Lies are being spread and a big question is being asked, which is also being asked time and again by authoritarian regimes: are liberal democracies capable of managing crises and supporting and protecting people, permanently, sustainably?

I think that we must not avoid this question, quite the opposite; in the end it must become clear: we do not need authoritarian structures to deal with a pandemic like this one. On the contrary, we need democracy, and we always need a very open, even controversial, discussion about the various instruments needed to protect people in the long term.

That brings me to Ms Laura CASTEL, and I would like to thank you once again for your encouragement. Hate speech – especially on the Internet – is basically a matter of tension. On the one hand, the principle of freedom of expression applies: everyone must be able to express his or her opinion freely. But at the same time, of course, there are limits, and this is about the integrity of people's dignity, and it is about ensuring that insults and threats on the internet are punished in accordance with the rule of law, that we put up stop signs.

And what can politicians do in concrete terms? A lot would be done if we could commit ourselves, irrespective of our political views, to conducting controversial discussions in a fair and respectful manner, where we do not deny anyone their own integrity and dignity and if we refrain from disinformation and lies, if we always argue on the basis of facts. And it is sad that in the 21st century we cannot take this for granted.

I would like to use the point about Belarus once again to make a clear appeal: it must be our goal that all political prisoners in Belarus be released without delay. I cannot recall a single public statement I have made without drawing attention to this central point. Once again, new elections, an immediate end to violence against peaceful demonstrators and, thirdly, the release of political prisoners. These are our minimum demands on Mr Alexander Lukashenko and the ruling regime in Belarus.

Let me then address another issue: Armenia and Azerbaijan. First of all, I would like to call once again on Azerbaijan to release the Armenian prisoners of war. We regularly remind Azerbaijan of the need to execute the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and we expect progress. And we also need an

appropriate forum for dialogue. As member states of the Council of Europe, Armenia and Azerbaijan have committed themselves to protecting human rights. Even in conflict situations, the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe must not be set aside.

In the further implementation of the ceasefire, the ceasefire agreement of November 2020, we will pay particular attention to the observance of human rights. We also see an important role for the Council of Europe bodies here, you are absolutely right. The states involved must enable international monitoring of the human rights situation in the region in accordance with their international obligations. Therefore we support the work of the OSCE's Minsk Group, its Co-Chairs, and the OSCE Observer Mission led by the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk. We trust that the efforts of the Minsk Group will lead to a lasting and sustainable solution to the conflict and, we are prepared to make our contribution to this endeavour.

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

We'll now go to the five questions. We'll take them all. We still have, formally, five minutes, but I guess since this is your farewell today, you'll take another five or ten minutes. I'm taking advantage of the fact that you're on the screen, so that's how it works here.

So we'll take the remaining questions. I'll start with the question from Mr Sergio GUTIÉRREZ PRIETO, who is not yet on the line.

Then we'll continue with Ms Sibel ARSLAN. I think she's in the room.

Ms ARSLAN, you have the floor.

**Ms Sibel ARSLAN (Switzerland, SOC):** Thank you very much, Mr Michael ROTH,

Mister Roth,

I would like to thank you very much for your trenchant manner and for the clarity – especially as a woman – that you have also spoken out so clearly on the Istanbul Convention.

I would like to know from you how you will proceed with the release or procedural continuation in the case of the unimplemented judgments of the European Court of Justice. You mentioned the release of political – Mr Alexei Navalny, Mr Osman Kavala and Mr Selahattin Demirtaş – and these are important actors. The arrest of these people leads to people being broken and their motivation and their beliefs being supported. Where would Voltaire be better quoted than here in this House when he said, "I do not share your opinion, but I would stake my life on you being allowed to express it".

How will you continue to work with this clarity to ensure that these people in this political imprisonment are released, and, indeed, all of them?

Thank you very much.

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

I'm going to come back to a question that I had jumped over, but the person is now in the room, so it would be a bit of a shame not to do that.

I will now give the floor to Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN. Is he in the room?

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN, you have the floor.

**Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD):** Thank you, Mr Chair.

I would like asked to ask some short questions to the Minister.

Firstly, you already addressed the issue of the fulfilment of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. You said that you will have zero tolerance to our non-implementation of judgment.

I would just like to say you know perfectly what the situation is with the Armenian prisoners of war. The European Court already informed you about the fact that several interim measures indicated that Azerbaijan has not cooperated with the European Court of Human Rights.

Will you, under your presidency, have the same zero tolerance in case the interim measures are not respected?

My second question: you address the issue of hate speech. I would just like to have a precise answer: what is the point of view, under your presidency, about hate speech against Armenians? In Azerbaijan we are called dogs, in Azerbaijan we are called something amounting to "inhuman", and we have this trophy park, which depicts ugly Armenian faces and so on.

Thank you very much.

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

I would like to ask the Secretary General: are there colleagues online or are there none left? I have the impression that there are no more.

Minister, that concludes the list of questions. You are free to give us your answers; as far as I am concerned, as long as you want, but obviously not until this evening.

You have the floor.

**Mr Michael ROTH (Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe):** No, Mister President,

Mister President, as much as I enjoy being with you, I have a few other tasks ahead of me. I know that they have a long agenda, so thank you for your generosity in occasionally allowing me to speak at greater length.

I had already spoken. I will start with the last Member, about the situation of prisoners of war. We are working to ensure that all prisoners of war are treated by both sides in accordance with the standards of international humanitarian law. We are also in very close contact with the International Committee of the Red Cross on this, which is in contact with some of the remaining prisoners. Let me say once again that the release of all prisoners is a very important step towards peace and stabilisation in the region, and I have already publicly addressed the worrying and critical comments from Armenia.

You have just mentioned the rhetorical escalation. Yes, this is a fundamental evil, and I can only appeal to all those involved. Despite all the conflicts – which may also be very painful – we must return to a culture of respect and recognition. Insults, insinuations and threats have no place in communication between people, and I would like to make it very clear that we politicians have a very prominent role to play here. We must set an example; we cannot expect our societies to put an end to insults and threats to their neighbours if we ourselves do not set a good example. I do not want to exclude myself from this.

In the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, we can see how deep the wounds are, but courage is needed if these wounds are to heal. Courage and a willingness to build bridges so that peaceful co-existence is once again possible and the outstanding issues can be resolved. Once again, we have tried and tested formats for this – that is the Minsk Group – and we want to help ensure that, with the support of the Minsk Group, corresponding successes can be achieved. But that presupposes the willingness of Azeris and the willingness of our Armenian partners to sit down around a table and sort things out.

Please stop the rhetorical escalation. It only poisons the climate and does not solve a single problem.

Now Ms Sibel ARSLAN had another question. Now I am just looking.

Thank you again, Ms Sibel ARSLAN, also for your praise. I am happy to pass it on to my colleagues.

We have already acted. The issues of unimplemented judgments are regularly discussed in the Committee of Ministers, and the Committee of Ministers cannot continue to avoid them. We are continuing to pursue this issue vigorously and also expect it to be pursued accordingly.

But we have to keep all our options open. There is Article 46, there are other possibilities. Once again, if judgments are not implemented on a permanent and consistent basis, then the legitimacy of the Council of Europe is called into question in its entirety. That is why we need a corresponding commitment here, and it must be clear to every member state what the consequences will be. Of course, I also take note, Ms Sibel ARSLAN, that there are discussions in Europe, including here in Germany, about how patient we should be. I say again: we are not being lenient. All options are on the table. But it is important that we leave no stone unturned to convince even states that are currently refusing to rejoin to play a constructive role and, as I said,

to meet these minimum requirements of membership of the Council of Europe. I am afraid that the instruments which the Council of Europe also has at its disposal will have to remain on the table. That must also be clear to any member country that breaks the treaty agreements.

Perhaps that will be an attempt.

I would like to thank you, Mister President, and also the honourable Members, once again from the bottom of my heart. I would be very pleased if we had another opportunity to exchange views in the near future, or if we were able to get together again soon for physical meetings, which might make things easier. After all, the main thing is not to talk about each other, but to talk to each other.

I considered today a great honour. I want to assure you once again that Germany will leave no stone unturned in the few remaining weeks to strengthen the Council of Europe and, above all, to strengthen it where we have gravamen – where there are difficulties, which we have spoken about quite openly today.

Thank you for your hospitality.

All the best to you, and stay healthy.

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

"Thank you and I hope we see each other soon in Berlin or Hamburg; who knows" [in German].

In any case, if they give me a small window of opportunity to head out there, I'll be there and we will meet each other.

Thank you very much for your answers and your questions and your address. Hopefully we can see each other physically, as they say, in the near future.

Thank you.

Dear colleagues, we will now go to our next point.

I ask our vice-president Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN to take over.

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN, thank you.

## **Debate under urgent procedure: The arrest and detention of Alexei Navalny in January 2021**

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The faces here in the podium are now changing and we are also changing the item we are discussing.

Now we will have an urgent debate procedure. Debate on the arrest and detention of Alexei Navalny in January 2021.

The item will be presented by Mr Jacques MAIRE on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

Before starting this debate I wanted to say a few practical matters on how to conduct this session. I know the issue itself is very tough. Politically heavily loaded. Emotions are involved and there is even a personal tragedy related.

That's why I try to conduct the meeting to practical elements, I tell you very clearly beforehand, and one substantial element. Practical ones first.

I really hope that we respect the three minutes limit. There are lots of speakers. The list of speakers is very long. There are lots of people who want to address the issue so I really would like to do it so that three minutes is three minutes and not any more. We don't steal other's time.

I have to finish the debate around 11:25 a.m. in order to allow the voting and reactions by the rapporteur in this regard.

Secondly, a practical issue. I have seen in this Assembly the misuse of points of order. I will not allow any misuse of points of order. You can raise your hands in a point of order only if it relates to a technical matter on how we are conducting the meeting. Please don't challenge the Chair on points of order. I will not allow it. I'll strictly stop it and we will continue the discussion with the real speakers. I will be very strict on that one.

Then the substantial point. Why are we discussing today about the Navalny case? The arrest and detention of Mr Alexei Navalny. We are not, I hope so, we are not discussing it because of a broad international concern on the item. We are neither discussing it because of the huge publicity around the theme. The reason we are discussing about it is that there's 47 member states in the Council of Europe, those 47 states have made commitments and we have common standards here in Europe. That's why the whole of this week we have discussed in this Assembly how those commitments and standards are met in different member states of the Council of Europe. How human right issues, rule of law, and democracy issues have been fulfilled in our countries according to the standards we have jointly approved.

Now the issue is about Navalny and Russia.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** I would also like to say that it's a great pleasure for me. It's very important for me that we have Russian delegates who are present and who are discussing this issue, because it's a common theme, it's a common subject, and concerns all of us. [in Russian]

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** I want you to understand very clearly that this is why we are having this discussion.

Now we will go to this discussion.

I shall first allow Mr Jacques MAIRE to introduce the theme.

You have seven minutes.

At the end you'll also have three minutes.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's debate is essential.

It is essential, firstly, for Alexei Navalny, who is suffering alone in prison. The reports on his state of health are alarming. Allow me at this point to spare a thought for him, for his wife Yulia and for his children Daria and Zakhar.

The report is important for Russia because it goes to the heart of the pact that unites us with our Russian colleagues: respect for the European Convention on Human Rights.

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that Navalny's conviction is illegal and yet he is still in prison. Yet he is still in prison. This is despite the court's adoption of a binding interim measure in February calling for his release. This is despite the request by the Committee of Ministers, responsible for supervising the enforcement of judgments, to quash his conviction and release him. And this despite the first appeal we made here in this Chamber at the January plenary session.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Assembly is more than a forum for political debate. We are a statutory body of the Council of Europe. We have a responsibility to defend the rights and values of this organisation.

The case is clear. The Court has handed down its judgment. Our position is therefore based on established facts and on its conclusions, which are unambiguous.

In 2014, Mr Navalny was sentenced in the so-called Yves Rocher case to a three-and-a-half year suspended prison sentence, with a five-year probationary period.

In 2017, the European Court found that this conviction and sentence violated the Convention. First, they violated its Article 7, which prohibits punishment without law. The Russian courts applied the Criminal Code in such an arbitrary manner that Mr Navalny would have been unable to foresee that his conduct would be

considered criminal. They then violated Article 6 which imposes the right to a fair trial. The European Court has, therefore, ordered Russia to reopen the criminal proceedings to ensure that the domestic courts remedy the violations I have just indicated.

And indeed, in 2018, the Russian Supreme Court reopened the proceedings. It did order financial compensation, but it upheld both the conviction and the sentence. It did not remedy anything.

The next episode takes us to January of this year: Mr Navalny returned to Russia after receiving medical treatment in Germany for possible poisoning. He was immediately arrested for allegedly failing to comply with the conditions of his parole. Two weeks later, a court sent him to prison for the remainder of his suspended sentence of two years and eight months.

The Committee of Ministers has expressed "serious concern" about the decision to imprison him, which it says is in total contradiction with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights.

Dear colleagues,

Your Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights therefore proposes that you recognise and support the position of the Committee of Ministers and the Court. This support by the Parliamentary Assembly is of immense political importance for Navalny, of course, for Russian civil society, but also for all of us as parliamentarians.

However, we must also address another issue: Mr Navalny's state of health, which makes it even more urgent that he be released. The problem is not only his serious health problems, but also and above all the lack of proper medical care and the very ambiguous - to say the least - attitude of the Russian authorities.

According to the information that I received from the Russian Ministry of Justice, on 7 April, the prison doctors judged his health to be "generally satisfactory". Then, on Monday, three days ago, he was transferred to a medical unit of the prison service, which confirmed his "satisfactory" condition.

I'm not a doctor, but I find it amazing that a person with multiple herniated discs, spinal protrusions, who no longer has full use of his legs, who has respiratory problems, who has kidney dysfunction, who has lost more than 15 kilos, is in "satisfactory" condition. I find it astonishing that the representatives of the ombudsman are also journalists from *Russia Today*, who attack Navalny in the media and violate his right to privacy. And when the only treatment given is vitamins, according to the Federal Prison Service, then something is wrong.

Dear colleagues,

I am not an expert on Russian law either, but according to the European Court, in its *Amirov v. Russia* judgment, the internal regulations of the prison system state that "prisoners who are willing and able to pay may receive additional medical assistance". If Mr Navalny has the right to consult the doctor of his choice, under Russian law, the authorities must allow it.

However, we learned yesterday from a statement by the Russian Ombudsman that Russia has made a different choice. Four doctors, who are not prison doctors but who were commissioned by the authorities, checked his health. They reportedly indicated that Navalny posed no medical risk and that he was receiving appropriate treatment.

So if this is the case, why prevent him from seeing the doctor of his choice? I wanted to question this administration, even remotely. The question remains: the exchange was not possible.

The authorities are therefore fully responsible. Mr Navalny must be released immediately. If he dies in prison, it will be as a result of the conscious action of the Russian authorities. We therefore ask that the Committee for the Prevention of Torture be allowed to visit Mr Navalny's place of detention without delay to ensure that, if he is not released, his conditions of detention are compatible with European standards.

Dear colleagues,

In conclusion, I have tried to make my report as balanced, objective and impartial as possible.

I have made every effort to co-operate with the Russian authorities. I have offered to talk to the officials, as well as to the delegation. I did feel that some of our colleagues in the Russian delegation were open to dialogue, and I thank our Chair Rik DAEMS for his efforts, including in Moscow. But the facts are this: my requests for contacts were not accepted. I have of course incorporated all the official information received in writing from the Ministry of Justice and I thank it for this useful document. But there is no substitute for discussion.

There is therefore no speculation in my report. It is not anti-Russian. It does not politicise the situation. It concludes with the same analyses as those already expressed by the Committee of Ministers and the Commissioner for Human Rights. I hope that the Russian delegation to the Assembly and the authorities in Moscow will read it for what it is, honest and fair, and that they will not misrepresent it.

I hope that our debate this morning in Strasbourg will be heard in Moscow, and that it will be of help to Alexei Navalny and to all prisoners in his situation. Our Organisation remains a source of hope for Russian civil society, which has been demonstrating in many cities since yesterday, but also for all the silent Russian citizens whom we have the task of defending, like all those in our 47 member states.

I thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** "Thank you very much" [in French] Mr Jacques MAIRE.

I hope that you have actually at the end only used two minutes because it was clearly overtime, but I obviously allowed you to introduce the theme.

Now we go to the speaker's list.

We'll start as usual with the political groups.

We first have Mr Tiny KOX who represents the Group of the Unified European Left.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mr President.

Yesterday President Putin made his State of the Union, which was watched by millions of Russians and the President addressed many important issues, like the pandemic, the international tensions and the social and economic situation in Russia. There's one issue he did not mention in the State of the Union and that was the issue that was mentioned by thousands only a few hours later in the streets of Moscow and St Petersburg and Irkutsk and in Novossibirsk. That was the call, the question of the arrest and imprisonment of political activist Alexei Navalny.

We have to be clear, the majority of the Russian citizens, according to the Levada studies, at the Levada Centre thinks that Mr Navalny is imprisoned rightly. And it is clear that the President of the Russian Federation also thinks so. But in this case, Mr President, it is not the majority that decides. As Russia is a member state of the Council of Europe and a signatory to the European Convention of Human Rights, it is the court at Strasbourg that finally decides whether or not the arrest and the imprisonment of Mr Navalny was correct. And it is the Committee of Ministers that takes share for the execution of this verdict. The verdict of the Court is clear, Mr Navalny only has to be released. He is imprisoned wrongly and I was happy to hear that Minister ROTH, the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers just addressed this Assembly and stated that there are commitments if you are a signatory to the European Convention of Human Rights.

It is not for free and I was pleased to hear that Minister ROTH said we shall not rest – we the Committee of Ministers, in which also the Russian Federation is represented – we shall not rest before Mr Kavala, Mr Demirtaş, and Mr Navalny are released. He made it clear, Minister ROTH, that to release Alexei Navalny, as well as as Osman Kavala or Selahattin Demirtaş it is not a present given to them, it is an obligation. It is a binding obligation under the Convention and it is a binding obligation if you are a member state of the Council of Europe. And that is, I think, the essence of the report and the Resolution that our colleague Mr Jacques MAIRE presents to us.

Here we say the same thing as thousands of people yesterday said in the Russian Federation: free Alexei Navalny. Let him go. And not because he is a hero, not because he is a villain, not because he is something in between, it is because the highest court in Europe, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, said you have to release Mr Navalny, this is binding law and that is why the Group of the United Left supports the resolution presented by our colleague MAIRE.

Thank you very much.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much, Mr Tiny KOX. Next, Mr Frank SCHWABE, representing the Socialist Group, please.

**Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Mister President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to address my colleagues from Russia directly.

Whatever we think about the geopolitical situation of the last 30 years – and I can understand some disappointments, also on the Russian side, about the geopolitical developments – you yourself committed, in 1996 with Russia's accession, to upholding human rights, the human rights of 144, 145 Russians. That is, so to speak, the promise that you made to the people of Russia with this signature, because we have a common understanding. That is what it is all about. As Europeans, we have a common understanding of unbreakable human rights and, in doing so, they have relinquished a certain amount of sovereignty. We have all done that. We have relinquished sovereignty by allowing the European Court of Human Rights, rather than national courts, to make the final decision. That is precisely what the treaty says: that it is not the country that decides on the basis of goodwill or whether you think someone is good or bad, but that it is the European Court of Justice that decides and that we submit to that judgment in the end.

I simply want to make that clear once again, ladies and gentlemen from Russia. We must insist on this for our own sake, because if we were to let you get away with this, as far as Mr Alexei Navalny is concerned, then others would come and say, well, if it does not apply to Russia, then it does not apply to others either. That is why it is an existential question for this Council of Europe – and you must understand this – that the judgments are implemented. This is not about Mr Alexei Navalny and whether we think he is good or bad, as is often discussed. Nor, incidentally, is today's debate about whether or not he has been poisoned – I have a clear view on that – but that is not what is at issue today. That is why I recommend that the amendment that has been tabled today be implemented in accordance with the rapporteur's wishes. One thing is clear: Mr Alexei Navalny must be free. The European Court of Justice has made numerous judgments on this matter. Mr Navalny is in great danger – from all we know, he is very ill. Therefore, there is a reason to release him very quickly and comprehensively. I want to say it again: Whoever does not implement this ruling basically excludes himself from the Council of Europe, opens the door to leaving and, in the end, cannot stay in either. That is why: Let Mr Alexei Navalny go free, for the sake of one person, but also for the sake of 144, 145 million Russians. That is why I very much welcome the fact that we are recommending to the Committee of Ministers that, at the end of the day, Article 46 be used and introduced accordingly, in order to make it clear – in all binding and diplomatic language, but also in all clarity – that we are at a crossroads.

In conclusion, how can a country have a future that imprisons young people? Young people who are committed, who take to the streets, who you need after all to build the future of their country.

And directed to the young people: I know there are many who are disappointed that sometimes we can't do more. But believe that we are at your side in the fight for democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thanks, Mr Frank SCHWABE.

The next one is Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS representing the Group of the European People's Party.

You should ask for the floor.

Yes, here you are.

**Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS (Greece, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Good morning from Athens.

Thank you very much, dear colleagues, dear friends.

The case at hand is as simple as it is appalling.

The fundamental question is a single and straightforward one. Should the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, which constitutes the very core of our institution and our mission since the Council's founding in 1949, be respected and be implemented or will we allow ourselves to become irrelevant in the face of a member State that insists on ignoring the repeated verdicts of the court, let alone that vocal and massive international outcry against the mistreatment of Alexei Navalny.

We, at the European People's Party Group, think that the answer cannot be but as simple as the question. We cannot and will not allow this kind of behaviour on the part of any state, let alone of a member State of our convention and our venerable institution.

The reason is equally simple and straightforward as the question. If we were to allow Russia's disrespect and non implementation of the Court's decision, we would no longer be the conscience of Europe, as Chancellor Merkel reminded us last Tuesday, but we would have turned into accomplices to a shameless attack on the most basic human right, which is the respect of human life and the fundamental freedoms that make us European.

Let me remind you all that Alexei Navalny is currently in a Russian prison for a criminal... for an original conviction that was overturned by the European Court of Human Rights in 2017. Recently, Navalny's originally suspended sentence was turned into a prison sentence for failing to observe the terms of his parole. This decision of a Russian Court in February 2021 was also overturned by an urgent injection of the Court that requested his immediate release. Overall, there have been seven rulings of the Court in his favour since 2011 to no avail, while currently it seems that the very life of prisoner Navalny is at risk.

Alexei Navalny is accused for breaching the terms of his parole while lying in a coma in a German hospital after a near fatal attack against his life with a rare neuro agent Novichok. Furthermore, he is deemed in risk of escaping despite the fact that he voluntarily returned to Russia in January. Given all these facts, his imprisonment becomes even more arbitrary and vindictive. It is easy to be carried away by a justified outrage against this gross violations, but I will conclude by sticking to the facts.

The Court has decided. We at EPP believe that the Court's decisions are not negotiable and their implementation is not and cannot be a matter of national discretion.

Furthermore and consequently, the Committee of Ministers has decided on the full implementation of the Court's decision. We at EPP believe that our Assembly should stand by the Court and the Committee of Ministers and ask for the immediate release of Alexei Navalny. This is the least the Russian authorities should do right now given this sorry state of affairs.

I, therefore, call upon our Russian colleagues in our venerable Assembly: prove Russia's critics wrong and vindicate all of us who believe in Russia being an integral member of our European home based on the respect of human rights and freedoms.

I urge you, my Russian friends, to join us all from all corners of Europe in crying out loud: free Alexei Navalny now!

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much, Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS.

I was a bit flexible anyhow because you were representing the group. But when it comes to the personal statements, I am much more rigid. A little bit of flexibility.

Now at this stage it is Mr Damien COTTIER representing the ALDE Group, please.

**Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mr President.

This is an important debate.

It is important because, although it has already been debated, this is the first time that our Assembly will take a position on the situation of Mr Navalny. It is important because what is being asked of the Russian Federation is essential to the principles of our organisation. It is not a matter of interpreting a situation today, of exchanging opinions; we do that regularly and it is important at other times. Today we are at another stage in this process: it is about implementing binding decisions.

Every country that has joined the Council of Europe has obliged itself to respect the European Convention on Human Rights and to implement the decisions of the Strasbourg Court. That applies to my country and to all our countries, dear colleagues. The German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers was right to point out this morning that we can discuss everything together, but not the implementation of the Court's judgments. That applies in the case of Mr Navalny, as it does in the case of Mr Kavala or Mr Demirtaş, whom others have mentioned this morning.

In the case before us, the Court has adopted judgments. They are enforceable. It adopted a binding interim measure in February. The Committee of Ministers, which is responsible for monitoring the Court's decisions, has called on the Russian authorities to enforce these decisions. We must expect the Russian Federation, as we do every member state, to implement those decisions and to fulfil its obligations, as it has itself undertaken to do.

This is essential because the mechanism is ready and the mechanism is provided for: it is provided for the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of every inhabitant of the European continent. How to implement these decisions is then a matter for each state. The Court says what a state cannot do; it is up to the state to decide how to correct the situation.

This debate is important, finally, because we must act quickly. No government obviously wants to bear the responsibility for not having provided the necessary care to a man at risk, under its responsibility, all the less so when a binding decision has deemed his imprisonment illegal, as thousands of people reminded us again yesterday on the streets of Russian cities.

Mr President, what is expected of the Russian Federation is extremely important. It is urgent, but it is actually quite simple: it is a matter of allowing Mr Navalny to be assisted by a doctor of his choice, as Russian prison regulations seem to stipulate. It is also about releasing a man who the Court has ruled should be released.

The ALDE Group urges the Russian Federation to fulfil its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, as it urges all member states to do at all times. It will support the Resolution, while carrying an amendment which should allow us to return to the rapporteur's original text, without reference to another separate procedure, that on the reasons for Mr Navalny's poisoning, which will be covered in another report.

I thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

The last speaker on behalf of the political groups is Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA. He is representing the European Conservatives Group.

Please, the floor is yours.

**Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA (Ukraine, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you very much dear Mr President.

Dear colleagues, on behalf of our political group I would like to express my gratitude to the rapporteur for the truly challenging yet undoubtedly necessary work he has conducted on this matter. We consider it to be of utmost importance and would like to endorse his efforts.

I said necessary because there is a persistent feeling in the air that the time has come to finally start calling things by their proper names if this estimable institution wants to preserve its well-deserved status of one of Europe's oldest largest, and one of the most influential organisations. And more importantly if we truly want to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the principles of the rule of law and the enjoyment by all persons within member state jurisdictions of human rights and fundamental freedoms as stated in the Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities of the Council of Europe adopted by this very respected Hemicycle just days ago.

We need not be afraid to use such terms as propaganda, authoritarianism, intolerance, act of aggression, war, annexation and of course violation of human rights. Even if such terms are usually applicable to one specific member state. Indeed the reason we specifically need to start doing this is because otherwise such deviant behaviour becomes a new normal as the case with Mr Navalny is not the first one, and I'm afraid, will not be the last one if the democratic community doesn't take any measures.

Navalny is just a personification of a much greater and longer issue that might be called by also such names as Nemtsov or Politkovskaya. And more recently Matyushenko, Atamanchuk, Peh, Sidorenko, Stasenko and Akshov. These are Ukrainian citizens with serious health conditions imprisoned in Russia, as much as Mr Navalny, deprived of access to medics, relatives or international organisations such as the Red Cross.

This issue is not just about Mr Navalny, it's about constant and systematic violations of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by the Russian Federation.

In this specific case of Mr Navalny we should pay particular attention to Articles 10 and 14 of the Convention being freedom of expression and prohibition of discrimination. Article 10 states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression and this right shall include freedom to hold opinions without interference by public authority.

Do we reckon that opposing political positions might not be regarded as such freedom, and that Mr Navalny has been in fact detained for explicitly expressing such opinions and has been specifically interfered by Russian public authorities.

Article 14 at the same time provides that the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground including political or other opinion. Who would then disagree that Russian teenagers went on the street to support Mr Navalny and interpose his incarceration have been further arrested specifically on the grounds of having political opinion, unacceptable for the public authorities of the Russian Federation.

Ladies and gentlemen, for these and many other reasons we have had an opportunity to bitterly observe in the last decade, we as a group support the resolution and would like to encourage the rapporteur to proceed with his challenging, however utterly important work.

If you allow me to finish with the following quote as though a sober appreciation of the general situation in the world will clearly show up the dangerous position in which we find ourselves. In Europe, "the powers threatening our form of life are not prepared to open the boundaries to freedom and that instead they're merely concerned with extending their own sphere of influence and those depriving the whole world of freedom". This is a quote from a speech of Konrad Adenauer, one of the founding fathers of a united Europe delivered in this very Hemicycle in 1954. This was addressed 67 years ago to the Russian Federation's predecessor, the USSR.

Dear colleagues it has been 67 years. It's time for something to change.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much, Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA, I was a bit more flexible in terms of timing concerning these group presentations, but now let's try to respect the three minutes very clearly.

We now move to the real speakers list and first we start from Sweden, Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG.

Thomas, you didn't ask for the floor. Please, request the floor. We can then link to you. Request the floor.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** Mr Sergey FABRICHNYI.

"Yes, please. Make a request to speak, Mr FABRICHNYI" [in Russian].

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next one is Mr Sergey FABRICHNYI from Russia. And I am already warning him so that he is ready to do that.

Now, Thomas..

Okay, let's start now actually, we will take Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG later on. Next one. Now we start with Mr Sergey FABRICHNYI.

Please.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** Next one.

Now we start with Mr Sergey FABRICHNYI. Please.

Excuse me, but your microphone is not working properly. We have almost no volume when you speak.

Excuse me, yes, I think you need to put your microphone in front of your mouth. It should work now. Yes, now it's fine.

**Mr Sergey FABRICHNYY (Russian Federation, NR)\*:** Thank you very much. Good morning.

In point 30 of the report of Mr Jacques MAIRE, there is an appeal to the Russian delegation to participate constructively in any future work on additional measures relating to this text. Now, to participate in this debate, we have six members of our delegation, who have inscribed. I think that is a confirmation of the fact that we are prepared for an exchange of views. We would like our arguments to be heard out and we would not want this to be a one-sided discussion.

Now, Mr Jacques MAIRE, from one of the meetings of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to another, I mean, he keeps coming up with new arguments and adding in new points and really removing us from the essence of what has happened. The essence is the following: Mr Navalny, in January of this year, was arrested because he had violated an order established by law. The law is very much in line with the German criminal code and it is the way in which social relations are regulated through the Nomos, the old Greek concept of law that establishes order in society. He therefore violated public and social order but also his personal duties under the law. It is normal for society to activate the mechanism required to return order. That is precisely what was done on 14 January. If you look at point 344 in the judgement concerning Khodorkovsky, there it is clearly stated that the status of an individual does not give him immunity from being charged with crimes.

Now, as I have stressed on a number of occasions at the meetings of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights that our country has ratified the European Convention of Human Rights, we have implemented that in our legal order. At the same time, we did not agree that there be a broad-ranging interpretation of certain acts taken domestically. Please take that into consideration.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

The next one is from Sweden, Ms Annicka ENGBLOM.

**Ms Annicka ENGBLOM (Sweden, EPP/CD):** Thank you and good morning from Stockholm, where it's actually snowing.

Mr President,

Dear colleagues of the Assembly,

Outrageous, unacceptable. Unexpected? Unfortunately not. The illegal and heavily criticised arrest and detention of the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny along with violent arrests of thousands of demonstrators supporting him is outrageous, unacceptable but not unexpected.

These actions by Russian authorities, sanctioned of course by the Russian leadership, are nothing new to this Assembly. Actions alike have been up for animated debates and have been condemned in the Hemicycle for years. Actions that are in every aspect completely the opposite of human rights, the rule of law, freedom of speech and all of the other fundamentals of this esteemed Organisation and that all member states have signed and promised to respect and fulfil. Conventions that the Russian Federation repeatedly violates, over and over again. Conventions that the Russian Federation apparently pays no attention to. They obviously don't seem to matter to them. They are words only to be played with.

It's been two years now since the Russian Federation and its delegates were allowed to re-enter PACE. A re-entrance that came along with a large number of conditions of democratic compliance and some improvements of which few have been seen.

So the question, Mr President and dear colleagues, is for how long and to what extent are we going to put up with it?

Here today I will fully and wholeheartedly support the excellent report and resolutions from Mr Jacques MAIRE. But I do think that eventually, sooner or later again, we will have to raise the question whether the Russian Federation has a place as a member of PACE. If it continues to ignore the values of the Assembly and continues its path away from democracy.

Mr President, during our session in January, a Nordic Baltic online manifestation took place with the participation of party leaders, foreign ministers, former prime ministers of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Lithuania and last, but not least, the journalist Zhanna Nemtsova, daughter of former and assassinated Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov. They were in their message as clear then as that of the European Court of Human Rights and the EU Committee of Ministers, along with the report of Mr Jacques MAIRE now.

The Russian authorities must without any delay release the Russian leader of the opposition Alexei Navalny.

Mr President, one for all, all for one, *un pour tous, tous pour un, einer für alle alle für einen, одиn за всех и все за одного*.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much, Mr André GATTOLIN.

The next one after him is Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

Mr André GATTOLIN.

**Mr André GATTOLIN (France, ALDE):** Thank you, Mr President.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by thanking Mr Jacques MAIRE for his report, which I praise for being both critical and very balanced, and I will continue along these lines.

The arrest and detention of Alexei Navalny in January 2021 are in flagrant contradiction with the values that we defend in this Assembly. They are also in flagrant contradiction with the undertakings resulting from membership of the Council of Europe. They are also in contradiction with the decisions and rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. We must state this firmly here.

I want to be clear: I supported the reinstatement of the Russian delegation in our Assembly in 2019 because I consider the Russian Federation to be a great country. However, that was not a blank check: Russia must fulfil its commitments. The European Court of Human Rights, whose authority we wished to strengthen yesterday afternoon, concluded that Mr Navalny's conviction in the Yves Rocher case violated his right to a fair trial and the prohibition of any punishment without law. Despite this, the Russian Supreme Court upheld the verdict and the sentence imposed. I therefore strongly call for Mr Navalny's conviction to be quashed and for him to be released immediately.

Yesterday, like many other colleagues, such as our colleague Mr Tiny KOX, I listened to President Vladimir Putin's speech to the Duma and the Federation Council. He spoke little about current affairs and international issues, but he did, however, very elliptically, define the fact that he would, moreover, define a certain number of red lines in an *ad hoc* manner. The Russian Federation has set itself a number of red lines, including that of having acceded to the European Convention on Human Rights and therefore accepting its rules and judgments.

I want to say that, when it comes to real co-operation, it is not acceptable for one of the partners to insist on a unilateral approach, according to which "what is mine is mine, what is yours is negotiable". Bilateralism, multilateralism and above all, the spirit of cooperation, cannot be confined to such principles.

I therefore reiterate that we demand the release of Alexei Navalny and his right to proper treatment.

I am giving the floor a few seconds early to comply with the President's instructions.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** The next one is Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

After him is Mr Sergey KISLYAK.

**Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA):** Dear Chairman, dear colleagues,

many people in Russia now are following this debate so I will continue in a language understandable for all of them.

**Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA)\*:** In the Navalny case everything is absolutely clear. They tried to poison him, this was done at Putin's order by FSB agents. And when he miraculously survived and returned from medical treatment in Germany, he was arrested, he was thrown into prison and that was a spit in the face of the European Court of Human Rights.

Now we are here for the European Court of Human Rights to be able to work, to have judgements that are truly executed. I mean, what are we to do when a country spits in the face of the Court? Should there be some sanctions against the Russian delegation? I do not know. Yes, we are afraid of that so we will not have sanctions and we will want to have business as usual with the Russian Federation.

But no, the case of Navalny is really emblematic of the approach of the Putin regime to my country, to Moldova, to the Czech Republic, to many others. And yesterday, Putin spoke before the Federation Council of the Russian Federation and thousands of people went out onto the streets of Russia and we saw two Russias: the Russia of Putin and his entourage – just look at their faces, I mean I have nothing to comment – and another Russia, the Russia of a free and democratic civil society.

That first Russia has been involved in geopolitical blackmail, but the other Russia is howling in pain under the batons of the forces of law and order. The one Russia, is people who live very comfortably and the other are those who are imprisoned, who are suffering from poverty, from a lack of public services. The one Russia is the one that is oppressing Georgians, Moldovans, Ukrainians and others, the other Russia are those who simply want to live in peace.

Which Russia do we want to protect and defend? We want to protect and defend the second Russia. Unfortunately, we are defending Putin's Russia, and I am ashamed of that. As it is said "when you are oppressed, break off your shackles and your chains and rise up".

Now, the reward for you and Putin, what can there be? Only the International Court in the Hague.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Mr Sergey KISLYAK from the Russian Federation, to be followed by Mr Oleksandr MERZHKO from Ukraine.

**Mr Sergey KISLYAK (Russian Federation, NR)\*:** You know, while listening to this discussion I ask myself what are we really talking about?

We're talking about legal obligations, about the rule of law, about the governments fulfilling their commitments, about the bodies of the Council of Europe executing their duties and functions in accordance with texts that have been accepted by all. Or do we rather find ourselves in a situation where, as we just saw from the previous speaker, this has just become an anti-Russian forum?

When I hear these arguments that are supposedly based on legal texts... but what is behind all of this? A continuation of the line to put pressure on my country, in political terms, in economic terms, or in legal terms.

Unfortunately, our organisation has been drawn into this anti-Russian process. But we really need to look at the facts openly, clearly.

I mean, what is the Navalny case in the Russian Federation?

There was an economic crime which was confirmed by a court. That is not the first economic crime with respect to which there was a court judgement against Mr Alexei Navalny, but this is really the first situation that I've seen where for such serious economic crimes, he was in fact sentenced to a very light sentence.

But he followed the rules for a certain period of time, the rules concerning parole, and therefore accepting the court sentence. But now there is this request for a sentence to be quashed. I mean should the decision of the supreme court of the Russian Federation be quashed? No. At the request of the European court of human rights, the supreme court reopened the proceedings and paid the financial compensation, but the reopened procedure resulted in a confirmation of the previous of sentence.

Now, insofar as the payment of a financial fine, because there had been some procedural shortcomings the first time around, that was done.

So we have in fact fulfilled all of our commitments and obligations in a way that is fully in line with the European Convention of Human Rights and Russian domestic law.

Now there is a second accusation; that we are not following the new decision of the European Court of Human Rights, namely the interim measure. But in the convention, there is not a single word about interim measures.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** I'm very sorry Mr Sergey KISLYAK but you have exceeded your speaking time and I will therefore have to cut you off.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO from Ukraine and after him Mr Juraj ŠELIGA.

I'm so sorry, we have to be strict on time, we cannot continue in this way.

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO you have the floor.

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO from Ukraine.

Next one, Mr Juraj ŠELIGA.

**Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO (Ukraine, SOC):** Dear Colleagues,

The life of Alexei Navalny hangs by a thread. Can we really save his life from imminent death? We all know perfectly well that now Alexei is at the hands of the same people who had tried to poison him. We also know who is a primary decision-maker when it comes to a decision on whether Alexei will live or die. This person is Russian President Mr Putin.

Let's have no illusions that there isn't any rule-of-law state in Russia. There is no rule of law in Russia. There is only rule of Putin. It is up to him to decide Alexei's fate, whether he will live or die.

Now the question. How to influence Mr Putin's decision? How to save the life of Alexei Navalny? Can we say our resolution will help to release Mr Navalny? I strongly doubt it. The other day Mr Petr TOLSTOI had openly declared that Russia is not going to implement the PACE resolutions if Russia doesn't like them under the pretext that these resolutions come into conflict with Russia's legislation.

Therefore, I'd like to put a question to the head of the Russian delegation. And my question is: Is Russia going to implement the decision of the European Court of Human Rights and the resolution of the PACE demanding the release of Alexei Navalny and to honestly investigate his poisoning? Please tell us openly.

I also have a suggestion to my colleagues in PACE. Dear friends, you are members of the parliaments of 46 countries and if you really want justice to prevail, if you want to save Navalny's life, turn to your respective governments and demand serious sanctions against Russia, because only this kind of pressure can stop Putin from killing Alexei Navalny.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Now comes Mr Juraj ŠELIGA.

Ms Jette CHRISTENSEN, you will be the next one, you can already prepare yourself.

Now Mr Juraj ŠELIGA, please.

**Mr Juraj ŠELIGA (Slovak Republic, EPP/CD):** Thank you Mr President and dear members of the Assembly.

First of all, let me express my strong support for the resolution. I would like to add a few remarks to the report and to the resolution at the very end of our session.

Firstly what happened yesterday in Moscow and other cities in Russia is absolutely unacceptable. People were arrested only because they were there to free and publicly express their opinion, exercising their human rights for freedom of expression.

I also want to address our colleagues from Russia in this Assembly and kindly remind them that the Russian Federation is a member of the Council of Europe. This membership comes with binding regulations of the Council of Europe, including judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

I repeat what was already said. The European Court of Human Rights ruled and Russia should accept this ruling. The judgment is binding and should be respected. Asking for respect for a judgment is not an anti-Russian forum, it's a regulation of the Council of Europe and a really strong part of the membership of the Council of Europe.

I think it's our responsibility here in the Council of Europe to condemn any such activities of member states that are in violation of the values upon which this organisation is built, and upon which it depends: human rights, democracy and rule of law.

Mr Alexei Navalny and other political activists in Russia should be released immediately.

I think that it is absolutely clear and I will say it repeatedly. Please release Mr Alexeri Navalny and other political activists in Russia.

This Assembly must issue the resolution and I propose, as I said, to fully support this draft.

Thank you very much.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thanks a lot.

Mr Juraj ŠELIGA is from the Slovak Republic.

Now we move to Norway, and it's Ms Jette CHRISTENSEN. And I ask Ms Ingjerd SCHOU to prepare.

**Ms Jette CHRISTENSEN (Norway, SOC):** Thank you very much, Mr President.

To me, this is not about Alexei Navalny.

This case is about illegal detention everywhere. About putting opposition in prison.

Freedom of speech and opposition rights.

This case is about the value of rule of law everywhere. It's about our common human rights and the very legitimacy of the Court of human rights.

Therefore, this is not a domestic matter for Russia. It is our common human values that are imprisoned. President Putin has said that nations who threatened Russian security will regret their deeds. He said that organizers of any provocations threatening the fundamental interests of our security will regret their deeds more than they have regretted anything in a long time.

Mr President,

In the hours following this speech, thousands of protesters fanned out in cities across the country to demand the release of Alexei Navalny. Hundreds were detained. The imprisoning of Navalny is, so to speak, a threat to the domestic security of Russia. And that alone should worry the Kremlin.

Mr President, Dear colleagues,

I am speaking to you as a friend of Russia and as a friend of human rights. I'm speaking to you as a friend of Russian culture, of the Russian people.

The court of Human Rights find no reason to arrest Navalny. We stand not only with Navalny, but illegal detention of protesters everywhere, and our common human rights everywhere. Because if they are relativized in one country and we don't do anything, the values of freedom of speech and rule of law are weakened everywhere.

President Putin has said that Russia wants to have good relations with all participants of international society. That is fantastic news. We as a collegium and we as neighbors want to have a good relationship with Russia. And I do experience that we have a good relationship with Russia.

But I call upon our Russian friends here in the hemicycle to help us in this matter and contribute to the release of Navalny. Not for me, not for you, but for the human rights of every Russian.

And thank you very much.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Ms Jette CHRISTENSEN is representing the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Now we have another lady from Norway, Ms Ingjerd SCHOU. She's representing the Group of the European People's Party.

After her is Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN from Ireland.

But now, Ms Ingjerd SCHOU.

**Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD):** Thank you.

President, colleagues,

In January we had a current affairs debate on the exact same topic as our ongoing urgent debate – the arrest and detention of Mr Alexei Navalny. Since being poisoned by Novichok in August last year, the situation for Mr Navalny has been urgent. Sadly it is no less urgent today, than it was in January.

By September 19, Russian voters will cast their ballots and decide who will represent them in the State Duma. Regrettably, the candidates they can vote for will be limited. Regrettably, all of the candidates who would like to run will not be allowed. Regrettably, it is in the interest of the sitting majority that opposition politicians are kept silent. I am truly saddened by these circumstances making the situation for Mr Alexei Navalny even more precarious.

Since our debate in January, Mr Alexei Navalny has been sentenced to three years imprisonment.

He has been transferred to a penal colony, where the conditions seem to be far below the standards we promote and have signed up to as members of the Council of Europe.

There are reports of Mr Alexei Navalny being denied continuous sleep by the prison guards.

He has resorted to hunger strike and his health is rapidly deteriorating.

This week he has been transferred to a prison hospital.

We as an Assembly cannot remain silent in this situation. We must all unite in a strong condemnation of the treatment of Mr Alexei Navalny. I call on you to support the resolution presented by Mr Jacques MAIRE. Mr Alexei Navalny must be released.

Mr President, two months from now we will meet for our third part session.

It is my sincere hope that Mr Alexei Navalny will have been released by then. It is my sincere hope that our calls for freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association for all citizens of Russia, and in all countries in the world and in member states of the Council of Europe, and in particular Mr Alexei Navalny, will have been heard. I truly hope that it will not be necessary to have this very debate again in June.

However I am doubtful, and sad to close by stating that I think we will.

This is not the last time Mr Alexei Navalny is at the top of our agenda.

Thank you Mr President.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much Ms Ingjerd SCHOU.

The next one is Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN from Ireland. And I ask Ms Naira ZOHRABYAN from Armenia to prepare.

**Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE):** Thank you, Chair.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important date. I want to commend the rapporteur Mr Jacques MAIRE in relation to his speech. I felt it was very measured and very balanced and his recommendations are proportionate and hugely, hugely important. We have spent the last three days talking about human rights, talking about upholding democracy and this case goes to the very, very core of those. The world is watching

what is happening at the moment. We in the Council of Europe have to take a very, very important stance in relation to this for Navalny himself, and for the thousands of people in Russia who support him, and of course, for those all over the world who uphold democracy and human rights.

Alexei Navalny's biggest crime seems to be being the prominent face of political opposition to the Russian government, because he has effectively utilised the internet to communicate the strong political message. We know that he has millions of Russian followers on social media. He himself proposed a united opposition platform involving vote sharing between opposition parties for parliamentary elections, which made sense, of which, of course, the government absolutely did not want. I know that at the Foreign Affairs Council on the 22 February, that Ministers used the new EU Global Human Rights regime to proceed with four listings of Russian officials related to this, which was published on 2 March. We have to support it.

My own country has condemned the imprisonment of Navalny on his return to Moscow. We have called for his immediate release and the release of those people detained during the protests. The fact that his detention happened immediately upon arrival raises very serious questions around the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights in Russia. All medical care and independent medical care, if necessary, should be made available immediately and also the possibility of independent medical intervention needs to be there. Unfortunately, there has been a deterioration in the environment for civil society in Russia. The recent changes in the foreign agents law is an example of this. We are very concerned that these laws could be used to further crackdown on civil society and critical voices. We are also disappointed that Russia appears to have withdrawn its request for a technical assistance visit from the OPCW Technical Secretariat. We would encourage a re-engagement in the organisation to ensure those responsible can be held to account.

Thank you, Chair.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Now Ms Naira ZOHRABYAN from Armenia.

After her, Mr Tony LLOYD.

**Ms Naira ZOHRABYAN (Armenia, EC/DA)\*:** Thank you, President.

Dear colleagues,

The world is suffocating in the grip of the coronavirus. On a daily basis hundreds of thousands of children and women are victims of domestic violence in Europe. And we have hundreds of Armenian prisoners of war in prisons of Azerbaijan.

And yet the number one urgent problem for us is Alexei Navalny. Yes, of course I'm in favour of respect for human rights. I would like for everyone to have the right to express and freely exercise her or his political opinions, including Alexei Navalny.

But I cannot understand Europe that has turned anti-Russianism as a number one point on the agenda and is doing this via Navalny.

Dear colleagues,

I can understand that you have certain strong emotions about Navalny, but I have a simple question to you. You have been criticizing Russia with so much enthusiasm. Do you know how many thousands of Armenian mothers are now looking for their disappeared sons and can't find them because they're either prisoners of war or they simply got killed?

I mean, there has to be concrete information provided by Azerbaijan about these prisoners of war who are currently probably being tortured. I mean, their soldiers and civilians in the Nagorno-Karabakh area who have decapitated by the Azerbaijanis. There has been systematic destruction of historical monuments and cultural monuments and art sites, churches and monasteries. And this country is having its roots torn away through this destruction of monuments and the destruction of Armenian culture.

And you are looking at all of this and worrying about a simple situation of an individual because you are anti-Russian. I mean, you have turned into an anti-Russian club and that is in contradiction with our essential values, which are to defend human rights in a depoliticized manner.

I mean, just to gang together with those who are geopolitically on your side, to gang together on a single country because you are anti-Russian. I mean, that is not worthy of the Council of Europe. Our political interests are often put above thousands or hundreds of thousands of individual tragedies.

Europe has turned into a political club of member states who are opposed to those who don't want to play by your rules.

So, I am in favour of human rights but I'm against the double standard.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Then Mr Tony LLOYD and I ask Mr Sergiy VLASENKO to prepare.

Mr Tony LLOYD are you there? We lost you. We lost Mr Tony LLOYD now.

Okay, he's coming. Good.

**Mr Tony LLOYD (United Kingdom, SOC):** Thank you very much.

Let me give my thanks first of all to Mr Jacques MAIRE for what is an excellent technical report. It lays out the legal position in a very clinical and very sensible fashion. I hope our colleagues from the Russian Federation will look very carefully at this report.

This isn't an anti-Russian report. In actual fact it's pro-Russian. It's pro- a particular Russian, which is Mr Alexei Navalny. But it's actually about the way Russia operates as, one would hope, a country that respects the values and the norms and the institutions of this Council of Europe of ours.

The problem with the Navalny case is that, almost at every level, it makes a mockery not of the Russian people but of the Russian government and Russian institutions. Courts that operate not judicially but politically, as it brought Mr Alexei Navalny to trial mainly for the charge that he is an opponent of President Vladimir Putin. This isn't a charge. This in the end means that it's Russia and its government that's on trial, not the Russian people and certainly not Mr Alexei Navalny.

Now within that context most of us were astonished that Mr Alexei Navalny was later on accused of failing to meet his bail conditions because he lay near death in a coma in a hospital in Germany. In almost any court in the world, even in the most repressive regimes, that kind of legitimate reason for non-adherence to bail conditions would have been accepted.

Again, this makes a mockery of the judicial process, I've got to say, in Russia. The allegation that the Russian courts are simply operating as a political arm of the Kremlin becomes a very real one.

I would say to our Russian colleagues to please take this message back.

Russia has many friends. Russia has people who have wanted a better dialogue with Russia over many many years and that still continues to exist with the Russian people. The problem we have at the moment is this almost bizarre incarceration of Mr Alexei Navalny, as I say, for the simple charge that he is an opponent of President Putin.

In the end, President Vladimir Putin holds all the cards, we know this. In the end the question for people across Russia, those who demonstrated yesterday, those who didn't demonstrate, is whether the Russian people will be put back once more in control of the Russian system, of the Russian government, and whether we can see the values of the Council of Europe properly established and enshrined in a way that we've not seen in the case of Mr Alexei Navalny.

I say to our Russian friends look please, take that message back home. Take the message that Russia's friends, and yes there may be Russia's opponents, but Russia's friends want to see something better, and that the Russian government ceases to be the one on trial.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Time.

Thank you.

Now it is Mr Sergiy VLASENKO from Ukraine.

Mr Leonid KALASHNIKOV should prepare.

**Mr Sergiy VLASENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD):** Thank you President.

Many colleagues already mentioned that we are discussing not the case of Alexei Navalny. We are discussing the question of violation of human rights and the question of the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. That's the issue, despite the fact that Alexei Navalny is a prominent anti-corruption activist and the opposition leader in the Russian Federation.

By the way, the representatives of the Russian authority mentioned that there is some legal discussion. No colleagues, no. The legal discussion was finished by the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. We have no legal discussions at all.

We must implement the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in Mr Navalny's case. That's the only question, no discussions. Discussions are ended by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights.

By the way, this Assembly welcomed the Russian Federation with no sanctions two years ago by the reasoning... there were two reasons. The first one, that we should create a dialogue and we should create an umbrella of ECHR over the Russian people.

So about the dialogue with the Russian Federation, do we have the dialogue with the Russian delegation? When we are talking about climate change or immigration in Europe yes, we have a dialogue. But when we start talking about the LGBT people in the North Caucasus, the illegal annexation of the territories of other member states like my Ukrainian Crimea, when we start talking about the violation of human rights or implementation of the ECHR judgments there is no discussion. There is no discussion.

And about the umbrella, I have a strict question, does Mr Navalny and thousands of his supporters enjoy the umbrella of the ECHR? The answer is totally clear. No, no. So what are we talking about? No dialogue, no implementation of decisions of the ECHR.

I would also say that that case is totally like the case of Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine in 2011. Totally the same. Politically motivated hearings of the court, arbitrary detention, conviction and imprisonment, absence of medical care. The same arguments of the government. Totally the same. Madam Tymoshenko was released as a result of the implementation of the ECHR decision only after the revolution of dignity in Ukraine. I'm not calling for the revolution in Russia, but that's just the fact.

I do not believe that Mr Putin and his authority will release Mr Navalny if there is no strong signal for him to do that. If we do not strongly push him to do that. For the sake of human rights, for the sake of the implementation of the ECHR decisions as a cornerstone of our Organisation, we should send a strong signal to the Russian authorities. Without that, nothing will happen.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Now Mr Leonid KALASHNIKOV.

Do we have the connection?

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly)\*:** Mr KALASHNIKOV, are you connected?

No contact.

Mr Artuss KAIMIŅŠ from Latvia?

No connection.

Then we go to Mr Stéphane BERGERON, from Canada.

Please.

**Mr Stéphane BERGERON (Canada):** Dear colleagues,

First, I would like to welcome the rapporteur, Mr Jacques MAIRE.

As I was not able to participate in the January debate on the arrest and detention of Alexei Navalny, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak today.

*(Brief interruption)*

As you know, Mr Navalny's current state of health appears to be deteriorating. There is a great risk that he may become the next voice of the Russian opposition to leave us prematurely. To paraphrase one of the so-called Moscow rules, amalgamating it with a Quebec proverb: "Once is a mistake, twice is a coincidence, but after three times is a bad habit. »

After the assassinations of so many activists, such as Anna Politkovskaya, Boris Nemtsov and Sergei Magnitsky, or former Russian agents such as Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei Skripal who narrowly escaped with his daughter, it would take a healthy dose of gullibility to think that what we have witnessed are mistakes or coincidences.

However, when I looked at the speeches of some of my colleagues in January, it seemed to me that there was a cognitive hijacking going on. For example, it was said that there was no evidence of poisoning. It was completely surreal. The denial is so magnified as to be laughable.

In 2016, the Oxford British Dictionary chose "post truth" as its word of the year and defined it as a word referring to circumstances in which objective facts have less influence in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal opinion. In the five years since, the concept seems to have taken hold as a new reality. It brings to mind the great Dostoyevsky who said, "The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point where he cannot distinguish the truth in himself or around him. »

Like many of my colleagues who spoke in January and today, I do not know Mr Navalny personally and may never have the opportunity to meet him. Therefore, I cannot speak about his strengths and weaknesses, let alone the mistakes he may have made. Who would I be to judge the mistakes of others? But I can certainly speak about the very important role that the opposition plays in a democracy worthy of the name, since in more than 26 years of politics I have only held a ministerial post for 18 months. As you can imagine, I have therefore often had the opportunity to criticize the government. In fact, that is not only my job but a sacred responsibility in a true democracy. But it has never resulted in me fearing for my freedom, my safety or even my life.

Are democracy and freedom of expression things we take for granted in Quebec and Canada? Perhaps even a little too much, since the example of certain democracies with feet of clay should make us realize that we must jealously cherish and protect these benefits obtained from high places. I sincerely hope that one day all Russians will be in exactly the same position.

Thank you for your attention.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

It is now 10:25 a.m.

As I originally said, unfortunately, we have to close the speakers list exactly at this time.

There were more than 20 people on the list. Unfortunately, time is against all of us. I'm so sorry. I tried to do my best, but here we are.

We will now move to the final stage of the debate, and first I will ask...

I'm so sorry, we have calculated it exactly, because there is a Turkish debate and then we are dividing exactly half the time.

We understood that we would start at 10:10 a.m. and have five minutes for our session, and five minutes for the other session. Unfortunately we will not finish at 11:30 a.m., we will finish around 11:25 a.m. Even time is now passing because of continuing this discussion.

I am sorry.

And now it Mr Jacques MAIRE.

"Please, and you have just two minutes" [in French].

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

I would first like to thank all our colleagues for their useful and strong speeches, and I would also like to thank our Russian colleagues in particular for holding this debate.

I note from this debate that the pressure on Russia is now extremely high. That is why I repeat that it is not a matter of dictating anything to the Russian authorities: it is a matter of them now finding ways and means to fulfil the obligations to which they and the Russian people have freely subscribed.

That is why the draft recommendation and draft resolution of your Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights are precise and legally sound.

Finally, we propose acting within the respective responsibilities of the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and the Court. That is why the recommendation calls for the use of all the tools available, including those under Article 46 of the Convention, to enable this enforcement.

This is also why I would like to say this to all those who have mentioned the poisoning of Mr Navalny, in view of the debate that awaits us in a few moments: yes, it is essential to shed light on what happened to him in August 2020. But the time is not ripe. Another report is being prepared: it is solid and will provide the Assembly with the means to take a strong decision.

To address this issue of poisoning here and now in the resolution would be to render irrelevant the forthcoming report on the alleged poisoning, which obviously deserves more than an amendment.

I will continue to be involved in the follow-up to this report with the extremely efficient assistance of Mr Günter Schirmer and Mr David Milner, and I thank you most sincerely for the confidence you have shown in me, on behalf of all the groups and the very many delegations.

Our unity on the situation of Alexei Navalny honours this Assembly. I am sure that our message will be heard even in Pokrov penal colony no. 2.

I thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thanks, Mr Jacques MAIRE.

Now we will ask the Chairperson of the Committee to speak.

Mr Boriss CILEVIČS.

Maximum 3 minutes. Hopefully 2.

**Mr Boriss CILEVIČS (Latvia, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights):** Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to commend our rapporteur, Mr MAIRE, in particular for his tireless efforts to maintain dialogue with our Russian colleagues. And I deeply regret that this dialogue, diplomatically speaking, is far from being as constructive as we would like to.

Colleagues,

This is not a political issue. As many speakers in this debate have pointed out, this is a matter of respect to key principles of our organizations. This is a purely a legal issue. Russian colleagues have referred to the subsidiary role of the European Court of Human Rights, but this is not disputed.

The Strasbourg Court did not consider the matter and substance. The court evaluated the trial and concluded it was not fair and did not meet the requirements of the European convention.

Our Russian colleagues said that the guilt of Mr Navalny is established by Court. Dear colleagues, this is not true. The court, the Strasbourg Court, did not acquit Mr Navalny, it simply said that the presumption of innocence is still in place as he was not convicted by fair trial.

Our Russian colleagues say that Russia has executed the decision of the Strasbourg Court. Not true. Because it is a committee of ministers who is entitled according to the convention to monitor execution. And the committee of ministers thinks something different: member states and state parties to the convention cannot by themselves decide when the decision by the court is executed and the case is completely closed.

So, colleagues, each of our member states voluntarily decided to join our organization and voluntarily undertaken certain commitments, and all we want to see and all we demand is that each member states, including Russia, fulfills its obligations.

Thank you, President.

**Mr Andreas NICK (Germany, EPP/CD):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear President, dear colleagues,

At our plenary session in January, I stated very clearly that all dimensions of the Navalny case – his poisoning, his arrest and the way in which protests have been dealt with – have an impact on us within the Council of Europe in particular and represent a central challenge for us.

In this forum, we have repeatedly expressed our full support for the mandate of our colleague Jacques Maire as rapporteur. And I wish to stress my gratitude towards him for his committed and unflinching work along with the report presented today with the draft resolution.

Today, a dramatic and fundamental dimension has been added, with the news of Alexei Navalny's health giving us cause for extreme concern. The priority now is to save his life and restore his health. We therefore demand that Alexei Navalny receive immediate and unrestricted access to comprehensive medical care and is treated by doctors he trusts, be these in Russia or elsewhere. This humanitarian matter must take precedence here and now over everything else.

Along with several Members of the German Bundestag – from four parliamentary groups, in both government and opposition – we recently expressed our complete solidarity in a letter to Alexei Navalny. We consider his treatment to be irreconcilable with the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. For this reason, we also demand, today, rapid and unrestricted access for the CPT to assess the detention conditions.

With this resolution, we therefore call upon the Committee of Ministers to use all means at its disposal to also ensure application of the court's ruling to the Navalny case. We appeal to the members of the Russian delegation and the government of the Russian Federation: fulfil this obligation at last.

It must be clear to all parties involved: adherence to and implementation of the rulings of the ECHR is at the absolute core of this organisation and is the central obligation of each and every member state within the Council of Europe.

A state that does not wish to meet this obligation towards its citizens cannot, in the long term, remain a member of the Council of Europe – and does not want to be part of this community.

The future credibility of the Council of Europe will be measured by the consistent and targeted application of the full range of instruments at our disposal – including the Joint Procedure – in order to move member states to observe and comply with the basic values and rules of the Council.

**Mr Markus WIECHEL (Sweden, EC/DA):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mr President,

At our last session in January of this year, we debated this very same issue as a 'Current Affairs debate'.

Today, however, we do so under the heading 'Urgent debate'. And justly so, for the matter has truly become urgent.

In January we were relieved that the brave Mr. Navalny had miraculously recovered from the novichok assassination attempt carried out against him in Siberia some time earlier.

And perhaps, some of us were confident that he would now be given proper treatment in Russia, after his return there in January from Germany, where he had been hospitalized and cured.

Why would he otherwise return to Moscow of his own choice and openly – despite the mistreatment by the Russian authorities and what had recently happened?

Despite the fact that he was unconscious, he received a sentence of two-and-a-half years, in a strict and unpleasant prison, simply for not showing up at a routine presence control.

Meanwhile, as you all know, new prosecutions for other alleged offenses were thrown at him by the Russian authorities.

He truly did succeed in one thing: Showing the world the ruthless reality for Russians in opposition to the government!

Distinguished colleagues, I could go on, but the excellent and accurately prepared account by the Rapporteur does it much better. Today we can say that our concern for Navalny's health and well-being has become acute, to put it mildly.

The Russian state has instead of what you should expect, made Navalny's life less safe, and once again showed the world a reckless face.

The rapporteur gives a sober account of a worrying development, in which the many recommendations, bases and calls made by our European Court of Human Rights and our Committee of Foreign Ministers have not yet been followed - or in some cases directly rejected - by Russian courts and authorities.

This can cause serious damage to the entire system of international law, a system that is as valuable as it is vulnerable.

Furthermore, without wishing in any way to interfere in a country's domestic policies, Russia vitally needs a truly democratic political life - one where political parties oppose each other, where they take turns in being in opposition and government, and where personalities like Mr Navalny could find their proper roles.

If not, the whole of society stagnates. It becomes ossified. People's joy and creativity fade away rapidly, unless they enjoy political freedom.

For all these reasons - which must be added by ethics and morality - Alexeï Navalny must be immediately released from prison and given the freedom to resume his political career without any institutional interference.

Thank you, Mr President.

**Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK (Ukraine, ALDE):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Distinguished members of the Assembly,

Through recent decade we have been witnessing how the Kremlin kills the Russian opposition in literal meaning of the verb "to kill". Would we and the rest of the civilized world keep silent on Alexei Navalny case, this politician will stay in danger to be killed the next.

Yesterday, Russian police have arrested key supporters of Alexei Navalny and cowardly begun closing central squares in Moscow and other cities before planned in support of the jailed opposition leader.

Let us just think: pro-Navalny demonstrations have been announced in more than 100 cities, with the largest expected in Moscow and St Petersburg. Over 100 cities had voiced their support to the opposition leader in the purely police state, which the Russian Federation turned into through the last decade.

Predictably, instead of demonstrations, over 100 potential protesters were detained. I can't call it other way than the harassment of the whole nation.

Likewise, Russian representative here, Mr. Tolstoy announced that the Russian Federation won't implement PACE Resolution on Navalny before the Resolution is approved. This is how the low signal in the dialogue with Russia looks like in the Assembly.

What Putin understands as "the red lines" is the basic pan-European values: respect to human rights and dignity, democracy and rule of law. And freedom, of course, the taste of which the generations of Russian people have never tried unfortunately. These are basic values, that make all Ukrainians to escape the Kremlin's influence despite the geographical location of our country.

Thank you.

**Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Rapporteur Mr Jacques Maire,

Dear Colleagues,

Yesterday nearly 1,500 peaceful demonstrators have been arrested throughout Russia. They were calling for freedom for imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny, whose health is deteriorating due to a serious illness and three weeks of hunger strike in prison.

The last time such demonstrations took place in Russia in January and February, right after Navalny was arrested, and then more than 11,000 people were detained.

Recently Russian prosecutors have requested that Navalny's network of regional offices and his Anti-Corruption Foundation be added to a list of "terrorist and extremist" groups, clearing the way of its members to be jailed.

Navalny's case, his arrest and imprisonment is only one of many puzzles of a huge picture, a caricature of democracy in Russia. Many colleagues have already mentioned the decision of the European Court of Human Rights on Navalny, decision ignored by the Russian Federation. It is obvious: Russia is ignoring its own commitments as the CoE Member State. Those commitments are obligatory, and all Member States shall stick to them.

Colleagues, it is appalling what is happening in Russia. We all know that in January 2021 Navalny returned to Russia from Germany following his treatment for a serious deterioration of his health, which was the consequence of poisoning him with Novichok nerve agent on 20 August 2020 in Russia.

And now, this courageous man, the father of two, is dying in prison. Because he is fighting against corruption and for human rights in Russia.

The only possible solution is his immediate release. Alexei Navalny should be transferred for a treatment to a country where he would feel safe and receive proper medical treatment without delay.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thanks very much, Mr Boriss CILEVIČS. Now the debate is closed.

I am really apologising, once again, that there were so many people who wanted to address. You do have actually a opportunity if you have a prepared speech, you can submit that to the Table Office and that will be published in our official report at the end. That option is for everybody who prepared themselves for this session.

Sorry, the debate would have been nice to continue, but we could not. Now we come to the decision stage, we will consider the amendments and the Committee of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, whose Chair was just speaking, presented the draft resolution with 1 amendment.

We will start with the consideration of the draft resolution and after that we will look at the recommendations also.

Now the we first start with the amendment made for the draft resolution. Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ, would you like to support the amendment number 1 or Mr Damien COTTIER, please.

You have 1 minute only.

## **Vote: The arrest and detention of Alexei Navalny in January 2021**

**Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE):** Thank you, Mr President.

We propose to return to the rapporteur's original text with this amendment.

The issue of Mr Navalny's intoxication and its causes is an important issue, but it is the subject of another procedure and a separate report to be produced at a later date. It is a matter, it must be admitted, that is less urgent than the issue that concerns us today. It is therefore unnecessary from our perspective, and even counterproductive, to mix these two processes.

The delegation of the Russian Federation could rightly reproach us or say that we should not mix these two issues. We have all said it, and many have said it today: we want to have an honest and friendly dialogue with all the member states and, of course, with the Russian Federation.

We therefore propose to return to the rapporteur's original text. This is also the position of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights – its chair can certainly confirm this. That is therefore the Committee's position. We ask you to support this amendment, which reverts to the original text and deals with the most urgent issue.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Does anyone want to speak against the resolution? Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

**Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA):** Yes. There were two amendments that I prepared and as a member of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, I gave them to the Committee and they were supported.

The first one: the report started with the words that Mr Alexei Navalny went to Germany for rehabilitation after serious illness.

Sorry, but we all know that it was poisoning.

I want to thank the rapporteur who supported it and now we have the alleged poisoning in the text. That is very important. But if we have poisoning, poisoning is a crime; it should be investigated. Certainly it will be a very important report in June.

We are waiting for it, but Mr Alexei Navalny cannot wait because I do not know if he will be alive in two months. If we are saying that there was a crime with poisoning, the crime should be investigated.

The second amendment, which was first supported in the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, is to investigate our demand to the Russian authorities.

"To investigate" and then the decision was changed by only nine against five, so I would like to ask everybody to be against this amendment.

Thank you.

**Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much it was a clear statement for and against.

Now I want to hear the Committee's opinion. I understood the Committee accepted the amendment. That's the case. I know it. That's why I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is now open.

You know the system already, those who are at a distance and those who are in the hall, the vote is now open.

The vote is now closed.

Please display the result.

*Result: the amendment was agreed with clear majority.*

Now we move to the draft resolution as a whole.

I will put the draft resolution to the vote.

The vote is now open.

The vote is closed, and the result.

*Result: It was approved with a clear majority.*

Thanks.

And now the last vote on this item is the draft recommendation.

I put the draft recommendation to the vote now.

The vote is closed, and the result.

*Result: The draft recommendation was approved with a clear majority.*

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, thanks very much. It was a very nice, important discussion.

Thanks very much indeed. Very good in different ways.

Unfortunately, apologies once again for those who couldn't address us. Next time.

Thank you.

## **Request for explanations of vote**

**Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD):** For the record, I would like to mention that during the vote on amendment No. 1 to the draft resolution on "The arrest and detention of Alexei Navalny in January 2021", my intention was to vote against, and that I voted for by mistake.

## **Debate under urgent procedure: The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey**

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

The next item of business this morning is the debate on the report on "The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey" presented by Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG and Mr John HOWELL on behalf of the Monitoring Committee. The report is Document 15272.

I remind you that we must finish the debate, including the vote, at 1:00 p.m. We will have to interrupt the list of speakers at about 12:45 p.m. in order to allow time for the reply from the Committee and for the vote.

The Monitoring Committee has seven minutes in which to present the report and three minutes in which to reply to speakers at the end of the general debate. The co-rapporteurs share this time as they see fit.

I call Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG, co-rapporteur. You have the floor.

**Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG (Sweden, SOC, Co-rapporteur):** Thank you very much.

We prepared this urgent procedure report on the request of 5 political group leaders in the assembly. We worked on this report in the spirit of dialogue and coordination, cooperation really.

I want to thank all members of the Turkish delegation for good cooperation. This new report is actually triggered by recent and worrying developments in Turkey. We have undermined their democracy, rule of law, and human rights. That is of course in the report.

A procedure has started which could lead to closing down the second largest opposition party in the parliament. Whatever the outcome is, this is an alarming signal. A third of the parliamentarians are subject to legal proceedings and to have their immunity be lifted if this goes on.

We also report on problems relating to the freedom of expression. We mentioned the civil society groups and their problems, and that covers also human rights defenders. We think they must be able to continue their work without risking to meet problems. Activists in Association of Human Rights is one of the organization which have had problems. Amnesty International is another one. And we will also mention in the report and we do, in fact, that journalists still have problems when it comes to the freedom of work on journalism in the country.

So, that is basically a part of this report which we feel are urgent and need to be addressed.

Thank you

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister Chairman.

I'm going to turn it over to the other co-rapporteur, Mr. John HOWELL. It's your turn.

*(Technical problem)*

We will not waste time because there are a few speakers. I am sorry, but we will take the rapporteur back later.

So, if Mr Frank Schwabe for the Socialist Group is here, he can speak.

Yes? Mister SCHWABE, you have the floor. It's quicker than I expected.

**Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you very much, Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We only have important debates here, of course, but we now have the second debate this morning which, in the end, touches the very foundations of this organisation.

We have the topical and urgent debate – and I would like to thank the two rapporteurs for their tireless work and for the fact that they have to submit reports here all the time. What some of my Turkish colleagues, at any rate, regard as unfair is that Turkey is always on the agenda. But that is precisely because we have to deal with Turkey again and again, because the human rights path – the path of democracy and the rule of law – is leading in completely the wrong direction and because it is happening at high speed.

Where else is the second largest opposition party to be banned within the Council of Europe? Where are court rulings of our Court of Justice wantonly not implemented? Where are people imprisoned for political reasons? I am personally concerned about two Germans, Hozan Canê and Gönül Örs, who are still imprisoned in Turkey on absurd grounds and in absurd proceedings and who, incidentally, are being subjected to the COVID-19 situation with great health risks. Which country is actively withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention?

On the Istanbul Convention, I want to say: Is it legal for a country to withdraw? Yes. Is it reasonable? No.

Against the majority in your own country, in a situation where we are seeing particular violence against women under COVID-19. Basically, there are no free media left in Turkey, many human rights activists are in prison, the top of Amnesty International. We could list cases here. We probably wouldn't even get through today.

We have the attempt to put massive pressure on the opposition parties. We have the case of the chairperson of the CHP, Ms Canan Kaftancıoğlu in Istanbul, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison. We now have the case of the HDP, which, incidentally, is not under pressure because it has become radicalised in recent years, but because the opposite has happened: the HDP has moved more into the centre of society. It is to be banned, 700 politicians are basically to be banned from activity, and Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu in recent days as an MP and human rights activist has been absurdly jailed for two and a half years for a tweet.

Turkey is on the wrong track at great speed. That's why I think it's right and we should encourage the Committee of Ministers, which is about to open an Article 46 case.

I think it is right and proper that Mr Ahmet Altan should be released in the last few days. I very much appreciate that. But I want to stress again, the implementation of judgments of the Court is not an act of mercy. It is not like shopping where you pick one case and don't pick another. We have the cases of Selahattin Demirtaş, where it is really close to twelve, and of Osman Kavala, where it is actually already five past twelve. Turkey has an obligation to implement the court rulings and release the two immediately.

Once again, if not, the Committee of Ministers will have to act accordingly and initiate proceedings, which in extreme cases could ultimately lead to their expulsion from the Council of Europe.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, sir.

Mr Andreas NICK, if you don't mind, I'm going to turn it back over to Mr John HOWELL, the other co-rapporteur.

Mr John HOWELL, if you are on the line?

Mr Andreas NICK, if you would like to speak on behalf of the EPP Group, please? Thank you.

**Mr Andreas NICK (Germany, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a *de facto* founding member of the Council of Europe, Turkey has committed itself to upholding the highest standards of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This entails fundamental obligations, in particular to comply with and implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. This goes to the core of the Council of Europe, it was also a priority of the German Presidency, is a priority of the German Presidency. Mr Michael ROTH has pointed this out again today.

The Council of Europe bodies and our monitors have repeatedly called for the implementation of the judgments, especially in the cases of Selahattin Demirtaş and Osman Kavala and many others. We will not give up on this. Minister of State, Mr Michael ROTH, mentioned again today that an official letter from the Presidency has been sent to the Turkish Foreign Minister. The cases in question will now be on the agenda at every meeting of the Committee of Ministers.

The citizens of Turkey have demonstrated on many occasions their special appreciation of parliamentary and pluralist democracy with high turnouts in numerous elections, national and local, in recent years. However, fair and open political competition is a necessary condition for the democratic process to achieve legitimate representation of all citizens' opinions and interests.

Depriving freely elected MPs of their mandate or putting them in jail is an unacceptable course of action that worsens the democratic framework. The proper place for elected parliamentarians is in parliament, not in prison. Our group is very concerned about the banning of the HDP. A party ban is one of the last and heaviest swords in democracy and it requires a very special justification. This does not seem to be the case.

The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is, of course, something that concerns us greatly. Let me remind you that the Convention bears the name of this great Turkish city for a reason. It was unanimously adopted by the Turkish National Assembly in 2012, and now it is being withdrawn by presidential decree.

Ladies and gentlemen, Turkey's internal constitution should not increasingly be at odds with its own strategic interests, including its political, social and economic links with Europe.

We will continue to follow these events very closely.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Andreas NICK.

This time I have Mr John HOWELL on the line. We'll pass it on to him.

Mr John HOWELL, you have five minutes maximum, since your co-rapporteur spoke for two minutes.

It's your turn.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Co-Rapporteur):** Thank you Madam President and I apologise for the technological links that have prevented me from joining so far.

There are only two points that I wish to raise. The first is the Istanbul Convention and the second is the independence of the judiciary.

The withdrawal by the president from the Istanbul Convention without any parliamentary debate is indeed a devastating a piece of news as has been demonstrated this week on a number of different occasions. And withdrawing from a human rights-based convention is a regrettable step backwards and this has, as we have seen, triggered huge reactions. We regret that misleading narratives were used to deprive women and girls from Turkey of an international treaty setting, what is considered today to be the gold standard to combat violence against women.

And my own country – just to provide some information – is proceeding with the process of ratifications, is changing the law first, to be able to ratify the Convention in good faith. We hope that Turkey will reconsider this decision and make sure that the Istanbul Convention remains the Istanbul Convention and the

presidential decision to withdraw from a major Council of Europe Convention was unprecedented for the organisation and it has raised the question of the modalities of denunciation of conventions in democratic societies, which is what the Venice Commission is looking at.

The second issue I was going to raise was the independence of the judiciary and I think that has underlined the problems that we have seen and because it has also introduced a lack of separation of powers, which were enshrined in the 2017 constitutional amendments. Again, we refer to the rulings of the Strasbourg Court to call on the Turkish authorities to revise their practices and ensure that conditional decisions are free from undue political interference and comply with Council of Europe standards and with Turkey's obligations towards the organisation. And we remain confident that the Turkish authorities can reverse these worrying trends and they should seize the opportunity of implementing their human rights action plan and revising the legislation on elections and political parties to take meaningful steps to put an end to the judicial harassment of opposition members and dissenting voices and that they should improve freedom of expression and media.

That Madam President is all all I wish to say. Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr John HOWELL.

We shall continue with the list of speakers for the political groups and I call Ms Gyde JENSEN, for the ALDE Group.

Is she online? Okay, you have the floor, Ms Gyde JENSEN.

**Ms Gyde JENSEN (Germany, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you Madam President.

Dear colleagues, our job as members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is not only to safeguard the institutions of democracy, the rule of law and the free press. Our job is to safeguard journalists, politicians, members of civil society who are bringing these institutions to life. I want to stress the importance of doing this continuously and tirelessly when it comes to our member Turkey.

Let us remember that ten years ago the gold standard in the fight against violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention, was signed in Istanbul. The Grand National Assembly was the first parliament in Europe to ratify it in 2012 by a unanimous vote. By doing so Turkey played an invaluable role in the success of this landmark initiative.

For years Turkey was genuinely aspiring to becoming a member of the European Union and meeting the Copenhagen Criteria. This means committing to high standards when it comes to democracy, the rule of law and civil rights and liberties.

Dear colleagues, many opposition politicians in the Turkish Parliament have done their best to uphold these aspirations for a democratic, constitutional and free republic of Turkey as elected representatives of the Turkish and by the Turkish people. Had there been a proper parliamentary procedure, including a debate about the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, the opposition could and would have presented convincing arguments of why leaving the Istanbul Convention is not acceptable. Debates like this are at the heart of every democracy.

During the last weeks however, we have seen an unprecedented cluster of attacks on members of parliament and therefore the Turkish democracy itself. Stripping elected members of parliament of their immunity because their voice, their own opinion, is not acceptable. Using the judiciary to strip elected members of parliament of their rights and privileges is not acceptable. Taking steps to ban the third largest party on dubious grounds is not acceptable.

Madam President, dear colleagues, even though this long-running dismantling of Turkish institutions is very concerning I urge us not to give up.

The recent release of Ahmed Altan shows us that the European Court of Human Rights can make a difference, that the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly can make a difference. To do so we have to hold President Erdogan accountable and use every instrument we have to remind him about his commitments under international law as a member of the Council of Europe.

The Turkish people are counting on us and we must not disappoint them.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I now give the floor to Mr Markus WIECHEL, for the Conservative Group. He is online.

Mr Markus WIECHEL?

**Mr Markus WIECHEL (Sweden, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** Madam President.

I'm honoured to take the floor on behalf of European Conservatives and Democratic Alliance political group regarding the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey.

I salute the untiring work and expertise on this subject by our two rapporteurs from the Monitoring Committee: my fellow countryman Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG and my fellow political group colleague Mr John HOWELL.

The fact that both these rapporteurs are in such agreement as to the shortcomings in today's Turkish democracy serves to demonstrate that their concerns are not partisan.

Instead, they are widely shared worries across the political spectrum in our Assembly and in our member states.

Indeed, almost daily nowadays we receive troubling official news from Turkey and notably from its president.

The other day it was that Turkey would leave the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. As you all know, this convention was signed under the Turkish chairmanship in Istanbul a decade ago: hence it is often referred to by its other name, the "Istanbul Convention".

A few days later came the captivating news that 10 retired Turkish admirals had been put in prison simply for having signed an open letter in which they advised against the planning and building of a second Bosphorus Canal alongside the original one.

This is perhaps minor news by comparison, but it's still revealing of the present climate in the country.

There is also, in the report before us, a whole range of fundamental complaints against the present democratic situation in Turkey. They include: a lack of judicial independence; insufficient separation of powers and checks and balances; breeches against parliamentary immunity; unlawful imprisonment of lawmakers and many professionals; undue restrictions on the media; non-respect for judgments of our European Court of Human Rights.

The list could be made much longer, but I'll leave that to the rapporteurs and the other speakers.

In conclusion, distinguished colleagues, it is vital that we react and keep reacting all the time for as long as challenges and setbacks remain in our struggle on behalf of democracy.

I look forward to a lively and enriching debate.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

So, just to make it a little smoother for the rest because there are quite a few people who are attending remotely, before I give the floor to the last speaker from the political groups, I would like to ask Ms Inka HOPSON and Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS to get online and be ready to speak.

In the meantime, I call Mr Hişyar ÖZSOY for the European United Left.

Please do so, sir.

**Mr Hişyar ÖZSOY (Turkey, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear Chair, Dear Colleagues,

Six months ago, we had another urgent affairs debate on Turkey. Let me start by reading a few sentences from that resolution: "In the past months there were new crackdowns on political opposition and civil dissent... Investigations and prosecutions targeted members of parliament, ... opposition political parties and lawyers. Continued undue pressure exerted on journalists... and civil society activists... Such crackdowns also have a regrettable chilling effect on women's participation in political and social life." Today the situation is similar but much worse, unfortunately, which is why we are having another urgent affairs debate.

This resolution covers only some of the important issues that happened in Turkey over the last few months. Three of these issues are of particular concern: the first is Turkey's refusal of executing judgments of the European Court of Human Rights regarding my party HDP's former co-chair Mr Selahattin Demirtaş and Mr Osman Kavala. Second, is the politically motivated closure case to destroy the HDP – my party – before the next elections, and another possible round of lifting of parliamentary immunities and more arrests. The third is the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention by a presidential decree. Turkey was the first country to sign this convention, which was an honour and source of pride. Now it is the first country to withdraw from it, which is a source of deep, deep shame for all of us to say the least. It is also absurd that these negative developments are happening after the government of Turkey had announced its Human Rights Action plan with much fanfare.

What other problems do we have in Turkey? Some of them are mentioned in the resolution, some are not. Elected Kurdish mayors removed from office and jailed, the worsening health situation of hundreds of sick prisoners, torture and arbitrary detentions almost every day, ongoing hunger strikes to protest prison conditions, the policy of isolation imposed at the Imrali Island prison and Turkey's refusal to implement recommendations of the CPT, the students and faculty members of Bogazici University who continue with their protests, detention of women protesting the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, continued harassment of journalists, lawyers and doctors...the list can be extended almost endlessly.

As the UEL Group, we thank the rapporteurs and fully support the resolution. We also think that, in encouraging Turkey to act as a genuine member State, it is high time for the Council and this Assembly to start considering the use of more effective means, mechanisms and procedures at their disposal other than simply having urgent debates, opinions, or statements of concern. The Turkish government, unfortunately, does not seem to have the will or willingness to fulfil the obligations of a member State, not even executing court decisions. In doing so, it is setting a very bad example for other member States to follow. That is why we are asking the leadership of the Parliamentary Assembly, Madam Secretary General and the Committee of Ministers, to have a concerted dialogue, address the aggravating situation in Turkey and uphold the values and principles that the Council proclaims to represent.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Chair.

That concludes the list of the group speakers.

Moving on, I now call Ms Inka HOPUSU from Finland, if she is online.

**Ms Inka HOPUSU (Finland, SOC):** Thank you, Mister President, Dear Colleagues,

I welcome the decision to hold a debate under urgent procedure on the situation in Turkey.

Exactly ten years ago Turkey became the first member State to sign the Convention to eliminate all forms of violence against women in Istanbul. One year later its parliament unanimously ratified what is known as the Istanbul Convention. These decisions were taken by the same people and the same party still in power today. Sadly, much has changed in Turkey since then. I am concerned by the shrinking space for civil society, journalists, politicians, human rights activists and limits to several rights and freedoms. The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is a sad continuum to this.

Let me be very clear. The Istanbul Convention was set up to protect women from violence. It has no hidden agenda, and we must speak loudly against all such false claims. Let me also strongly reject all reference to the Istanbul Convention as going against traditional values. What does that even mean? That violence against women is somehow permitted within such traditions? I really hope that such views were a part of the past.

According to the World Health Organization at least 38% of women in Turkey have been subjected to domestic violence. Although there are no official figures, women's rights activists in Turkey report a considerable increase in cases of domestic violence during the pandemic. Significantly more people have called NGO helplines for the protection of women. The "We Will Stop Femicide" platform reported 300 femicides in Turkey in 2020.

In Turkey, access to protective and preventive mechanisms is one of the great challenges for victims of male violence. However, supporting women victims of abuse has never been a priority for the Turkish government. Sadly, this has not changed during the pandemic. In contrast, Turkey has decided to withdraw from the very treaty that obliges the government to protect its women from such abuses. I sincerely hope that no other country follows this example.

Women's rights are human rights, and human rights are everybody's rights. Our job here is to defend our people and to strongly reject any attempts to undermine the rules-based international order and human rights.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I now give the floor to Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS from Greece.

You have the floor.

**Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS (Greece, EPP/CD):** Thank you very much, Madam President.

Dear colleagues, it's the third urgent plenary debate we have on the situation in Turkey in the past year and a half.

The main thing is the deteriorating situation of democracy, of human rights and the rule of law.

Evidently, despite our warnings and recommendations, things have not been improving in Turkey. Far from it. How long can this keep up? It gives no one joy to have to remind that often a member of this Assembly, colleagues of ours, that their government's choice and approach to the democratic function of institutions and society alike is harmful. First and foremost for the Turkish institutions, the Turkish society and its people's. Because it's about choices we are talking about. Conscious, concrete choices that go against all the basic principles of a modern state, and that at last, a member of this Council needs to uphold and protect.

It is a choice to crackdown on opposition, throw journalists, activists and politicians in jail. It's a choice to interfere in education, in freedom of speech, in judicial procedures. It's a choice to prosecute an elected political party of the opposition and its members and try to ban it. It's a choice to declare a letter of a hundred retired naval officers and attempt to a coup, simply for raising a different opinion.

Finally, it's a choice, a well-thought one, to withdraw from a Convention that bears your name and protects, as the first of its kind, women from violence.

Turkey, its leadership and our colleagues in the parliament, should consider the impact their choices and actions bear.

I strongly urge you to support the report the rapporteurs and the Monitoring Committee put forth.

The world is watching and Turkey's credibility is dwindling. I only hope it does not reflect on the credibility of this Assembly as well.

Thank you, Chair.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Madam.

I now give the floor to Mr Ahmet YILDIZ of Turkey.

**Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR):** Thank you Madam Chair.

Indeed as chairperson of the founding member of this organisation, I am trying to do my best in co-operation with the rapporteurs, with Presidency, with the Secretary General, and with everybody here, and I expect the same from everybody.

In this context, I have three problems in this report. I will briefly mention it: one is that my country has some particularities, differences from others, some problems, it is mainly terrorism. Unfortunately, this report does not recognise my country's need for combating terrorism and indeed, in recent years, in recent decades, we have a lot of conventions on terrorism and modalities of international cooperation, it is obvious that, if we

cannot address the terrorist organisations as they are, these states, unfortunately, serve their propaganda purposes: it weakens international combating the terrorism. That is why I will come with an amendment on this, I will expect your support. It is a simple wording.

Secondly, of course, some wordings here are constituting a direct insult to the Turkish judiciary. Saying that a prosecutor general acted upon request of a political party leader is totally rejected. These files are the product of a process. Not one day, but as you know, moreover, the constitutional court returned this file due to serious discrepancies. So it is at the hand of the judicial process.

Thirdly, of course, freedom of speech is okay, very good, but we need some consistency here. I trust that my country's judiciary executive authority legislation will address with remedy these verdicts of the European Court. Some of them are happening, some of them will happen according to judicial processes. But when we check in the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights there are so many countries which did not implement vital decisions of the Court for decades. One of them is Greece, a Turkish minority that cannot use Turkish despite the verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights. Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS is serving in ministerial positions, she could do something on when she is there. Now, it is not too late. She can use her good offices on the Prime Minister, she has time.

Also on the Istanbul Convention, I declared several times, I am for the Convention, but it happened to be criticised by the Chairperson of a country which still did not sign or ratify the convention, that is not fair here. Let us be consistent. I expect your support in this small wording amendments.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I now give the floor to Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV for Azerbaijan.

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

Dear colleagues,

In recent years, one of the topics of our constant debates in the Assembly has been the need for radical reforms in the Council of Europe, the importance of renewal, the urgency of getting rid of traditional shortcomings and diseases. Unfortunately, the main shortcomings that need to be corrected remain the same and we continue to move forward with the same gait.

The utmost diseases to be treated — double standards, non-objectivity, ordered speeches, biased groups, the habit of attacking certain member states by choosing them as a permanent target — remain so far.

Once a time, the First Chancellor of Germany, Konrad Adenauer, entitled the Council of Europe the "conscience of Europe". This was also mentioned by Angela Merkel, who addressed the Assembly at this part-session. Words like "angels" are easy to pronounce. Nonetheless, unfortunately, we do not always, and sometimes never think about how hard and difficult it is to be an angel, to bear the responsibility of being the conscience of Europe.

Pick up the reports with the same title about Turkey prepared here in different years and read the transcripts of the debates. Don't get surprised when every time witnessing the same names criticizing Turkey with particular passion

Look at previous years, take documents from subsequent years and compare them with today's report. You will find out that it appears to be a similar melody written by the same composer. Turkey, on the one hand, wages a serious fight against terrorism, accepts thousands of foreign refugees in the Middle East and South Caucasus as a cleansing factor, thus saving Europe from serious consequences with this sacrifice. Furthermore, abiding to the traditions of democracy and the lessons inherited from great Atatürk, this country moves forward with confidence and loyalty thus becoming stronger and more powerful from year to year.

If you honestly make comparison, you will see that today's Turkey is stronger and more democratic than 5 years ago.

Nevertheless, 5 years ago it was declared here that democracy in Turkey was in danger.

Council of Europe is already quite old.

And Turkey has been a member of this 72-year-old organization for 71 years.

After all, the Council of Europe is entitled the "conscience" of Europe.

So let's get used to looking at Turkey honestly, at least from this point of view, in order to honestly evaluate it.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I now give the floor to Mr Asim MOLLAZADA from Azerbaijan, who is also at a distance.

Excuse me, Sir, I just want to ask Mr Piero FASSINO, next, to be ready.

Thank you, Mister MOLLAZADA.

**Mr Asim MOLLAZADA (Azerbaijan, EC/DA):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I think that this document has had endless discussions about it, based on, really, the political interest of some countries. [These are] some political forces which had competition with Turkey, which are trying to use issues of democracy, human rights, to punish Turkey to create a problem and obstacle. It is like a continuation of this competition, which countries lost in different parts of the world and which are using the Council of Europe for revenge.

Look, it is an issue, we heard from people from countries which have not ratified the Istanbul Convention. They are criticising Turkey, but in their own countries... and there are a lot of countries in the framework of Council of Europe which did not ratify.

I personally support the Istanbul Convention. I think that combating violence against women is a priority for the whole world.

But I also respect the countries, based on religious issues and family conservative traditions, which do not accept this declaration. Discussing only Turkish issues is insulting Turkey as a country.

Another thing, the whole of Europe, the European Union, the United States of America, consider the PKK to be a terrorist organisation. Turkey combating terror and Turkey combating not only terror, also, are very important things that are the glorification of terror.

We had a new process, tradition, this glorification of Nazi and SS, it is the violation of international law and procedure. It is the same when it comes to terror. Why are we accusing Turkey, which is trying to resist this country, because there are tens of thousands of victims of terror within Turkey now, also in Turkish neighbourhoods. There are a lot of terrorist organisations, and Turkey alone combatted them.

I think that Turkey plays a very important role for Europe. Millions of refugees, a result of some military operations in the Middle East, are in Turkey. Turkey is supporting them. Turkey is trying to help Europe to keep and care about this army of migrants.

I think that all of our European colleagues should look to the processes and should not use your political disagreement with Turkey in the form of punishing Turkey for human rights and democracy. That is not fair.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Before I give the floor to Mr Piero FASSINO, I would like Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS to be ready.

Mr Piero FASSINO, for Italy.

**Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC):** Thank you very much.

However... I would like to say this to the Turkish Members, to Ms YILDIZ and to the others: there is no prejudice against Turkey in the Council of Europe. This attitude of our Turkish colleagues of always presenting themselves as the victims of prejudice, of preconceptions, is not founded.

Turkey is a great country, as we know. Turkey, through one of its influential representatives, held the presidency of this assembly a few years ago. Turkey is a country that is listened to and, if we discuss it, we discuss it precisely because we consider Turkey to be important. What we are asking is that Turkey respects the fundamental rules that the Council of Europe lays down and in which all countries, including Turkey, recognise themselves.

We are in complete solidarity with anyone who fights against terrorism, but the fight against terrorism cannot mean that everyone who expresses dissent becomes a terrorist. I refuse to believe that Demirtaş, the leader of the HDP, is a terrorist. Just as I refuse to believe that 51 Kurdish mayors are all terrorists and that is why they have all been removed by the Turkish authorities, in violation, let us say, of the electoral mandate of the people.

I refuse to believe that any journalist who expresses criticism of the Erdoğan government immediately becomes a supporter of terrorism. And I do not believe that it is possible to accept that in a democratic country thousands of civil servants, judges and teachers should be dismissed simply because they are suspected of disagreeing with the leader of the country.

Turkey, of course, is a great democratic country. This was demonstrated last year by the electoral vote which, in all major cities, rewarded the opposition candidates and not the candidates of the governing party. It is precisely for this reason, however, that we insist on the fact that the rules laid down by the Council of Europe must be respected. That is what we are calling for.

We are not asking Turkey to limit its sovereignty. We do not assume any act of interference in its political choices. Turkey has the right to make its own internal foreign policy choices on the basis of the mandate that the voters give it and that the Turkish Parliament approves.

What we are asking, however, is that Turkey joins the Council of Europe, that it commits itself to the founding principles of the Council of Europe, and we are asking that it respects them. It must respect the judgments of the European Court, it must respect the principle of recognition of the protection of human rights, which are laid down, and it must respect the democratic rules which are fundamental in every democratic country and which are the basis of the Council of Europe.

That is what we are asking for.

And the recommendation, the resolution, which I endorse, and I thank the rapporteurs, says exactly that.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS will speak for Greece, followed by Ms Azadeh ROJHAN GUSTAFSSON from Sweden.

I call Mr KAIRIDIS, please.

**Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS (Greece, EPP/CD):** Thank you, thank you, Mr Speaker.

I will put my prepared speech aside because I prefer to respond to some of the things that my Turkish and Azeri colleagues have just said.

Let me say out clear and loud that Osman Kavala is not a terrorist. That the millions of women of Turkey are not terrorists. They are seeking their rights according to the Istanbul Convention. And that the millions of Turkish citizens who voted for the second largest opposition party of Turkey are not terrorists. It is an insult to them to call them — and to cancel their democratic will, as expressed in Turkey's elections — terrorists.

There was a talk about double standards. Let me tell you what is a double standard.

30 years ago, in the 1990s, when the then mayor of Istanbul was imprisoned, we at the Council and here in Greece stood by his side against the illiberal kemalist that was the then president. The current president Erdogan, 10 years later, when his party AKP was threatened with banning, we stood by the AKP and the democratic free will of the Turkish people, both here at the Council and in Greece.

It is quite a great irony when the victim becomes victimised. When the people who were protected by the Council 20 and 30 years ago, come today here and speak to us pointing fingers about double standards.

Let me conclude with the issue of anti-Turkishness. There is no such thing. Here in Greece, we feel a great disappointment because we have been supporting, as no one else in Europe, the European vocation of Turkey with full force wholeheartedly and in full good faith.

We are very concerned with the link between the turn to authoritarianism domestically in Turkey with increasingly aggressive and peace threatening behaviour of Turkey abroad. As a result, we are very concerned with all the violations described in full detail in the report. I'm not going to list them again. The list is quite long and very worrisome.

Let me conclude by congratulating the rapporteurs for their work with the hope that the Turkish leadership will take their recommendations at heart and implement them as best as possible for the benefit of the Turkish people and their rights.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Ms Azadeh ROJHAN GUSTAFSSON from Sweden will take the floor, followed by Mr Halil ÖZŞAVLI from Turkey.

You have the floor, Madam.

**Ms Azadeh ROJHAN GUSTAFSSON (Sweden, SOC):** Madam President, dear colleagues,

What we are seeing happening in Turkey is a demolition of democracy. The foundation of democracy is built on rule of law, human rights, and the freedom of speech. And President Erdoğan and his party is taking this down, brick by brick.

The relentless crackdown on freedom of expression and other human rights is enabled by the widespread executive control and political influence over the judiciary.

In recent years, this has led the courts to systematically accept bogus accusations and to detain and convict individuals who advocate different political ideas or represent dissenting voices. At the same time, when political prisoners such as Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş remain behind bars and many journalists are imprisoned for their journalistic work and criticism of the government, the Turkish authorities moves to ban HDP, opposition party.

That means that the one-third of the parliamentarians, including the leaders of the two main opposition parties in Parliament, are facing legal charges. This would not only be a very serious setback for the already fragile democracy, but also a way to strike down the voices of the Kurdish minority in the country, a group that for many years has been subjected to persecution and oppression.

Dear colleagues,

Turkey was the first country to ratify the Istanbul Convention in 2012 with great support at the time from President Erdoğan and his party. Therefore it is very disappointing to witness how the same authorities are now withdrawing from the Convention. The announcement is especially dangerous at a time when many women are killed and there has been a sudden increase of domestic violence cases during the Covid pandemic.

In 2020 alone, according to the Minister of Interior in Turkey, 266 women were killed by men in acts of gender-based violence. Instead of withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention Turkey should work towards implementing the Convention through national legislation policies and other measures to protect women and girls from violence without discrimination.

Madam President,

On the streets of Turkey the people are raising their voices. They are worried about the developments in their country. The report presented here by the rapporteurs includes important recommendations to the Turkish authorities and how to rebuild the foundation of democracy.

I hope this assembly adopts the report and that the Turkish authorities will acknowledge the recommendations.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Madam.

Mr Halil ÖZŞAVLI from Turkey will speak, and behind him will be Mr Anastasios CHATZIVASILEIOU from Greece.

You have the floor, Mr ÖZŞAVLI.

**Mr Halil ÖZŞAVLI (Turkey, NR):** Thank you dear President.

Dear colleagues, the report we are discussing now argues that the Assembly has been following the developments in Turkey in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation with the Turkish authorities. I wish this argument could be verified with the content of this report as I am quite disappointed to see that the report contains lots of distorted information, misrepresentation and baseless claims.

As I can see in the report the rapporteurs focused on some major issues which are: functioning of the democratic institutions, the rule of law, the protection of human rights, parliamentary immunity, the HDP case and the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.

Due to lack of time here I will focus on the the pending case for the closure of HDP.

First of all, HDP is a political party which has very close and unbreakable ties with the terrorist organisation PKK.

Please let me give you a very brief account about PKK. PKK is a terrorist organisation which is listed as a terrorist organisation internationally by numerous countries including the members of the European Union and others such as the United States, Canada and Australia. The European Union also designated the PKK as a terrorist entity in 2004. NATO also refers to the PKK as a terrorist entity.

Since its foundation in 1984, 84,000 attacks have been carried out by this terrorist organisation and more than 40,000 people have lost their lives because of these attacks.

Dear colleagues, 84,000 attacks have been carried out by this terrorist organisation and more than 40,000 people have lost their lives.

The PKK has been increasingly using children in terrorist attacks. Just within the last two years the PKK kidnapped more than 2000 children and took them to the mountains.

The PKK is also involved in extortion, arms smuggling and drug trafficking. The rapporteurs seem to have forgotten the previous resolutions of the Assembly, such as Resolution 1622 which acknowledged that democracies have the right to defend themselves against extremist parties and political parties can be dissolved in cases where the party threatens civil peace and the democratic constitutional order of the country – exactly what is being done today by the HDP.

Considering that the HDP leadership accepts the leader of the PKK as their supreme leader, HDP officials neither condemn the terror activities of the PKK nor refrain from making statements legitimising PKK terrorism. It is very clear that the PKK and HDP are closely linked.

The distinguished members of this Assembly should recognise that the ties between the PKK and the HDP are much more concentrated and solid as compared to ties between ETA and Batasuna. As you remember, the European Court of Human Rights acknowledged that the dissolution of Batasuna was a response to a pressing social need given its ties to ETA.

Bearing in mind these facts, I firmly believe that the constitutional court will take the decision taking into account all judicial acts based on laws.

As a conclusion, the decision will be taken by the independent and impartial judiciary. We should hear the decision of the justice before raising criticism today.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much, Sir.

I give the floor to Mr Anastasios CHATZIVASILEIOU, from Greece, to be followed by Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN.

You have the floor, Sir.

**Mr Anastasios CHATZIVASILEIOU (Greece, EPP/CD):** Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

A democratic functioning of political institutions demands respect of checks and balances and the freedom of expression. And both are in a critical point currently in Turkey. This is the reality, as the report manifests.

And I'm very disappointed to listen to other colleagues denying this very reality today.

The constitutional revision of 2017 resulted as foreseen in a profound change of the balance of powers. It drastically reduced the role of the Turkish Parliament. Today, the government in Ankara turns towards more and more radical positions.

Amidst a difficult economic conjuncture, the Turkish society is reacting to the alteration of the traditional principles of democracy and protesting for the defence of fundamental rights.

We saw reactions for the ambiguous appointment of the dean of the Bosphorus University as well as for the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention. And this decision is a huge setback for human rights.

At the same time, a few things have been done for the return of the institutions to the normal function. Thousands of civil servants, judges and journalists remain incarcerated 6 years after the failed coup d'état. At the same time, hundreds of academics have been dismissed from their universities accused for subversive ideas. All this without the minimum respect to the principle of prior hearing and the right of defence.

On top of that, the strict state control over the media limits the freedom of expression and political pluralism at every level, with most opposing voices being highly censored. Look what happens to the members of the HDP.

Under these conditions, human rights and fundamental freedoms are directly menaced, minorities voices excluded from everyday dialogue and the risk of externalization of internal social pressure becomes imminent.

Dear colleagues, I am an old friend of Turkey and there is no anti-Turkishness in this discussion here today. We all desire the prosperity of our neighbouring country. We insist on the decisions and reforms that will re-establish the normal functioning of the democratic institutions for the sake of the Turkish people.

We call the Council to provide its assistance to Turkey by any means in this challenging path. In any case we should not put our credibility at stake. Our values should prevail.

Thank you, Madam President

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Sir.

Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN, from Ireland, you're on the line.

**Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

And I want to commend and support the report from the co-rapporteurs. I think they have done a very valuable job in relation to the report in terms of highlighting what we all need to be incredibly concerned about.

The recent developments in Turkey, there is no doubt, further undermined democracy, rule of law, and of course human rights. The crackdown on political opposition is very very concerning. The investigation and prosecution that have targeted politicians, lawyers, journalists and civil society is something that we all need to share a huge concern about.

The restrictions on NGOs doing good work in terms of supporting people at grassroot level in Turkey is also equally concerning. The lack of independence of the judiciary means that there isn't the adequate checks and balances that we need in any functioning democracy.

But the area that I wish to focus most on is in relation to the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention, and most specifically the fact that this was done without any parliamentary debate whatsoever. It really was a very significant step in 2011 when the Council of Europe negotiated this convention and it was agreed that it would be signed in Turkey. And the fact that Turkey were the very first country to sign sent out a very strong and hopeful signal to the world as well as the women in Turkey.

But following on from the last 12 months where we all recognised there has been a shadow pandemic in relation to the increase in domestic violence in all of our countries and right across Europe and indeed the world, it's particularly concerning that the Turkish president has taken this decision. And that sends a very very bad signal right around the world in terms of supporting and respecting women and ensuring that they live safe lives.

There has to be international concern for the increased prevalence of domestic violence against women, and in Ireland we've certainly played our part in terms of running a *Still Here* campaign to show our women that are suffering, and indeed their children, that all of the facilities that need to be there to support them are there and are still strengthened.

So, we need to send a very very strong message to Turkey in relation to their withdrawal from the convention and in relation to their refusal to uphold democracy and human rights.

Thank you, Chair.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Madam.

Given the time, you were – you are – our last speaker. We will therefore stop here for the hearing of speakers.

I remind the Assembly that all speakers who are present during the debate or who are connected remotely and who have not been able to speak may, within four hours, send their typed speeches to the Table Office for publication in the official report, provided that the speakers connected remotely are able to prove their presence at the end of the debate. They may also, of course, transmit the report electronically.

I call the Monitoring Committee to reply. I call the co-rapporteurs. You have three minutes to divide between you.

Who will speak first? Is it Mr John HOWELL?

Mr John HOWELL, go ahead.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Co-Rapporteur):** Thank you Madam President.

Better luck this time with the technology.

I think that I would like to recall the presentation made by my conservative colleague.

What he said was, and I paraphrase it, you could not get a piece of paper between me and Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG over this report and over the situation in Turkey. Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG is of course a socialist and I am a conservative. That shows there is no partisanship and there is no bias from us against Turkey.

We've always stressed that we want to continue dialogue and to continue the cooperation.

We hope that progress will be made to improve the functioning of democratic institutions.

Indeed, it is to improve the functioning of democratic institutions that we are working tirelessly on this report. What we have produced is a series of areas that are not very satisfactory. This implies a pluralistic political life with fundamental freedoms which are guaranteed.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG, would you like to add to that, please?

**Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG (Sweden, SOC, Co-rapporteur):** With reference to what Mr John HOWELL has just said, this is not a question of punishing Turkey, not at all.

We are aiming at a dialogue with the authorities there.

I hope there will be discussion about how to resolve the very serious problems that we have listed in our report, but it is not a question of being anti-Turkish at all.

In fact, both of us have good friends in that very country.

May I also emphasise that there is no tendency at all to support terrorism in this report. There is no glorification of terrorism. How could it be by people who are so much against terrorism as we are?

So I hope there will be a more sober discussion about the term "terrorism" when we go on.

I appeal to you to respect the approach we have taken in our report.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister HAMMARBERG.

Does the Chairman of the Monitoring Committee wish to reply? Yes ?

Please, Mister JENSEN.

**Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN (Denmark, ALDE, Chairperson for the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)):**  
Thank you Madam Chair.

I would absolutely just like to say a couple of words after a long week and a lot of good, fruitful discussion.

First of all, on behalf of the Committee, we would like to congratulate both Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG and Mr John HOWELL for their most excellent work. It is an extremely challenging report. It is basically in light of that this is actually the third urgent debate in three years. That actually highlights in my opinion that there are troubling developments in Turkey that we as a Monitoring Committee and the two co-rapporteurs should monitor closely, and also the entire organisation should monitor closely.

We have fundamental values that must never be broken, that must never be mended and must never be diluted in any way. Therefore when we see the developments in Turkey right now regarding the crackdown on opposition getting worse and worse, it is extremely troubling. When we also see that Istanbul Convention, a convention that actually we all normally have taken to our hearts, and that Turkey now sees as wrong for their country because of so-called "conservative values". I see that as very troubling indeed.

So I can only highlight that I as Chair am a strong believer that this report should actually be adopted by our organisation. I can also promise our Turkish friends that we'll do whatever we can to help you to make sure that you're still on the democratic European path. Therefore I can also promise the entire organisation that we as the Monitoring Committee will still keep Turkey in very close focus and monitor and help in whatever we can.

Thank you Madam Chair.

**Mr Paul GAVAN (Ireland, UEL):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Turkey has been moving away from democratic discourse and practice in recent years. The disgraceful decision to withdraw from the Istanbul convention should be seen in this context. This break from democracy has been stimulated by the dominant political actors under the role of the AK Party.

In 2019, in the context of the democratic situation in Turkey, the Parliamentary Assembly reiterated that political opposition in and outside parliament is an essential component of a well-functioning democracy.

In June 2016 a PACE Report stated developments in Turkey relating to freedom of the media and of expression, erosion of the rule of law and human rights violations in relation to anti-terrorism security operations in south-east Turkey raised serious questions about the functioning of its democratic institutions.

The Assembly was particularly concerned about the stripping of the immunity of 154 members of parliament in May 2016.

Civil servants who were also dismissed have had their passports cancelled.

The European Parliament has condemned "the decision made by the Turkish authorities to remove democratically elected mayors from office on the basis of questionable evidence"

Last October The EU Commission said that Turkey was guilty of serious backsliding in the areas of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and the independence of the judiciary.

Last month a Turkish prosecutor has asked the country's top court to ban the main pro-Kurdish opposition party the Peoples' Democratic Party - or HDP.

The government has stripped HDP parliamentarian Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu of his status as a member of parliament.

Turkey has arrested hundreds of HDP members. Only in the last month, over 718 people, including HDP provincial and district chairs, have been detained in so called "anti-terror operations". The coalition AKP-MHP has continued this repression during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years many HDP members have been investigated or jailed - including its former leader, Selahattin Demirtas. The European Court of Human Rights has declared that his detention goes against "the very core of the concept of a democratic society." Turkey's flagrant disregard for the Court and its judgements now requires action from the Council of Ministers."

Other opposition parties have voiced solidarity with the HDP seeing this as "an "encroachment on democratic society and the rule of law."

Turkish authorities must immediately halt proceedings to ban the HDP, stop repression against the HDP and to release all HDP elected representatives from prison and respect democratic institutional structures.

**Mr Yunus EMRE (Turkey, SOC):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

"In this assembly like many in the world, parliamentarians generally start their speeches stating how delighted they are to talk about the report under consideration. But as a member of this assembly, I witnessed many reports about my country and I could never feel delighted about the situation. It wasn't what's written in the report that made me sad. what made me sad has been the situation in my country.

We have had extensive problems in the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey. Very basic principles of democratic politics such as free and fair elections, freedom of expression and the rule of law are being violated. My country is defined as authoritarian in the indices of international research organizations and non-governmental organizations that rate democratic progress in the world. Democratic decline is the most important question of Turkey. These circumstances do not suit a country with deep-rooted democratic tradition.

We are proud of contributing to the establishment of this organization, Council of Europe.

However after seventy years of membership we are still in monitoring procedure and we are still discussing the democratic regression in turkey. Turkey does not deserve this. Authoritarianism does not solve the problems of my country, on the contrary it deepens the problems. Authoritarianism is the problem itself.

Although the government strengthened its authoritarianism with constitutional amendments in 2017, there is a fundamental difference between Turkey and other authoritarian regimes in the world.

Our citizens have a strong sense of democracy. Although the administration imposes uniformity, Turkish society demands pluralism. The retreat of Turkey's democracy is a temporary situation and a deviation from the historical trajectory of our country.

With each passing day, our citizens are experiencing the social and economic problems caused by the democratic decline more severely.

Broad circles gather around the idea of democracy. Democratic demand is getting stronger.

My party, the CHP has succeeded in establishing a strong democratic alliance. Segments of very different political views came together around the ideal of democracy. Turkey's deep-rooted democracy and modernization accumulation has achieved great success in the local elections. We voided all the traps, we overcame all the obstacles. Following this success achieved under the most difficult conditions, a sense of trust has been created in our citizens and the partnership between different elements of opposition has strengthened. We saw the light at the end of the tunnel.

The essence of democracy lies in the ability of all citizens to voice their demands and to negotiate on these demands. And this achievement is only possible if every segment of the society can have their voices heard and participate in the decision-making process.

Turkey is not just made of the alliance that holds the political power today. Majority of the country is supporting the opposition. The struggle of democratic forces in Turkey is getting closer to success."

**Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ (Turkey, NR):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to touch upon the number of issues raised in the report. First one is the parliamentary immunities. Parliamentary immunity is indispensable part of democratic systems but it is not a shield which enables offenders to hide behind. In the laws it is very clearly defined in which cases a parliamentarian cannot enjoy the parliamentary immunity, one of which is the disseminating, legitimizing and normalizing terrorism. PKK is an internationally recognized terrorist organization and if the prosecutors find any concrete evidence of act promoting terrorism, they have duty to act against it. This is a purely legal procedure.

The second issue is the ongoing procedure regarding the closure of HDP. A political party is not an organism which is independent from its members. Political parties are what the acts, speeches and connections of its members make of it. In compliance with the Constitution and the Law on Political Parties, Chief Public Prosecutor of the Court of Cassation opened a case before the Constitutional Court requesting the dissolution of HDP. The request was made on the grounds of acting together with the PKK and its affiliated organizations, and engaging in activities as an extension of the PKK. However, the Constitutional Court has returned the file to the Chief Prosecutor for serious discrepancies regarding the substance and the form of the file. The judicial process will continue in accordance with the Constitution and the laws. We should wait and see the result of this purely judicial process before criticizing my country.

Thirdly, Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention should not be interpreted as backsliding from Turkey's dedication to fight against domestic violence and the violence against women. Turkish legislation on combating violence against women and domestic violence has already embraced the substance of the Convention. Our fight on violence against women will continue unimpeded. The creation of a joint committee as referred in the report is a proof of our decisiveness.

Unfortunately, criticizing Turkey constantly on any ground, especially by considering each and every judicial decision taken by Turkish judiciary is unfair, has turned out to be a bad tradition. While respecting ongoing judicial processes is the norm in the Council, Turkey does not receive a piece of respect. and moreover, Turkey is treated in such a way that there is no judiciary in Turkey at all. This is a rhetoric that can never be accepted and should be rejected at the highest tone.

Thank you.

**Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

I speak today as one of those voices representing the ten-millions who are standing strong for democracy and justice in Turkey.

- The ten-millions who prefer strong parliamentary regime to one lacking checks and balances.
- The ten-millions who care deeply for a human-rights based World order despite the very worrisome trend of powerful actors blatantly negotiating human rights.
- The ten-millions who in the 2019 local elections put these words of democracy deed.

And most importantly, I speak today on behalf of the millions of women in Turkey who have been devoted fighters of their rights and the Istanbul Convention. These strong voices resonate through powerful women's movements and heard through all over the world.

On March 20 we woke up to a unilateral and undebated Presidential decision attempting a withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention. The very convention the Turkish Parliament had approved unanimously ten years ago. I underline, unanimously. Each and every single MP and political party voted very enthusiastically for the approval of the Istanbul Convention.

This public support was built with decades of women's fight for their rights. Rights that were not granted at the grace of politicians but earned through hard political fights... And this public support continues to be out there. Several public polls from after this attempted withdrawal, showing not only women but a very strong majority of the people wishing to keep the Istanbul Convention. Wishing to ensure women's right to life is protected, gender equality is achieved, the legal framework for these protections are in place. The people's will is clear.

I would like to note, according to our very own constitution any law or international convention about human rights is in the mandate of the parliament not the president's office; and denunciation of a withdrawal from an international convention that was approved by the parliament can only go through the parliament.

As the voice of the ten millions in Turkey I reiterate: We will continue to fight for our democracy, for a rule-of-law based order, for a rights-based system, for equality. But clearly what we are debating today goes beyond an individual country. It is an existentialist question regarding our very own organization.

A choice between multilateralism and unilateralism; between parliamentary democracies and authoritarianism; between non-negotiable human rights and transactionalism. Our choice as the Republican People's Party CHP, the main opposition party of Turkey, is clear. We will continue fighting for multilateralism, for a strong parliamentary democracy, liberty of expression and media, impartiality and independence of justice and for well-protected human rights. In short, I believe we all leave today's discussion with the responsibility to pick our path and decide on how strongly we will fight for these principles in our very own capacities!

**Ms Tatevik HAYRAPETYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It has been more than two years I am presenting Armenia in this organization and I remember many discussions on Turkey, particularly about the violation of human rights in Turkey and I am also sure this is far from being the last discussion. But while having this discussion I want to get into the roots of the problem. The biggest issue is that current Turkey can't face its own history. Just in 2 days in Armenia we will mark the 106th anniversary of Armenian Genocide when more than

1,5 million Armenians were killed in Ottoman Empire. Armenians who were the citizens of Ottoman Empire and their only guilt was that they were Armenians.

106 years has passed and many countries, also CoE member states have recognized the horrible events as a crime against humanity. But unfortunately until now Turkey not only denies but also fights against the international recognition of Armenian Genocide. The tragic history of Armenians within Turkish empire by itself shows how brutal Turkish state can behave towards its own citizens. And even nowadays those rare Turks who dare to talk about these tragic events are either killed, like it happened with Hrant Dink or arrested.

So today's problems lie in the past and until the Turkey is not able to face its own history we will continue these kind of discussion for many other times. Moreover, 106 years ago Turkey, particularly Erdogan has openly helped Azerbaijan to start a war against Armenians living in Nagorno Karabakh and creating the real threat of the existence of Armenians once again in the region.

This organization can and should take an action to stop the Turkey. In order to correctly evaluate the present, we need to recognize, condemn and accept mistakes of past.

**Ms Christiana EROKORITOU (Cyprus, SOC):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Colleagues,

Regrettably, we find ourselves enticed, once more, to debate the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey, a founding member of the Council of Europe. Turkey continues to fall short in honouring its international obligations and commitments. Ankara has been escalating its provocations and illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and elsewhere, as part of its expansionist aims. Turkey's persisting arrogance, intransigence and gunboat diplomacy severely undermine prospects of achieving a just and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem, in accordance with international law and pertinent UN Resolutions and further destabilise the wider region.

By choosing to ignore or discard international legal instruments [Treaties, Resolutions, Conventions] and independent court decisions, the Turkish government sends a disheartening message to its own citizens and the international community (that its agenda for geopolitical supremacy supersedes the rule of law).

Under the Turkish President, Mr. Erdogan, Turkey has been gradually heading towards an authoritarian system of government. This casts a blow on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and dissociates the country from European values and principles and the Council of Europe standards, legislation and practices, in particular. The 2016 attempted coup (d'état) in Turkey gave President Erdogan the perfect opportunity to adopt emergency measures, now integrated into the Turkish Constitution and pertinent legislation. The independence and the competences of the judiciary and legislative powers have been seriously undermined. Effective checks and balances are not in place and Turkey is facing a serious democratic deficit.

Democratically elected mayors being replaced with government appointees, despite relevant opinions of the Venice Commission, the ongoing detention of Selahattin Demirtas and Osman Kavala, in disregard of pertinent decisions by the European Court of Human Rights, systematic crackdowns on political opposition and restrictions on the freedom of expression and NGO activities, all indicate serious erosion of democratic institutions. Under the pretext of countering terrorism or defending national security, thousands of civil servants, journalists, academics and others, including women, often with their children, are being detained. Mr Erdogan's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, as well as his declared intention to eventually reintroduce capital punishment, are further distancing the country from our shared democratic principles.

Turkey must take careful note of the recommendations of this Report and abandon policies that compromise the democratic functioning of its institutions and disrespect the democratic maturity demonstrated by the Turkish society.

**Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Colleagues,

The PACE has repeatedly warned about the consequences of Turkey's deviation from our Organisation's standards and principles, which primarily affect Turkish society and the most progressive forces within it.

The Council of Europe does not seek confrontation with the Turkish authorities, but rather ways to encourage constructive dialogue conducive to democratic reform. The aim is not to impose any model of governance on Turkey nor meddle in its internal affairs, but rather, to remind Turkey that it is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights by its own sovereign choice. Defying the ECHR's judgments, as in the case of Mr. Demirtaş, Mr. Kavala and most recently Mr. Altan cannot continue without consequence.

Turkey must respect its contractual obligations and extend the implementation of the Convention to all its citizens, including those who openly criticize government choices and policies. This is the essence of a democratic and pluralistic society.

The PACE has voiced its strong concern at the transformation of Agia Sophia into a mosque. We also regret Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. We deplore the intimidation and persecution of thousands of people because of their political beliefs. We cannot tolerate that opposition figures, the HDP and its leaders in particular, are stripped of their parliamentary immunity, outlawed and denied their fundamental rights and liberties, including the right to a fair trial. Thousands of journalists, academics and intellectuals are thrown into jail on random terrorist-related charges, with the judiciary appearing submissive, if not complacent. Checks and balances are elusive.

Where is this going to lead and what can we do?

If the situation does not visibly improve until the next part session of the Assembly in June, we believe it will be necessary to initiate the Joint Procedure in close consultation with the Committee of Ministers.

At the same time, we encourage all those actively engaged in the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Turkey to continue their struggle. They have our strong support and solidarity.

We urge the international community and the EU, in particular, to step up efforts to address these violations, as a matter of priority, so that Turkey lives up to its commitments and respects its own citizens.

Thank you.

**Mr Jeremy CORBYN (United Kingdom, SOC):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

I welcome the fact that the Council of Europe is debating Turkey, and I compliment John Howell and Thomas Hammarberg for presenting a detailed and balanced report on Turkey.

The role of the Council of Europe is to monitor human rights across all our member states. Monitoring is not an attack on an individual country, but it is a very important and responsible role that we must fulfil.

The European Convention on Human Rights, and the European Court of Human Rights protect our rights: the rights of assembly; the rights of religious, press and academic freedoms; and the right to be a member of a trade union.

I am very concerned about the many issues facing the people of Turkey at the present time and I wish to draw attention to the following.

President Erdogan's attempt to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention:

This convention was a huge step forward in the protection of women in society. It is a terrible message when any government tries to withdraw from something that at the outset clearly a huge step forward. I strongly urge the Turkish government to reconsider that step, and to recommit fully and unequivocally to the Istanbul Convention.

Anyone who believes in free speech must be concerned at the number of journalists who have been imprisoned, apparently for expressing criticism of the government of Turkey.

This is unacceptable and journalists should be able to speak out freely without fear of legal action when they are giving an opinion or telling the truth about a situation.

The closing down of political parties is also of the greatest concern. The rights of minorities in Turkey must be respected within the terms of the Convention on Human Rights and I draw your attention to the rights of Kurdish people to their linguistic and cultural freedoms as well as political expression.

To reiterate, my words are not an attack on Turkey or its people, but are intended as an act of solidarity on behalf of the people of Turkey. I would hope the government of Turkey would respect the views put forward in a fraternal matter.

**Ms Maryna BARDINA (Ukraine, ALDE):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Jacques MAIRE for his comprehensive work on the report preparation.

Today we are discussing another case of shameful human rights violations and suppression of freedom of speech. We are talking about poisoning and detention of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Russian authorities have shown the systematic practice of detentions, politically motivated persecutions of public figures, representatives of national minorities, and journalists. There is no place for the voices of opposition and civil society in the Russian Federation. All of these actions run counter to Russia's international human rights obligations, especially under the European Convention on Human Rights.

We are deeply concerned about the health situation of Mr. Navalny. Every day this situation is becoming worse. Mr. Navalny was very close to the death, was poisoned and he is continuing to fight for his life now. We, the international community, should use all our diplomatic instruments to protect Mr. Navalny in this situation.

And I want to ask all women of PACE to show your solidarity with Ms. Navalnaya for her incredible power to fight for her husband's life, for the life of her children's dad.

The international community calls for his immediate and unconditional release as his sentencing is politically motivated. Even we – Ukrainians, who condemn Mr. Navalny's position on Crimea occupation, stand for his freedom today.

We also expect Russia to fulfil its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, including complying with the interim measure of the European Court of Human Rights.

Thank you!

**Mr Stéphane BERGERON (Canada):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr President of the Monitoring Committee.

The general debate is now closed. The Monitoring Committee has presented a draft resolution to which five amendments have been tabled. They will be called in the order in which they apply to the text, as published in the collection of amendments.

I remind you that the time limit for each amendment is one minute. I have been informed by the Chairman of the Monitoring Committee that Amendments 1, 2, 3 and 4 were rejected by the Committee by a two-thirds majority.

Is that the case, Mr President?

## **Vote: The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey**

**Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN (Denmark, ALDE, Chairperson for the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)):** That is absolutely the case, Madam Chair.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Very well.

Is there any objection to us considering them definitively rejected? If there is, please come forward. Those present, by raising their hands, and those participating at a distance, by asking to speak. We need to verify that the objection has the required support of at least ten people.

So we do have the required number of votes to review these amendments. The request of the Committee Chairman is therefore rejected. The amendments concerned will be discussed in the usual way and will be called in the order in which they apply to the text published in the compendium.

I ask members participating from a distance to ask for the floor only when they have to defend their own amendment or when they wish to speak against an amendment.

We will start with Amendment 1.

I call Mr Ahmet YILDIZ to support Amendment 1.

**Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR):** Mr Chairman, the wording of this amendment is only about PKK.

It is not about any political party, any leadership, any person.

PKK is recognised as a terrorist organisation by the courts.

Sorry, it's Amendment 1.

Yes.

Chairman, as I explained, this is a serious allegation against the judicial authority. It is not real.

I think, it should be deleted because in the course of the Monitoring Committee probably the rapporteurs and other officials of the Assembly will meet the prosecutor general.

This allegation will poison this positive relationship. It will be a serious allegation against a serious judicial authority in Turkey.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Yes, please, Mr Hişyar ÖZSOY.

**Mr Hişyar ÖZSOY (Turkey, UEL):** Okay. Thank you so much.

We are opposed to this amendment because, I mean anybody who is a little bit following the political climate in Turkey, knows that actually the Nationalist movement party's leaders made repeated calls for the closure of the HDP. Almost every single way in January and February, so I mean, we think this is pretty much the reality, so the text should stay the way it is.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

The committee, I remind you, rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority. We will now proceed to vote on Amendment No. 1.

The vote is open in the Chamber and from a distance.

The vote is closed.

*Amendment No. 1 is rejected.*

Amendment No. 2.

I call Mr Ahmet YILDIZ to support Amendment No. 2.

**Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR):** Madam Chair,

Indeed I don't want to confuse anybody.

But this wording is only about the PKK. The PKK is a terrorist organisation, recognised as such by almost every member country here, by international courts, by UN authorities.

If we do not describe it in that way, it will serve the purposes of a terror organisation.

As a diplomat, I know that very closely. That is why it will be good confidence building to accept this amendment.

I invite every colleague to do this and to remove this setback, because if we keep this wording as it is, everybody in Turkey, 90% will approach this report with caution, as biased and suspicious.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Mister KOX, you wish to speak against the amendment?

You have the floor.

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL):** As in the Committee it was clear that the our rapporteurs stick to their factual text and that was also supported by the vast majority of the Committee.

So I would propose not to accept this amendment.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** The committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We will now proceed to vote on Amendment No. 2.

The vote is open in the Chamber and from a distance.

The vote is closed.

*Amendment No. 2 is rejected.*

We will now proceed to vote on Amendment No. 3.

Does anyone still wish to speak in favour of Amendment No. 3, Mr Ahmet YILDIZ ?

**Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR):** Indeed this Fethullah organisation attempted this coup and performed several terrorists and illegal subversive activities.

So those who don't follow Turkey's laws even know it is enough, that they are the perpetrators of the coup.

It is enough reason to describe them a terrorist organisation.

Thank you.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Mister KOX, to speak against this amendment?

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL):** Thank you, Madam President.

With the same argument, as with the argument we just dealt with, our rapporteurs say that they would like to stick to the factual description of organisations mentioned in this report. That was followed by a large majority of the committee. So, I would advise the Assembly not to adopt this amendment.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** I remind you that the committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We will now proceed to vote on Amendment No. 3.

*The vote is open* in the Chamber and from a distance.

*The vote is closed.*

*Amendment No. 3 is rejected.*

We will now proceed to vote on Amendment No. 4.

Does anyone wish to speak on Amendment No. 4, Mister YILDIZ?

**Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR):** Madam Chair,

Indeed, I withdraw it for discussing this issue on the next amendment.

Thank you. I withdraw the Amendment 4.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** So, we do not need to vote on Amendment No. 4: it has been withdrawn.

We come to Amendment No. 5.

I call Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ to support Amendment No. 5.

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

The aim was in fact to await the conclusions of the Venice Commission. We want to stick to the same text, which was the original text.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ, do you wish to speak against this amendment? No.

Does anyone wish to speak against this amendment? From a distance either?

Mr John HOWELL, from a distance, against this amendment.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** We as rapporteurs support this amendment.

**Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** This amendment is therefore supported. Obviously, no one wishes to speak against it.

The committee adopted the amendment.

We will now proceed to vote on Amendment No. 5.

The vote is open both in the Chamber and from a distance.

The vote is closed.

*Amendment No. 5 is adopted.*

We will now proceed to vote on the whole of the draft resolution contained in the amended document. Members present will vote using the in-house voting system; members participating remotely will use the remote voting system.

The vote was taken in the Chamber and at a distance.

The vote is closed.

*The draft resolution in Document 15272 is adopted, with a large majority.*

Thank you.

Thank you,

It has been a pleasure to be with you during this sitting. I hope that, for the next one, there will be even more of us in attendance.

We have come to the end of our work in what are admittedly very special circumstances.

I am going to give the floor to our President, who has just come for the finale. Thank you for having trusted me. I will leave quietly and greet everyone.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you so much, Nicole.

Now I'm making it sound a little like I'm chasing a lady. (Laughter) It really does look bad, so I apologise to you and to all of you.

## **Request for explanations of vote**

**Mr Andrej HUNKO (Germany, UEL):** For the record, I would like to mention that on Thursday 22 April 2021, during the vote on amendment No. 5 to the draft resolution on "The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey", my intention was to vote for, and that I voted against by mistake.

## **Closure of the part-session**

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Anyway, I would like to thank each and every one of you having come down to Strasbourg, or come up to Strasbourg. Either way you see it or look at it.

It was very important for us to have the second physical meeting with remote access, which makes it hybrid.

We had over a hundred colleagues of parliament coming to Strasbourg.

If we count all the people around them we basically were able to have more than 500 people down here which shows that if we are careful, and I hope you all stay careful in the coming days and weeks, that it is doable.

Of course the sanitary conditions thanks to Ms Despina and her team were well in place. Also thanks to the French authorities.

This means that the June session will in any case go in the same manner except of course if everyone is vaccinated in the meantime. Let's hope that even the October session could be 100% physically.

**Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** I hope that in June we will be able to have the same meeting — Madam Ambassador, I see you are there — and, who knows, at the end of September, we could change to have our meeting in a normal way.

As I said, this is third gear. June will be the fourth, September, fifth, and then, to have the grand finale at the end of the year, I don't know, we'll see!

In any case, a big thank you to all of you. Many thanks to our services under the *leadership* — as we say in beautiful French — of our new Secretary General. Many thanks to the interpreters and all the staff around us. It has been a pleasure to work with you.

So far — here we are, 1 p.m. — everything has gone well; let's hope that in the coming hours everything will continue to go well.

Again, thank you very much. We have had a very full agenda with four reports, two urgent debates and two current affairs debates. We have had Ms Merkel, Mr Sassoli, the President of the Republic of Moldova, the Minister, our Secretary General, of course, our Commissioner for Human Rights. It will be difficult to do better in June, but we will do even better in June!

Many thanks to all of you.

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

Safe home and see you back as soon as possible.