



Provisional edition

Tuesday 28 September 2021, morning

Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting No. 25

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Good morning to all of you.

The sitting is open.

This morning the Agenda calls for the election of three judges to the European Court of Human Rights in respect of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation.

The list of candidates and biographical notices are to be found in Documents 15358, 15350, 15304 and 15375, Addendum 2.

The voting for each election will take place by individual electronic secret ballot voting between 10.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. today.

Each political group has appointed a teller according to the rules. The tellers are:

EPP: Mr Serhiy VLASENKO (Ukraine)

SOC: Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria)

ALDE: Ms Reina de BRUIJN-WEZEMAN (Netherlands)

EC: Mr Alberto RIBOLLA (Italy)

UEL: Mr Paul GAVAN (UK)

I will announce the result of the elections at the afternoon sitting.

For these first ballots, an absolute majority of the votes is required. If a second round has to be organised, it will take place tomorrow morning.

I hope I was clear.

I now declare the ballots open.

The next item of business this morning is the address by Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.

Yes, sir.

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.

Lord George FOULKES (United Kingdom, SOC): The mechanism for voting. Some people are not yet clear about how we do it. Could someone explain it fully?

Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU-TSOVILIS (Council of Europe): Yes, thank you, President.

It will be conducted by ScytI electronically, as the elections of high officials in January and the judges election since January take place.

No difference. Thank you very much.

And please, we will be sending reminders. It's important that our judges are elected with an important participation to ensure their legitimacy.

Thank you.

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

Let me now warmly welcome our former colleague, friend, and above all President of this Assembly, now the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES.

We are kind of proud to have you here because I mean having a former President now in the European Commission, it has some people dreaming, by the way. You never know. I wasn't talking about myself.

The Parliamentary Assembly of course fully supports your work and priorities within the European Union making life better for patients and consumers across Europe. We are grateful to have you back here in this chamber that you know so well and that, as you know, this chamber basically represents the beating heart, as they say, of European democracy.

Now, colleagues, Commissioner KYRIAKIDES has spent her life working on matters related to health and well-being, not to mention her never-ending endeavour against breast cancer, which still serves as an inspiration to all of us, as we, by the way, have seen last night together.

Now, your commitment, Madame Commissioner, is also a testament to the fact that progress and change is possible, because you do acknowledge that. Treatment, research and awareness of cancer have all come a long way since your engagements. Therefore, if there is one takeaway for us members of parliament from your work, it is that we should never stop championing for what we truly believe in.

Yesterday I put the Hamlet-like question "to lead or not to lead?", and basically the answer is: yes, we should lead. And this is exactly what you are doing in your capacity.

Finally, let me recall that after being elected President of our assembly in 2017, now-Commissioner KYRIAKIDES's first official trip was to a seminar in London about children's mental health and child-friendly justice. This truly illustrates her passion, your passion, Stella, and priorities, putting the most vulnerable and those in need first.

Stella, if you allow me to say Stella, thank you again for being with us, and without any further delay I am extremely proud and happy to yield the floor to you.

Adress: Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES (European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety): Dear President,

Madam Secretary General of the Assembly, Assembly Members, colleagues, friends,

I am truly delighted to be among you, again, today and I would like to sincerely thank President Rik DAEMS for his kind invitation.

Not so long ago, I had the honour of serving as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I cannot but recall the excellent co-operation I had from various posts I served in this Assembly, and as head of the Cyprus delegation, with colleagues across political groups and national delegations, with experts and NGOs, [and] with ordinary citizens. I take this opportunity to thank you, again, for the partnerships we built to fight for common causes.

Our ultimate goal is always to serve democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the name of European citizens. [We do this] for the protection and respect of our children with the One in Five campaign, for the protection of women against violence, of LGBTQI rights, for the rights of vulnerable groups, the disabled, [and] the Roma community, for access to health, to education, [and] to social care. [We do this] to fight corruption and for the promotion of transparency and equity, for the promotion of justice – always aiming to make the voices of the citizens of the 47 member states of this pan-European organisation, heard loud and clear, and that their inalienable human rights are protected. We need in this House, to be their voices. It is, indeed, a privilege to be serving from any post in this organisation.

President, Secretary General, colleagues, I must admit that today feels a little bit like coming home.

Now, as European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, I know that I am here among many friends.

I am very glad to know that tomorrow's plenary sitting will focus on the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment. I am sure that the discussions you will be having tomorrow will reflect the action we need to be taking together, today. The health of our planet and the health of our citizens is a continuum - something I will never get tired of repeating.

Plant health, animal health and human health are inseparable.

Our One Health approach to policymaking in this area is an unshakable principle in our work.

Since the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, our lives have dramatically changed [with] the loss of thousands of lives being the darkest page of this unprecedented crisis. Each and every one of them is a tragedy. A human story of loss that cannot be subsumed in statistics.

A public health crisis that has shown us, in the starkest terms, that we need to be better prepared for cross-border health threats and able to respond adequately to them.

In fighting the pandemic we have learned, first and foremost, that working together offers us the best, indeed I would say the only, chance at securing a healthier future for us, for the next generation, and for our planet.

Co-operation and solidarity are, really, the only way forward.

The Council of Europe could not, of course, be absent in these tremendously huge efforts to combat this unprecedented public health crisis. It immediately responded to this immense challenge and offered all possible guidance and support to the citizens of its 47 member States. We are grateful for that.

Furthermore, this Assembly, vibrant and active as always, discussed and took positions on a number of important issues in relation to the pandemic.

Honourable members,

To see co-operation at its most powerful, we need to look no further than the remarkable way in which the world's scientists have come together to deliver safe and effective vaccines.

Similarly, the EU's Vaccines Strategy has shown European collaboration and solidarity at its finest.

A historic initiative for Europe and a massive leap forward for European co-operation. Two years ago, it would have been unthinkable for the EU to be purchasing vaccines, in order to get its member states out of a public health crisis.

Yet, European unity and solidarity meant that we could have vaccines produced and delivered as quickly and as safely as possible.

Working with, and on behalf of, our member states, we have obtained the biggest and most diverse portfolio of vaccines in the world.

We gave our member states access to vaccines fairly, equally, and simultaneously.

We have met our summer target of fully vaccinating 70% of European adults.

Dear friends,

Vaccines do save lives and protect healthcare systems. They offer people hope and they offer people predictability. Yet we know all too well that no one is safe in a pandemic until everyone is safe. That is why vaccinating in the EU alone is not enough.

For us, universal and fair access to Covid-19 vaccines and treatments is both a top priority and a moral imperative.

So far, the EU, its member states and financial institutions, working together as Team Europe, have mobilised over €40 billion for partner countries' efforts to fight Covid-19.

The EU has been leading by example; exporting around half its vaccine production. In all, we have sent more than 700 million doses to over 130 countries. We have helped spearhead the global vaccine rollout with over €3 billion in support for the COVAX initiative, to ensure equitable vaccine access. Team Europe is already committed to donating 250 million doses by the end of the year. And in her recent State of the European Union address, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged a further 200 million doses by the middle of 2022.

The EU is working tirelessly for global co-operation and solidarity.

Looking ahead, we have to make sure that the World Health Organization is reformed and strengthened in order to play its critical lead role in making the world safer against future pandemics.

We strongly believe that international co-operation, through a binding international agreement on pandemics, has an important role to play in combatting serious cross-border health threats at national, regional and at international level and can move us towards a more robust global health architecture.

The Council of Europe can, and should, put its moral authority behind this global effort and support all the efforts that we are making to have a global agreement on pandemics.

It can promote better national, regional and international preparedness and response, stronger health systems, and offer predictable funding, especially for lower-income and middle-income countries.

Co-operation and solidarity also underpin our bold action to deliver a post-Covid recovery that makes Europe healthier, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable.

That includes building a strong European Health Union - another paradigm-shifting initiative of the past year in the area of health.

We are going to be pressing ahead with three key proposals designed firstly, to strengthen the European Medicines Agency, secondly, to give the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) a broader mandate, and thirdly, to address serious cross-border health threats. The fourth, and arguably the most daring initiative was proposed last week; a new European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, called HERA, will be another vital element in our Health Union.

Learning from the structural gaps that the pandemic has revealed, HERA will help anticipate serious cross-border threats to health and identify effective responses. This will enable the EU, and its member states, to rapidly deploy the most advanced medical countermeasures in the event of a health emergency.

Our work is to better protect our citizens' health and it is about fairness- especially in the areas of healthcare access.

Covid-19 has, of course, impacted healthcare access. Patients have had important, potentially life-saving treatment for other diseases postponed or cancelled. [For example in the case of] diseases such as cancer. Having had cancer myself, I know what a worrying time this is for patients and their loved ones. The last thing they need is a delay in diagnosis or care.

What we will need in future crises is co-ordination and effective partnerships, support for vulnerable groups, and contingency planning for continuity of care. This is where Europe's Beating Cancer Plan comes in; to address all these.

Drafting the plan has been one of my priorities. A collaborative effort, undertaken with all the member states, citizens and stakeholders. Now we need their co-operation to make its goals, flagship initiatives and actions a success. An Implementation Roadmap will soon be made public.

Thanks to the Cancer Plan, we can now step up our efforts on cancer care and prevention and urgently address backlogs and shortages because we know that together, we will change the cancer realities.

Mr President, dear friends and former colleagues,

Together, we are all working together in solidarity to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. This will stand us in good stead in our ongoing efforts to build co-operation and solidarity in the service of global health and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today as I stand before you, I know we all share the same vision and determination, to work towards building a better future; a future in health that will leave nobody behind.

A future where our guiding beacon will be only those foundations that this organisation was built upon. Foundations that we can all strengthen together.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Stella, for your inspiring address.

I remind colleagues, because we go into the so-called QA that you know so well having presided over this Assembly, let me remind colleagues that you should be asking one single question and not making speeches and, on top of that, the speakers' limit is 1 minute.

So, let's head off with the delegates from the political groups. Let me remind you that you have 1 minute.

The way we tackle this issue: we will have the five representatives having their question, and after five questions we will invite the Commissioner to respond, after which we will take the next five and we'll see within the timing how far we can get.

The speakers on behalf of the political groups are:

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE as first, Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS second, Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN as third, Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA as fourth, and Mr George KATROUGALOS as fifth.

Let me head off by giving the floor to... Mr Stefan SCHENNACH is here.

We thought you were lost somewhere in the Strasbourg space, but now I see you. You have the floor, Mister SCHENNACH.

Questions to Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): OK.

Thank you, Mr President.

Dear Commissioner, dear Stella, it is always a great feeling to see you with us and I congratulate you in the name of my group for your extraordinary work.

I have two questions.

We have the situation that in a lot of European countries people are not willing to have their vaccinations and the gap between those who had the vaccination and those who will not do is growing deeper and deeper, and this is not good for our society. What are your strategies?

And the second is: on the other side, poor people in developing countries, or in poor countries, they want to have vaccinations and they did not get it. So I know there are programmes, maybe you can tell us? And my compliments for your holistic approach to health.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Next on my list is Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS.

Luís, I suppose you're in the room.

The floor is yours. Where is Luís? [spoken in French]

Ah, Luís, I didn't see you, sorry, you are all the way back on the left. The floor is yours. [spoken in French]

Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS (Portugal, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Mister President,

Madam Commissioner,

Dear colleagues,

First of all, allow me, on behalf of the PPE-DE, to congratulate Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES on the vaccination campaign in the European Union. As she said, the target was 70%; we are already at 73%.

Many mistakes have been made, as the President of the Commission has acknowledged, and there are also important issues. One of these very important questions has to do with European harmonisation of the health pass, because practices vary greatly from country to country. Could you elaborate on this? We have experienced this in this Parliamentary Assembly, with the difficulties that some delegations have had in joining us during this session.

Another issue is co-operation with other countries, particularly within the Council of Europe. There are regions and countries, particularly in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Ukraine, which have benefited from European Union aid but which now have problems. What more do you think you can do to help these countries and combat the pandemic in these regions?

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Now we move to Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN.

Fiona, you have the floor.

Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr President and Madame Commissioner.

I commend you for your incredible work in vaccines and of course in cancer strategy as well. You speak about the voice of the citizen and I wish to give a voice to those who don't have a voice, neither here nor in their own home countries, sadly because in many cases their voice is no longer and it remains to families and others to advocate for them. And I'm talking about people living with dementia or Alzheimer's who have been hugely impacted by the pandemic. And while member countries need to invest heavily in home care strategies and community day services, I believe that, at a European level, focus and investment should go into some particular areas, particularly around younger onset dementia support, dementia research, drug therapies, etc. And of course investment in prevention. The dementia-inclusive companies focus on the nine modifiable risk factors of dementia and I would like to ask you what you could possibly do to prioritise these areas.

Thank you.

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

We now move to Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA.

I do not see Mr NATALUKHA in the room. Yes! *Voilà*.

Mister NATALUKHA, you have the floor.

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

Dear Commissioner,

Ladies and gentleman,

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed deep-rooted weaknesses in the EU's capacity to act in a health crisis. It undermined the overall sense of European solidarity and cooperation and gave birth to such a phenomenon as vaccine diplomacy. For quite some time, what is officially called a union has been in fact the spread of subjects left to their own devices, without anyone to pull them all together and provide a clear plan of action.

Today, dear Commissioner, you are the most public and fierce advocate of such a plan. The vaccine strategy has been launched in June 2021, and I thank you and congratulate you with all your efforts. However, before June '21, and I have no intention to offend you, but you really were not that much public and on the radar. You are not even half as public as you are today.

For this reason, again, don't get me wrong, but it might come to someone that in this Assembly as a pleasant surprise that Europe actually does have a commissioner for health: it does exist. After such a discovery, one might rightly inquire how you have been doing lately, and, most importantly, what have you been doing lately before June 2021, when coronavirus ravished Europe and vaccines were still scarce.

Thank you.

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

We now move to Mr George KATROUGALOS.

George, you have the floor.

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Madam Commissioner, in January our Assembly, in echo of proposals of states like South Africa or India, and even ideas of progressive politicians, like Alexis Tsipras, has asked the vaccine to be considered a public good and for a waiver of the intellectual property so as to be possible for all citizens, even in the poorest countries, to get vaccinated.

The United States have accepted this idea, but not the European Union. In another case, in San Marino, we have seen the European Commission not to accept the vaccination of the citizens of this state by Sputnik.

Do you think that these positions of the Commission are in line with the message of solidarity that you have conveyed to this room today? And what do you plan to do towards this direction?

Thank you.

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

I now yield the floor to Madam Commissioner for all of these questions and then we will move to the next five answers.

Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES, you have the floor.

Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES (European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety): Thank you so much for all the questions. There's a great deal that we need to discuss.

First of all, I want to come to the question placed and the comment by my colleague Mr Stefan SCHENNACH. You are absolutely right that we are seeing across the European Union a diversity, I have already said it, of the rates of vaccinations: we have reached over 73% in the adult population in member states but this is not for all the member states.

But we need to address this gap. We need to address the difficulties but one size does not fit all, so we cannot have vaccine hesitancy and address it using only one way.

We need to, in every country, in every member state, understand the reason why they are having challenges. As you do know, the vaccination programmes are competencies of the member state, so we need to address the differences faced in the different member states and support them in every way that they need.

There needs to be no doubt that the lower we have the vaccination coverage in any country and in any member state we have more pressure on the hospital systems and higher rate of mortality.

So the work of the Commission and my work as the Commissioner of Health and Food Safety is to understand the different challenges faced in member states and to support them so that they are able to move forward.

I wanted to also say here that it was mentioned that at the beginning a lot of mistakes were made. I would say that we have learned a lot of lessons along the way in an unprecedented health crisis, but we have also always left space for the member state in their national campaigns to use the information that they think fit. And also we work with them very closely to fight misinformation and disinformation about vaccines.

Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS talked about harmonisation in the area of health. It's not an option because of the treaties, but I would say this: what we have achieved over the last 18 months was to work with all the member states in order to have joint procurement for vaccines, for medical equipment, for masks.

We have managed to move forward with all the member states. In fact it was the member states themselves that came in and supported the EU vaccine strategy. To clarify, the EU vaccine strategy is the Commission working with and on behalf of member states.

I wanted to just inform you that that we now also have an EU therapeutic strategy based on the same concept, where we're building up a broad portfolio of potential therapeutics that member states can have access to through a procurement the moment that they are approved by the European Medicines Agency.

The pillars that we're putting forward for the European Health Union within the treaty – and I stress this because the competencies of health are of member states – we're well within the treaty, but we are working in order to exhaust and use the treaty as broadly as possible in order to have coordination and cooperation with member states especially in the area of public health during crises.

There was a question on intellectual, on dementia – I think that there was a question on dementia. I agree with you, that this is a very important area. Covid-19 seems to have taken over many of the discussions but I can assure you that we are looking at all the other areas of health at the same time.

The new EU4Health programme – this is the first time we have such a large and a big budget for a standalone EU4Health programme – will be looking to address the issues that have to do with with dementia and other non-communicable diseases. So it is very much, I would say, on our radar. Thank you for raising that.

On the issue raised of intellectual property rights – I think it was raised by Mr George KATROUGALOS. I have said it in my introductory remarks. From the beginning it was never about Europe first. From the beginning, vaccinating the world has been a priority for us. We are open to discuss all options and for the production of vaccines, but we don't think that lifting the IP waivers is the way to bring vaccines quickly forward.

Europe never put an export ban on the export of vaccines at a time when production problems were faced. Europe was the continent that exported vaccines throughout and from day one, and exports half of the amount of vaccines it produces.

For us, we continue to work in this way. We work very closely with companies who have shown that they can be active when they work closer together.

On the issue of what we can do in terms of working with other countries – I just wanted to say that is important that we mention here the initiative of the digital Covid-19 certificates which has allowed European citizens to move and travel safely.

I just want to say that here third countries are also able to join. We are working to make sure that these certificates are compatible with systems and countries across the world.

I hope that I have covered most of the questions, I can come back – oh and there was a question I think on Monaco and the recognition of Sputnik – sorry, San Marino and the recognition of Sputnik. The member state would decide which vaccines they would approve. San Marino would themselves approve which vaccines they would put into their vaccination programmes, it's not us.

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

We now move on to next list of colleagues.

I remind all of you you have exactly 1 minute. Then I will cut your mic in order to give way to as many colleagues as possible. We take it five by five. The next five of my list are Mr Alain MILON, Ms Maria RIZZOTTI, Mr John HOWELL, Ms Nerea AHEDO and Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ.

Let's start with Mr Alain MILON. You have the floor.

Mr Alain MILON (France, EPP/CD): Commissioner,

The European Union has committed itself to participating in the COVAX mechanism and you have told us how many doses were provided by the European Union. Are these doses supplied by the Union in addition to the doses supplied by the Member States? Can you also tell us which are these third countries?

And, finally, do the States receiving vaccines free of charge through this mechanism assume the same responsibilities as the Member States of the Union, particularly in terms of compensation for people who suffer damage as a result of vaccination?

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

We now move to Ms Maria RIZZOTTI.

You have the floor.

Ms Maria RIZZOTTI (Italy, EPP/CD): Thank you, President.

In recent months, the European Food Safety Authority based in Parma has in fact confirmed the correct battle that Italy is waging in Europe against the Nutriscore, which is not based on a scientific principle but on algorithms, while we know that there are no good or bad foods, but balanced diets.

There will be no red light for products such as oil, Parmesan cheese, and Parma ham. In order to guarantee food and consumer safety, and to safeguard the agri-food sector, the European Union and Italy have adopted the strategy "Safety from farm to table".

I think that, in Italy, we have very strict laws and controls on food safety; do you not think, therefore, that it is necessary to check the legislation of other countries, including European ones, which risk not only penalising excellent products, but also jeopardising the "Made in Italy" label?

How do you intend to intervene, for example, with regard to those countries that decide to take possession of historic Italian brands, as has sensationally happened with Croatia, which has applied for the use of the word "prošek" to register four protected designation of origin wines, trying to deceive the average European consumer into thinking that Italian Prosecco is a phonetic similarity.

Thank you

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

We now move on to Mr John HOWELL.

John, you have the floor.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Thank you very much.

I am sure that the pandemic has taken up a lot of your time, but I would, too, like to ask you a question about the food-systems work that you do. You said earlier that the work you are doing on food systems was to try to make them support the green economy. Can you tell us how you're doing with that please?

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you. I now move on to Ms Nerea AHEDO. You have the floor.

Ms Nerea AHEDO (Spain, ALDE)*: Thank you.

I wanted to talk about the third dose, when so many people around the planet have not even had the first dose but it would take me too long.

So I want to talk about something more specific, vaccination for the people who are in an irregular situation in Europe and other communities who may be excluded from the public health system. In the Basque Country, where I come from, everybody has access and entitlement to public health, whatever their administrative situation. And specific protocols have been put in place for them. I know similar initiatives have been carried out in other parts, but not throughout Europe and not with a similar degree of success.

We need to vaccinate everyone. When some people may not have access or entitlement to those vaccines, this means a higher risk to others and inaccurate figures. We've been told about 70%, but I don't know if that 70% of vaccinated people includes these invisible populations.

So I wonder if you could give an outline of what you're doing in the EU and looking at how the various European countries are dealing with this issue. And I would like to know if the European Union has a comprehensive strategy, recommendations or instructions?

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you. I now move to Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ.

Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ (Turkey, NR): Madam Commissioner,

The EU has started to impose restrictions for unvaccinated persons or persons vaccinated by non-EU approved vaccines. In PACE Resolution 2383 (2021) "Covid passes or certificates", it is stated that preferential treatment should not lead to unlawful discrimination among people in accordance with Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Why does the EU not accept WHO-approved vaccines which were also examined based on scientific data? Do you think these measures are in compliance with the Convention as well as rights and freedoms of citizens of other countries?

Thank you.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, that concludes the list of five.

So now I yield the floor to Madam Commissioner.

You have the floor.

Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES (European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety): Thank you.

First of all about, again, the question on sharing vaccines and COVAX. I just wanted to say that what we're seeing now and we have been working from the beginning with COVAX – and we have one of the great funders of COVAX – in order to ensure that vaccines reach every corner of the globe.

I have said this from the beginning, that we're going to continue working on this global dimension.

We have now reached over 140 countries through COVAX.

We can expect a growth in the manufacturing capacity and the availability of vaccines, but we also need to understand as well that the challenge of vaccinating the world is a marathon, it's not going to be a sprint. This is why we're working continuously in order to be able to achieve this.

COVAX was set up in a few months. I believe it has been quite successful in global cooperation and is already securing millions of doses. The Commission, through Team Europe, is ensuring that there is vaccine sharing to reach every part of the world.

It is true, and I will say this, that the COVAX deliveries up to now are below our expectations. This is one reason that Team Europe has stepped up, are those sharing to support third countries, both through COVAX and bilaterally.

Now there was a question by Ms Maria RIZZOTTI, I think, on the Nutri-Score. I take note of your concerns. It is a question that has been discussed also in the Council with the agricultural ministers regarding the potential impact of a future harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling of products and how these can affect the Mediterranean diet.

Let me – I just want to reassure you, as I have the ministers – that at this stage we have made no choice on the mode and how this will be, a future EU harmonised front-of-pack label. This is something that is going to be based on the result of impact assessments, and based on the result of scientific advice from the European Food and Safety Authority, in consultation with the stakeholders.

I can understand that there are concerns about this, especially to do with some aspects of the Mediterranean diet; the Commission will take everything into account. All options are on the table. I believe by working together we can reach a way forward that will make sure that consumers have informed choices on healthier diets.

Also, there was a question, I think, on the registering of Prošek, if I'm not mistaken, as a protected designation of origin by Croatia. All interested parties, including Italy, will now have two months to submit their substantiated objection. The Commission will then analyse any objections received before coming to a final decision.

To the question on sustainable food, and how we will move forward: this Commission in this pandemic has never, never not put forward its priority in the European Green Deal, and as part of my portfolio the Farm to Fork Strategy. A strategy that looks exactly at how we can work towards sustainable food systems.

I think that this is extremely important. The pandemic has shown us, and has highlighted, the importance of us safeguarding, working through the European Green Deal, safeguarding the targets that we have put from Farm to Fork. It's a strategy that was adopted in May 2020 in the midst of the pandemic. The reason that we have stuck to all the timelines is we wanted to highlight that the pandemic made this even more important.

The Farm to Fork Strategy goes across the board with many ambitious targets which we are following up continuously, which ultimately all lead to the same result. We are in negotiations about many of them but I'm very optimistic that given the situation now that the world has been facing, we see the importance of a healthy planet and the importance of the European Green Deal in terms of health as one of the priorities.

In terms of the question to do with donations to third countries and liability with the vaccines, we have been negotiating and respecting the EU liabilities to protect citizens. We have been negotiating these with the companies throughout. This has always been a priority. I think we have succeeded there, so that we do not have any issues there for the moment.

I'm not sure if I have answered all the questions. If there are any that I haven't, please come back to them.

Thank you.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you. We now move to the next five speakers. This will probably be the last five on the list.

I have Mr Joseph O'REILLY, Ms Nicole TRISSE, Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA.

Will head off with Joseph. Joseph, you have the floor.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD): Welcome back, Commissioner Stella.

I would be interested to hear your views, Commissioner, on an issue I do not see given the importance it deserves, namely the role of the nation in protecting its citizens. It seems that many of the voices advocating selfish self-preservation and National self-interest have fallen silent in recent months. Our national health system must be supported, systems must be supported, defended and strengthened. Now is the time to learn what works best in our neighbour countries and to share our expertise and knowledge. As the dark clouds of Covid-19 begin to lift, how can we ensure, Commissioner, a more secure future which includes robust, well-funded national health systems for all our citizens? Could you please comment on any relevant proposals in place at the EU level to achieve this protection of health services at nation state level?

Thank you, Commissioner.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): We'll now go to Ms Nicole TRISSE.

Ms TRISSE, you have the floor.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE): Thank you, President.

Madam Commissioner,

As the initiator of a report in France on the care pathway for patients with Lyme disease, I would like to ask you about this subject, which currently affects more than one million Europeans.

In a resolution of 15 November 2018, the European Parliament wanted to set up an EU plan to combat this disease with, among other things, clinical and basic research programmes.

I know that the Commission has funded research projects, such as DualDur and ID-Lyme under the Horizon 2020 programme, but this is clearly insufficient.

So what action do you intend to take on the European Parliament's requests?

And do you envisage an earmarked budget for research into tick-borne vector diseases (and in particular Lyme disease)?

Thank you.

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA (Austria, EPP/CD): Commissioner, when we launched coronavirus vaccination programmes late last year in Austria we assured that shots would not be mandatory, but now we realise that around a quarter of adults would be unlikely to take the Covid-19 vaccine when it is offered to them. So we see that there is a concrete and strong link between vaccine hesitancy and the use of social media.

Therefore, I have two concrete questions: what is the European Commission doing in the near future to convince people who have vaccine scepticism to get vaccinated? First question. And second question, do you have concrete plans to create a strong counter narrative to the fake news and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories?

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

We now move to Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV.

Rafael, you have the floor.

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan, ALDE): Dear Commissioner,

Although 8 June is celebrated annually as World Safety Day, it is an issue that should be recalled and monitored every day. It is also important to take a comprehensive approach to this problem. After all, the first reason our food is unhealthy is the environment. Therefore, I would like to ask: to what extent do you study and pay attention to the interaction of humans, animals ecosystems and the environment in the context of food security and what specific measures do you take in this direction? Thank you.

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

We now move to our fifth speaker, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA. Mariia, you have the floor.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you dear President, dear Commissioner.

I am previously grateful to the whole package of the assistance which has been affiliated to Ukraine during the coronavirus pandemic and the stock in the whole world. Recently the Assembly adopted the resolution in improving the policies with regards to chronic diseases, including breast cancer for women. Given our organic link within the EU and the Council of Europe, I have a question to you: is there an opportunity to create a platform for non-EU Council members to proceed with this programme?

Many thanks.

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

We will now go to Commissioner Stella.

Obviously we got a lot of very pointed questions, I see that.

Stella, you have the floor for the last response.

Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES (European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety): Thank you President,

Well, the Assembly was always characterised by having a diversity of questions, of opinions. I think that these are very welcome, whether they're... I think we're here to listen and to discuss. I want to thank you.

First of all, the first question on what we can do about the health systems of member states: this is a huge issue. Let me just say two or three points on this.

First of all I think the pandemic definitely showed us the limitations of us working in fragmentation. It has shown us how if we work unilaterally we cannot deal with such a huge health crisis. Viruses know no borders – this was evident from the beginning.

Of course we need to work together.

I will tell you that as part of the European Health Union package, and the new authority we are setting up as HERA, this will also be working with the member states. The member states are very much part of this, so that we can be looking at and addressing weaknesses in the health systems and also looking through this with the new EU4Health programme.

Ultimately it's extremely important that we work together in order to address the public health crisis and issues. The proposals we've put forward with the European Health Union will be working towards that.

There was a question on Lyme disease. I know that there is also a big interest in the European Parliament. I have had the opportunity to discuss this with parliamentarians there. Lyme disease – what I can say is that maybe not many people know about it, but it is a very serious issue. We will be looking within the EU4Health programme and the Horizon programmes together how we can address and better coordinate, especially in the areas of research around these diseases.

In terms of vaccine scepticism and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, there is no doubt that this is an area that is of concern to us all and not only within the EU member states. I have said before that we cannot look at this with a one-size-fits-all. What I have seen through my visits to member states is that there are vast differences in the reasons why there is vaccine hesitancy and scepticism.

I work with the social media platforms, as do other Commissioners, continuously. What we are trying to do is always give and share with member states the scientific knowledge so that they are able to have their own vaccination communication programmes to address the different target groups in member states.

Ultimately what I think is very important is for us to all realise that where we are today in this pandemic – and let me just share with you that we are now at a point when we have the Delta variant in over 99% of the sequenced cases of Covid-19 in the EU – we have reached the point of vaccinating fully about 74% of the adult population, but this is not for all the member states. We're not at the same point. We cannot be talking only about the member states, we need to look at the world.

We need to address as many citizens as possible with correct scientific information, fighting misinformation, to fully vaccinate people. As long as we don't fully vaccinate all the citizens, we are in danger of having more variants develop. This puts everyone at risk. So when I say 'no one is safe until everyone is safe', this is not just a phrase, it's very true.

Finally, to the question on the One Health principle and what we can be doing about about this, for us this is a priority. I work under the One Health principle. The health of the environment, the planet and humans, plants and animals are totally interlinked.

We are also addressing the serious issue of AMR – antimicrobial resistance – this is a priority in my mandate. I call it the silent pandemic. It has been further highlighted through Covid-19. We need to work together towards achieving all the goals that we can through One Health.

I think that... I've answered that vaccines are offered to third countries. We are constantly working through Team Europe and through COVAX in coordination with the World Health Organization to make sure that we reach countries as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Stella, for all these answers to the questions.

I suppose that if any colleagues, and there is a lot of them having much more questions, maybe they can just send you a friendly email or something, and that you will then oblige to respond to the extent of the possible. Am I allowed to say that?

Ms Stella KYRIAKIDES (European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety): Yes, any emails that reach us, we will respond to them. Thank you.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): I took a little bit advantage of the fact that you are a former president so it is a bit hard to say no to that one, right?

Colleagues, if you have any questions, feel free to either through a Secretariat or straight over to the Cabinet of the Commissioner to have them out.

Now we, unfortunately, must conclude, with you, I would love to continue for an hour or two because I am sure you have got questions for an hour or two. Now we must conclude and on behalf of the Assembly. Also, personally, I really want to warmly thank you for all the answers that you have given us, Madam Commissioner, dear Stella. Thank you very much.

Let me now remind our members that the ballot for the election of the three judges to the European Court of Human Rights in respect to the Czech Republic, the Republic of Moldova, and Russia Federation is open until 3:00 p.m.

Members are invited to cast their vote. The link for voting has been sent, once again, to secretaries of all delegations including political groups, also, in order to facilitate your voting. If you do not find a link, then it is really not because we are not handing it out to you.

Let us then move to our next item this morning which is the debate on the report titled "Socio-economic inequalities in Europe: time to restore social trust by strengthening social rights". This is the Document 15365. It is presented by Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. We have Professor Jeffrey SACHS, the Director of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, – that is a long title – who will make a statement on the issue.

We have to conclude, dear colleagues, the debate at 1:00 p.m. The person presiding will have to interrupt the list of speakers at about 12:50 p.m. to allow time for the replies and the vote before the next debate.

Now the rapporteur has 7 minutes to present the report and then will have a further 3 minutes to reply to the debate at the end. Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE, are you ready to go?

Selin, you have the floor, 7 minutes.

Debate: Socio-economic inequalities in Europe: time to restore social trust by strengthening social rights

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you very much.

Socio-economic inequalities are deep in all dimensions and intersectionalities.

Policymakers have been rightfully concerned and have been seeking out solutions.

The 2019 report of the OECD is titled "Under Pressure: the Squeezed Middle Class". It states middle-class households feel left behind as their income grew less than average, if at all. A 2018 report of the OECD entitled "A Broken Social Elevator" provides new evidence of lack of mobility at the bottom as well as the top of the social ladder, calling for a focus on policies to enhance mobility, especially for the lower income.

A recent survey in France shows that 72% of French respondents believe that inequality in income, and 62% believe inequality in wealth, is a serious or very serious problem. A similar survey for Britain shows 80% in Britain also think so. Moreover, in France, 70% believes that the big issue is inequality in opportunity. In Britain, 60% think the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.

The people are speaking a word.

My research on the subject on inequalities, and in my double capacity as Rapporteur for this report and as chairperson of the sub-committee on the European Social Charter, has pointed out several other stylised facts. It's not limited to what I have counted.

The slowdown in social mobility and extensive intergenerational transmission hampers inequality and hampers children's well-being and their prospects for the future, calling for early childhood interventions. Access to basic healthcare, access to quality education, better remunerated jobs are more difficult to find for poor households. Housing inequalities are both a symptom and a cause of income inequalities.

There is a persistent gender pay and pension gap across Europe. Middle income, low income, people from all walks of life, people from different origins, with different identities, all face the challenge of wide socio-economic inequalities. People call for equal opportunities. People demand that governments take action to eliminate socio-economic inequalities.

Experts call, with urgency, the need for us to change our policy frameworks and economic models to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. They underline that business as usual will not do in resolving inequalities. They underline social rights are to be treasured, protected, but more importantly strengthened, given that they are not self-enforcing.

The multidimensionality and intersectionality of socio-economic inequalities necessitates that we have a comprehensive and holistic framework. We need to do so because growth and equality are actually two sides of the same coin. There is a need to compliment redistribution policies with the creation of productive employment opportunities.

The urgency of the matter is very clear post-financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the Covid-19 pandemic upon which these inequalities – structural inequalities – have magnified. Austerity measures meant a slowdown in the progress of implementation of social rights. In some cases, it even meant turning a blind eye to social rights, social rights that are actually enshrined in our national legislation as well as international conventions, including our very own European Social Charter. There was a backslide in the progress towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, if not being fully sidelined.

And all the while providing equal opportunity to all in basic public services using public policy to reduce income gaps are actually basic social and economic rights already enshrined in our legislative convention frameworks. So it's the very basic duty of governments to make sure the rights that are written on paper do not remain in print but become the very reality of life for the millions. It is our duty as politicians, as policymakers, to ensure that these words of social rights do become deeds of socio-economic equality.

We need to overcome the disconnect between the economic and financial policy frameworks with human rights and a specific focus of social rights. This is what this resolution and this recommendation seeks to do.

Before listing some of the specific policies that are already in the recommendation in detail and the resolution, I'd like to note two critical messages that come out of this work.

First, policymakers should avoid treating social rights as ignorable, be it during crises such as the pandemic, the global financial crisis or the climate crisis, or be it an effort to revamp our system. Overcoming the deep existing socio-economic structural inequalities through stronger social rights protection is easily pushed to the back burner, with the excuse that we don't have resources. We cannot allow for this to happen. We do have the resources – where we choose to use our resources is actually a political choice. We can and must choose to ensure the resources are put in use to guarantee equality, inclusiveness, full protection of social rights that are already enshrined in our national and international legal documents.

The second message is that unless strong policy interventions are implemented, the prevailing economic models will continue to create a certain degree of socio-economic inequalities. Therefore, it's of urgency to revisit the structure, to ensure that we look into the structural root causes of inequalities. So it's of urgency that we take up the detailed list of policies and proposals that are included in the resolution.

I look forward to a fruitful discussion.

I strongly welcome Professor Jeffrey Sachs, with whom we had a wonderful conversation in the Committee this morning.

We look forward to hearing his comments here.

Thank you very much.

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE.

Let me welcome Professor Jeffrey SACHS. As President of the Assembly, I very much welcome you, Professor. You are the current Director of the United Nations initiative called – that's that long title again – Sustainable Development Solutions Network, as well as the Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University.

First of all, thank you for taking the time and being present physically to exchange views with our Assembly. As you know, we parliamentarians and lawmakers we must always seek the advice of experts, which is why your statement here today is very much awaited.

Dear colleagues, Professor SACHS is a lifelong advocate for sustainable development. He was awarded in 2015 the Blue Planet Prize for major efforts to solve global environmental problems. Colleagues, he has spent his life advising not only university students as a professor at Columbia and Harvard, but also governments and, as they tell me here, three consecutive UN Secretary Generals, Kofi Annan, Ban Ki-Moon and now Antonio Guterres. That's a lot!

Now your expertise obviously includes issues ranging from Economic Development, battle against diseases to stopping climate change, and ending extreme poverty. Now through your career I have been told, you have authored hundreds of scholarly articles and books. That's quite impressive!

Professor, without any due delay, I yield the floor. You can take the stand up front which probably will make it a bit easier for you to deliver your comments.

Thank you very much again. You have the floor.

Mr Jeffrey SACHS (Professor, Director of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network): Mr Chair, thank you very, very much.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is really a great honour and delight to be with you and to say some words in support of this very important document, in the statement that Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE has just made on restoring and strengthening trust by strengthening social rights in Europe.

Europe leads the world in social rights. Europe leads the world in economic rights and social justice. Please continue to do so. Please continue to inspire the world in that. And in order to continue to lead the world, please strengthen the bulwarks now, because they are under tremendous stress everywhere.

Let me say on a personal level, I'm coming from a country at the breaking point of social inequality. I arrived from the United States yesterday. My country – we are in utter conflict because the divisions between the wealthy and the poor are greater than ever. And the wealthy are winning this battle. I don't just mean the wealthy – I mean wealth beyond imagining, that owns our media, owns our politics, and is destroying American society, if they succeed.

Europe has avoided this horrible fate by having a wise European Social Charter, by having social rights, by having decency, hard-won after a lot of bloody struggles, but getting it right.

But the underlying forces of the world economy are extremely powerful towards inequality, and the underlying forces of politics are extremely powerful towards inequality. The richest 3,000 people in the world, the billionaires, have about 15 trillion dollars of wealth right now. It has soared even during the pandemic. In my country they own the mass media; they give the campaign contributions; they drive the politics.

We have this week a vote on a rather modest package of tax increases on the rich. It's a knife edge right now, because any tiny attempt to collect from the rich leads to an explosion of rhetoric: "its socialism!" We're given the worst warning in the world, "we could become like Europe!"

In the United States that's almost a curse word, you know.

It's unbelievable the situation that we're in. I want to stress, of course, Covid-19 has made things dramatically worse in every respect.

We just had a discussion now with the Commissioner: the poor are not getting vaccines in the poor countries of the world right now. The situation is not good. The international planning is not fair and not adequate. But even before this pandemic the situation was dramatic on social inequality.

Europe has been holding the line to an important extent, but even in Europe the inequalities are certainly rising both in income and wealth.

But they have broken free of any constraint in the United States for example. We have no constraint. We had a – if you'll excuse me, a psychopathic leader for four years – a claimed or actual billionaire, whose job it was to deliver tax cuts for the wealthiest people in the world. And he did so in the middle of the night in 2017, which is how our legislation gets passed.

This was already happening before Covid-19.

The digital revolution is exacerbating inequalities, both because we are divided between the digital haves and have-nots, and because the digital world will continue to replace jobs of the lower-wage and lower-skilled workers, which therefore need much more job training and other compensatory actions, and universal benefits, so that society does not widen between the Mr Bezos who owns 200 billion dollars of wealth today, and people who have absolutely nothing.

That would be the digital divide played out in full. That would be the path unless politics says no, because the market forces alone will not stop that. So the market forces must be constrained by a politics of social justice and equality and a Social Charter.

The educational gaps are widening, the returns to advanced degrees. Now in Europe most of that is paid for socially. In my country young people go into debt. Now one and a half trillion dollars of debt, a whole generation – half of them not able to finish their degree because they're too much in debt, ending up in the worst of all worlds: no degree and a lifetime of debt. That's considered normal in a civilised country – by the way, the United States is very rich but just unbelievably unfair, and without the political resources to be able to fight back so far. We'll see what happens this week.

In the US the last election cycle was \$14 billion dollars of campaign funding. Who do you think gave it? The poor people? No. So if 14 billion dollars goes from the richest people, what kind of vote do you think that the Congress gives? That's why we're seeing the struggle, because the congressmen don't want to vote against their campaign contributors – pure and simple. If it weren't for that, we might have a normal civilisation. But we don't, we sold it a long time ago.

The environmental crisis is making all of this worse. I was mentioning in the Committee this morning, two weeks ago we had people drowning in their basements in New York City. Supposedly, you know, a sophisticated city. But poor people live in basements and Hurricane Ida came through. Dozens drowned in their basements in New York City, drowned to death.

This environmental crisis is creating not only havoc everywhere but deepening divides because some people are vulnerable. They live on banks of rivers. They live on unprotected coastlines. They've been pushed to the most vulnerable geographies. They are feeling the brunt of heat waves, forest fires, extreme storms, droughts and floods. We don't even know truly how bad it is because it's only when you hear an urgent report from a far-flung place that you begin to feel how much is actually happening. We're able to filter out most of this, most days, but on the ground the environmental crisis is dramatic.

And then finally just to add in this pre-Covid, or other-than-Covid world, the race to the bottom in taxation completely got out of hand. It started with Reagan and Thatcher, and then Europe responded with tax cuts, then the US went further, then again, then came Trump cutting the corporate tax rate, which used to pay for one-quarter of our budget – now it is 10% of the budget, because we're collecting 1% of GDP in corporate taxation now in the United States. They're aiming to make it zero and then maybe we can give away our taxes to the rich – that's the goal it seems.

So we need to stop the race to the bottom.

So all of this is to say that there is nothing to take as given in Europe's social conditions today.

They are the best in the world, the lowest inequality, GINI coefficients between 0.25 and 0.3 in many countries. In the United States it's at about 0.45 – but don't take it for granted. We already see it rising in many European countries. Many European countries joined the race to the bottom. Why don't we cut some taxes? Why don't we let the rich get richer because we have to compete with the Americans, and so forth.

And so the idea of strengthening the social rights is timely and appropriate and vital.

All of this requires fiscal space, because the main tool – not the only, but the main tool – of social inclusion is budgetary, to ensure social consumption for education and health, infrastructure for all, and transfers to those who need it. That requires budgets of 45% of GDP or higher. The huge difference of the US and Europe is Europe, in the European Union, tax is about 45 percent of GDP on average, in the United States 30%. So imagine lopping off one-third of your budget and see what kind of society you would have.

Well it would look a lot like America – I don't recommend it.

So this is what we're grappling with. Now we need more fiscal space. We need to tax the digital world because that's where the money is now. Just a few companies have gargantuan market capitalisation beyond anything we've seen before: Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft. The combined market cap is about eight and a half trillion dollars when I checked last week. That's a lot of money. They are not taxed. That's a game.

When Europe tries to tax, the United States says no! How can you do that! But you're listening in the US not to politicians, you're listening to the rich, who determine what the politicians say.

Now this administration is trying hard right now, the Biden administration, but it's in a huge fight, including with its own party, because the Democrats are also funded by the plutocrats. Not as much – the Republicans sold everything a long time ago. The Democrats, it's somewhat split, but that's the battle that's underway exactly this week.

But for Europe, tax digital. Maybe we'll get around to doing that.

Let's tax mega wealth also. These huge personal wealth accounts – Mr Bezos, 200 billion dollars today, and a long list of a hundred billionaires. It's unbelievable. We never would have imagined anything like this before, of Zuckerberg, Gates and others. All of that is tax free in the United States, you understand. They pay tiny amounts – if anything – because all their capital gains are untaxed unless they quote "realise" the capital gains, which they don't. And then we have a gimmick in the inheritance to make sure it can all be passed forward.

We need a global wealth tax also so you can't just change your registration of where you say you live to avoid the tax.

Imagine the poor countries looking at us. We talk about the global community, that's the world I live in day by day – the United Nations. Every other phrase is "the global community". There's no global community, believe me. There is a divide that is yawning and widening.

So please, fiscal space, to be able to carry out a strengthened European Social Charter.

Second, always more Europe. Europe is in the lead of decency. In order to stay there, Europe needs to act as Europe. Both the European Union and the big Europe. And this is extremely important, including transfers across states, and pooled resources, and common investments.

And then globally, for Europe to help inspire, and to help lead, and to help speak the truth, about the need for a universal Social Charter. We have a Universal Declaration, which is wonderful, but we don't have a universal social charter which we need, which would be enforceable by court as in Europe.

So let me just conclude on the global front by saying, first, we need to get vaccines to everybody. This can be done, but to this moment – to this moment – the vaccine-producing countries and companies have not sat around the table together to do it, because the companies are out selling their vaccines. Europe is not correct to protect the property rights the way it's been doing. And there isn't a systematic approach to universal vaccine coverage yet. It's amazing to me. I'm watching very, very closely in this process – I could elaborate if there's interest.

Second, we need global financing for sustainable development including climate finance. It's a shame that the rich world could not find, 12 years after its promise, to provide a hundred billion dollars – even including loans – for climate finance. And now we're going to Glasgow in a few weeks and that is still unfulfilled. The poor countries are saying "what is this?! You land us with the crises, you promised financing in 2009, we are 2021 and it's not there". And that's not a lot of money by the way, I can tell you from a macroeconomic perspective.

We need to carry on the tax reform globally that is started. I greatly applaud that we made progress this year. This is extremely important.

Finally, we need global cooperation, not a new cold war. The United States policy towards China is wrong, provocative and dangerous, period. Europe should not follow this terrible path. This is the US trying to keep its hegemonic role. We don't need a hegemon. We need global cooperation. Europe should not follow blindly the US into more conflict, because that is the opposite of social justice, that is the opposite of social rights. That is a waste of time, a waste of money and a profound danger to the world society.

Thank you very much.

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

May I call upon Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ, one of my Vice Presidents, to take over the meeting.

Thank you very much, Professor, for your words that struck many of us, I have got the impression. I hope you won't be a stranger in the future. The door is always open.

Thank you very much.

Laima?

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Professor SACHS, once again, for your statement, which has been listened to with keen interest by all members of the Assembly.

Now we come to the list of speakers. I remind colleagues that there is a time limit of 3 minutes on speeches. In the debate, I call first Mr John HOWELL on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance political group. Please.

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

I think what we have just heard shows that we need to read these reports with a great deal of care. There is a tendency in this Council to see things from a left-of-centre perspective. I disagree with that perspective. The rapporteur was right. This is a question of political choice. I was surprised, for example, at the last meeting that we had, to see a paper that, I believe, set out programme of nationalisation of so much of European industry. I do not think that is the right the right approach.

There is another perspective on this, which needs to be set out in these debates. I do not have time in this debate to challenge everything that Professor SACHS has set out, but let me start with a number of points that I think we can agree on. Let me start, first of all, with housing. There is an emphasis on the importance of good housing, and I share that. The report rightly points to a number of solutions, that, I too, agree with. One size does not fit all. There is a great importance to increase the availability of social housing and there is a great role for social renting within that. But there is also a shared equity role as well, where a person becomes a stakeholder in their home. Personally, I speak to many housing associations to see the big issues that are coming up. We need to see wealth cascading down. We need to make sure that our own children can have the necessary wealth to be able to live in a manner that is proper to them.

The second issue is health. I think that we need to avoid the caricature that can occasionally creep into this sort of report, where it simply states that poorer people are fat. They do have unhealthy diets. That is not necessarily a question of money. That is also a question of education. This is a complex area which needs considerably more analysis.

Finally, on the subject of climate change, I would like to understand that more. The report is quite hesitant about saying what the link is between that. It does use the word "seem" in order to describe that, so I would like some more information on that. The report points to the role that inequality has in encouraging our entrepreneurial risk. I do not believe that. I do not believe that inequality leads to entrepreneurial risk. I believe entrepreneurial risk is something in addition to that that we should look at separately to this item.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister HOWELL.

Now our next speaker is Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW on behalf of the United European Left political group.

The floor is yours, please.

Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW (Sweden, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm privileged to speak on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

First of all, let me just thank the Rapporteur for a brilliant report.

We live in a society with growing socioeconomic disparities.

On the one side we have the richest 1% that will have accumulated twice as much wealth as 90% of the global population.

On the other side, we have 4.6 billion people at the bottom of the global world pyramid being confronted by growing disparities in income, wealth, educational achievement, health status, nutrition, living conditions, occupation, and housing etc. You can go on and on.

This inequality is not only having profound and often deadly effects on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, individuals and communities, but also restrains overall economic development, undermines social justice, and hurts the functioning of our societies.

Madam Chair, how is this possible in one of [the richest], if not, the richest continent in the world? How can we call ourselves first class democracies and yet have second class citizens?

We have an economic model that commodifies everything. It commodifies our schools, our healthcare, our housing - no sector is spared.

We have all witnessed how the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated, magnified and further entrenched structural inequalities.

We have seen increased poverty, and the erosion of social rights, leading to social resentment and an elevated risk of social unrest, and political instability.

I ask again - how is this possible in one of [the richest], if not, the richest continent in the world?

This is made possible because of the prevailing economic development model; a model in which everything is commodified; a model that systematically erodes social rights; a model that takes from the poor to finance the lavish lives of the rich - reverse Robin Hood; a model that will always entail a certain degree of socio-economic inequalities for it to function. Capitalism; the so-called free market economy.

So in order to be able to explore the root causes of these socio-economic disparities, we must fundamentally change the prevailing economic model.

We must shift to economic policies with a clear objective, for an equal redistribution of wealth, mechanisms to create equal societies, and to better protect the most disadvantaged and the most vulnerable.

Madam Chair, we must have policies that promote genuine inclusiveness and sustainable growth and strengthen socio-economic rights.

What kind of society would we be? What kind of institution would we be, when we see children systematically become victims of extensive intergenerational transmission of inequalities and poverty, and do nothing about it?

So I call on this Assembly to support the report and its recommendations, and to collectively and resolutely act to ensure and guarantee the right to access to quality education, healthcare, social protection services as well as adequate affordable housing, in order to give every individual, and especially children from less privileged backgrounds, the same opportunities in life as those from wealthier families.

Lastly, inclusion leads to growth. When there is growth, everyone wins.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW.

And now we call on Mr Fourat BEN CHIKHA, who will be speaking on behalf of the Socialist Group.

The floor is yours, please.

Mr Fourat BEN CHIKHA (Belgium, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Dear colleagues,

I would like, first, to thank the rapporteur for the excellent work on this report.

The growing socio-economic inequalities in our society damage our economy and tear our society apart. They divide us citizens from one another. Inequality is a threat for democracy, and a threat that particularly hits vulnerable and marginalized groups the most. Along with all older persons, children, persons with disability, women, migrants, and refugees, LGBTI people are also disproportionately impacted by the socio-economic inequality in Europe.

One-third of all LGBTI people have difficulty to make ends meet. The striking number of 20% of LGBTI people in Europe report experience of homelessness. Many of LGBTI people have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Those who lost their jobs and were unable to afford rent often did not have families to return to, and if they do it, they returned to abusive homes.

The root causes of social economic inequality should be tackled. States must invest in sustainable growth while strengthening their social system. To measure is to know. We need to collect adequate comprehensive data when it comes to social inequality. Legislative and regulatory change to be provided to facilitate access to quality public service, adequate housing, and stable employment.

We need to assure equality to live and dignity and security. Our humanity needs equality, our democracy needs equality. The survival of our planets is only guaranteed once we can speak of socio-economic equality for all of us.

It's up to us to stand against these social economy and inequalities and for all member States to commit themselves to breaking the vicious cycle of poverty for so many.

Socio-economic inequality is a human-made phenomenon, which means that we can also dissolve and change the structure. The circle doesn't end by itself. As policymakers we must dare to intervene and break the status quo. We need to do more, we need to act upon.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Fourat BEN CHIKHA.

And now I call on Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO who will be speaking on behalf of the EPP/CD political group. The floor is yours, please.

Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Chair, dear Rapporteur, dear speakers,

I want to ask a question. Is it still in the capacity of States to actually ensure and overcome social and economic inequalities? Isn't it a shame that we even question that?

Of course, the State should deal with inequality. Of course, the State should do everything to make people happy and to serve their needs.

But when we think about what the purpose of the State is, depending on left, right, or centre ideologies, we may have different answers.

But I want to ask you to think about the human side of it.

Yes, the Rapporteur excellently stated the different inequalities that exist right now: in child labour, gender, pay, salaries, social mobility.

But is equal distribution, and just adding budgets to the States, or collecting more tax, really the solution?

Maybe we should think more about what people need to feel free, to develop themselves, to develop their opportunities, and to feel security and protection.

I come from a country, Ukraine, that has a communist past and we used to think that in a society, equal distribution would make people happy but, what did we receive as a result? We received millions of ruined lives - that yes, maybe they had access to education, to health; it was for free - but not for everyone.

For example, if you were a Jew, or if you were against the Communist Party, did you have the same opportunities? No, you didn't.

Nowadays, it's great that we have this report and that we're discussing this right now.

But I think Covid-19 gave us an opportunity to rethink what we can actually do to combat this inequality.

I know how many inequalities there are for disadvantaged communities around Europe.

In every country, we can see it. Depending on where you come from, depending on what opportunities you had - you may not have the same access to education and it's not only about money. But the system is corrupt.

I'm asking everyone now to think about the purpose of our parliaments and the States, and what we can do to ensure that creativity, innovation and freedom can actually blossom in our countries so that we can really tackle that inequality. But it cannot be done just by distributing more money to it.

We need to give opportunities to people. That's the main thing that will make them happy.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO.

And our last speaker on behalf of the political group is Ms Diana STOICA who will be speaking on behalf of ALDE.

Please, 3 minutes.

Ms Diana STOICA (Romania, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madame Vice President. Dear colleagues, guests,

On behalf of ALDE group, I would first of all like to thank Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE for the excellent work on this report.

The effects of Covid-19 medical emergency have been profound reversing the convergence of the standard living and putting considerable pressure on our social protection systems. Even though Europe's been prospering and growing, the reality is that this is not the reality for every citizen. The socio-economic division has grown raising concerns both from the perspective of sustainable economic growth and from the perspective of social cohesion. The most vulnerable of us were the most affected. Social inequality has deepened poverty and poverty is never good business for any nation. We have the duty to tackle the root causes of inequalities, guarantee fundamental rights and develop national legislatives to ensure opportunities for all of our citizens.

High and growing inequalities harm our society in many, many ways, not least in terms of economic growth. In my own Romania, socio-economic inequalities have had a systemic, lasting character. Their sources must be sought out in the mechanism of social stratification. The politicisation and weakening of State institutions have fostered corruptions and high profits in the underground economy. This reality has only worsened during the ongoing pandemic. It is our responsibility to leave no one behind, especially those most vulnerable and at risk of poverty.

As Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE's report also highlights, during the Covid-19 pandemic social inequalities have persisted across age groups, gender, geographical areas and income clusters, with single-parent families – mostly headed by women, by the way – being at the highest risk ever of poverty and social exclusion.

I believe that we need to address the root causes of inequalities within our communities and do so with a clear focus on providing equal access to education as this factor is key to diminishing the growing prevalence of chronic and long-term diseases in Europe. Investing in and promoting education of children from poor families will reduce inequality in current and future generations. Now, we may never live in a perfect world but it is our duty to work together to make sure we reduce the gap as much as possible and to allow each person to become all that they are able to. We must act to rebuild our economies and strengthen our social systems and we must do so now.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Madam STOICA.

Now we come to our speakers list. I call next Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

You have 3 minutes, please.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I would first like to congratulate our rapporteur on this excellent work on a subject that is so important, that of the inequalities that affect our various countries, with the social dramas that we know.

As Chairman of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, I would like to extend the subject to an aspect that will also affect the world around us, as I did in committee.

We all remember the terrible tragedy in Syria in 2015, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the roads in search of hope, a future and security. We have a country, Germany, at the time, which had accepted about a million migrants to give them a chance, a hope, and really it's all to the credit of Ms Angela MERKEL who is, these days, retiring.

What did we see in this country? We have seen, in fact, a rise in extremism – right-wing extremism – of populations who refuse to give foreigners what they themselves feel they are not receiving. I want to say that, if we want to remain a Europe that is open to the world around us, we must be prepared to receive migrants, to give, to share with people who are much poorer than we are, people who, now with climate phenomena, are likely to be ever more numerous. It is essential that our society be a solid, egalitarian society where no one feels rejected or forgotten.

We all also remember, a few years ago here in France, for example, the "yellow vests" crisis, where people rose up to say: we don't have enough, we don't agree, we are blocking the roads, we want to express our dismay at the world that is changing too fast for us and where we no longer find our place.

This is a fundamental issue. I really welcome the report and the work that has been done, because it is our duty to stabilise our state, to share and to create the most organised and solid social net possible, so that everyone in our country can really find their place and feel supported and protected. This will in fact be the means that will allow us, in a second phase, to welcome more people, because our Europe is ageing: the demographics are clear on this point and we need to accept people. To do this, we need a society that is prepared to accept them, an egalitarian society in which everyone finds their place.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, dear colleague.

Our next speaker is Mr Alain MILON.

The floor is yours, please.

Mr Alain MILON (France, EPP/CD): Thank you, Madam President.

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I too would like to congratulate our rapporteur on this report, which highlights the rise in socio-economic inequalities in Europe, both between the various states and within each state itself.

These inequalities are a threat to the democracy and cohesion of our States, insofar as they give the impression that the institutions are neglecting a part of their population – the most vulnerable – which has fewer and fewer means to live on. It is therefore important that each Member State of our Organisation take up this issue, in a context where these inequalities have been aggravated by the pandemic.

As the draft resolution rightly points out, we cannot but be concerned about the slowdown in social mobility and the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next. This undermines the well-being and development prospects of children and, in the medium and long term, may well lead to a form of secession that is risky for our societies.

I would particularly like to emphasise the great disparities that exist between the social protection systems in Europe and to stress the need for our States to really take hold of the European Social Charter.

These disparities can be found within the European Union itself. For example, in 2017, the share of social protection expenditure in the gross domestic product was 30% in Denmark compared to only 15% in Romania. A more integrated social policy at EU level would be necessary to define a minimum set of labour rights with effective social protection in case of unemployment or work accidents in particular.

Socio-economic inequalities do indeed have repercussions on individual health. In the future, states should not try to limit their debts, which have been increased by the health crisis, by putting an excessive strain on the budgets allocated to the health sector. As parliamentarians, we must be vigilant about this.

In this respect, I note with interest and satisfaction the call by our rapporteur to use the Council of Europe Development Bank to co-finance priority social projects, in particular to distribute the supply of health services more equitably throughout the country and to reduce the gap between urban and rural areas.

I think this is a particularly interesting point, and I think it would be useful for us to look at it in greater depth so that the Members of our Assembly are fully capable of making their national institutions aware of the value of this approach.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister MILON.

Now I call on Ms Zeynep YILDIZ.

Three minutes please.

Ms Zeynep YILDIZ (Turkey, NR): Thank you.

Dear President,

Dear Colleagues,

Socio-economic inequalities have risen in Europe gradually but surely since the mid-1980s. With the increased adoption of market-oriented policies in sectors such as education and health, divergences in quality and accessibility of social services have also increased. Concerns over inequalities have further surged in the aftermath of the post-2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the socio-economic inequalities are deepening, the need for taking stock and trying to restore social trust by strengthening social rights is more crucial than ever. I would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE, for her important and extensive report. She accurately underlines the need for member States to invest in revitalizing their economies while reinforcing their social systems.

Covid-19 is a reminder that sustainable development must include massive investments in public services, as emerging evidence suggests that Covid-19 is experienced unequally, with higher rates of infection and mortality among the most disadvantaged communities. Universal coverage and access to social protection is key to providing a safety net, especially for the poor and marginalized.

We should also remember that fighting socio economic inequalities requires collective efforts. Member States should work towards improving the regulation and monitoring of financial markets and institutions, encouraging development assistance and foreign direct investment to regions where the need is greatest. Facilitating the safe migration and mobility of people and prioritizing refugees and migrants are also key to bridging the widening divide.

As Turkey hosts 3.7 million refugees, it is paying special attention to their needs by running education aid programs, providing vocational, language, and psychosocial skill courses, as well as providing with Covid-19 vaccines and free health care. It is my hope that refugees, the most disadvantaged people in this socio-economic crisis, remain high on the agendas of each and every one of our Member States.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Ms Zeynep YILDIZ.

Our next speaker is Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN. The floor is yours, please.

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

I would like to commend and congratulate both the Rapporteur on her excellent work, and of course Professor Jeffrey Sachs for his passionate and compassionate presentation before us.

There is no doubt that this is a very important agenda debate for us during this week.

In the world of fake news, populism and sound bites, we absolutely have to restore social trust, which essentially is the belief in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of others, which acts as a foundation for cooperation and contributes to both social integration and democratic stability within our own countries and of course within Europe.

Understandably, there's been growing concerns about disparities in income, wealth, educational achievement, health status, nutrition, living conditions, occupations, social identity and participation both within and between our countries.

There are glaring inequalities in our society that not only harm individuals and communities, but undermine social justice, hurt the functioning of our society, as well as restraining overall economic development.

We need to take action on the basis of national recovery and resilience plans. We absolutely need to set out and prioritise the creation of decent housing, employment, and educational opportunity.

The pandemic has deepened global inequality. It has put into stark relief that we have not made sufficient progress in reducing poverty and increasing access to quality healthcare, education, and indeed in relation to climate change.

We need to fight for those who are most vulnerable, who do not have a voice, and rely on others and on us to be that voice.

Those who are vulnerable, those who are victims, those with disabilities, those who suffer from social exclusion or racism, or indeed homophobia.

We must put energy and momentum, and work collectively to break the cycle of generational unemployment and look at labour activation measures to facilitate a transition between education, training and employment. We need to address the barriers and challenges that are inherent.

May I make specific mention of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which by now has been ratified by almost all European countries.

I would urge all member countries to also ratify the optional protocol, which my country Ireland hope to do in early 2022.

We must address the systematic and institutional barriers that prevent people from participating in education, in the workforce, and society in general, because of disability, gender, and race.

We need to refocus on the Sustainable Development Goals which my own country Ireland and Kenya were pleased to lead.

"Thank you" (said in Irish).

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, dear colleague.

Our next speaker is Ms Olena KHOMENKO. If you hear me, Madam KHOMENKO, we do not see your requests to speak.

I was informed that you will speak online, but you are here. Very good.

The floor is yours, please.

Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA): Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE for this report and extend our support for the cornerstone idea of this report.

Europe has to prioritise its human capital and put it at the centre of education, healthcare, labour and fiscal policy.

We have already witnessed the great disparities between the richest and poorest countries in vaccine procurement, yet it is now amplified again by the governments who want to secure the third dose for its residents, while others cannot even get one dose of the potential life-saving medication.

As pointed out in this draft resolution, and also mentioned by resolution 23.84 on overcoming the social economic crisis sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic, we evidence a weakening of the social systems and an amplifying of the numbers of those who are in need of assistance.

I totally support the provisions of paragraph 2 that states should continue to invest in rebuilding the economy, prioritising sustainable growth and equity.

I would like to stress that the social impact of the pandemic on households cannot be overstated.

For instance in Ukraine up to 90% of single parents are women, which casts light on the huge gender gap for unpaid care work.

Thus, it is of utmost importance to implement paragraph 10.8 of the resolution which calls upon states to take stronger legislative action, to eliminate the gender pay and pension gap, as well as discriminatory practices in the labour market, practically by creating better employment opportunities and affordable child daycare facilities for working parents.

Finally, I would also like to express my support for paragraph 10.18 of the preliminary draft of the the resolution to increase financial resources available for protecting public interest by ensuring full cooperation with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL) aimed at ending corruption, as implementing zero tolerance to corruption is vital for executing a fair budgetary policy that helps to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

I believe that with this resolution we will draw attention to the current disturbing growth of social inequalities in Europe, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and stimulate the governments to take action and to ensure social welfare for the most vulnerable members of society.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Olena KHOMENKO.

Our next speaker is Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, and she is online. Please, the floor is yours.

Ms Marietta KARAMANLI (France, SOC): Thank you, Madam President.

Before meeting you again in the Chamber, I should like to begin by thanking the rapporteur for her excellent report and for her desire to see socio-economic inequalities better assessed and better taken into account by a proactive policy on the part of States.

It was a challenge and, as we know, there were links between human rights and economic and sustainable development.

The United Nations, which is responsible for these issues, is both normative and statistical. Its aim is to share good practices and advise states, including on the social and solidarity dimension of the economy, arguing that social capital is just as necessary – and in my view, more decisive – than financial capital. The question of those who have no means of support or who are unemployed and in a situation of unemployment is a very important one. There is also the question of the quality of growth and the growing inequalities affecting the world. The Council of Europe's strength lies in its treaty system.

Many of our studies have highlighted the importance of progressive taxation, monitoring of financial securities, an effective right to education and employment and, finally, the need for quality public investment to reconcile growth for all, environmentally friendly growth and the reduction of inequalities. So, Madam rapporteur, perhaps we could do some good by drawing up a list of our proposals in this area and by proposing a method for evaluating their socio-economic effects?

We are also defending a common European vision that guarantees a fair level of taxation and stops the competition of the lowest bidder when it comes to company taxes. This competition has mainly benefited the strongest and most mobile economic players, and the working and middle classes are still suffering today from this lack of purchasing power, as a result of increases in the CSG, VAT and other indirect taxes, which clearly show the limits of the effectiveness of taxation.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is what I would have liked to say about this important report, and to thank the rapporteur once again and ask that these elements be taken into account in the follow-up and in the answers that may be given later.

Thank you, and see you later.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Marietta KARAMANLI. We were able to hear you. Unfortunately, we were not able to see you.

Our next speaker is Ms Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART, and she will be online as well.

Please, the floor is yours.

Ms Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART (France, EPP/CD): Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my satisfaction at the fact that socio-economic inequalities are being discussed today in our Assembly. I would like to thank and congratulate our colleague, Mrs Selin SAYEK BÖKE, for her excellent report, which proposes several interesting areas for improvement. Europe is a developed, technologically advanced region of the world with a high development index, but there are still major socio-economic disparities between our citizens.

[The rest of the speech was provided in writing due to technical problems.]

I believe that this reality deserves our full attention. The challenge of our time is prosperity: we must think of our way of life, our system, our jobs, with social rights that respect each and every person living in our Member States.

The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of social rights. Poverty, a scourge that affects millions of our fellow citizens, is not acceptable, especially on our continent, which has so many assets to eradicate it.

We must, therefore, [not only] pay particular attention to the most vulnerable of our senior citizens but also to people with disabilities, so that they do not become the forgotten ones.

I believe that one of the strengths of our Assembly is that we look at reality with lucidity; without pessimism, and without angelism. It is in this sense that we can make the following observation: certain socioeconomic disparities affect the mental and physical health of millions of people, but also their life expectancy.

In order to combat these injustices, I would like to highlight two measures in this report which I consider to be fundamental: the first is to compile the data available to us so that we can analyse them and make an inventory. In this way, States will be able to measure the state of socio-economic inequalities with precision and therefore draw conclusions from them.

The second, which must be done with respect for the social systems and practices of each State, is to facilitate the access of "populations to quality public services".

This is the path that drives us collectively, and it will enable our nations to ensure access to social rights and thus combat poverty. The restoration of social confidence will only be possible if citizens and local public authorities are widely involved.

This action must be rooted in order to succeed and to be understood, with a concern for high standards and fairness.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Yes, I see that we have some technical problems. If we can do something about this. I was told that the connection is poor. That is the reason why the speech was interrupted. Can you can try once again?

She's not online.

I will give the floor to our next speaker, and we will try to fix the problem with Ms TRASTOUR-ISNART.

Our next speaker is Ms Petra BAYR.

You have 3 minutes, please.

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

Selin, I also want to applaud you for this really comprehensive and important report and I especially want to line out article, or paragraph, 10.4 where you tackle the impact of economic activities and human rights and we must not forget the situation beyond Europe due to long and very complex supply chains, the environment, social rights and human rights are infringed.

We see for instance poisoned air, having fresh water, child labour, slave work and much more of incredible living and working conditions all over the world. And taking into account that socio-economic inequalities not only exist in Europe, but to a much higher extent globally, we have the moral and political duty to terminate both social inequalities and infringement of human rights everywhere with our policy, with our laws.

We need corporate responsibility and liability not only at the level of voluntary commitments like the UN Global Compact or the OECD Guidelines on business and human rights. All these measures, for decades now, did not change the lives of people in the global south for the better. They did not stop human rights violations or the degradation of the environment and they did not create any liability and accountability of the private sector. So I want to remind you that at the moment at the UN Human Rights Council there is a debate or negotiation going on on a global level about a treaty – a binding treaty – on business and human rights and I really would like to call all our Member States to proactively support this discussion and negotiation. We really could find a solution for the living, the working conditions, of human beings worldwide. It was initiated by Ecuador and South Africa, and I think, it would really be a step forward to have a treaty – a binding treaty – on a global level that avoids that we import human rights violations, that we import the degradation of environment with all those products we here in Europe consume, and wear and whatever we do with it, and forget about what happens in the global supply chain, we are responsible also for people elsewhere. Thank you very much for also tackling this in your report.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much for your contribution.

And our next speaker is Mr Lőrinc NACSA.

Mr Lőrinc NACSA (Hungary, EPP/CD): Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the floor.

There are many challenges in the social and employment field, and several are highlighted in the report under discussion today.

We can say that many of these challenges are not unique to one member state – they affect each and every one of us but in a different manner.

As a result, from a Hungarian perspective, I would like to emphasise that the safeguarding of national competencies should be the starting point of the discussions when it comes to the social and employment field.

In our view, in employment and social matters, it is the member states who are first and foremost able to find the policy solutions tailored to their own circumstances.

But of course that is why this and similar debates are always useful, international comparisons, exchanges of ideas and sharing best practices are always welcome.

As you may be aware, the European Union has created a “competitor” for the Social Charter of the Council of Europe, namely the “European Pillar of Social Rights”, adopted back in 2017.

While we agree with these principles, we maintain our opinion that there was no need to place them under an overarching “social pillar”.

I am happy to say to you, as a result we are proud of, that in Hungary more than 4.7 million people had jobs in July (after the pandemic), our country had not had this many people in employment since the change of regime back in 1989. The economy added nearly one million jobs over the last 11 years, so Hungary was just one step away from full employment.

And I would like to add that the Hungarian family support system is widely known: this year we are dedicating more than 5.2% of the GDP to family subsidies.

We are committed to achieving the Hungarian version of the social model, which is based on four pillars: competitiveness, work-based society, family policy and national identity.

Thank you very much.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister NACSA. Now I will give the floor to Ms Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART.

I see that she's waiting for the for the floor. Our second try. Please.

Ms Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART (France, EPP/CD): To pick up where I left off, I believe that this reality deserves our full attention and that this report is welcome. The issue of our time is one of prosperity: we need to think about our way of life, our system, our jobs and social rights so that they are respectful of every single person living in our Member States. The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of social rights.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Yes I have to apologise but the line is really poor and I have to introduce another speaker.

Our next speaker is Lord Richard BALFE. The floor is yours, please.

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

Inequality is a bit like sin, isn't it? We're all against it, but on occasions, we quite enjoy some of the byproducts thereof.

I put forward the argument that a certain level of inequality is inevitable but it's in the sensible interests of the State to promote equality in certain areas; if only to get the best out of the people. Because if you have discrimination in education, in health, and in other areas, you actually end up not functioning well as a society.

That has been the basis of the social democratic settlement in Western Europe. We spend money on educating our people; they don't go without healthcare as they do in the United States; and we live in a properly regulated and policed society.

But once you get beyond that you start to run into trouble. The biggest trouble we run into is how much of the GDP you actually spend.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs mentioned 45% is probably the maximum that you can get away with in a democracy, because the problem, in a democracy, is that you have a clash between democracy and the willingness to pay to end inequality.

People vote with their pocketbooks. I will only quote one American and that was Paul Samuelson who invented the concept of the Free Rider. Most people want to spend more on welfare, but they want to spend it out of someone else's pocket.

That's quite important.

So what we have to deal with is how we can get an equal base society. It's fine for Professor Sachs to rail against Mr Jeff Bezos, and all the rest, and I hope Madam Rapporteur you could offer Professor Sachs asylum in Europe because he clearly doesn't like the place where he lives!

But what I would suggest is that we're in a position where we need to balance the needs of an equal society against the willingness of people to pay for it.

Now that's not an easy concept but overall, the biggest weakness at the moment, is that the middle class are paying the taxes, the very rich are escaping the taxes, and the very poor are demanding more taxes because they don't actually have to pay for taxes.

That's the conundrum that you have to solve.

I've had many interesting evenings with members of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in your country. I know that they will be able to add much intellectual rigour to the debate you're going to have.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Honourable Lord Richard BALFE.

Now I call Ms Lesia VASYLENKO. 3 minutes, please.

Ms Lesia VASYLENKO (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you Madam President,

I would like to join in the praise of the author of this report who truly did a remarkable job in presenting us with an all-encompassing study of the issues of socio-economic inequalities across Europe.

This report proves, yet again, that economic, social, and political inequalities are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The short-term simple solution is of course to ensure higher wages and more jobs at national state level, accompanied by a fairly differentiated tax burden.

However, it has long been established that economic growth does not always lead to equal opportunities and shared possibility.

The pandemic and the ever-growing climate crisis urge societies to change the *modus vivendi* of today, particularly by quenching overconsumption and appeasing environmental and economic interests.

As Europe strives to decarbonise and become the first net-zero continent by 2050, the Green Deal transition needs to be fair and smooth with no one left behind.

As coal and fossil fuel use are phased out, employment in the fossil fuel sector must not turn into mass unemployment. Whole towns and regions must not be marginalised and be thrown overboard by the renewables revolution.

Finally, basic needs and resources cannot become inaccessible to all but the wealthy 1%.

In order to prevent such a scenario, parliaments need to endorse and adopt Just Transition Programmes.

Similarly to some countries in this Assembly, Ukraine has already begun developing the necessary legislation and structure of such a Green Deal fair integration programme. Discussions are plenty around the setting up of a special Just Transition or Climate Fund, and having a climate framework law adopted.

However, in the face of a global problem such individual national solutions and unaligned policies will not yield results.

The socio-economic inequalities resulting from climate change can only be tackled by simultaneous and equal international efforts. Thus, next to national initiatives, an all-European Just Transition Fund must be set up.

All countries on the European continent - and not just EU member states - should have a proportional share in this fund. This will ensure a fair and sustainable development of the wider European community. And as a result, I believe, it will close many inequality gaps mentioned in the report, including the access to services gap, the education gap, the health gap, and the gender gap.

Thus, colleagues, I conclude by definitely upholding the idea that social and economic rights must be revisited, revised and strengthened according to the proposals in the report.

But nonetheless, I strongly claim that we, in this Assembly, have the task to find common solutions; and a responsibility to share resources in order to prevent further socio-economic injustices resulting from new, over-encompassing global challenges.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Lesia VASYLENKO.

I call next Ms Dumitrina MITREA. The floor is yours, please.

Ms Dumitrina MITREA (Romania, EC/DA): Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Combating inequality that is a focal point we want to talk about today. And I will because it's a crucial issue. But inequality is not something that only affects poor countries. Inequality affects all of us. The trend is manifest. More and more of the world wealth is in the hands of fewer and fewer people, and the reason is that as the richer get richer things get priced beyond the reach of the middle-class.

Excessive inequality has no benefits of sorts. In fact it has disturbing effects, such as discouragement and depression. People can inspire each other, but they can also frustrate, discourage and upset each other and that is what gross inequality does, even in prosper parts of the world. It unravels the very fabric of societies, it robs people of decent jobs and decent pay. And it robs them of their sense of purpose and self-worth. But as the gap between rich and poor is far bigger in developing countries, inequality is not a technical issue. It's not just an object you can fix with the right tools and know-how and it becomes functional again. Inequality is the result of political choice and that means tackling it is political responsibility.

Whether it is conflict, climate change, economic stagnation, or migration flows, inequality is always a major underlying factor. So you can say that the inequality is truly our architect of world crisis.

The United Nation motto "Leave no one behind" could be the cornerstone of the battle we must win in the world against this kind of inequality.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Dumitrina MITREA.

Our next speaker is Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO. Please.

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO (Ukraine, SOC): Thank you.

Dear colleagues,

The key question we are trying to answer is how to solve the problem of global poverty and economic inequalities. The answer to this difficult question lies in the psychological theory of law developed by Leon Petrażycki. To be more specific, in his concept of scientific legal policy. In this regard, I would like to make several simple points:

First of all, the solution to the problem of poverty and socio-economic inequality in the final analysis does not depend on the redistribution of wealth, it depends primarily upon the creation of wealth.

Second, the creation of wealth depends upon the high level of the entrepreneurial spirit in a given society and the high level of legal culture, legal consciousness, in the society.

Third point, law as a psychic phenomena which exerts influence upon human psyche, individual and collective psyche, creates the corresponding motives of stimuli for the development of their legal consciousness and dynamic entrepreneurial spirit. For example, one of such stimuli having psychic affect are taxes.

And finally, to solve the problem of poverty and socio-economic inequalities we need to create and implement an adequate scientific legal policy. And without such a policy, it is hopeless to solve these problems.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO.

Our next speaker is Mr Zoran TOMIĆ and he will be addressing us online.

Please, the floor is yours.

Mr Zoran TOMIĆ (Serbia, EPP/CD): Thank you, Madam President.

I want to thank the rapporteur on the good report and recommendations on this problem.

As you know, socio-economic inequalities are a problem facing not only Europe but the whole world. One of the priorities of all countries should be to fight for these differences to be as small as possible. The reasons are precisely the unpredictable circumstances that can lead to negative effects on a global level, such as the coronavirus pandemic. It is a pandemic that clearly showed how much of a problem socio-economic inequality can pose to countries in the fight for the health of their citizens. I'm glad that Serbia, the country I come from, has worked on this matter in the previous period to reduce these in inequalities through numerous instruments and measures implemented by the state. From programs for inland employment of hard-to-employ categories of people to investments in education, health, culture, sports, and business sectors: all these become more accessible to a wide number citizens. Exactly such efforts proved to be good in the fight against the coronavirus because in the previous period Serbia built three new Covid-19 hospitals...

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Sorry for those technical problems, we are trying to restore our line.

In order to save time, I will give the floor now to our next speaker and I will give the floor to Mr Zoran TOMIĆ later on.

Our next speaker is Mr Andrej HUNKO. You have 3 minutes, please.

Mr Andrej HUNKO (Germany, UEL): Thank you very much, Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE, most sincerely for this very good report, which has also come at the right time and, as our speaker Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW has already said, has the full support of the Group of the European United Left.

This report follows in the tradition of a series of reports adopted by this House in recent times. I would remind you that in June we had the debate on overcoming the socio-economic crisis caused by Covid-19. And it is also a similar debate that we are having today. That is very good, and that is right. I also want to remind you that it was this Assembly in 2012 that criticised the aberration that we had at the time in response to the financial crisis and the subsequent euro crisis. The criticism of austerity policies. And I think that in retrospect it's fair to say that that was the right thing to do. We were the first international organisation to point that out.

We are seeing a paradigm shift internationally on the issue of inequality. The debate within the OECD is also moving in the same direction. 10, 20 years ago, inequality was seen as positive because it would stimulate the economy. Today, as the report states, inequality is also seen as leading to economic problems and to stability in societies.

However, I would also like to thank Jeffrey Sachs very much for his speech. I thought it was a very impressive speech, he emphasised very strongly the need for *taxation*, in German "*Steuer und Steuern*" is one word. A society can only be steered if taxes are levied. I would also like to thank him for emphasising the need for international cooperation on this issue too, and not the slide into a new Cold War, which would of course also make this fight more difficult.

The recommendation, which I also find very remarkable in this report, also refers to the need for the European Union to accede to the European Social Charter, because this Pillar for *Social Rights* is not a substitute for the European Social Charter and I think we should make a strong case for it. We should emphasise this so that the European Union also strengthens the European Social Charter here, because we need a strengthening of the European Social Charter and the corresponding political will.

Thank you very much.

Mr Héctor VASCONCELOS (Mexico)*: First of all, I would like to tell you how happy I am to be with you again despite this terrible epidemic. [spoken in French]

Mexico is continuing our endeavour to sign up to the Istanbul Convention to tackle violence against women. We are currently in the final stages of analysing the implications that accession to the convention would have on all of the different tiers of the Mexican government which would be impacted. Because the Istanbul convention is of paramount importance when it comes to preventing and combating immediate violence against women, in other words domestic violence, violence which takes place in a domestic setting, this will require a reform of the constitution building on the gender equality act that we have already passed. And the Mexican government has striven to drive forward women's rights to an unprecedented level in our country's history.

Today, both chambers of the congress have women at their helm. The senate is presided over by a women and the cabinet has eight women in positions of leadership. We have a modern framework which looks at how we can provide prevention and protection services to counter violence against women. Similarly, we have instruments as well as guidelines to overcome stigma and prejudice using education. And the real added value of the Istanbul Convention is to get to the heart of the matter in order to bring about structural change.

When it comes to our internal processes, once they have concluded, the president or the secretary for foreign relations will give appropriate notice to the international community that we undertake to sign up to the Istanbul Convention.

Thank you very much.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Héctor VASCONCELOS.

And now I will give the floor to our colleague Mr Zoran TOMIĆ.

I see that you requested it. Yes please, go on.

Mr Zoran TOMIĆ (Serbia, EPP/CD): My speech, as I told you, in Serbia we built three new Covid-19 hospitals in just four months in order to help our citizens to save their health and to fight against coronavirus. In addition we are producing currently two vaccines. In future time we are going to have five vaccines from five producers so that our vaccination campaign is going well and we are making sure that everyone has the access to the vaccines.

The measures from that the state is taking, from financial aid to economy citizens and artists and other part of the population through payments of the financial aid, minimum wages, is the way the state is helping them in these difficult times or especially the people whose professions are in danger due to the epidemic so that they can fight and survive until the the situation returns to normal or adapt to new circumstances. That is why I personally believe, as do members of the Serbian delegation, that this resolution came at the right time and that all countries should give their best to help elevate socio-economic inequalities with your available instruments and the measures. Only through mutual co-operation can we succeed in this. That is why today, more than ever, it is necessary to co-operate and help each other and not to provoke and conscientiously endanger the lives of the citizens for the sake of a political point. That is why I will support this mentioned resolution and report. I call on the other members of the Assembly to support it as well.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Zoran TOMIĆ.

Now I call next Mr Koloman BRENNER. The floor is yours, please.

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

I would like to emphasise, firstly, that this report is really taking place at a very topical time and the discussion about it.

Secondly, I would like to mention the point that has not yet been raised in this discussion, namely that, on the one hand, inequality does not only exist in the society of our Member States, but inequality also exists geographically within our Member States. That means regionally and also on the European continent.

Thirty-two years after the political change, there is still a very great inequality between the western part of Europe and the states of East-Central Europe, where, as we know, after the Second World War there was a Soviet-Russian occupation and a Communist regime until 1990. It was precisely for this reason that my party, the centre-right Jobbik People's Party, launched a European citizens' initiative on the so-called wage union. Namely – let me give you a concrete example from my home town of Ódenburg, Sopron, 60 km from Vienna – petrol costs the same in Austria as in Hungary. Hungarian citizens drive over to Austria to fill up their tanks because petrol there is of a better quality, and they shop at Billa because they get a better quality of food, even though the same company actually produces this food for Hungary as well. This means that we also have to talk about these issues in the margins of this report.

I believe that tax rates must, of course, support performance on the one hand and combat social inequality on the other. Please, let us remember the founding fathers of the European Union, Konrad Adenauer, De Gasperi, Schuman. They were all just such Christian social politicians as we are in my party. We know that social market economy is particularly important for our bourgeois democracy. Social components are not the same as left-wing, ladies and gentlemen. A real, decent conservative party supports workers' rights, for example. I can tell you that, for example, in my own country, Hungary, a so-called slavery law was passed two years ago, where workers' rights were quite severely curtailed by the current Orbán government.

This is not a question of left or right, but prosperity and freedom can only come from a social market economy, which is why I welcome this report. Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr BRENNER.

I call on I call Ms Margreet De BOER. The floor is yours, please.

Ms Margreet De BOER (Netherlands, SOC): Thank you.

Socio-economic inequality is one of the most pervasive issues of our time. A globalised world led to a race to the bottom in terms of labour and production prices, and in this process the rights and position of workers were diminished. Government policies allow big companies as many taxation liberties as possible while cutting down on social welfare systems and redistributive methods, all for the sake of the ever-powerful market.

Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic deepened already existing inequalities. Socio-economic inequalities almost seem like a logical consequence of this global system but they are not, and we surely should not accept it.

As the report aptly points out, socio-economic inequalities are not only detrimental to those in lower socio-economic strata, but to societies as a whole. Inequality hampers economic growth. Inequality disturbs the social structure of societies by creating divides, mistrust, unrest and polarisation. Inequalities contribute to climate change. And inequalities destroys lives.

Groups in lower socio-economic strata suffer from negative health impacts, different education outcomes, inequality of opportunity. Another particularly severe issue of this time is a lack of fulfilment of people's housing rights, with people unable to find adequate housing or having to spend most of their income on rent. The self-perpetuating character of these inequalities leads to a continuous cycle.

An intersectional approach shows that those hit the hardest are those with other vulnerabilities. In this context, legislative and regulatory changes of a social egalitarian nature are the only way forward. We need to change the system. For this to happen, it is paramount to remove the fictitious dichotomy between social welfare and wealth redistribution on the one hand, and economic progress on the other. The information included in this report should support a move away from this antiquated assumption.

I applaud the Rapporteur for expansively discussing fiscal policies in the report, as I believe they are an important but often overlooked driver of inequality, but also could be a mechanism to correct inequalities, both in income and in wealth. It is suggested in the report to rethink inheritance taxation as a means to facilitate the inter-generational transmission of wealth to combat inequality. I am not sure that is something we should strive for, because low inheritance taxation could also perpetuate inequalities, as it creates unequal starting points depending on the socio-economic status of one's family.

In conclusion I fully support the report and I thank the Rapporteur.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues, Madam Chair,

First of all I would like to thank the Rapporteur Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE for an excellent comprehensive report that did not miss a thing.

There are clearly defined problems and various reasons of social inequalities. Most importantly, solutions are offered.

Indeed the issue of socio-economic inequality among people accompanies society throughout its history. It is still relevant today because on the one hand labour predictability and global GDP are constantly growing, and on the other hand the search for funds for a decent life also remains the main challenge for most people.

According to the UN, as of 1990, 77% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty. Today the same share of people has decreased by four times. However even today the problem of poverty remains on the agenda even in the most developed countries, as we heard from Professor Jeffrey Sachs.

This problem has only worsened because of the Covid-19 crisis.

As an example the main reason for the decline in income received over the past year was the increase in the share of people who lost their jobs due to current Covid-19 restrictions. The income received among the working age population in EU countries decreased by 7% compared to 1990.

Covid-19 is a global challenge. There is no country that has not suffered economic losses.

In this context the Assembly's concerns about the protection of socio-economic rights of citizens of member states as set out in the European Social Charter are extremely relevant today.

Social protection is about promoting access to medical and educational services, proper public services. This is especially important for people with disabilities and other socially vulnerable groups of the population.

As you know the European Social Charter guarantees persons with disabilities the right to social integration and participation in society.

In Ukraine the number of people with disabilities is almost three million. Almost 80% of them are of working age and need rehabilitation and employment. Currently the parliament of Ukraine is developing a draft law designed to create favourable field and tax conditions for the employment of people with disabilities.

Investing in people, human capital development, should remain a key priority for all European countries.

In situation of such crisis and shocks, social protection is an important stabilising element that allows the economy to absorb these shocks and also recover.

Finally, the social protection of the population contributes to social peace because it reduces injustice and creates a connection between people.

Thank you.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Our last but not least speaker is Mr Petri HONKONEN. The floor is yours.

Mr Petri HONKONEN (Finland, ALDE): Thank you, Madame President,

Social equality is the basis where we built human rights and democracy. Throughout Europe, differences between regions in livelihood and wealth are large. These differences are apparent especially in rural areas. There are many aspects explaining this phenomenon. The key issue is the level of industrialisation in the region. If there is very little industry in the area, it is often more undeveloped in socio-economic terms. In addition, another central question is how many higher competency jobs there are in sparsely populated areas as well as in areas that have experienced industrial restructuring.

In order to reduce socio-economic disparities between regions, I would like to raise three significant matters.

Firstly, industrialisation and business policy interventions are basic means to develop the socio-economic situation of a region. Secondly, housing policy is also very focal in reducing inequalities. Weak housing conditions degrade development and reinforce socio-economic difficulties even more.

Third, and the last point I would like to emphasise here, is the importance of education in reducing socio-economic inequalities. The fact that children and young people in sparsely populated areas have access to quality education on an equal basis until the highest level is necessary to combat social inequality. This is not yet a reality in every region, but it should be an essential objective everywhere. It should not depend on a place of residence or wealth of the parents or the family how good education a child may get.

As Ms. Sayek BÖKE states in her excellent report, equal opportunities for access to quality public services prevent social disparities. Therefore, it is highly important to ensure the availability of public services in every region, especially in rural areas.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Petri HONKONEN.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers. Our time allocated for this debate has expired. I have to inform all of you that the speeches of members on the speaker's list who have been present, physically or remotely, during the debate but have not been able to speak may be given to the Table Office for publication in the Official Report provided that speakers connected remotely can report the actual presence when the debate is closed. I remind colleagues that type-written texts must be submitted electronically, no later than 4 hours of the day list of speakers is interrupted.

Now I called Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE our rapporteur to reply to the debate. You have 3 minutes, Madam, please.

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you very much.

I'd like to start by thanking each and every one of our colleagues for their very important contributions and actually indeed for a very fruitful debate.

I strongly hope this enthusiasm that we are sharing lasts across our policies and legal issues that we deal with when we go back to our member states.

A couple of comments, and I'd like to underline some of them in reference to what we already have in the resolution.

There seems to be – even though we use different words – a common agreement that we seek an equal opportunity-based society. Lord Richard BALFE mentioned this. We seek that the poor actually have access to good education. This is what Mr John HOWELL actually mentioned. We seek a strong social infrastructure with good quality public investment. This is what Ms Marietta KARAMANLI mentioned.

I can extend this list, so I believe what we have stated in the resolution by saying fiscal policy should be mainstreamed with social objectives and social rights, and budget should be directed by the very basic social rights providing equal opportunities, ensuring that everybody feels they have access to the same health system, the same education system, so that they can actually be physically safe and live a dignified life.

I think I am very happy to report that we are in unison in regard to this request. We might be using different words, but the common base is there.

The second issue that I think popped up very strongly to me is that we are all seeking to improve the incentive structures, these incentive structures so that market forces that prevail and will continue to prevail do not eat up social justice, they don't swallow them up. That's what we're seeking.

I'm happy to hear that there is a common agreement there as well that we are actually trying to ensure that whatever healthy competition policy we have, it actually makes sure that production continues, that productive employment opportunities by both the private sector and the public sector are actually operational in the system.

So I believe when I had stated in my previous intervention with the following sentence: "We need complementarity between redistribution policies which should be there, but complemented with the creation of productive employment opportunities". I was happy to hear when Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO intervened, that we do seek to have these stable and productive employment opportunities complemented with redistribution policies.

I am also very happy to have heard from several of our colleagues that we do need to seek to ensure that we have reskilling, upskilling. When we think of education, we don't just think of it as education for the young, but rather to ensure that with appropriate social protection and reskilling and upskilling, people are actually able to achieve those productive opportunities. Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN mentioned this when she spoke of the labour market activation policies.

Finally, I am happy to have heard that we do seek international coordination and cooperation out of this very organisation. Ms Petra BAYR, Ms Margreet De BOER rightfully mentioned what Mr Jeffrey Sachs has already said: we need to form a global community, and we already have this in the report. So I would like to hope that we will take this common understanding to actually contribute to the global community.

I hope the enthusiasm prevails throughout the day, when the voting might actually be delayed I understand, but more importantly it prevails after today, so that we actually implement these things.

I thank, in my last words, the Secretariat who has been an immense support.

I'd like to end with the following sentence: "Social rights are not a cost, they are actually an investment in today and tomorrow".

Thank you very much.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Madam rapporteur.

And now I call Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS, the chairperson of the Committee.

If you wish to speak, please, you have 3 minutes please

Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS (Portugal, EPP/CD, Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues.

The report we have just debated highlights social mobility as an issue.

Indeed, social mobility in our countries is something that has broken down in recent years. The global financial crisis of 2008-2009, and the recent Covid-19 pandemic, have further exacerbated the deep and persistent structural inequalities. This is a social injustice that hinders the economic progress of our society.

The report by Mrs Selin SAYEK BÖKE is in line with the approach of our Assembly. It concerns the responsibilities of national authorities to guarantee socio-economic rights for all. It reminds us of Resolution 2384 entitled "Overcoming the socio-economic crisis triggered by the covid-19 pandemic" of last June. At that time, the Assembly clarified that fiscal austerity measures taken during the last decade were a mistake and that rather, there should have been greater investment in truly inclusive and sustainable growth. This involves a broad spectrum of socio-economic policies.

I thank Mrs Selin SAYEK BÖKE on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development for proposing a roadmap for diagnosing inequalities in each country and monitoring policy options. The aim is not to break the economic model that we have, but we're trying to make it truly inclusive to guarantee equal opportunities in a fairer way across society and between generations.

Ladies and gentlemen, this year the European Social Charter celebrates its 60th anniversary. Let us make this anniversary a real opportunity to renew our commitment to socio-economic rights and their implementation in order to move towards a fairer, more prosperous society, more concerned about the well-being of all.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Colleagues!

Let me draw your attention to the problem of education and educatedness in the modern world. There are two main factors that determine the success of the development of any society:

The first is the access of education as a core condition for ensuring the equality of people.

The second is the attitude to knowledge as a value that ensures progress and development. There is an understanding that any modern nation can consider itself advanced in terms of how much and what kind of knowledge it produces, and not goods.

It is in the context of the above that the issue of the fundamental nature of knowledge and the quality of education becomes especially relevant today.

Social networks and new communication technologies make information more accessible for people, but they do not contribute to their deep assimilation, this information does not turn into knowledge. Easy access to the information creates misperceptions about sufficient literacy and education. They do not contribute to the formation of fundamental personal values for orientation in a complex social space.

This leads to frequent and rapid changes in social orientations and professional priorities, especially among young people. We need to pay serious attention to the issues of more effective ways of transforming available information into knowledge and then into fundamental values of any human. The only fundamental education can provide the real competitive advantage of the individual.

Our governments should pay special attention to this problem, especially in the post-covid world. Unfortunately, there is an increase in the risks of reducing the quality of education in the world. This can lead not only to the intensification of the problem of equality, but also, as a result, to social instability and loss of sustainability of our societies.

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

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank Mme. Selin Sayek Böke for this important and timely report.

Inequalities have always been among the most important problems of our societies. But we know that the global financial crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have deepened existing inequalities. Today, there is no society in the world that is not affected by problems such as income inequality, wealth inequality, inequality of opportunity, gender inequality or inequality between regions and countries. It is obvious that national preferences and policies have a limited effect on the elimination of these inequalities, but international initiatives are required. For this reason, it is of great importance for our Assembly to propose policies and take decisions on this issue with an egalitarian vision, both in terms of current requirements and the needs of our societies.

Unemployment question had been the main source of inequalities and the poverty in the past. However today in many countries, being an employee is no longer a way to get out of poverty. The working poor, as a very important social category, is shaking up the social order. Many countries do not generate the necessary income for their citizens to lead a life worthy of human dignity. Inequality question is becoming more complex and multidimensional.

The idea of equality is among the most powerful ideas in the world. It is also behind the great transformations in world history like universal suffrage, public health schemes or social security systems. They are considered commonplace today but they were distant goals generations ago. The idea of equality and the struggles for it made those distant goals possible.

One of the most important founders of the modern welfare state conception, William Beveridge, once wrote:

“The object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or of races, but the happiness of the common man.”

However today democratic systems fail to create advances and improvements in the lives of common men. Inequalities are deepening. New generations are seeing a regression from previous generations' living conditions in terms of access to education and health, in terms of income, in terms of social security and so on. This has become the root cause of the instability and democratic decline. This situation is shaking the roots of democratic systems.

The great depression of 1929 paved the way for the collapse of liberal democracies in the interwar period. We are witnessing a similar democratic regression in the recent decade. We must stop today's decline by presenting a vision that will not lead to similar devastation. For this reason, Mme. Sayek Böke's call is of great importance for our societies.

Mr Didier MARIE (France, SOC): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French.*

Mr Christophe LACROIX (Belgium, SOC): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French.*

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

I want to commend the Rapporteur and support this resolution.

The rapporteur makes a number of very important points about the impact of rising inequality across Europe which has led to deeper poverty, the erosion of social rights, reduced social mobility and greater social polarisation.

A few short points in response to this report:

The first is that the rapid rise in inequality in recent decades is no accident, but rather a direct result of over 40 years of an oppressive adherence to a free market ideology that has hollowed out the post war welfare state model that had managed to close the equality gap across so many states.

We have witnessed over recent decades the obscene spectacle of cuts to essential public services across Europe even as we see ever greater amounts spent on military hardware and so called defence spending.

The second is that the legislative changes to curb the strength of trade unions has had a very detrimental impact on societies across Europe. Trade unions have played a crucial role in lifting the pay and conditions of workers, and in their absence it is so much harder for workers to extract a fair wage. Indeed we now have a situation where many people who work for a living are unable to earn a living because their rates of pay are so low.

We need a new emphasis on enhancing democracy within the workplace and restoring the role of trade unions. A crucial step would be to ensure that the pending EU Minimum Wage directive which aims to set targets for collective bargaining is made to be a binding commitment on member states.

In Ireland I regret to tell you that we still do not have the human right to collective bargaining, as set out in the European Social Charter, enshrined in law. This is directly linked to our record of having the largest percentage of low paid workers among our EU peers.

We also need to see a shift back to the public sector playing a larger role in society, to ensure decent public housing, public health systems that are free to access, and a modern public transport network. Of course we need progressive and fair systems of taxation to pay for these services.

But we should call for a reversal of that regressive trend of the last 40 years whereby corporations pay a smaller share of overall tax revenues across Europe. Fundamentally we should all agree that the economy is here to serve society, not the other way around!

Mr Vladimir KRUGLYI (Russian Federation, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Mr. Chairperson, dear colleagues!

Firstly, let me express my profound gratitude to Ms. Selin Sayek Böke for her report on the highly topical issue of social inequality in Europe. We commend initiatives within the Assembly aimed at recognising social and economic rights as important for people's lives and ensuring their consistent enforcement. The COVID-19 pandemic has tragically confirmed the need to strengthen the social dimension of our Organisation's activities. Moreover, it should not just be about social rights, but also about joining action-oriented forces in social policy and health care. We have to admit that in the pre-coronavirus era, the CoE witnessed a process of curtailing its work in the field of social rights protection, social policy and health care. Relevant structures, such as Committee on Disability, Steering Committee on Health have been eliminated.

In order to bring Member States together in the face of the pandemic and to strengthen the multidimensional nature of the Organisation, we propose that the abolished Steering Committee on Health be reestablished and that the practice of Conference of Ministers of Health of the CoE member states be revived.

In general we support strengthening the social dimension of the CoE activities, provided that the real capabilities and interests of States are taken into account.

Dear colleagues! We support paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, in particular, regretting the significant impact of socio-economic inequalities on the health of individuals. An example of this is the lack of approval by the European Medical Agency of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.

The review of Sputnik V began on 4 March, which is more than six months in the making. This timeframe seems unreasonably long given that, for example, the first EU-approved vaccine, developed by Pfizer (USA) and BioNTech (Germany), took just over two months to complete. It took even less time for a registration certificate to be issued for the US vaccine Moderna.

Meanwhile, the Sputnik V vaccine has already been approved in more than 70 countries with a total population of almost 4 billion people. At the same time, studies conducted outside the Russian Federation, among others, have shown high efficacy to the Indian strain and Sputnik Light is an ideal booster vaccine option.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) during the study of the Russian vaccine "Sputnik V " did not reveal any critical comments either on the production or on the clinical part.

The non-recognition of the Sputnik V vaccine reduces the access of citizens of the European continent to a high quality product, therefore I would like to appeal to the Assembly to support efforts to have the Russian vaccine approved by the European Medical Agency as soon as possible.

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ (Lithuania, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister Chairman, and now our debate is closed.

I have to inform all of you that we have technical difficulties with our remote voting system so we have to postpone the votes on the draft resolution and draft recommendation to this afternoon by 5.00p.m. and the vote would be taken after the communication from the Chair of the Committee of Ministers.

I would also like to remind members that the ballot for the election of the 3 judges to the European Court of Human Rights in respect to the Czech Republic, the Republic of Moldova, and the Russian Federation is open until 3.00p.m.

Members are invited to cast their vote.

And my last announcement is that the Assembly will hold its next public sitting this afternoon at 3.30p.m. with the updated agenda which was approved on Monday morning.

And now the sitting is adjourned.