



Provisional edition

Friday 28 January 2022, morning

Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting No. 9

Debate: The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (January-December 2021)

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, President of the Assembly): Dear Colleagues,

The next item of business this morning is the presentation of and debate on the report by Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN, on behalf of the Monitoring Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe, entitled "Progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (January-December 2021)".

I remind you that we must complete our consideration of this text, including the vote, by 12:00 noon.

The rapporteur has 7 minutes in which to present his report and 3 minutes in which to reply to speakers at the end of the general debate.

I call Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN.

You have the floor, Michael.

Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN (Denmark, ALDE, Rapporteur): Thank you so much, Chair.

Also, congratulations on your new election on Monday as our new President of this Assembly.

As you know, this is actually the highlight, so to speak, of my two-year term as Chairman of the Monitoring Committee. A post I actually put on almost two years before Covid-19 hit us all. Therefore, the two-year term has, of course, been somewhat special, and also of course, made our work of monitoring the different countries somewhat difficult.

But even though, I actually would like to congratulate the rapporteurs especially, but also the Committee as a whole. Even though we had the Covid-19 pandemic, we have still been able to monitor the different countries. The result of that is actually put forward in my draft for the progress report.

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.

Then, there are some positive acknowledgements. We have especially seen positive developments in some countries as I put forward. But I would especially highlight some of the shortcomings, because I think they are the most important ones because there's still work to do.

If we start in no particular order with a country like Turkey. Turkey's extremely problematic developments, we have especially seen the Kavala case, that even though there is a clear-cut court case from our Court, the authorities in Turkey are still dragging their feet. Some can just speculate why, but if you are a member country of this organisation, there should be no discussion whatsoever when we have a clear-cut court case like Kavala's.

Therefore, we call upon the authorities in Turkey to release Kavala immediately.

But that is not the only worrying development in Turkey. We're also seeing a crackdown on the opposition, basically in light of the steps right now taken regarding banning a completely democratic party like the HDP. If that is going to take place, that is not only a worrying, but an extremely worrying situation, that we have a member country banning democratic opposition just because they are opposition. Because that's the only reason why the Turkish authorities would do something like that.

We are also seeing worrying developments in a country like Azerbaijan, where we actually call upon the authorities to do more. We all know the developments that are taking place between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but that does not excuse the shortcomings that Azerbaijan still has.

Therefore, it is important that the Monitoring Committee and the whole Assembly actually still put pressure on a conflict like, for example, Azerbaijan, to be more in line with democratic values.

Then there are countries like Russia. We all discuss Russia a lot, both in the Assembly but also in the Committee. And you know what? That's actually a shame, because we should not be discussing our biggest member country that much, because there shouldn't be so much to discuss. But there is.

There are so many issues to raise regarding Russia, so I'm not even able to raise them all in my somewhat short speaking time. But the Navalny case, which our Assembly has written a very good report about, and also very good resolutions, is of course a clear-cut violation of all the fundamental values we have. You're first trying to kill him, and if that's not possible, then you just jail him.

That should not take place in 2022 in a European country.

We're also seeing the crackdown on completely legal NGOs. We see crackdowns on whatever seems like opposition. And we see, sorry for being frank, but we see more and more steps in a more authoritarian direction. Actually, you should actually now in Russia discuss in the Duma, but also of course in the government – do you really want to be a European country? Do you really want to be a member of the Council of Europe? Because if you want to, and I hope you want to, then there are of course also some minimum standards that you of course should uphold. Because if you do not, then you are not a European democratic country anymore.

I also raise some discussions regarding our inner work in our Committee. That is of course how we elect our rapporteurs, and also the duration of the mandate.

We all have a day job so to speak, of being a member of our home country's parliament. And we all, especially in smaller countries like, for example, the country I represent, Denmark, but in countries like of that size, we have a lot of work to do because we have smaller parliaments than the bigger countries and we also have a lot of work being perhaps spokesperson on different issues back home.

That is actually also the thing that I raised: that in light of that, that it is becoming more and more difficult to get rapporteurs, to get the necessary candidates. But also to have the rapporteurs have sufficient time to do their job because of their commitments back home.

I actually put forward a proposal that instead of a five-year term, we should put perhaps a two-year term, so it will be more coherent with that job back home. It will allow more balance, and also should allow us, in the Monitoring Committee, to be able to produce more reports and to produce more visits. That has been increasingly difficult because of the somewhat unbalanced approach a lot of our members have.

So that was just a somewhat short overview about my progress report, and I'm looking forward to the debate.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, President of the Assembly): Thank you, dear Mister Rapporteur, Michael.

May I thank, with you, all those many co-rapporteurs who are behind you, because you are now summarising the results of their work. Indeed, as you said, under very dire conditions the Monitoring Committee managed to continue its work. If I thank the co-rapporteurs, of course, I also thank the brains behind the co-rapporteurs and those are the members of our staff.

May I thank you particularly, Michael, for the fact that under these dire conditions you were able to preside your Committee in an excellent way.

I thank you as an outgoing president of a committee. I do thank all the other old outgoing chairs of committees, because I'm really proud of you, and I think the whole Assembly is proud of your work.

Now let's get back to the substance. We will start the debate.

You have, at the end of the debate, 3 minutes to reply.

Also that is not not much, but you know our rules.

Now we first go to the 5 speakers of the political groups.

[in German] The next speaker is Mr Andrej HUNKO, from Germany, on behalf of Group of the Unified European Left.

Andrej, you have the floor.

Mr Andrej HUNKO (Germany, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much Mr President.

I would like to congratulate you as well and underline what you said – thanks to all the rapporteurs and the chairs of the committees and especially the brains behind them, the Secretariat.

I think this Progress Report shows that our Assembly is willing to do its task under really difficult political and pandemic circumstances. I want to underline the common understanding of the Committee that in-person contacts are a necessary condition for meaningful political dialogue and that fact-finding missions were possible despite travel restrictions to Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Malta and Moldova.

As to the different countries, I really want to underline what Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN – I would like to thank him for the report – said about Turkey. I think this is really a decisive moment, as we have in the Committee of Ministers this procedure next week – there is a new decision. I think it's very, very important that Turkey is letting Mr Osman Kavala out following the Court's decision, and that we can go on, and that Mr Selahattin Demirtas, head of the People's Democracy (HDP), will be released as well.

This is a very, very central and decisive situation and our Assembly should really support the Committee of Ministers, who so far decided in that direction with a two-thirds majority.

We have the crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well; I think we should do more about it. We have the problems in Hungary and Poland.

I want as well to say some words about the crisis in Ukraine and Russia. By simply stating that both face massive political challenges to overcome, besides the geopolitical issues, to overcome the influence of oligarchs, and to develop the requirements for a stable, democratic and social political system.

I think both states should strive to find ways out to follow the line of the Minsk Process and fulfil their responsibilities with regards to Eastern Ukraine. We should all overcome the new ongoing talks in the Normandie Format and we should not try to use the Progress Report, of any monitoring procedure, to play political games that hurt the two parties.

Ukraine, Russia and the whole of Europe have more to win when we achieve a successful peace process, which could be a starting point to the development of a long-lasting security system in Europe.

Thank you very much, Mr President.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, President of the Assembly): The next speaker in our debate is Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austria, on behalf of the Group of Socialists, Democrats and Greens.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, you have the floor.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Mr Chairman,

Dear colleagues, on behalf of my group, the Social Democrats and Greens and Democrats, I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the previous Chairman, Mr. Michael Aastrup JENSEN. I know the work, I was myself Chairman of the Committee. It was not easy, the last two years in times of crisis.

But I would also like to thank all the rapporteurs on behalf of my group. It was work under difficult conditions and not all visits could take place. At the moment, the monitoring procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly is a heart of the Assembly and we currently have 11 countries under the strands of monitoring procedures, we have 3 post-monitoring procedures, we have many countries in periodic, and there are also systematic.

Personally, I may disagree with the outgoing Chairman. I am not in favour of shortening a rapporteur to 2 years, I can only say this myself as a rapporteur for Azerbaijan for many years. You need your time to understand the country, the situation, for that you also need many visits to also move things along and get developments in.

It is good that we have Poland again in the monitoring procedure, on it we could already observe last year the elections to the presidential election. And we see that visits were possible in Armenia, in Malta, in Georgia, in Moldova, in Russia and Ukraine, and many things also happened online.

Let's hope that the year 2022 is now the possibility for everyone to visit countries again, to exchange with the opposition, with civil society, with the media, and so on, in the previous format.

I share the Chairman's critical assessment of Turkey. This is certainly a situation, especially when rulings of the Human Rights Court are not implemented. That is not possible. We cannot accept that. The Assembly cannot accept that. The Council of Ministers cannot accept that as well, because that is an obligation that simply has to be fulfilled.

In this sense, my group will gladly give our approval to this annual report, to the annual progress report of the Monitoring Committee.

Once again, many thanks to the outgoing Chairman and many thanks to all the rapporteurs.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

Now I call Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN from Armenia to the debate. He is speaking on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mister Vladimir VARDANYAN, you have the floor.

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you Mr Chair.

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of my political group I'd also like to congratulate Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN for his excellent work and for his excellent report, as well as to welcome all the members of the Monitoring Committee and to appreciate their work.

Democracy is not a static substance. It's a dynamic phenomenon which has no state of rest, which is either developing or backsliding.

The Council of Europe and our Assembly are the watchdogs of democracy, monitoring it in motion by supporting positive trends and expressing concerns at setbacks.

No state, ladies and gentlemen, is perfect. There is always room for improvement.

Therefore our recommendations shouldn't be considered as instructions or pressure towards the countries concerned. But rather, should be deemed as guidance, as advice, intended to support democratic developments within the member states.

Ladies and gentlemen, our Assembly continues to work in unprecedented sanitary conditions. Covid-19 is still affecting our lives. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that due to the adapted working methods, the activities of monitoring rapporteurs remained uninterrupted throughout the whole reporting period, as illustrated by number of statements, a number of reports, and information notes.

It is quite important that despite the continuing travel restrictions, as it was mentioned by my colleagues, several fact-finding visits have taken place.

I strongly believe that no hybrid or remote format is able to replace live communication and sanitary regulations shouldn't be used as a justification for postponing, suspending or cancelling democratic dialogue within our members on the ground.

It was mentioned many times during this part-session, that we are not a security organisation. Nevertheless, the ongoing or frozen conflicts always have human rights impacts. We can't be reluctant to them.

From this perspective, the Monitoring Committee's continuous attention to the developments concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and its readiness to actively contribute to the establishment of political dialogue between the parties concerned, at the parliamentary level, should be welcomed.

Dear colleagues, during the last decades we have elaborated a sustainable legal basis for parliamentary monitoring procedures and relevant internal working methods for the activities of co-rapporteurs. Nevertheless, the practice shows that several amendments need to be done, and the monitoring procedures, in particular the time limit, should be updated to meet our current demands.

Once again, let me express words of gratitude to the rapporteur for his excellent work.

Thank you very much Mr President.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN.

Next in the debate I call Mr Samad SEYIDOV from Azerbaijan. He speaks on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

Samad, you have the floor.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you Mr President.

On behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance, I also want to express my gratitude to the rapporteur for his work, for his very important job.

I think from this point of view, we should take into account that the Monitoring Committee is an essential one within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

I want to remind my honourable friends and colleagues in the Parliamentary Assembly that in one of his speeches, Mr Rik DAEMS said that we should not only speak about the countries, we should speak with the countries.

From this point of view, I think this is very essential for the Monitoring Committee.

Sometimes we can see that in our language we can use two words: speak with the countries and push the countries. Especially those which are under monitoring, for example Russia.

We just recently discussed very many times Russia. We speak with the Russians and push the Russians. But sometimes, in the case of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and other states, we only push the countries without speaking with the countries. That's why, from this point of view, I think, especially taking into account that we have a new President of the Monitoring Committee, I hope that we will be able not only to push the countries, but to speak to the countries. This is the first.

The second I think is very important. I am fully in favour to think about changing the term of the rapporteurship within the Monitoring Committee. Five years is really too long. The President of the Assembly is for two years, committee chairs, all other responsible positions, but only rapporteurs are for five years. That's why, in order to change, in order to bring fresh opinion, vision, to the country, in order to understand that not only one person can be or could be responsible for the country, we should think about two-year terms for rapporteurship within the Monitoring Committee.

Generally, on behalf of my group I said that we have to, as I very many times mentioned, and my group supported this position, that we have to be very objective in our approach to the countries. We should reflect the realities. Yesterday we talked about that, now we're talking about that, and after this question we will also be talking about that: realities are the key issues for this organisation.

We should do our best, just as I said at the very beginning, not to just speak but to help countries.

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

Now I call in the debate Mr Iulian BULAI from Romania. He speaks on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Iulian, you have the floor.

Iulian, you are muted, I think. Try again. We cannot hear you. Is the problem on your side. Are you muted?

Say something. This does not come from your speaking time. Iulian, you have to allow your microphone in your browser. Did you do that?

Could we then move to the next speaker and come back, as soon as we have fixed this, to you, because you look great but without tone, Iulian, we have a problem.

Okay, we come back to you as soon as possible.

The next speaker in the debate, I would like to call Ms Klotilda BUSHKA, but she is not there.

The next speaker is Mr Alain MILON from France. You have the floor, Alain.

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

Dear colleagues,

I welcome the report by our colleague on the evolution of the monitoring procedure, which highlights some progress but also points out, all too often, the persistence of sometimes serious shortcomings.

On reading this report, regardless of national circumstances, common features emerge, which are also dealt with in a cross-cutting manner by our Assembly. I am thinking of the lack of independence of the judicial system, the lack of independence or security of the media, the stigmatisation of minorities.

I am also thinking of the polarisation of political issues around the theme of identity, or of the closure of the political landscape, or even the sidelining of civil society.

All too often, we also note the difficulty of enforcing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, whose authority was accepted by all the member states of the Council of Europe when they joined. I would like to mention two particularly emblematic cases at this point: the Kavala case in Turkey and the case of the NGO Memorial in the Russian Federation.

The progress noted in this or that country does not erase a general impression of a threat to the democratic progress of Europe and, consequently, of a greater need for this Assembly to reaffirm our common values.

The role of the Monitoring Committee is essential in this respect. In order to be credible in this process, I think it is very important that two rapporteurs from two different political groups be in charge of the monitoring of a country, in order to ensure the impartiality and objectivity of the committee's reports, which is a sine qua non condition for their acceptance by the countries concerned. I therefore fully agree with the refusal to reduce the overall number of rapporteurships by appointing only one rapporteur for the periodic review reports. This would, in my view, be quite counterproductive.

Finally, I would like to conclude my intervention by referring to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh and its aftermath. This conflict has certainly profoundly destabilised the Armenian political system, like any lost war. However, the June 2021 elections have overcome the political crisis, as highlighted in the report on the functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia, which was debated yesterday.

I hope that the Azeri and Armenian governments will move towards normalisation of relations, which will require the return of prisoners of war or captives and will necessarily involve "truth operations" on both sides. Without shared truth, reconciliation will be precarious at best, and probably impossible.

Thank you for listening, Mr President.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister HOWELL.

Now we'll try again to give the floor to Mr Iulian BULAI.

Mr Iulian BULAI (Romania, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Hello, do you hear me now?

Thank you, Mister Chair.

On behalf of ALDE I thank Mr JENSEN for authoring this report. I also want to thank the Secretariat for each work during this period.

I think the report gives us a very good overall picture on the most serious issues concerning the monitored countries. I would like to focus on two of them, the hottest topics of the moment: Turkey and the Russian Federation.

I fully noticed the observations on the need for Turkey to ensure the functioning of democratic institution and stop the traditional harassment of opposition and dissenting voices and restore the rule of law in the area of elections and political parties ahead of the next election.

As members of our parliament enjoying full rights and protection, we should all protest against procedures seeking to lift immunity from parliamentarians belonging to a position.

It is obvious, based on this report, that the rule of law is in dire condition in Russia. It is important for our Assembly to strongly ask and make use of all the mechanisms at our disposal for the lifting of restrictions imposed by the Russian authorities on freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of association and, of course, for the immediate release of Mr Navalny.

We are here as representatives of our countries in PACE so the designation by the Russian authorities of the Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies Association as an undesirable organisation is not something we could accept. Both Turkey and the Russian Federation seem to be willing to go as far as it takes for the crackdown of any opposition. This includes extra parliamentary opposition, activists for women's rights (we know and we deplore the Turkish decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention), philanthropists and human rights organisations, that is Memorial in Russia.

Furthermore, the more recent Russian elections kept including territories which do not belong to Russia – emphasising again that the Federation is not willing to implement a request of the international community – which are Eastern Ukraine, Crimea, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, or the presence of Russian troops in the transition region of the Republic of Moldova.

It is not enough to notice our concern because Turkey and the Russian Federation are represented within our body. Yet, we're having our reunions right now while Russia is concentrating large numbers of military troops along the border with Ukraine.

Thank you again, Michael JENSEN, for your report.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Iulian BULAI.

In the debate I call next Mr Kamil AYDIN from Turkey.

You have the floor.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Thank you Mr President. It is nice to be called eventually.

I would like to start also by thanking Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN. I had the privilege of serving on the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) under his chairmanship. I'd like to pay tribute to the way in which he undertook the work that we had to do.

I think that we need to look at the question of monitoring again as a whole. I know that there are discussions that are taking place with other organisations about how we change our monitoring procedure, but I think it is absolutely essential that we make the point that monitoring is a fundamental part of this Assembly. It is what we do and actually what we do very well. I wouldn't like to see us lose that at all.

Now I understand that the Committee of Ministers also undertake monitoring procedures and there is some opportunity for bringing the monitoring that we do into line with what the Committee of Ministers is doing, so that we present a unified face in the monitoring that we do. But I would point out very strongly that we should not lose sight that monitoring is important to us.

I have been the co-rapporteur for Turkey for the Monitoring Committee. Picking up on Mr Samad SEYIDOV's point from earlier, we have tried very hard to speak with the country. I'd like to pay tribute to Mr Ahmet YILDIZ and to give him the thanks that are due for the work that he has done to be able to get us to do that. I'd also like to thank Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG, who is my co-rapporteur for Turkey, but who has not been able to be with us this time.

The problems with Turkey are significant. We've already heard that there are the problems of Mr Osman Kavala and Mr Selahattin Demirtaş. We know that there are problems with the appointment of rectors of universities, with the opposition and also with the Istanbul Convention. But we have tried with the difficulties that have been imposed on us because of Covid-19 – we have tried to speak with the country. We have tried to have online round tables with individuals across the country that represent as wide a view as possible so that we can get a good opinion.

We are of course now trying to make a visit to Turkey in order to draw all this together, but I go back to what I said at the beginning: it's important that we do it, and it's important that we do it well.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr John HOWELL.

Next in the debate, I call Mr Kamil AYDIN from Turkey.

Mr Kamil AYDIN, can you request the floor?

Mr Kamil AYDIN (Turkey, NR): Thank you President.

Can you hear me now?

Dear President, dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur for this report, and the whole Committee for their diligent work over the past year.

I believe that bringing about the changes mentioned in the report regarding the reference period of periodic monitoring reports, Committee memberships and rapporteur positions will contribute to both the functioning of the Committee and the monitoring process. Thus, the reports prepared in this context can be more comprehensive, reliable and efficient.

Regarding the draft Resolution of the report, I wish to state that I would have appreciated more if some developments and issues about Turkey had been considered.

Considering the shortage of time, I would like to touch on some of them. I first want to remind you that the Turkish Constitutional Court's decisions on Mr Gergerlioğlu and Mr Berberoğlu's cases are welcomed in the report. These are demonstrations of the independence of the judicial system in Turkey, contrary to the accusations. Furthermore, the judicial reform process still continues with the aim to make the judiciary more trustworthy and accessible and to increase the standards regarding individual rights, freedoms and democracy.

In light of these, as the legal proceedings continue, I would like to ask you all to respect and trust in this process on cases mentioned in the report, such as the one against HDP.

We should also keep in mind that my country is actually fighting against multiple terrorist organisations. For instance, many of you would probably remember the failed coup attempt of FETO, which left 251 Turkish citizens dead and more than 2 000 wounded. Also, you surely must have heard of PKK, a terrorist organisation responsible for the deaths of more than 40 000 people, including civilians of course.

Additionally, Turkey as a founding member of the Council of Europe is certainly aware of its responsibilities stemming from the European Convention on Human Rights, and has demonstrated its commitment by being the country that closed the highest number of cases in the last three years and also has been punctual in paying compensation.

Finally, regarding the call for the revision of the legislation on elections, I am glad to share with you that the government has decided to lower the current electoral threshold of 10% to 7%. I hope the Turkish Parliament will adopt soon the necessary law on this issue.

Finally, I would like to add a very little tiny notice: the Kavala is an ongoing case. It is still, you know, in the judiciary.

On the other hand I would like to see that the Committee should have heard the voice and cries of those mothers who lost their children, whose children were abducted from their homes and taken to the terrorist organisations through the HDP headquarters.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Kamil AYDIN.

Next in the debate, I call Ms Etilda GJONAJ from Albania.

Ms Etilda GJONAJ (Albania, SOC): Distinguished Chair of the session, colleagues.

First of all, I want to do give my congratulations to the esteemed President of PACE Mr Tiny KOX and a lot of success in this mandate even to the heads of the committees.

For me, it is the first time as an Albanian MP of the Socialist Party being a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and I want to congratulate the Monitoring Committee and all members that have been involved for their professional work and contribution.

Albania has shown commitment to working and guaranteeing the principles for a stronger rule of law and consolidating democracy and respecting human rights in the lines and principles advocated by the Council of Europe and the European Union. Based even on the recent reports, Albania has made significant steps forward on the main reforms with results that are acknowledged even by the international community.

We have successfully advanced our agendas of establishing the rule of law through justice reform and the fight against corruption. And the justice reform – I want to emphasise – has been the main reform undertaken in the last 30 years of the democracy for Albania, which will give concrete results even on fighting impunity and corruption of high-level officials.

As regards the elections, the general election was held on 25 April last year following the cross-party agreement of 5 June 2021 that led to a wide-ranging electoral reform in line with OSCE-ODIHR recommendations.

Electronic identification of voters was implemented at the polling station while e-voting and e-counting were piloted successfully in 32 polling stations in Tirana. The OSCE-ODIHR's final assessment found that the elections were generally well organised and the new electoral administration gained the trust of most stakeholders.

The parliament is, at this moment, preparing a new electoral commission in order to discuss all the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee, the OSCE recommendations and all the concerns and recommendations of international partners.

I can say that we are committed to trying to be oriented in all the lines of the recommendations of our partners, not just only for the electoral...

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam GJONAJ.

Now I ask Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN and Mr Jonathan ATTARD to request the floor while I am going to give the floor to Mr Claude KERN from France.

Mr Claude KERN (France, ALDE): Good morning, Mr President.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome the very comprehensive report of our colleague Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN and I congratulate him.

For my part, I would like to mention two points of this report in particular: Georgia and the future work of the Sub-Committee on Conflicts between Council of Europe Member States, of which you elected me as chair.

Concerning Georgia, where I recently visited with my colleague Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN, we are concerned about the deeply polarised political climate in the country. This tension has contributed to the breakdown of the political agreement negotiated by the European Union.

I want to strongly reiterate here the call we made in December to the two largest parties, the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement, to place the common good of the nation above any partisan political strategy. This is fundamental.

In recent years, Georgia has embarked on a path of democratic consolidation. Considerable progress has been made. This path, which is the shared responsibility of all political forces in the country, now appears to be in danger. There is still time to redress the balance. To do so, a truly independent and impartial judicial system must be put in place, which implies in particular a reform of the Superior Council of Justice. In my view – in our view – this is an essential condition.

May our debates today and the prospect of the April part-session contribute to unblocking the situation.

As regards the Sub-Committee on Conflicts between Council of Europe Member States, our work should focus on the process of resolving the Transnistrian and Cypriot cases and the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, which has unfortunately kept our Assembly very busy in recent months.

This agenda is dense and I hope that it will not be burdened by other conflicts. You know what I am thinking of, especially the threats linked to the concentration of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border – which is of particular concern to me in this respect. I can only agree with the report before us. Unfortunately, it bears witness to the tensions that are fracturing this Europe to which we are so attached.

I assure you that my voice is not due to Covid-19 but to a cold that I caught yesterday.

I thank you for your help.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Claude KERN.

In the debate I call next Mr Jonathan ATTARD.

Mister ATTARD, you have the floor.

I am sorry. I think we are having some problems with the connection.

OK, I'm going to give the floor to Mr Lulzim BASHA in the meantime.

You have the floor.

Ms Klotilda BUSHKA (Albania, SOC): Thank you.

Mr President, esteemed colleagues.

I'd like to thank all of our colleagues who continued with the monitoring activity, despite all the challenges of the pandemic. This has to be marked as a good thing.

It seems from the report's text that the lack of country visits due to Covid-19 has impeded rapporteurs from accessing the situation of the countries and obtaining more reliable and all-inclusive information. Sometimes fluctuations in the appointment of the rapporteurs has had an impact on this too. Therefore I wish that the pandemic would end soon and we get back to the normal activity here in PACE and in our parliaments.

I have this opinion because, in the case of Albania for example, the monitoring reports talk about the election of April 2001, but there is another PACE report on the monitoring of the election that has to be taken into account. This provides information on the electoral activity of the Albanian President for his natural constitutional rule that has not been respected. Meanwhile, the monitoring report refers only to an impeachment procedure that is happening in Albania.

One more thing that I noticed in the monitoring report is that there is a lack of updated information with regards to the main dialogue. However, Covid-19 has created these problems for all of us, to have full access to information. But we need to know and we need to work together as I have stated before and I want to reinstate even today – that the monitoring of PACE should be like a mechanism to improve countries, to have better standards in democracy, protection of human rights, and in the strengthening of the rule of law.

Keeping this in mind, we need to be careful when we formulate recommendations for specific countries. In case our recommendation should serve to help these countries, we need to be based on reliable information, we need to be compatible with all the reports of the Assembly during the monitoring activity, and at the other end see what the impact of the recommendations of the monitoring activity gives for the countries locally.

To this end I want to ask my colleagues to discuss even the mechanism of monitoring – the prolongation, the going on with this mechanism. In the case of Albania, for example, we have been under monitoring for 26 years. We need to reorganise standards and discussions on how monitoring could be effective to help countries.

In conclusion, let me thank all our colleagues that have been involved in the monitoring activity. I use this occasion to ask all of my colleagues, members in European countries, to help Albania and the region in the process of integration with the European Union, and as well of the advancement of Kosovo's adherence in the Council of Europe.

Thank you for listening.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Klotilda BUSHKA.

Now in the debate I call Mr Jonathan ATTARD from Malta. You have the floor.

OK. We have some trouble with the connection.

I call on the debate next Mr Leonid SLUTSKIY from the Russian Federation.

You have the floor.

Mr Leonid SLUTSKIY (Russian Federation, NR)*: Good morning dear colleagues.

I hope that I can be clearly seen and heard.

Regrettably, the report we're discussing, Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN's report, gives rise to quite a lot of questions.

In principle, the Russian delegation feels that the time has long since passed when we should have moved to situation-based monitoring rather than country-based monitoring when any situation of non-compliance with the lofty standards of the Council of Europe is considered by the Monitoring Committee, including issues of standards of democracy. This would ensure that we get away from this dividing line in the Council of Europe and ensure that the organisation takes its proper place in establishing a new European architecture for the 20th century.

Furthermore, if we're going to talk specifically about the report of Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN, who I know very well, and I have that report at hand. If we look at the paragraph on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the explanatory memorandum, here we have very accurate information that shows there's a clear unilateral approach of the authors to such an important issue of the Council of Europe.

At the same time, in the Resolution, in Paragraph 3, this text does not reflect the new realities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in the region after the signature of the trilateral statement of 10 November, which put an end to military action in the region. I have to say, dear colleagues, that I take pride in the fact that the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, took a most serious part in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Once again I would like to congratulate our previous colleague, the previous head of the Azerbaijan delegation, now the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, congratulate him on his birthday. He's done everything possible to bring Azerbaijan in line with the lofty standards of the Council of Europe.

I would call for colleagues to take a closer look at the inaccuracies in the draft Resolution, and take an appropriate decision to correct those inaccuracies. I think we all need to work actively through the monitoring procedure to ensure that the information in the report is not out of date. The monitoring procedure should not divide countries in the Council of Europe between two camps, but rather ensure that we seek to uphold the lofty standards of the Council of Europe.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister SLUTSKIY.

Now I call next in the debate Ms Blerina GJYLAMETI from Albania.

She is not connected.

Then we go again. We try with Mr Jonathan ATTARD.

Mr Jonathan ATTARD (Malta, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

Good morning and first of all I would like to thank the co-rapporteurs for their work and the cordiality with which they have conducted the discussions in Malta. I am pleased to note that the fact-finding mission is recognising the bold historical reforms that were implemented in my country, Malta, particularly those that have made substantial changes and improved procedures that have been with us for decades. These include procedures for the appointment of the Chief Justice, the President of the Republic, the appointment of the Commissioner of Police, the appointment of the members of the judiciary, the office of the Attorney General and the newly created constitutional role of the State Advocate.

Parliament approved as well legislation to enhance the Permanent Commission against Corruption, the Office of the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life, the Office of the Auditor General and the Office of the Ombudsman.

I note, as well, the call made by the co-rapporteurs for a profound reform of the Maltese parliament, particularly in relation to the establishment of a full-time parliament. I must say that the present government is all in favour of having a discussion on the possibility of giving elected members of parliament the option of serving parliament full-time, and in fact, there is an electoral pledge to this effect.

In addition, the party in government has publicly made it clear that it is in favour of having a national discussion on the Maltese electoral system.

In relation to the public inquiry into the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, the office of the prime minister has been holding consultations to ensure swift and timely implementation of the recommendations. These meetings were constructive and comprehensive. There was a lot of common ground, especially on the aim and objective of safeguarding the protection of journalists and the media in Malta.

As recommended by the public inquiry a committee has now been set up with the aim of analysing the journalism and media sector in Malta, underlining areas that require development and making recommendations to the prime minister. The committee will also examine the draft legislation amendments prepared by the government following the consultations carried out with key stakeholders. These include amendments on the protection of journalists against strategic lawsuits, against public participation, as well as an amendment to the constitution of Malta on the right to freedom of expression to ensure that freedom and pluralism of the media and the importance of the role of journalists are respected.

Reforms and actions taken by the Maltese government are attesting to the fact that good governance and the rule of law are indeed on the Maltese government's top priority list.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister ATTARD.

That concludes the list of speakers.

Now I call Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN, the rapporteur, to reply to the debate.

You have 3 minutes.

Yes? Point of order?

Mr Bob van PAREREN (Netherlands, EC/DA): There is someone going out of the list that is not available at this very moment.

I suggest that you take another number of persons. I think they have important input, for example my neighbour behind me. Probably it is possible, Mister Chairman.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Mister YILDIZ, I'm very sorry for the delay that there has been over this. You are very welcome to take the floor.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Since I got the position, I try my best to co-operate with both the Committee and with the co-rapporteurs.

With this understanding, I invited you and Mr HAMMARBERG to Turkey. Unfortunately, we couldn't due to the pandemic. Also, I invited the Committee to meet in Turkey in March, but it couldn't happen also due to the pandemic. Hopefully, we can get it if the conditions allow. In May the committee is welcome in Turkey. Hopefully, we can do it in a better way.

Mister Chairman, of course, Turkey is a deep-rooted state. We know our responsibilities. I have one issue here, a kind warning that in the meetings in the reports.

Yesterday we dealt with security in Europe although we talked a lot about bilateral dispute, some of them escalated to the armed conflicts. Although terrorism is a big threat to European security, it causes a lot of friction among states, vehicle states. It also causes a lot of casualties among people, creates hatred among people. That's why we should be careful about terrorism.

Combatting terrorism is a very well-established area of co-operation among states, especially in Europe.

I urged in the Committee to name PKK as a terrorist organisation as was recognised by the European Court, including the European Court of Human Rights, and many national courts. I hope in the future it will be accepted. Otherwise, it causes a lot of harm to the credibility of these reports in Turkey and in other countries' public opinion.

The Committee is welcome in Turkey in May.

Thank you very much.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister YILDIZ.

I think the members of this Assembly need an explanation of what just happened then.

When the papers were produced for the chair up here, they forgot that there was a list on the other side, and it wasn't duplicated. I'm very sorry that that has happened.

I now have the full list. So, we will continue with that, and we will go back to Mr Lulzim BASHA, who, I think, is now online to be able to make his presentation.

OK. Mr Lulzim BASHA is not with us, but Ms Olena MOSHENETS is.

Ms Olena MOSHENETS (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you very much.

...Connection issues...

...and transparent and competitive progress.

Our partners helped to establish the Public Council of International Experts, which assisted in the selection of anti-corruption judges. Today it is the most efficient court.

...Connection issues...

Also, we adopted a law regulating the issue of the oligarchs' influence on our state policy which will contribute to democratisation. The Venice Commission is going to give an opinion on this law. I do not doubt that Ukraine will take it into account.

Concerning the closure of certain TV channels, unfortunately the aggressor, the Russian Federation, is using informational weapons to influence Ukraine. Some TV channels have carried out systematic activities aimed at the realisation of beneficial for Russia narratives concerning the legalisation of aggression in Eastern Ukraine and the legitimisation of the occupation of Crimea. To fight in the informational war, we must reform the media market. Without real leverage, it is and will remain open for informational attacks.

The security of journalists is also in priority. The Ukrainian Association of Press Publishers continues to cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Police of Ukraine to strengthen the guarantees for their protection.

Moreover, Parliament adopted the law defining indigenous people as the ethnic community on the territory of Ukraine and which does not have its own state outside our country. This law is an important message: the occupying state pursues a policy of repression in Crimea, while Ukraine protects and provides development opportunities.

The Ukrainian legislation guarantees national minorities the rights to study in communal education establishments in their native language additional to the state one. Thus, any fears about possible oppression of the rights of national minorities have no basis.

On 23 August 2021 the Crimea Platform was held; 46 countries and international organisations took part in it. We are grateful that our achievements in the development of international co-operation on the occupation and the prevention of risks posed by the occupation of Crimea were mentioned. We would like co-operation to continue, and to hear the position of further action for the occupation of Crimea.

All these changes threaten not only our country, but the security of the whole of Europe. Only yesterday we talked about the protection from enforced disappearances, and yesterday the Ukrainian Parliament introduced a legislative change for the social protection of missing persons and their families.

Our work here is about real change.

Thank you very much.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Olena MOSHENETS, and thank you for your perseverance, as well, to keep on going for that presentation.

Now we have Mr Hamid HAMID, who is online.

Mr Hamid HAMID, you will need to unmute.

Can you hear us? No. Okay, well let's come back to Mr Hamid HAMID if we get him at the end.

Let's go to Ms Irina RUKAVISHNIKOVA. Is she online?

Madam, you have the floor.

Ms Irina RUKAVISHNIKOVA (Russian Federation, NR)*: Distinguished colleagues, I hope you can all hear me.

I am delighted that there are no complaints about my country's implementation of the voluntary commitments which the Russian Federation took upon itself under the Assembly resolutions and for which there is a monitoring procedure. That means that, de facto, Russia long ago implemented all of its obligations. It should therefore move to the post-monitoring dialogue stage.

We are disappointed that for yet another year, there is inclusion of last minute issues on the agenda which do not correspond to the reality of the situation. For example, the use of unreliable information by the authors who have not even tried to give them a semblance of legitimacy, such as the accusations going to Russia with reference to nine million citizens being deprived of their passive electoral rights.

Distinguished colleagues,

According to the legislation of the Russian Federation – which is fully compliant with international legal instruments – citizens may be temporarily deprived of the right to be elected if they've carried out criminal offences. That is 1.5% of all the electorate in the case of the Russian Federation. Of course, this is of no interest to you, because this is not impressive to you.

Another example of fake news is that the law on foreign agents apparently creates unequal conditions for different candidates, according to this report. But there are similar laws in many other countries which claim to be democracies.

The so-called law on foreign agents provides for the revelation of information if these candidates have received foreign funding. There are conditions created for transparency and accessibility to this information among the electorate. It is important to know the truth about the candidates involved in elections. Those who do not agree to this are basically saying that they are entitled to restrict the expression of the will of the electorate.

I think that is ludicrous.

In conclusion, regrettably it's completely difficult to understand why, for 20 years, demands are made of the Russian Federation to revise the monitoring system created last century.

We have consistently called for a transition to thematic monitoring, and away from country-based monitoring. If there is thematic monitoring, then we will see true principles of equality for all of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. We will do away with the humiliating labels stuck on certain countries. There will be more grounds for a thorough consideration of issues within states, in the interests of protecting the rights of citizens and the upholding of fundamental values, not belittling these crucial issues.

Thank you.

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

Now we will go back to Mr Hamid HAMID to see whether he can join us.

Yes, we can hear you.

Mr Hamid HAMID (Bulgaria, ALDE): Thank you, President and dear colleagues.

I will speak about *...poor connexion...*

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Mr Hamid HAMID, I am afraid we must interrupt you. You are breaking up in your speech.

Have you selected "floor"?

Could you try once more? Yes, try again.

Mr Hamid HAMID (Bulgaria, ALDE): Thank you President and dear colleagues.

I will speak about points 102 to 106 from the report regarding the recent elections in Bulgaria only.

I would like to thank once again PACE for the election observation mission to Bulgaria. The ALDE party has also conducted an election observation mission and has several findings which are mentioned in the PACE IEOM report and the progress of the assembly monitoring procedure. But I would like to add some more details.

Vote-buying is a long-standing problem that we have identified more than 12 years ago and had a feeling ever since publicly for legal actions against it, but in these past elections and the elections in July the minister of interior Boyko Rashkov, who was responsible for the organisation of the election as well abused the fight with this ugly phenomena as an excuse for illegal and unlawful actions against political opponents.

I will give you just a few examples. First, the police authorities have entered into several polling sections in the district of Haskovo and interfered in the voting process of the election day. Second, those officially recognised as such with disabilities were interrogated in their homes by police authorities and were forced to do physical exercise to prove their status of disability which only a designated medical committee can do.

Candidates for parliament were forced by the police to sign protocols that they will not campaign for their respective political party and will not educate voters on how to handle the electronic machine voting in general. Candidates were subjected to demonstrative police searches in many regions, like in the case of Burgas and Vidin. The candidates were stripped down naked and humiliated in front of their families and neighbours without having their immunity removed from the central election committee and without the required-by-law approval of the prosecutor on duty.

And the last one, the local authorities, based on their political affiliations, were a target of random police actions which hindered them from fulfilling their duties by law in organising the elections.

As a conclusion from our side I will you just one figure from the official statistics from the past two elections which speaks for itself: from 20 000 election-related police actions there are only 250 forwarded to the prosecution. This means that there are more than 19 750 cases of police brutality and breach of human, civic and political rights of political opponents.

Thank you, dear colleagues.

Also I would like to thank PACE once again for the long-standing commitment.

Thank you, President.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Hamid HAMID.

We now go to Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN from the Russian Federation, who is also online.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: ...the monitoring procedure is necessary. It makes it possible not only to monitor the implementation of obligations by countries, but also helps to improve those countries' legislation. The return points here are that they call for thematic and not country monitoring, I repeat. Otherwise, some countries will be under monitoring for ever.

Secondly, monitoring should not just list problems, but also ensure that there is provision of information in the light of the real state of affairs and common sense. In this regard, monitoring would give rise to less misunderstandings.

I repeat what my colleague Ms Irina RUKAVISHNIKOVA has said about the nine million Russian citizens supposedly deprived of their passive electoral rights. It might be worth knowing who we're talking about.

Apart from the categories that Ms Irina RUKAVISHNIKOVA mentioned, apart from people convicted for criminal offences, for example drug trafficking, which is a practice in other countries as well, they also include people with foreign citizenship who are not entitled to hold governmental office. There are similar practices in other countries. As you know, there are several millions of such citizens in the Russian Federation.

How many people have been genuinely deregistered in these cases? Only 27. Less than 1% of all registered candidates were struck off the list, so it's making a mountain out of a molehill.

With regards to the Memorial centre, it was not liquidated for political reasons, but because it systematically and deliberately violated the law. The Russian Federation has countless non-profit organisations. They are not receiving foreign funding, and they are not at all in question. But Memorial does.

We are also bewildered by the listing of complaints about the parliamentary elections in Russia. Russian electoral legislation has been recognised by the international community and several observation missions. How can we then have these complaints about the electoral process? It's absurd. We have very close watching over the ballots once they've been cast.

Then the question of territorial conflict. Russian peacekeepers are in Transnistria. That is why they're there. There are no Russian troops in Luhansk and Donbas.

In Crimea, they are there because Crimea chose to join the Russian Federation in a referendum.

We hope that monitoring in the future will deal with such situations with more precise legal understanding of the situation.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN.

Now we move to our last speaker Mr Hristo IVANOV from Bulgaria.

Is he online? He is, good.

But you are not unmuted, Mr Hristo IVANOV. Unmute.

Mr Hristo IVANOV (Bulgaria, NR): Thank you very much for this opportunity to address this very important forum for all of Europe.

I would like to express my thanks to the rapporteur and his team, as well as the Secretariat for doing their excellent job.

I would like to comment first of all on the text on Bulgaria, and to express my happiness with the positive evaluation of the election process in Bulgaria. Whatever claims of irregularities there might be, the Bulgarian courts are available to address them.

We also would like to point out that in December a new regular government was formed in Bulgaria, finally resolving the sharp political crisis in the country. Particularly, that this new government has adopted a very ambitious agenda in the coalition agreement vis-a-vis judicial reform.

The commitments that the government has undertaken are going to address a number of longstanding recommendations by the Venice Commission and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), vis-a-vis the reform of the Bulgarian Supreme Judicial Council, to increase the impartiality and independence of the Bulgarian courts, and also to impose greater accountability on the prosecution office, particularly the Office of the Prosecutor General in the country.

I would also like to comment on the text vis-a-vis the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), which contains references to the Bulgarian negotiating position in the context of the European Union. We would like, in particular, to point out that the new governments both in Sofia and Skopje have adopted a number of very positive steps.

In the very short period in which the new governments have existed, there have been two top-level meetings. First, the Bulgarian prime minister Mr Kiril Petkov visited Skopje, and then there was a cabinet to cabinet meeting in Sofia which established a very positive dynamic. We see a very positive change in the overall atmosphere, as well as some hopes that we will finally see particular, specific results in the dialogue between the two countries.

It is against this background that we are raising an objection to this link that appears to be made in the final part of the text on North Macedonia between the Bulgarian position and the domestic political events in North Macedonia. We think that definitely this is at least very questionable, and also it can absolutely play no positive role going forward. Let's not engage in this type of comments. Moreover, this is a matter for the European Union and not the Council of Europe.

Let's give a chance for the new positive atmosphere to really produce some results.

Thank you very much.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Hristo IVANOV.

That really does conclude the list of speakers.

I call Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN, the rapporteur, to reply to the debate. You have 3 minutes.

Is he online?

Michael, we are waiting for you.

Can you request the floor again, Michael?

Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN, can you refresh your browser? We are trying desperately here to get you online, Michael.

Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN (Denmark, ALDE, Rapporteur): It worked! That was actually good advice to refresh the browser.

So thank you for that, Chair, and thank you so much for all the comments that have been raised by our colleagues.

Let me just touch upon a few of them because of my speaking time.

First of all, I would just touch upon what our Russian colleagues said.

First of all, I don't see that the country monitoring should be removed and put in place by a so-called thematic review instead. Because, this is not to put a shameful eye on a member country or anything like that. It is just to push the attention to where the shortcomings are. If there are no shortcomings, a country is not under monitoring any more.

This is very important to say.

Therefore, because we raised a lot of attention on Russia and other countries, is because unfortunately, there are shortcomings.

For example, one of our colleagues from Russia said that the Foreign Agent Law was in line with the Council of Europe's standards. That is absolutely not true. The Venice Commission has stated repeatedly that the Foreign Agent Law is not in line with the Council of Europe's standards.

I'm raising this because we all need to be in line with the Council of Europe's standards, because every country actually signed to uphold these standards when we became members.

I would like to also, of course, say thank you so much for all the nice comments regarding our job.

Actually, shamefully, I forgot to thank somebody in my opening speech. That is of course the Secretariat. because as Mr Iulian BULAI has mentioned, without the Secretariat we could not do our job. They are really the brain and especially the muscles behind the Committee's efforts to actually do our job, even though there was a pandemic.

Just a short comment to Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, my very dear colleague: I fully understand your comment regarding the discussion on terms for rapporteurs.

I myself have been a co-rapporteur for Georgia for five years, so I fully understand the idea. But the reality is that it is becoming more and more difficult to get candidates for rapporteurships, and also to get the rapporteurs to allocate enough time to be rapporteurs in practice. That's why I'm raising the debate, and I think it's important that we actually touch upon it.

So all in all, thank you so much for all the comments and I'm looking forward to not in the chairman position of the Monitoring Committee, but so to speak, on the normal seats, to follow the work and be involved in the work because there's a lot to do still.

Thank you so much.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN.

Does the Chairperson of the Committee wish to speak? Do we have him? You have 3 minutes, Mr Piero FASSINO.

Mr Piero FASSINO needs to request the floor.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): I had a connection problem.

First of all, I want to thank the rapporteur because he has done a great job, but especially because he has been the Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee for the last years. He has led the Committee very efficiently.

I am the new Chairperson and as the new Chairperson I am really happy to succeed my colleague and I congratulate him for the work he has done.

This report is a very precise report that summarises the work that we have done with the monitoring of the 11 countries that were reviewed: three countries were reviewed by a post-monitoring activity and we did a review of the other countries to verify the fulfilment of democratic rights and standards.

Even though Covid-19 has obviously made the work much more complicated, the Committee has worked well and this report demonstrates this.

I think that one thing should be stressed: Mr Samad SEYIDOV, in his speech, said something that I agree with, namely that the Monitoring Committee should not talk about a country but should talk *with* a country. This is what our Committee always does: our rapporteurs are in continuous dialogue with the authorities, either the government authorities, the opposition authorities, or the various parliamentary representatives. We work with concrete and continuous contact because we are not a court. We are not judges. We are a committee that must work to ensure that the values and rights that are the basis of our Assembly are fulfilled in all countries, so that every citizen of every country can be sure of their rights and achievements.

I think that our rapporteurs have done a good job and they are still working in this way. And I think that we should continue in this direction.

The report contains, for each country, indications on which we will continue to work and a continuity with the work we have done until now, to proceed and continue in our work with all the member countries of the Council of Europe, in a spirit of co-operation and friendship.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Mr Piero FASSINO, can we keep you online? Or has he gone? Mr Piero FASSINO, can you ask for the floor again? It would be good to keep you online rather than you disappear and never be able to get you back.

Very good, just stay online. I've got you and I don't want to lose you.

The Monitoring Committee has presented a draft resolution which is Document 15433 to which 11 amendments have been tabled.

I understand that the Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendment 5 to the draft resolution which was unanimously approved by the Committee should be declared as agreed by the Assembly.

Is that so, Mr Piero FASSINO?

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

Dear colleagues! I would like to thank the Monitoring committee for visiting Kyiv and for the recommendations. The main objective for 2022 is to form a new High Qualifications Commission and a reboot of the High Council of Justice. This process is ongoing and I am sure it will be successfully completed due to the laws adopted by our Parliament. International partners helped reform the Supreme Court and establish the High Anti-Corruption Court. Both were formed under a transparent and competitive process. Our Partners helped to establish the Public Council of International Experts, which assisted in selecting anti-corruption judges. Today it is the most efficient court. Also, we adopted a law regulating the issue of the oligarchs' influence on the state policy, which will contribute to democratization. The Venice Commission is going to give an opinion on this law and I do not doubt that Ukraine will take it into account. Concerning the closure of certain TV channels, unfortunately, the aggressor is using informational weapons to influence Ukraine. Some TV channels have carried out systematic activities aimed at the realization of beneficial for Russia narratives concerning the legalization of aggression in eastern Ukraine and the legitimization of occupation of Crimea. To fight in the informational war, we must reform the media market. Without real leverage, it is and will remain open for informational attacks. The security of journalists is also in priority. Ukrainian journalists' associations continue cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Police of Ukraine to strengthen guarantees for the protection. Moreover, Parliament adopted the law defining indigenous people as the ethnic community formed on the territory of Ukraine and which does not have its own state outside our country. This law is an important message: the occupying state pursues a policy of repression in Crimea, while Ukraine protects and provides development opportunities. Ukrainian legislation guarantees national minorities the right to study in communal educational establishments in their native language, additionally to the state one. Thus, any fears about possible oppression of the rights of national minorities have no basis. On 23 August 2021, the Crimean Platform was held. 46 countries and international organizations took part in it. We are grateful that our achievements in the development of international cooperation on de-occupation and prevention of risks, posed by the occupation of Crimea, were mentioned. We would like for cooperation to continue and to hear the position on further actions for de-occupation of Crimea. All these changes strengthen not only our country, but the security of the whole of Europe! Only yesterday we talked about protection against enforced disappearances, and yesterday the Ukrainian parliament introduced legislative changes for the social protection of missing persons and their families. Our work here is about real change! Thank you!

Vote: The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (January-December 2021)

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Yes, it was approved unanimously.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): OK. Thank you.

Does anybody object?

Mister BASHKIN, do you object?

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: Distinguished Colleagues,

The Assembly is not expressing concern, for example, about the movements of the Bundeswehr here in Germany or Hungarian troops in Hungary. That's perfectly correct, because the disposition of the national army in any part of its national territory is the sovereign right of any state unless it is limited by a specific treaty.

Furthermore...

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN, may I interrupt you, please? Are you objecting to Amendment 5?

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: I am objecting to Amendment 5. I wish to give for a minute an explanation of that fact. Can I give that explanation now? Please could I be given the floor?

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): No, I am afraid you cannot be given the floor. Amendment 5 will be taken individually.

I understand that the Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 3 to the draft resolutions, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as rejected.

Is that so, Mr Piero FASSINO?

I think I saw you nodding.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Yes.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Does anybody object?

Mister SEYIDOV objects, good.

Does anybody else object?

Then these amendments will be taken individually in the order in which they appear in the compendium.

Hang on, please.

Could those who object to this raise their hand in the hemicycle or request to speak via the remote system?

I remind the Assembly that the objection must be supported by at least 10 members.

OK, we have 10.

All of the amendments will be taken individually.

We've come to Amendment 1, which was one of those rejected by a two-thirds majority.

I call Mr Samad SEYIDOV to support Amendment 1.

You have 1 minute.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA): First of all, Mister President, thank you very much for understanding.

I know yesterday we already discussed this question. I do not want to waste your time but this is the reality that we are fighting for. I think all speakers during the presentations made the same statement, that we have to speak, and we have to understand the realities together with the countries.

From this point of view, again, the conflict which happened between Azerbaijan and Armenia, just now, is over. But the title of the conflict still exists. "Former conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan". Even during the presentation, the respectable rapporteur said "conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh".

That is why I am in favour. Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN wishes to speak against the Amendment. He is online.

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD): I am against this amendment because we had a set of this similar amendments yesterday to be discussed. It is impossible to speak about the fact that there is no conflict because the conflict is still continuing and the national Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an internationally recognised one.

We used this word for a long time. We are still using this word you in this organisation. It is impossible to speak about the absence of the conflict when it exists in reality.

Once again, I would like to say that we are strongly against this Amendment. It was rejected by the two-thirds majority in the specialised Monitoring Committee.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The Amendment is rejected.

We move to Amendment 2, which was also one of those rejected by two-thirds majority.

I call Mr Irakli CHIKOVANI to support Amendment 2.

Is Mr CHIKOVANI in the room?

You have 1 minute, Sir.

Mr Irakli CHIKOVANI (Georgia, SOC): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

The suggestion that we have provided is that the notion of non-compliance with the international norms is something that is quite ambiguous because there is no set of codified norms that is applied to any country, including those that are the members of this organisation. At the same time, we do know that we are going to be preparing the country report that is going to be discussed within this hemicycle in a few months, whether it

is going to be down the road during the next sessions. We just wanted to make sure that the conclusions are not drawn based on general assumptions but rather on a detailed discussion that we are going to have later on.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anybody wish speak against the Amendment?

Mr Claude KERN, also online.

Mr Claude KERN (France, ALDE): Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to speak against this Amendment because, although I understand the position of Mr Irakli CHIKOVANI, it still calls into question the report that we will present on Tuesday in the Committee.

I therefore speak against this Amendment.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): The Committee has rejected the Amendments by a two-thirds majority. I shall now put it to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The Amendment is rejected.

Amendment 4. Also one of those rejected by two-thirds majority.

I call Ms MEZENTSEVA to support Amendment 4. Is she doing this in the Chamber or remotely?

She doesn't appear to be here.

Mr BASHKIN, do you wish to speak?

Oh, Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister Chair.

This amendment is just concrete words that we have in a previous paragraph about the illegal annexation of Crimea. At the part when we describe the elections in the Russian Federation, we say about the illegal elections on the territory of Crimea that were organised during the last elections. We want to support this Amendment because it is a reality. In our previous resolutions, we have this as a defect.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anybody wish speak against the Amendment?

I think we have Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN online.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: Thank you Chair.

There is no legal justification for this Amendment. On the territory of Donetsk and Lugansk regions in the area of conflict there are a large number of citizens of the Russian Federation living and it's technically impossible for them to vote on the territory of Ukraine so they moved to the nearest residential area of the Russian territory, that is Rostov region.

And on passportisation, this is also getting legally absurd. There has been no such an instance which can be held against the Russian Federation. They are simply trying to protect themselves from threats to their lives from the Ukrainian military and nationalists. As regards to the illegitimate voting in Crimea, it is well known that

there has not been a single instance of mass violations of the conduct of the elections. If there were trifling problems they did not have an impact on the results of the expression of the will of the population of Crimea, in the opinion of the observers of the electoral commission.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The Committee has rejected the Amendment by a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed. I call for the result to be displayed.

And that Amendment has been rejected.

Amendment 5. This one was adopted unanimously.

I call... Is it Mr SEYIDOV is speaking to this? Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV. I apologise. I apologise.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Yes, really this amendment was adopted unanimously.

The only thing that you can see on this Amendment is to withdraw troops as soon as possible from the territories near the borders of Ukraine. Now we have more than 130 000 Russian troops. If you remember in our previous declaration, we have the same words which were supported. We want these words to be supported just in this resolution as well.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

I think we have Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN still online.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: Thank you.

The Assembly, the speaker is breaking up. It may be on the floor channel.

It is perfectly right that people should be able to move their army on their own territory because that is a sovereign right of any state unless it is limited by a specific treaty.

Furthermore, the authors of the amendment have not adduced any technical evidence to the Assembly using technical verifications. The source of this information is basically the media, whose impact in crisis situations we discussed two days ago.

Where does the Assembly suggest the troops be withdrawn to if they were never introduced? Rather, concern should be expressed about the concentration of Ukrainian heavy weaponry in the area of conflict which is an over-violation of the Minsk Agreement. But that is the subject of a separate conversation.

We call for rejection of the amendment since it is not at all justified.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mister FASSINO, the Committee is clearly in favour. Yes?

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): The Committee is against this Amendment.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): This is Amendment 5.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): No, no, excuse me.

Amendment 5 was unanimously approved by the Committee.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed and I call for the result to be displayed.

The Amendment has been adopted.

We now move to Amendment 6, which was rejected by a two-thirds majority.

Sir.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

I want to withdraw this Amendment.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The Amendment has been withdrawn.

Amendment 8, which was one that was rejected by a two-thirds majority.

I call Mr Sergey KISLYAK to support Amendment 8.

Oh, Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN is doing this.

OK.

Mister BASHKIN, your turn again.

You have 1 minute.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: Thank you.

The shutting down of opposition mass media and persecution of journalists and opposition politicians in Ukraine are well-known facts.

Freedom of thought and freedom of opinion are guaranteed by Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. They are therefore fundamental rights. The protection of which is to be exercised by the Assembly.

This is not a question of relations between Ukraine and Russia, this is a fundamental position of our organisation.

The obligations of Council of Europe members must be implemented in the same way by all, regardless of any reciprocal complaints or other conditions. If we require from all member States the implementation of the convention, then why should an individual country be an exception?

I therefore call for support for this Amendment.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Anyone online? No.

I understand the Committee has rejected the Amendment by a two-thirds majority.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Yes.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Piero FASSINO.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting and now open.

The vote is now closed. I call for the result to be displayed.

That amendment has been rejected.

Amendment 9, which was another rejected by a two-thirds majority.

I call Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN again to support Amendment 9. You have 1 minute.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: Thank you, President.

Colleagues, this Amendment is expansive in its significance. Although this part of the text pertains to journalists, we feel that full and transparent investigation of all cases of violence must be carried out in respect of all citizens – citizens are not just journalists – since this pertains to common human rights and freedoms. So we call for support for this amendment.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

This chapter of the report is really about the violence against journalists. To investigate all these cases is an obligation of Ukraine. It is a control under the whole control of international organisations.

In the amendment, it is another item that is about all the violence on this territory – the territory of the war. I think it is not the item of this discussion. I am against it. I want it to be the same as the first text that we have now according to this draft.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Piero FASSINO.

The Committee has rejected the Amendment by a two-thirds majority.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Yes.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting are now both open.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

That Amendment has been rejected.

Amendment 7. I call Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV. Is it you again Sir to support Amendment 7?

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you.

This amendment is about the Crimea Platform. It is really a new organised platform where the only place we can discuss the situation in Crimea because no Minsk Agreement, no Normandy Format has this discussion.

Just now, we have 49 countries and different international organisations that supported this Platform, so we want to have this in the report.

This amendment was supported totally by the Committee.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN?

No, Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN has gone.

Mister FASSINO, what is the opinion of the Committee on the Amendment?

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): The Amendment was approved by a large majority.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

I cannot take a point of order in the middle of a vote. We must complete this vote first of all.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The Amendment has been approved.

I will now take Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN's point of order.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: This is a statement on Amendment 10.

We call on the Assembly to ensure that Ukraine understands just how undemocratic its language laws are.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Mister BASHKIN, this is not a point of order.

We are just moving on to Amendment 10. Would you please leave the floor?

You may have made the request, but I am ignoring the request at the moment.

I'm now about to introduce Amendment 10, which was an amendment rejected by a two-thirds majority.

Mister BASHKIN, now you have the chance to support Amendment 10.

You have 1 minute.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: Distinguished Colleagues,

I would like to introduce Amendment 10. We call on the Assembly in this way to help Ukraine to understand just how undemocratic its language laws are, which hinder study in the use of Hungarian, Russian, Romanian, Polish and other national minority languages on the territory of Ukraine.

Concern about violation of language rights for the citizens of Ukraine has already been shown in the designation of an Assembly report on this issue, but that is a subject for separate examination. In the meantime through this amendment we wish to convey a signal to Ukraine about the need for it to bring its laws in line with the norms and values of a modern democratic European state.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you.

Now it's a war on the territory of Ukraine.

It's not a problem of Russians speaking Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar-speaking population, that they are suffering because of the war. The war has no nationality. During the aggression, a lot of people were killed of Russian, Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar and other nationalities.

So I think it's not objective to put this in this paragraph.

So I am against this.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The Committee has rejected the Amendment by a two-thirds majority I understand, Mr Piero FASSINO?

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Yes.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed. I call for the result to be displayed.

The Amendment has been rejected.

I move on to Amendment 11.

I call again Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN to support Amendment 11.

You again have 1 minute.

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR)*: As of today, only the Minsk Agreement is recognised by the international community as the only instrument for ending the civil war in Ukraine, and as a consequence, ending the toll of victims on both sides of the Ukrainian conflict.

Commencement to implementation by Ukraine of the Minsk Agreement it signed but is not implementing, is the path to ending the violations of fundamental rights and freedoms on the territory of a European state.

The Assembly must use every opportunity to bring this process closer.

Supporting our Amendment, in other words, appealing to a return to the implementation of legal obligations, is one such step.

We call for the support to this Amendment.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

The Minsk Agreement is an agreement. It means there are different sides of this agreement. It's impossible to have one side to fulfil everything if all other sides are not fulfilling this.

Moreover, for the last 6 years a special law about some regions of Lugansk and Donetsk territory are still in the parliament. Each year, the last 6 years, we provide this law to the life. But it's impossible to do this because other side is not fulfilling Minsk agreements.

Lastly, it's not the Ukrainian conflict, it's the aggression of Russian Federation against Ukraine. We have this in all our reports and declarations. We are against. This is especially against the last phrase. Read it. It's something unrealistic, when the country aggressor talks about this.

Thank you.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Sorry.

Mr Piero FASSINO, the Committee has rejected the amendment by a two-thirds majority.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Yes, rejected.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I shall now put it to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting is now open.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 11 is rejected.

We now move to what I think is the last amendment, Amendment 3, which is again one of those rejected by a two-thirds majority.

I call Mr Hristo IVANOV to support the Amendment.

Mister IVANOV, online, yes?

Mr Hristo IVANOV (Bulgaria, NR): Yes.

Hello we call for the cancelling of the last part of the last language of the parts concerning the Republic of North Macedonia.

It makes a link between the position of Bulgaria in the negotiations for the accession of North Macedonia to the European Union, and the political processes internally in Macedonia.

Obviously, this cannot be objective. It drags the Council of Europe into the position of making unobjective judgments. We think this is not going to be constructive given the very positive new signals that the new governments in Sofia and Skopje are giving.

Let's not be negative and judgmental in this way.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

I cannot see anyone in the hemicycle. There's nobody online.

OK.

The Committee has rejected the Amendment by a two-thirds majority.

Yes, I shall now put the amendment...

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Rejected.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Piero FASSINO.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting are now open.

The vote is now closed.

Can I call for the result to be displayed?

That Amendment has been rejected.

We now move to the question of the draft Resolution, for which a simple majority is required.

So we will now proceed to vote on the draft Resolution that is contained in Document 15433 as amended.

The vote in the hemicycle and via remote voting are now open.

The vote is now closed.

Can I call for the result to be displayed?

The draft Resolution in Document 15433 is adopted.

Thank you all very much for that.

We now move on.

We now move on to the free debate.

This is where I hand back the Chair.

Thank you all very much indeed.

Requests for an explanation of vote

Mr Hristo IVANOV (Bulgaria): For the record, I would like to mention that during the vote on the Amendment No. 3 to the draft resolution and on the vote on draft resolution on *The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure*, due to a technical issue, my votes were not registered. My intention was to vote in favour of the amendment and to abstain on the draft resolution.

Ms Iva MITEVA (Bulgaria, NR): For the record, I would like to mention that during the vote on the Amendment No. 3 to the draft resolution and on the vote on draft resolution on *The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure*, due to a technical issue, my votes were not registered. My intention was to vote in favour of the amendment and to abstain on the draft resolution.

Free debate

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Good morning again, Dear Colleagues.

We now come to the free debate.

I remind members that this debate is for topics not already on the Agenda agreed on Monday morning. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes.

I call for Mr Samad SEYIDOV from the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance. Please start by identifying the topic you wish to raise.

Thank you.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much Mr Chairman.

Dear friends, during this whole session I have done my best in order to explain that we have a really new situation in our region.

It's really very good that my president just recently said that we are able to get some positive signals from Armenia. It means the reconciliation process is going on in the region, which is essential.

Three very important topics which were dealt with:

The first one is a peaceful treaty with Armenia.

The second one is a delimitation and demarcation of the bodies.

The third one is an opening of communication with Armenia and all communications in the region.

That's really very good.

With the third question – I mean the opening of communications with Armenia – we made some progress about the Zangezur Corridor, about railway and automobile way connections between Azerbaijan and Armenia. I hope we'll be able to have access, a direct access to Nakhchivan, which has unfortunately been under a blockade for 30 years.

We got positive signals about the communications between Turkey and Armenia which is also very good, because for a long period of time – because of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories – there were no connections or relations between Armenia and Turkey.

About delimitation and demarcation, we also got some positive information, but the question is that Armenia is ready to come to negotiate this question with some preconditions.

Friends, all questions can be and should be discussed, but taking into account these very, very painful questions, we should sit together without any kind of precondition, in order to understand each other, in order to explain the realities to each other. That's why we are in favour of negotiations and to sitting together without any kind of preconditions.

The third one: peaceful treaty, sustainable peace in the region. Unfortunately we got some signals from Armenia that again they are ready to do that, but with some kind of preconditions.

Friends, colleagues, if you have some preconditions, please explain them or present them during the negotiations. Come to the table, sit together with Azerbaijan.

This is the only one way to do that.

Thank you very much.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

I now give the floor to Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

You have the floor.

Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN (Denmark, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you so much, Chair.

And, on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) I would like to touch upon the issue regarding Russia's decision to close down the oldest NGO in that country: Memorial.

We, from the ALDE group are very very worried about the decrease in democracy and also making it more and more difficult for NGOs to work in Russia. Memorial were a completely independent NGO that focused a lot on the shortcomings that there are in Russia, and especially the current government. And that's all you can

reason why the government decided to close down Memorial: it is of course because they were irritated by the repeated demand that Russia move in a more democratic way, particularly in light of the fact that Russia is basically in the last few years has actually moved in the opposite direction, in a more authoritarian way.

We in this great discussion we just had had a discussion about should a country be under monitoring or not, should we have a more thematic monitoring? This is precisely the reason why we need country monitoring, because we now have a huge conflict – the biggest member of our organisation that are disregarding any minimum standards that we, as an organisation, have. And therefore we also have to take into account what kind of demands we, as an organisation, put forward on our members.

Do we just say: okay, we will need to talk about it, and have these endless discussions on discussions? Or do we also say that decisions have actually... we have to take into action what kind of decisions that are being put forward from the government in our member countries. And in light of the closing of Memorial, we can only speculate that a lot of the few remaining NGOs that are still in Russia, the few independent remaining NGOs, will now be even more hindered in their work.

And therefore we call upon this Assembly to actually raise this issue again and again so we can make sure that the many many citizens of Russia that want to be part of our European values and ideas are not being denied that opportunity. So that is what we from the ALDE Group believe is most important. And we also call upon the government in Russia to make sure the independent NGOs are still able to work in the future.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Michael Aastrup JENSEN.

In the debate I call next Ms Lynn BOYLAN from the Group of the Unified European Left.

You have the floor.

Ms Lynn BOYLAN (Ireland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you.

This morning I would like to raise the right to a clean, safe, and healthy and sustainable environment, which is recognised by the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

There has been much work done calling for binding rules and last year, the former PACE President launched the initiative Environment Right Now.

We know that we're in the midst of a biodiversity crisis, and as well as a climate emergency. Too often the two crises are conflated. We know that biodiversity is exacerbated by climate change, but it is caused by decades of ecocide by governments and large corporations: deforestation, deep-sea mining, oil spills, fracking and plastic pollution are destroying the ecosystems and denying communities their right to a clean, safe and healthy environment.

For too long, those responsible have not been held accountable. Financial penalties are budgeted into corporations' balance sheets, and corporations use their deep pockets to pursue states in corporate courts and to prevent tighter environmental regulations. They also use their financial might to pursue and destroy those who seek to expose their environmental crimes.

We only have to look at the case of Steven Donziger. Donziger is an environmental lawyer who represented farmers and indigenous Ecuadorian communities against the Chevron oil company. He's now being pursued relentlessly by Chevron and is currently under house arrest in New York.

The only way that we can ensure the corporations who commit ecocide are truly held accountable is to make ecocide an international crime and an arrestable offence. A law on ecocide would signal the end of corporate or government immunity.

In June last year, legal experts from across the globe drafted off a historic definition of ecocide. This definition defines it as an unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.

By making ecocide a crime, we would not only uphold the right to a clean environment, but it would also shift the dominant mindset of anthropocentrism that exists, particularly in Western cultures including Europe.

We must move away from the idea that we can control ecosystems and accept that we are dependent on the natural world for our well-being.

I would hope that in the future, at the Council of Europe, we could have debates and progress the campaign to make ecocide a crime, in addition to the Council of Europe's initiative which is the Environment Right Now initiative.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

In the debate I call next to Mr Richard HOLDEN for the United Kingdom.

Mr Richard HOLDEN, you have to request the floor, please.

Mr Richard HOLDEN (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Thank you very much Mr Chairman.

We've heard from some very interesting topics already in the free session today, covering massive international issues but a lot of these have been on relatively divisive issues, I'd suggest, particularly around Ukraine and Russia.

What I wanted to talk about is something that I hope will unite us all across the Council of Europe from all our traditions. It's something that I've been pursuing here in the UK Parliament recently. That's a cause to ban hymenoplasty and virginity testing.

It's often thought that the rights of women – that we've already moved on from that and are already there – but I think it's quite clear that that's not the case. We have shared values and shared human rights across the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe area, but currently some of these rights, particularly relating to women, are not being pursued to the level that we need to get them to. It seems to me that we're still allowing, in many instances, women to be treated as second-class citizens and valued not on who they are, but on what they can provide to others.

One of the things I would like to see us all working to together is a Europe-wide ban on virginity testing and hymenoplasty. The World Health Organization has already spoken out about the the impact that these measures can have on women, both psychological and physical. Those have been heard here in the United Kingdom. We're seeing that legislation go through parliament now. I think it's something that we need to look at on a greater Europe-wide basis.

I also extend that to what I know is a Council of Europe position on increasing the age of marriage to 18 across the board. It's something that here in England and Wales one of my colleagues is putting forward now, a measure to help to ensure that only adults could make those difficult and important life-changing decisions for themselves and their futures.

Those are two steps which on a pan-European basis hopefully we can all come together on, to ensure that the rights of women are still being pushed, because the boundaries at the moment just are not strong enough to protect all those who need it across Europe.

Thank you very much.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Richard HOLDEN.

In the debate I call next Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV from Azerbaijan.

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan, ALDE): Thank you chair, dear colleagues.

On the first working days of January 2022 was declared the "Year of Shusha" by the order of the President of Azerbaijan. This is not just a calendar event, it is not just a matter of one country. This topic has a deep socio-political and economic and, of course, historical and spiritual sense.

Shusha has always been a place of particular value for Azerbaijanis and this city, founded 270 years ago by the great commander and statesman Panakhali Khan, has always been a symbol of Karabakh. The people of Azerbaijan who liberated during the 44-Day War in 2020 their territories occupied for 30 years gained a new official holiday called Victory Day which will be celebrated on 8 November every year. 8 November was not

the day the war ended – on this day, the occupation of Shusha ended. However, the liberation of the symbolic city of Shusha signified for the Azerbaijanis the end of the occupation of Karabakh, and ultimately it happened. This event proves once again that Shusha is not just a city, but a symbolic city, a key city, a symbol of the whole Karabakh.

Today Shusha and Karabakh look like a huge construction site. In general, work is going on here day and night. Such a pace of work is inevitable in order to give new life to the territories destroyed over three decades in a short time, to create favourable conditions for the return of internally displaced persons who have been eager to get back here for 30 years.

In August 2021, I was in those occupied territories. Territories that have been so brutally destroyed can be created solely after the worst nuclear wars. However, there were no battles in those areas at that time, and the population was forcibly expelled from there. It is as if the occupiers have been fighting alone on these lands for 30 years. During the years of occupation of these lands severe fires broke out every year. This was no coincidence. Drugs were regularly cultivated there, along with forming the training camps for terrorists from different countries. These deeds, which took place outside of any international control, ended with the burning of the territories after the harvest.

Now a completely different picture comes to life there. The lands of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation are also becoming a platform for international economic relations and co-operation.

Thus, the "Year of Shusha" in Azerbaijan will always be one of the brightest responses to the dilemma of peace or war, co-operation or confrontation, which always ends in favour of the former!

Thank you so much.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV.

In the debate I call next Ms Maria BUTINA from the Russian Federation. You have the floor.

Ms Maria BUTINA (Russian Federation, NR)*: Dear Assembly members,

I assist citizens of the Russian Federation who have been subject to persecution abroad. They are political prisoners. Unfortunately, there are many of them.

I know what it means to be in prison for political reasons. I spent a year and a half in an American prison. Because of the fact that I was a Russian and a woman, I was treated in a very inhumane manner. I was subject to searches. I had to undress in the presence of other people, including men.

Finally, the prosecution accepted that I was not a Russian spy, but they still left me in prison for a number of years, so I was yet another victim. It is difficult to accept that 76 years after the victory over fascism, people are still subject to that.

When I was in prison, I wrote an appeal to the world community – but that disappeared, it was never published anywhere and it wasn't provided to the people to whom I had sent it.

We have this new reality - there is discrimination against people because of their nationality. The European Convention of Human Rights prohibits discrimination on the basis of nationality, but that still continues to be the case.

Mr Konstantin Nikulin for instance has been in prison for 14 years and he never has been properly charged. Nobody is interested in who the real guilty parties are. He submitted an appeal, a few years ago, to the European Court of Human Rights, and that has been left without any reaction so far.

Then there is the new Lithuanian law that in fact makes it possible to charge Soviet soldiers as Nazi criminals against humanity. There was an incident in which no-one died, nothing terrible happened, it was just a demonstration, and yet an individual involved in that has been in prison for many years now.

We have dozens of such cases. We have people who are in prison – not for criminal activities, but for their nationality, as happened in the thirties and forties – dating just to last year. These political judgements against Russian nationals are becoming a very common occurrence. I do what I can to protect these people.

Please hear my appeal.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Maria BUTINA.

In the debate I call next Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN from Romania. You have the floor.

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

One year after the aggressive war against the Nagorno-Karabakh launched by Azerbaijan, by Turkey and with the engagement of an unprecedented number of mercenaries we are still trying to resolve the conflict by exclusively peaceful means, with the clear understanding that peaceful solutions are alternatives and it is a general obligation of all the parties under the UN Charter and it is also the obligation for Armenia and Azerbaijan as an imperative condition for the membership to this respected organisation.

Unfortunately, in September 2020, this obligation was broken by Azerbaijan leading to war, deaths, casualties and other sufferings of people.

The trilateral statement of 9 November allowed to stop this institutional outreach and due to the involvement of Russian peacekeepers, the relative peace is maintained. But many provisions of the trilateral statement are not fulfilled by Azerbaijan to date. In particular, despite the precise obligation under the Geneva Convention for a lateral statement, Armenian POWs, as well as other captives, are not still not repatriated. Some of them are even convicted in the orchestrated snap trials, and do you know for what they were convicted? For just being Armenians.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would just like to quickly say that among our member states there is a country where being Armenian is a crime. Armenians are demonised. We are demonised and their very physical existence is in danger under the territory of Azerbaijani control. Armenian cultural heritage is deliberately destroyed under Azerbaijani control areas. Is it a victory? Is it corresponding to the international standards? Is it corresponding to the standards of the Council of Europe?

"Addressing Armenia and Azerbaijan relations", Mr Samad SEYIDOV says, I would like to stress answering him that, Mr Samad SEYIDOV, we are always in favour of the normalisation of relations. We are in favour of discussing the limitation and demarcation issues. We are for deblocking all communications, but let's be very fair with each other. No Zangezur corridor exists, no corridor logic is discussed either.

I would just like to just say, ladies and gentlemen, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict emerged even before Armenia and Azerbaijan got independence. Why did I decide to speak on this occasion here? Because, unfortunately, ladies and gentlemen, today here, we have even more alarming developments in this hemicycle, since Azerbaijan is now trying to erase the very notion of Nagorno-Karabakh from each and every place.

I am here to say and say it very loudly that Nagorno-Karabakh exists, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh – with its undeniable collective rights – exists and denial of their resistance is the denial of human rights and denial of democratic values and international law principles.

And last but not least, unfortunately the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is still unresolved and this is reality. And it should be solved in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship in accordance with the norms and principles of general international law.

Thank you very much.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN.

In the debate I call next Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN from Armenia too.

Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN, you need to request the floor please.

Okay, then we move to the next speaker.

In the debate I call next Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI, from Turkey.

Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI (Turkey, ALDE): Thank you, Mr Chair.

We all know George Orwell's famous dystopian *1984*. Much more of what is in the book is being done by the Chinese authorities against the Uyghur Turks today. Big Brother's eye sees every city, every neighbourhood, wherever they live.

You might think it is exaggerated. I'll give you a few examples.

Speaking their mother tongue is forbidden even in schools, where only Uyghurs attend. Students are monitored with microphones in classrooms. A warning is given the first time and a penalty at the second. Since late 1990s, the Uyghur language has been systematically removed from being the language of education.

There is also serious pressure on freedom of religion and belief. There are ID reading devices at the entrance of mosques, and cameras inside. They banned civil servants, workers in industry, service, business sectors, students, teachers and women from going to mosques.

Worst of all, Chinese men are placed in homes of Uyghur women whose spouses are in concentration camps or prisons. Uyghurs have no right to oppose this exercise. Those who oppose are sent to concentration camps. With this inhuman practice, China ignores the privacy of private life, family privacy and women's rights. China aims to forcibly remove Uyghur identity and replace it with something else. It is much more than *1984*, isn't it?

Concerns become fears, fiction becomes reality.

The China Uyghur Autonomous Region Human Rights Report was published in four different languages by Delegation of the European Union on 10 December last year at World Human Rights Day. In this report we have described the concentration camps which the Chinese government denied for years, but had to accept due to the documents and witnesses that emerged afterwards. For millions of Uyghurs are currently held captive. Although the Chinese government describes these camps as "vocational training and re-education camps", these are simply assimilation camps.

In 2010 we gave in this hemicycle a Václav Havel human rights award to Uyghur intellectual and activists Ilham Tohti. In fact, with this award we made a promise to all Uyghurs: we declared that we are against the human tragedy they are going through. What has happened after two years? Mr Tohti is still in prison according to Chinese authorities declarations. As PACE we cannot remain silent any longer. Before it's too late we must consider all necessary options. Uyghurs live their pain far away from Strasbourg. The question is: do they live far away from our consciences too?

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI.

In the debate, I next call Ms Feleknas UCA, from Turkey.

We can't hear you.

Can you switch on...

Okay, now.

Ms Feleknas UCA (Turkey, UEL): Thank you very much, Mister Chairman,

I would like to thank you all very much. I would like to present to you today a topic that is very close to my heart. I would like to talk today about the Yazidis, about Sinjar. The Yazidis were attacked by the Islamic State of IS on 3 August 2014. On 3 August 2014, a massacre was carried out against the Yazidis. Hundreds of thousands of people became refugees, were displaced. Thousands of Yazidi women and children fell into the hands of IS and these women and children, over 7 000, have been sold in various bazaars.

Today we also see that these women are appearing in different countries and have been sold. Over 100 mass graves have been discovered in Sinjar, in Shingal. Still today, out of the 7 000 women who have disappeared, about 2 800 women are still missing. In front of the eyes of the media and the international community, this massacre was carried out against the Yazidis. The people of Sinjar who were exposed to the crimes against humanity have returned to their country to build a new life. While they have formed their self-defense units, built women's councils and started again the new life in Sinjar, they have been exposed to the air raids from Turkey. Again and again Turkish killer drones bomb these self-defense units of the Yazidis, also hospitals

have been bombed and many civilians have become victims. There has never been a threat to the Yazidis against Turkey. Yazidis have never attacked Turkey. What do you want from the Yezidis? Survivors of the Yazidi Genocide have the right to live and rebuild their homes. The least the international community can do is protect them from airstrikes. That is why I am calling for a no-fly zone for Shingal.

Mister Chair, just after Kobane and after Sinjar, we have also seen that these IS attacks on Kobane today are also continuing in Rojava, in Haseke. Just in the last few days, there was a mass breakout attempt from the detention center where foreign IS prisoners are, over 5 000. That showed that there are hidden centers of power that supported them. Weapons, weapons of origin, NATO weapons, have also been discovered among IS fighters. I would like to ask this question here: what are NATO weapons doing in the hands of IS in Rojava? That is why I ask to work on this again. It is the responsibility for all of us to deal with this question.

Yesterday it was Shingal, today it is Kobane. The entire world is threatened by this. I wanted to make that point again here.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Felekna UCA, you were the last speaker in this debate.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): The debate is now closed.

I thank all the contributors to this free debate, which is an essential part of our Session week.

Our next business is to consider the changes proposed in the membership of committees. These are set out in Document Commission's 2022/1 Addendum 2.

Are the proposed changes in the memberships of the committees agree to?

I do not see any objections, so they are agree to.

We now will turn to the progress report of the Bureau. This morning the Bureau has proposed several references to committees. They are set out in progress report Document 15449 Addendum 4. Its references must be submitted for ratification by the Assembly in accordance with Rule 26.3 of the Rules.

Are there any objections against these references?

I do not see any. Therefore, they are approved.

I now propose that the other decisions in the progress report, which is Document 15449 Addendum 4, are to be ratified.

Any objections?

I do not see any. They are approved.

Next business today is to constitute the Standing Committee.

The membership of the Standing Committee is fixed by Rule 17.3 as follows. The President of the Assembly, vice-Presidents of the Assembly, the leaders of the political groups, the Chairpersons of national delegations, and the Chairpersons of the general committees. A full list is set out in Document Commission's 2022/02. The Standing Committee is accordingly constituted.

Dear Colleagues, we now have come to the end of our business.

I would like to thank all the members of the Assembly, and particularly the rapporteurs and the Chairpersons for their hard work, and all the members who participated in all the debates that we had this week, and in the work of our committees, who are so important for us.

I also would like to thank all the vice-presidents who have assisted me by presiding over settings of the Assembly this week. They are Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES, Mr John HOWELL, Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN, Ms Ingjerd SCHOU, Ms Nicole TRISSE, Ms Maja VUKIĆEVIĆ, and Mr Ahmet YILDIZ.

In addition, I would like to thank the staff and the interpreters, both permanent and temporary, who have worked so hard to make the part-session a success.

I would also like to thank the technicians who have made our hybrid proceedings possible.

I wish all those who got ill, who got contaminated by Covid-19, a quick recovery. We need you all people working for us to make the next part-session a success. That next part-session will be held from 25 April to 29 April.

Those who are more experts over here, know that at the end of the sitting I should pay extra compliments to those who participated most in the debates and votes. That is undoable with people being here and being online, because it's easy to be online and to say I participated in all the whole week. We cannot check that. So, we will come back to that good custom when we are meeting here in complete physical performance. Then we will also have the prizes for the number of attendances.

I see that Ms Feleknas UCA wants to take the floor for a point of order, I assume.

Ms Feleknas UCA.

Ms Feleknas UCA (Turkey, UEL): Thank you very much, Mr Chairman,

I would like for the record on the last vote, Amendment 7, I made a mistake there; instead of voting No, I voted Yes by mistake and couldn't change that.

I would ask that that be recorded again in the minutes, please. Instead of Yes, I wanted to vote No.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Dear Ms Feleknas UCA,

We'll take note of that. It does not change the result of the vote, but it's clear that you made a mistake. It's good that you announced it.

We now have come to the end of our business.

I declare the first Assembly session of 2022 of the Council of Europe closed.

The sitting is closed.