



Provisional edition

Monday 14 March 2022, morning

Official report of debates

Opening of the Extraordinary session

Opening of the sitting No. 1

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): I declare open the Special Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Madam Secretary General,

Mr Deputy Secretary General

Madam Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Mr President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to the chamber and online at this special session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

In the early hours of 24 February, by decision of the President of the Russian Federation, the Russian army illegally crossed the border into one of its neighbouring countries, Ukraine, and launched its armed attack against the Ukrainian people and state. Since then, thousands of Ukrainian men and women have been killed or wounded and millions of people have been forced to leave their homes to seek refuge in other parts of the country or abroad.

Would you please stand and observe 1 minute of silence for the victims of this brutal war that should never have started and should stop immediately.

[Minute of silence]

Thank you.

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

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.

By illegally crossing the Ukrainian border, the Russian Federation also crossed the red line of this organisation, which the Council of Europe formulated already in 1949 in its Statute.

Articles 1 and 3 make it obligatory that every member State of the Council of Europe must collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council of Europe, which is to achieve greater unity among the members for the purpose of safeguarding the ideals and principles which are our common heritage.

That is why, our member state Russia, was, within three days after the start of its armed aggression against Ukraine, suspended from its right to be represented in the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe, in this Parliamentary Assembly, and the Committee of Ministers, and later, in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

I thank the Committee of Ministers and its Italian chairmanship, as well as the leaders of our political groups, the chairpersons of our committees, and the leaders of our national delegations, that they were able and willing to act quickly and decisively, in exemplary synergy, together with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at the moment when it was most needed.

Since then, however, the military aggression of the Russian Federation did not halt, but did continue. Due to this, devastating destruction in Ukraine goes on. About two and a half million citizens have already left Ukraine seeking shelter in one of our member States.

May I thank all member States for showing serious solidarity with the citizens of our member State Ukraine by granting these refugees access to their territories and providing them with first aid to make them survive for the time being.

I want to thank the authorities of our member States, as well as their citizens, for showing a concrete solidarity with those who are now seeking shelter.

This weekend I personally witnessed, here in Strasbourg and its surroundings, ordinary people doing their utmost to collect as much direct support as possible.

Dear colleagues, this is heart-warming action. Nevertheless, it is not enough. Much more aid has to be provided by our 46 member States and other states and international organisations today, tomorrow and in the future. International solidarity is needed now, and will be needed in the years to come, as the humanitarian consequences of armed aggression will be immense and will last long.

I know that the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General are working hard to organise more support within their possibilities. I'm sure that they will brief our Assembly later today about our attempts, their difficulties, and their results.

Dear colleagues, as the Russian Federation did listen neither to our calls, nor to those of the rest of the international community, first and foremost the United Nations, further possible action has to be examined. That is why I convened this extraordinary session of our Assembly in which we, representing the remaining 46 member States of the Parliamentary Assembly, will thoroughly investigate the consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine as proposed by the five political groups of our Assembly.

After convening this session I have received a letter from the Chairperson of the Committee of Minister-Deputies, asking our Assembly to give, in accordance with Statutory Obligation 5130, a formal opinion on potential further use of Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

Article 8 says that any Member of the Council of Europe which has seriously violated Article 3 may be suspended from its rights of representation and requested by the Committee of Ministers to withdraw. If such member does not comply with this request, the Committee may decide that it has ceased to be a Member of the Council as from such date the Committee may determine.

Dear colleagues, last Friday, the Bureau of the Assembly, having heard the Presidential Committee's advise, decided to propose to the Assembly to give this statutory opinion, asked for by the Committee of Ministers, during this extraordinary session, on the basis of a report that is now under preparation by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

The Committee has selected our colleague, Ms Ingjerd SCHOU, from Norway, as its rapporteur. I wish the rapporteur and the Committee wisdom in preparing this most relevant opinion which will be distributed later today to all members.

I thank the Committee of Ministers for asking for our opinion in line with the statutory rules that govern our organisation.

Dear colleagues, our debate will have two components.

Today we will get information directly from Ukraine, and from the Committee of Ministers and our Secretary General.

Tomorrow we will debate on the basis of all this and on other available information from draft opinion prepared by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

Our list of speakers will be longer than ever before.

I'm grateful that our Secretary General of the Assembly managed to ensure that tomorrow's debate will already start at 9:30 in the morning and will be able to continue during all day until 8:30 in the evening.

Together with my vice-Presidents, I will do my utmost to allow as many speakers as possible. I hope that you will understand that I will be very strict on the three-minute speaking time in order to allow all speakers to participate in this most important debate where we might have to take decisions which this Assembly until now was never asked to take in the past seven decades.

Dear colleagues, at the end of my opening remarks I would especially welcome the members of the Ukrainian delegation, partly present here, partly connected online from Ukraine. I thank the Ukrainian delegation and its Chairperson, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA, for keeping me updated ever since the beginning of the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, about the consequences this aggression has.

I also thank the Ukrainian authorities, with whom we have been in contact during the past weeks and days.

May I express the hope, on behalf of all of us, that this war will end and peace will come as soon as possible for all Ukrainian colleagues and all citizens of our beleaguered member State Ukraine.

If you share this hope, please stand and applaud for all Ukrainian colleagues.

(Applause)

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Now, the first item on the agenda is the examination of credentials of new members.

The names of new representatives and substitutes are in Doc. 15473. If no credentials are challenged, the credentials will be ratified.

Are any credentials challenged?

That is not the case.

Therefore, I declare that the credentials set out in Doc 15473 are ratified. Then I welcome our new colleagues.

The next item on the Agenda is to consider the changes proposed in the membership of the Assembly's committees. These are set out in document Commissions (2022) 03.[1]

Are these proposals approved?

I see no objections. The changes proposed in the membership of the Assembly's committees are agreed to.

The next item on the Agenda is to consider the references to committees proposed by the Bureau for ratification by the Assembly in accordance with Rule 26.3 of the Rules. These references are set out in document AS/Info (2022) 08.

Are there any objections to these references?

As I do not see any, the references are approved.

Before we examine the draft Agenda, the Assembly needs to consider a request for a debate under urgent procedure.

The Bureau has received a request for a debate under urgent procedure on "Consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine" on behalf of the five political groups.

At its meeting on 11 March, the Bureau took note of the Ministers' Deputies' Decision of 10 March 2022 on the Consequences of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and of the request by the Committee of Ministers, under Statutory Resolution (51)30, to consult the Parliamentary Assembly "on potential further use of Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe".

The Bureau therefore decided to recommend to the Assembly to hold the debate on "Consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine" and to consider and adopt within this debate the Assembly's Opinion, requested by the Committee of Ministers under Statutory Resolution (51)30.

We will now consider the request for a debate under urgent procedure.

The Assembly needs to consider the request submitted by the five political groups for a debate under the urgent procedure on "Consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine".

At its meeting on Friday the Bureau approved this request, and therefore recommends to the Assembly that the matter be debated during this extraordinary session on Tuesday morning, with the debate continuing in the afternoon.

Does the Assembly agree to this recommendation?

I do not see any objection. Therefore, the Bureau's recommendation is accepted and the request for urgent procedure is therefore approved.

I propose that the topic of the debate we have just agreed be referred to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for report.

Is this agreed?

I don't see any objection. There reference is agreed to.

The next item of business is the adoption of the agenda for the 2022 Extraordinary Session (Doc. 15462 prov2). The draft agenda submitted for the Assembly's approval was drawn up by the Bureau on 25 February and updated on 11 March.

The Assembly has agreed to hold a debate under urgent procedure tomorrow and the deadline of amendments will be 8:00 p.m. this evening. The deadline for sub-amendments will be Tuesday morning 10:30 a.m. The Bureau proposes that movers of amendments limit their presentation to 30 seconds.

Does the Assembly agree with the Agenda as we have discussed?

It is agreed to.

If you allow me to inform you that we have a change to the agenda as President Zelenskyy, whom I invited to participate in this session, has informed me that, due to very urgent unforeseen circumstances, he will not be able to address our Assembly now. Instead, he has asked the Prime Minister of Ukraine to speak on his behalf.

I propose that we take note of this message. We have full understanding that the president of Ukraine is now under such time constraints that he could not make it at this moment.

I mean, we are eager to listen to the speech of the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Mr Denys SHMYHAL later this morning.

Dear Madam Secretary General of the Assembly, do you have any additional comments on the organisation of the debates today?

Is the Prime Minister of Ukraine now available?

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, now it's my honour to welcome his excellency Mr Denys Shmyhal, the Prime Minister of Ukraine.

Mister Prime Minister, we are very happy and honoured that you could join us virtually today. We can just imagine that you have time constraints, so I will not take long.

I would like to express on behalf of this Assembly my heartfelt solidarity to you, your country, and your citizens. This morning, at the opening of this extraordinary session, we observed a minute of silence and memory of the victims of this unjust war which should never have happened and we should now stop immediately. The moments you and your citizens are living through are devastating due to the brutal military aggression of our Member State Russia against Ukraine.

For this blatant violation of the Statute of the Council of Europe, Russia has been suspended from its right of representation in the Council of Europe.

Our extraordinary session will further discuss the consequences of the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and formulate, as we just decided, the statutory opinion at the request of the Committee of Ministers.

Mister Prime Minister, may I please give you the floor.

As you may understand, getting connection at this moment with our beleaguered member State is not that easy, so I ask you for some minutes to wait.

[long pause]

Dear colleagues, there are problems in the communication, but we have now made contact with Ukraine. The Prime Minister will now be able to be available at 4:00 p.m., so we reschedule our agenda to start at 4:00 with our next meeting: first Prime Minister of Ukraine, then the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, and then our Secretary General. Sorry for this change in our schedule. We have to be aware that we are talking here about a country that is under aggression, and it's not possible to schedule everything in a smooth way immediately.

I would like you to be back here at 4:00 to listen to the speech of the Prime Minister of Ukraine.

Until then the session is adjourned.