



Provisional edition

Monday 20 June 2022, morning

Official report of debates

Opening of the part-session

Opening of the sitting No. 17

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): I declare the third part-session of the 2022 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe open.

Please take your seats, dear colleagues.

Madam Secretary-General of the Assembly, ambassadors, members of the Assembly, guests in the gallery. Welcome and thanks to all of you who have joined us in Strasbourg for the first session since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic held in an in-person format.

I am very pleased we are all moving back to normal practises, which we all missed in the past two years.

However, let us never forget that this deadly pandemic took the lives of two million of our European citizens. Their relatives and friends deserve our sincere condolences. Let's be aware that we are still not sure whether it has ended yet. Let us therefore stay vigilant.

Dear colleagues,

I wish to extend a special welcome to our colleagues from the Ukrainian delegation, who are here today with us despite the challenging time Ukraine lives through.

I also welcome those Ukrainian Assembly members who stayed back home and are connected with us in this meeting remotely.

Dear colleagues,

While we meet here in sunny and peaceful Strasbourg, we should never forget that at this very moment there is a brutal war going on nearby in which people die, get injured, are maltreated, are chased away from their homes, and even from their country, every day.

This horrible war should never become a normality for us – we should defy any temptation to get used to it. Instead, we should continue to do our utmost to help end the suffering of the Ukrainian people and continue to demonstrate our solidarity in all effective and meaningful manners.

In this report:

1. Speeches in English, French, German and Italian are reported in full in English.
2. Speeches in other languages are summarised from the interpretation and indicated by an asterisk (*).
3. Speeches in German and Italian are available in full on the Assembly's website.
4. The text of the amendments is available at the document centre and on the Assembly's website. Only oral amendments or oral sub-amendments are reproduced in the report of debates.
5. Corrections should be handed in at Room 1081 not later than 24 hours after the report has been published.

I once again call on the Russian authorities – the president, the government, the parliament, and all Russian citizens to immediately end this war of aggression against our member state, Ukraine.

There is not a single reason to continue this war, which should never have been started.

Therefore I now wish to invite again, for a moment of silence for all those big numbers of victims of war on our continent.

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Dear colleagues,

At our April session, many of you called for continued involvement and solidarity of our organisation regarding the war in Ukraine.

I would like to thank the Secretary General and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe for all their efforts in this regard and for their fact-finding visit to Ukraine.

I also welcome the decision to send a sub-committee of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to Ukraine at short notice. Preparations are underway.

I would like to stress that our concrete solidarity and support for the Ukrainian citizens and state must be accompanied by a thorough reflection on how this war became possible, what we did not do to prevent it and how we can not only stop it but also take the necessary steps to avoid wars on our continent in the future.

I think it is fair to say that the multilateral system we have in Europe has failed to prevent the war of aggression against Ukraine. There are many organisations whose ultimate goal was to prevent war and preserve peace on the continent: the UN, the OSCE, NATO, the European Union and, of course, the Council of Europe. But all of them have collectively failed in this objective.

We must now ask ourselves what went wrong and how to strengthen our multilateral architecture and rebuild it in an effective and sustainable manner.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues, clearly we now have a unique momentum to reconstruct and to improve this architecture.

Rephrasing the words of the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi who said, during his visit to Ukraine last week together with the presidents of France and Romania and the Chancellor of Germany: "we are living in the times of destruction, but also of hope." The war united people in Europe and we can now do what seemed impossible before that war. The way we reacted to Russia's blatant violation of its obligations immediately, decisively and in an exemplary synergy is an example of this.

Last week, the European Commission delivered its proposal of applications for candidature stages by Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. This week, the leaders of governments of EU member states will take their decision, which has then to be approved by all EU member states. Whatever the decision, it is clear that eventual accession to these and other states to the EU will take a long period. And whatever the decision the EU takes, the Council of Europe as the continent's oldest and broadest free organisation will remain most relevant and be part of an effective sustainable and modern answer to the challenging questions of today and tomorrow with its 46 member states.

I welcome the decision of the Council of Europe's ministerial meeting in Turin in May, where I had the honour to represent the Assembly to express unanimous support to the proposal of the Secretary General on the quick organisation of the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member states. The first summit since 2005, 17 years ago.

I understand, Madam Secretary General, that the work to prepare the summit is already underway and that the Secretary General has composed a special reflection group of wise persons. We will hear more about this, I assume, from the Secretary General and from the Chair of the Committee of Ministers during the week.

Dear colleagues, I believe that our Assembly, as the political engine of this organisation should and could play its own role in this process. You will recall that the Assembly expressed its strong support to the organisation of a summit already several years ago. We also formulated clearly our vision on the Council of Europe which has to remain the pillar of democratic security in Europe, the guarantor of human rights and the rule of law, a platform of general multilateralism and an independent form of comprehensive and inclusive political dialogue.

The Assembly's report on the Fourth Summit is now under preparation in the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, and during this session we will already examine the report on "Recent challenges to security in Europe: what role for the Council of Europe?" which will be followed by a high-level panel on upholding democratic security in Europe. In this panel, the foreign ministers from Ireland and Finland will participate alongside with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe as well as the leader of the Belarus opposition, Madam Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

You are very warmly invited to participate in this panel discussion tomorrow.

Besides these debates, there will be many more subjects to be debated this week including:

- Ensuring accountability for the downing of flight MH17
- A joint debate on the humanitarian consequences and internal and external migration in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, protection and alternative care for unaccompanied and separated migrant and refugee children, and justice and security for women in peace reconciliation
- A report on preventing and combating antisemitism in Europe
- A report on the role of political parties in fostering diversity and inclusion
- And a joint debate on the continuing need to restore human rights and the rule of law in the North Caucasus region and political prisoners in the Russian Federation.

We will welcome several guests, including the King of the Netherlands Willem-Alexander and the president of the Hellenic Republic Madam Katerina Sakellaropoulou.

Finally, we will now return to usual practices, from the time before the Covid-19 pandemic.

I'm happy to announce that side events will also be held during the session. Furthermore, two exhibitions will be open today and tomorrow in the lobby of the hemicycle. One exhibition called "Listen" by the Sarajevo War Childhood Museum organised by the office of the Council of Europe Commission for Human Rights. It will present personal belongings and stories of children from Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo, as well as experiences of child refugees from Afghanistan and Syria, with a view to improving our understanding of children's experiences in armed conflicts.

The second exhibition, by the Ukrainian delegation, will focus on dangerous, courageous and important work of journalists during the war in Ukraine.

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

I am counting on your active participation in the debates of this week's session, which has a busy but also important and interesting agenda.

I invite you to get down to work now, knowing that we can all count on the committed support of our staff, our interpreters and all the other people who make our lives easier and our work possible.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Then the first item on the Agenda is the examination of credentials of new members. The names of the representatives and substitutes are in Document 1551. If no credentials are challenged, the credentials will be ratified.

As I see no objection, they are ratified.

I welcome our new colleagues.

The next item on our Agenda is the Election of Vice-Presidents of the Assembly in respect of Malta and Portugal. The two candidates are from the Maltese delegation: Ms Naomi CACHIA and from the Portuguese delegation: Ms Edite ESTRELA.

If there is no request for a vote, and I don't see any, Ms Naomi CACHIA and Ms Edite ESTRELA will be declared elected and I congratulate them.

Our next business is to consider the changes proposed in the membership of committees. They are set out in Document Commissions 2022 06 and Addendum. Then are the proposed changes in the membership of the Assembly's committees agreed to? I do not see any objections so they are agreed to.

Dear colleagues, before we examine the draft agenda the Assembly needs to consider a request for debates on the current affairs procedures. I remind the assembly that under Resolution 2350, the Assembly may now hold up to two current affairs debates in a part-session.

The Bureau has received the following: a request for a current affairs debate on the Consequences of the blockade of the Black Sea, requested by the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

The second request for a current affairs debate on the United Kingdom agreement on asylum seekers and the critical government reaction regarding the European Court of Human Rights decision was requested by the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

And the third request for a current affairs debate on Türkiye's aggressive behaviour and the threat of revisionism for European stability requested by the Group of the European People's Party.

We now come to the request for current affairs debate on the Consequences of the blockade of the Black Sea. At its meeting this morning, the Bureau agreed to recommend to the Assembly that this request be rejected. Does the Assembly agree to this recommendation?

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER.

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Mr President, thank you very much, indeed.

I would like to bring this back onto the floor of the Plenary Session, Mr President. I think this is such an important debate which is putting people's lives at risk. We cannot get food out. It's affecting Africa. It's affecting Europe. The United Nations has made it very clear this is a humanitarian disaster in the making. There are 700 ships off Odessa at the moment waiting to get food out. We cannot do it.

This organisation should be ahead of the curve, Mr President. It should not be behind the curve and it perturbs you when large countries here feel that this is not important.

I would urge you, Mr President, to bring this back, so we can vote on it in the Plenary Session to allow people to justify why they do not think that food security across the world is important.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER.

As I informed you, the Bureau is against.

The Assembly will now vote on the Bureau's recommendation not to hold a current affairs debate on the Consequences of the blockade of the Black Sea.

I remind the Assembly that the decision requires a simple majority. Those who agree with the proposal of the Bureau not to hold a current affairs debate on this topic should vote 'YES'. Those who are opposed to the Bureau's recommendation should vote 'NO'.

The vote is open now.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

There are 39 votes in support of the Bureau's proposal, there are 46 votes opposing it, and 9 abstentions.

That means that this current affairs debate will take place.

A point of order, Mr Frank SCHWABE.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC): First, I understand that you need a certain majority to change the decision of the Bureau.

Second, there was no possibility to speak against, no?

It is not foreseen to have a...? The problem is just that I think we have to explain before we decide on something why we vote in this direction, no? At the end we can have maybe 20 current affairs debates, but this would mean that we don't have space for the usual debates. And I think the colleagues are not aware of it. And this was the reason, I'm not against this discussion but at the end we have to choose a limitation or we have to limit our discussion. If this is the reason, I would like to know that you can clarify this.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister SCHWABE.

I did inform the Assembly that we can have a maximum of two current affairs debates and that there are three proposals. That is that the Assembly was informed about that. I did inform the Assembly that the Bureau had advised not to hold a current affairs debate on this issue. Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER spoke against that decision of the Bureau. Then I put it to the vote. The result is now that the majority, a simple majority, is required to change the decision of the Bureau. The simple majority is acquired. There are 46 people opposing the decision of the Bureau, so we have to hold the current affairs debate. These are the rules and this is my interpretation of the rules.

I now come to the second request. Again, we have three requests and we only have the possibility to accommodate a maximum of two. Now we come to the request for a current affairs debate on the United Kingdom agreement on asylum seekers and the critical government reaction regarding the ECHR decision. At the meeting this morning, the Bureau approved this request and, therefore, recommends to the Assembly that the matter be debated during this past session. Thus, the Assembly agreed to this recommendation.

I first give for a point of order Mr Frank SCHWABE the floor. Then I give Mr John HOWELL the floor to speak against the proposal of the Bureau.

Mister SCHWABE,

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC): A point of order, I just want to argue in favour.

I think we have to elaborate this whole procedure in the Presidential Committee because I think it's not clear what the situation is. Let's imagine if we had four or five proposals – what does it mean? We vote in favour of the first two, and nobody is aware that the last three are following. So we really have to check it.

But I for sure would like to speak in favour, to have the current affairs debate on the agreement on asylum seekers between the United Kingdom and Rwanda, and for sure the criticism from the British government.

It was not a private position – it was the Minister of the Interior who spoke about the scandalous decision by the court, and I think we cannot accept this so I ask you to follow the decision of the Bureau of the Assembly.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

As said, the Bureau is in favour to hold this debate.

Mr John HOWELL wants to oppose the proposal of the Bureau.

Mr John HOWELL, you have the floor.

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

I object to the current affairs debate number two.

Politicians come and go. Some say silly things but there has been no reaction from the UK government over this matter and what has happened is that the ECHR ruling has been accepted and we have moved on. This is a non-story and a non-debate.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr John HOWELL.

We now will proceed to vote on the proposal on the proposal of the Bureau to hold this current affairs debate on the United Kingdom agreement on asylum seekers and the critical government reaction regarding the European Court of Human Rights decision.

If you support the decision of the Bureau you vote 'YES'. If you oppose the decision of the Bureau you vote 'NO'.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed. May I ask for the results to be displayed?

The proposal of the Bureau to hold this current affairs debate is adopted. That means as the Assembly now has agreed to hold two current affairs debates in the part-session no further request will be considered.

I have to say that Mr Frank SCHWABE is proposed to introduce the second current affairs debate. There has to be a proposal for the first current affairs debate. Can I propose that Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER or Mr John HOWELL introduces?

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA): We're getting a name now Mr President and I'll pass it to the Table Office in 30 seconds, if I may. I'll confirm who it is with you Mr President as well.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): I think we can we accept a 30 seconds delay.

So these two debates will take place. We will hear later from our Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly how we are going to organise that.

The next item of business is the adoption of the agenda for the third part session of our 2022 Ordinary Session.

You'll find it in Document 15522, provisional.

The draft agenda submitted for the Parliamentary Assembly's approval was brought up to date by the Bureau of the Assembly this morning.

I remind members that we have just agreed the current affairs debates set out in the draft before you. The current affairs debate will take place this afternoon, but I leave it to the Secretary General to tell us when it will take place.

Madam Secretary General.

Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU-TSOVILIS (Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe): Well, Mr President, as we have now changed the decision of the Bureau of the Assembly, I think we will leave the slots as they were agreed.

So we will have – I would suggest that we have – as we agreed, the first current affairs debate and see this on the agenda.

Instead of the second current affairs debate on the aggressive behaviour of Türkiye, we take the current affairs debate that was approved just now, about the blockade of the Black Sea.

So in this way we changed a minimum the agenda proposed by the Bureau of the Assembly.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Madam Secretary General.

Can the agenda now be agreed upon? That is the case.

I was just informed that Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO will open the current affairs debate on the blockade.

Then we have the minister of the meeting of the Standing Committee in Dublin on the 31 May. They have been distributed. I invite the Assembly to take note of these minutes. No objection.

The next item on the Agenda is the debate on the progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee. You find it in Document 15550 and Addendum 1 and 2 presented by Mr Aleksander POCIEJ.

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, where are you?

This will be combined for the consideration of the report. Can I ask you Mr Aleksander POCIEJ to come to the front of the Hemicycle to present it here?

This progress report will be combined with the consideration of the report of the ad hoc committee of the Bureau on the observation of the presidential and early parliamentary elections in Serbia also presented by Mr Aleksander POCIEJ.

The debate must conclude by 1 p.m. I will therefore interrupt the list of speakers at around 12:50 p.m.

I remind members that speaking time is three minutes.

I now call Mr Aleksander POCIEJ to present the progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee and also to present the report of the ad hoc committee on the Bureau on the Observation of the early parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia. Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, dear Aleksander, you have 10 minutes in total to present the report and you will have five minutes to reply to the debate.

You have the floor.

Debate: Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you very much Mr President,

Dear colleagues,

I'm very pleased to present to you the latest progress report of the Bureau of the Assembly and Standing Committee of our Parliamentary Assembly, covering the period from April to June 2022.

During the reporting period, our Parliamentary Assembly has of course decided to pursue its discussion of the consequences of the Russian Federation's continued aggression against Ukraine by seizing our Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy to prepare a report on the political consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine.

The agenda of our current part-session this week is also highly relevant – not least of our high level panel on Upholding Democratic Security in Europe, as well as the debate on Recent Challenges to Security in Europe: What Role for the Council of Europe?

For very obvious reasons this remains on top of our agenda.

The Standing Committee in Dublin held a current affairs debate towards a fourth summit for a renewed, improved and reinforced Council of Europe: the way forward.

Assembly members expressed their strong support for the organisation of a fourth Council of Europe summit, which would bring together the heads of states or governments of all member states to renew, improve and reinforce the organisation at a time of dramatic changes in Europe.

Such a summit should be well prepared and would be the opportunity to undertake proud reflection on how to reinforce democratic security on the continent.

At its meeting on 30 May 2022, and in anticipation of the actual debate by the Standing Committee, the Bureau of the Assembly already seized the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy to prepare a report on a fourth summit for a renewed, improved and reinforced Council of Europe.

Assembly and Committee of Ministers representatives are discussing, and will continue to discuss, the follow-up to the ministerial session in Turin.

The idea of a fourth summit will be part of our discussion.

Let me recall that our Assembly has long been in favour of this organisation of this fourth summit. Now seems more than ever the right time to do so.

During the reporting period, the Bureau of the Assembly also examined some of the additional working methods brought about in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic as alternatives to ordinary procedures. As a matter of fact, procedures and practices applied during the last two years have led to a modernisation of the Assembly's functioning and, in many respects, to improvements.

Some of those procedures had already been called for by the members before the pandemic. The Bureau of the Assembly decided to introduce on a permanent basis those arrangements which bring an added value to the Assembly's procedures. The Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs has been seized to examine possible amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.

The Bureau of the Assembly also took note of two new initiatives of our Assembly committees: a network of contact parliamentarians for a healthy environment which is chaired by our former president of the Assembly, Mr Rik DAEMS, and the parliamentary platform for the rights of LGBT people in Europe, chaired by our general rapporteur on the rights of LGBT people. Both will launch their activities this week.

I could also mention many other activities carried by the Bureau of the Assembly and the Standing Committee, including election observation in Serbia, but this will come a little bit later.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, for your presentation.

I have to tell that Mr Aleksander POCIEJ is being assisted by Ms Isild HEURTIN who's sitting behind Mr Aleksander POCIEJ.

I have to inform the Assembly that Ms Isild HEURTIN is back on track since the 1 June, after having given birth to a beautiful son who has enriched her family.

So, welcome back Ms Isild HEURTIN.

Now I open the floor.

Yes, it should be especially the men who should applaud because it's not so easy thing to give birth to a child.

Now, I open the floor for the speakers and the first on my list is Ms Petra BAYR on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Ms Petra BAYR you have the floor.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to start where Mr Aleksander POCIEJ ended at the Serbian election observation, where I would like to share some really concrete concerns with you and share some main points of criticism. Three of them are more general, which is, first of all, the access to media, which is very uneven and we saw that especially with the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The party of the president had the vast majority of time and media, especially TV, which is the main source of information for people. And the opposition, in general, says that it barely had any possibility to give information about their programmes, about their ideas and that was obviously not a very fair competition. And even the media failed to play their watchdog function in this regard.

The second concern is about the financing of election campaigns and we know that we have a long process moderated by the European Union where opposition parties were also very involved. We have new legislation on financing for elections, but obviously, these new regulations failed to meet the goal because there is still the new legislation [which] does not provide sufficient safeguarding against the misuse of administrative resources during the election campaign.

Third, we hear a lot of concerns that a lot of pressure was put on people, who are working for the government, or public employees, that they were forced to vote for SNS, for the president's party, and not only that they themselves were put pressure around the vote for them, they are very obliged to bring other voters, the higher in the hierarchy they were, the more voters they had to swear to bring to vote for the ruling party.

And also would like to share some irregularities through the voting day. A lot of family voting, especially women, did not often have the possibility to vote on their own in the booths. There were members of the polling ports entering the polling stations alone with two or three of them helping people with the polls. There were pictures taken from ballot papers, we assume to prove that they voted for this or for that party and to buy

votes in the very end. And what is also of concern is that many, many voting stations were not accessible for people with disabilities. When you sit in a wheelchair, you rarely had the possibility to cast your vote. Also, for those voters from Kosovo, which in former elections had the possibility to vote in Kosovo and then the ballots were brought to Serbia, this time were brought by buses to Serbia to vote there which cost huge crowds in front of the polling stations.

So to conclude, first of all, early elections should not become the norm and second, there is obviously a further need for reforms and implementation and we hope that there will be a very close co-operation with the Venice Commission in this regard.

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Petra BAYR.

Next on the list is Mr Pablo HISPÁN from Spain and he speaks on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group)*: Thank you very much Mr President,

From my group, the Group of the European People's Party, the first thing that we have to do of course is support the report of Mr Aleksander POCIEJ and also the various comments that have been made by Ms Petra BAYR with regards to the elections in Serbia.

I'd like to focus on three things: on the fourth summit for renovation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I think change is extremely important and indeed several European organisations are going through a similar process: the European Union, with the conference on the future of Europe, and NATO. Countries are trying to align at this time of the invasion of Ukraine, which was the catalyst.

This organisation has made extremely important decisions in recent months: it expelled Russia. It is in a process of revising the policies that are in place right now. As regards Russia, it is necessary for us to look with greater depth into this issue, look at the role of interference that Russia plays in a number of our democracies, infiltration in other words of our democracies as well. This Assembly has to make very difficult decisions, which started to be implemented during the Covid pandemic; there was a great reaction. We are confident this summit will go ahead and achieve the necessary results.

As concerns the invasion of Ukraine, as I said the Parliamentary Assembly must continue to adopt the necessary measures. The matter of joining Europe is being debated in Ukraine and we must continue putting political pressure and supporting the country. Also as Ms Petra BAYR said, the elections in Serbia now are a very concerning issue for Europe. It is a key country in the Balkans and on our continent, and we want to make sure that democratic procedures are adhered to in that country, particularly under the circumstances which exist right now. This is critical for Europe, at this ever so crucial moment for the continent, once again.

So I do feel that we have to continue to put pressure on, adopt measures, and be extremely vigilant as concerns elections of this nature, and once again my group fully supports Mr Aleksander POCIEJ's report.

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Pablo HISPÁN.

Now next on the list is Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER from the United Kingdom and he speaks on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

You have the floor, Ian.

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Mr President, thank you. Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, thank you.

I think we've got to look at progress about what we achieve as an organisation.

We are now talking about having a fourth seminar, fourth conference about the future. But the future can only be set by the lessons of the past and one of the battles we're fighting now is for the very soul of Europe. At the moment we have a ghastly situation in the Ukraine.

We, as Europe's parliamentarians, must stand up against tyranny, we must stand up against non-democratic organisations, we must stand up for the members of this place. And if we want to make progress into the future and have conferences about deciding where we go and what we stand for, we must get our priorities right. And I wonder if they're right, because the whole idea of the Council of Europe is to stand for democracy, but yet we spend so much of our time just looking at ourselves, writing another report, another boring report.

That doesn't make any sense and people ignore it. No country takes any notice of this. No country will stand up and say, gosh, that was a good report. We don't get that. Surely the future and the way that we should make progress is by using the very best of what we've got, which is us, the parliamentarians, to take forward what matters. I've just spoken and I'm delighted and I greatly thank colleagues for supporting the debate on the Black Sea.

One of the very fundamental rights we have is for food, it's just the most basic thing you can have. Yet here we are looking at other debates which are not the core business. The core business is for us to defend the people, not just of Europe, of the world. These are not my words, these are the UN's.

We have a massive role to play. Our legitimacy as an organisation is not in doubt, but I do sometimes feel the fear for the future of our organisation, for what we stand for, what makes us really go above other organisations. And that is where I have a worry.

Mr President, I know you're doing your best with this and I know we've not always agreed, but I do agree with you on this, that we need to think where we're going and we need to make decisions that will take us forward. And I would actually plead with all of you to say this: that we have turned our back in the past, not sometimes on our generation, on former generations, it has always ended badly. If this place is to have a relevance in the future we must never turn our backs. We must stick to what matters, which is the defence of people, the defence of their rights and the defence of democracy.

I support this. Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER.

The next speaker is Mr Jacques MAIRE, from France, on behalf of the ALDE Group.

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Dear President.

Of course, thanks to Mr Aleksander POCIEJ for his excellent report.

The context is totally marked by the appalling Russian aggression in Ukraine. From this point of view, there are many sources of concern, but there is also a source of hope. This is what was effectively decided a few days ago by the European Commission when it proposed the status of candidate for Ukraine, for Georgia and for the Republic of Moldova.

I believe that, in this context, it is not our institution, but we must be pleased with this development. We must also be pleased when four leaders, four important leaders – the French, the German, the Italian and the Romanian – come to Kyiv to confirm this commitment with President Zelensky himself. This is all the more important because the situation on the front line is bad; on the migration front, on the humanitarian front, terrible things are happening, and in Russia, too.

I believe that just because Russia is no longer a member of this Assembly does not mean that we should not talk about the situation in Russia. From this point of view, the legislation adopted by President Putin in the last few weeks is having a dramatic effect, including when it comes to charging people with criticism of the Russian armed forces. Today, 15 000 people are imprisoned; today, nearly 3 000 administrative proceedings are underway; 58 criminal proceedings are themselves, I would say, underway against people who have done nothing more than tell the truth, namely that there is a war being waged by Russia in Ukraine. Let's not forget them.

I am very happy to have with us today the wife of Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is not only a lawyer and a defender of human rights but also a politician. In relation to this, one of the challenges that we will have to deal with in the coming months, concerning our summit, is the fact of knowing how we can obviously help the victim States, but how we can also remain relevant with regard to these populations whose States no longer

play the game with us within the Council of Europe, but whose many political, associative, institutional or other actors nevertheless wish to use the Council of Europe's platform once again as an instrument for the defence of their rights.

This is one of the great challenges we will have to face. I hope that, to do so, our Assembly will be there.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Jacques MAIRE.

Next on my list is Mr Andrej HUNKO from Germany and he speaks on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Andrej, you have the floor.

Mr Andrej HUNKO (Germany, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Miste President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The progress report always offers the opportunity to reflect, to think about the situation we are in. If we now look back at the last few months and look forward, then this terrible war in Ukraine, Russia's withdrawal - or actually the previous withdrawal of Russia from the Council of Europe and now also from the Court of Justice is a very serious setback overall. It has to be said: not progress, but a setback.

One hundred and forty, one hundred and fifty million people are no longer under the jurisdiction of the European Convention on Human Rights. That is a major problem although we as an Assembly and the Council of Europe as a whole, I think, have reacted very quickly and very clearly. It leads to the fact that there are also problems in other areas of the Convention on Human Rights, which are then perhaps no longer perceived in the same way, because people are now also looking primarily at this war. I'm thinking of the fact that the judgment, for example, in the case of Osman Kavala has still not been implemented. There is also no progress on the judgment of Selahattin Demirtaş.

By the way, we still do not have the accession of the European Union to the Convention on Human Rights. We also have these statements that are now leading to the "current affairs" debate from Great Britain. These are all difficult developments. That's why the Left Group supports the idea of a fourth summit of the Council of Europe – the fourth in the history of the Council since 1949 – because I believe it's time to re-organise and regroup in this changed situation.

The progress report. We also look back at the elections that took place. We were in Serbia. Some things have been said, including difficulties. I would also like to say a few positive things. I think it is important to mention this: the blockade has been overcome in Serbia. There was a non-participation of the opposition before, but we also share what is written in the report on the elections.

A quick note. I myself was a member of the pre-election delegation and was also there on election day. For some reason I was left off the list. Therefore, I ask the secretariat to correct that. There is no name for the Left Group at the moment. That is wrong.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Mister Andrej HUNKO, we will check your remark. This concludes the contribution on behalf of the political groups.

We did forget in the presentation by Mr Aleksander POCIEJ to address as well the election observation because you did both. You are our rapporteur on the progress report but also on the observation of the presentation elections. I give you 3 minutes, Aleksander, to address the elections in Serbia so that if others want to react. Then at the end, you will have your time to react on both issues.

You have the floor, Aleksander.

Debate: Observation of the presidential and early parliamentary elections in Serbia (3 April 2022)

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you, indeed. I did not know that I should do both at the same time.

Yes, our delegation was composed of 25 people. We, as usual, co-operated with ODIHR and OSCE and the European Parliament Mission. Once again, I have to express our gratitude to the members of the Venice Commission. They are always very useful, they are helpful and they are providing us with many, many very good observations.

Indeed, as the Assembly, we only observed one election in Serbia, 2020, Covid-19 situation. And indeed, this is worrying a little bit, this culture of early elections.

This is not really in line with the aim of democracy. Of course, this is in the frame of law but this is not really something which can help democracy. There is no doubt that this pre-electoral period was marked by many irregularities and, generally speaking, the misuse of the public funds and what was many times underlined by the opposition, there was no equal access to the media.

The whole process and the whole election time was overshadowed by the Russian aggression against Ukraine and somehow like in many countries, this topic was so important that people did not have enough time for the election.

But I must say that the day of the election, from my perspective and the majority of our colleagues who observed, was smooth and we did not notice so many irregularities.

I know, and Ms Petra BAYR was speaking about this, but out of the 25 people, only a few reported irregularities. So from this perspective, I must say it was a democratic choice.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, and sorry for not warning you in your first term to also address this report.

Now we continue with the list of speakers.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): The next speaker is Mr Christian KLINGER from France, on behalf of the EPP Group.

Mr Christian KLINGER (France, EPP/CD): Miste President,

Dear Colleagues,

On 3 April last, presidential elections were held in Serbia. I had the honor to be part of the ad hoc committee of our Assembly, which went there. I congratulate our colleague Mr Aleksander POCIEJ for his report, which gives a perfect account of the conduct of these elections.

The previous parliamentary elections, in June 2020, were boycotted by the majority of the opposition.

This time the elections in April allowed all parties to participate. Voters were thus offered a diverse range of political options. However, voter turnout remained low at 59 per cent, and politicians need to work to increase it in the future.

This observation is not specific to Serbia. In view of the legislative elections held yesterday in France, we will not escape a debate on the participation of citizens in our democracy either.

Returning to Serbia, while it was concluded that fundamental freedoms were largely respected on election day, long-standing difficulties remain.

Current legislation does not provide sufficient safeguards to prevent the use of public resources to benefit a candidate. Public officials clearly misused public resources to support ruling coalition candidates. There were also several credible reports of pressure on public officials to support the ruling coalition.

In addition, most opposition representatives cited the lack of opportunity to present their views in the public and private broadcast media. Journalists are sometimes forced to self-censor, if not pressured.

Finally, campaign finance rules are not fully transparent: the amount of campaign spending is not sufficiently controlled to ensure that the ceiling is respected. Corruption remains one of the major problems in Serbia. It will be imperative for the authorities in power to fight this phenomenon to ensure fairness in the upcoming elections.

After ten years in power, the challenges for President-elect Aleksandar Vučić are numerous. In addition to the fight against corruption, he will have to propose reforms related to media freedom and judicial independence to avoid a new boycott of democratic institutions by the opposition. The Council of Europe will have to help Serbia make progress on these issues.

Finally, although Serbia is a candidate country for membership in the European Union, it is nonetheless attached to Russia, with which it has a historical relationship. Tensions between Russia and the European Union over the war in Ukraine should not complicate or delay democratic progress in Serbia. This is obviously a point of attention for all of us.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Christian KLINGER.

Next speaker on our list is Mr Zsolt NÉMETH from Hungary.

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH, you have the floor.

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH (Hungary, EC/DA): First of all, relating to Serbia, I would like to congratulate the free, democratic and successful elections of our Serbian colleagues.

I would like to welcome the speaker of the Serbian Parliament among us, Mr Ivica DAČIĆ.

I would like to welcome also Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, the head of the Serbian delegation.

And congratulations to you, Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, for both reports.

Dear colleagues,

We all are now obsessed with the tragedy of the war. I think it is right to be so.

100 plus, some say even 1,000 dead a day, but it is really compelling and really shocking to all of us, not to speak about the geo-economic consequences for Europe and the globe which are dire: inflation, energy prices, food prices, and all these consequences supplement the post Covid-19 situation of us, which was also extremely challenging.

The values of peace, stability and justice are core values we are again crying for, again, after long decades of tranquillity and progress.

Now we have to re-evaluate, colleagues, what is important and what is less important to us in the Council of Europe as well.

The fourth summit I believe is coming just in the right moment in front of us. We need to exploit this new possibility in front of us. A new world order is developing; we all see that the Helsinki world is finished, but many of us are aware that we do not want Yalta coming back either; we do not want the Soviet Union to return.

Dear colleagues,

Hope that sooner rather than later, instead of generals, diplomats will take over the management of the present situation. I hope that the Council of Europe, as it played a crucial and central role 30 years ago in developments of democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe, will play an equally important role in creating the new political architecture of Europe.

European unity must be preserved and reinforced with the help of all of this fourth summit coming up.

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Zsolt NÉMETH.

Next on my list is Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV from Azerbaijan.

Rafael, you have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

As I reflect on this Progress Report, I would like to reflect not only on the work done and the achievements gained since the last part-session but also on how the Assembly has passed the previous period of the pandemic, to assess the difficult and testing path that we have left behind.

Because today, for the first time in the past two years, we are all working at full capacity, visually, without masks, in a pre-pandemic mode. This marks the end of an unprecedented period in the history of the world and the Council of Europe. It is necessary to evaluate each experienced period and the past stage. A simple disease has demonstrated that it can be stronger than democracy and human rights, and can easily bend everyone to its will. They said that not only going out into the streets and squares should be banned, but also leaving the house should be with special permission, at certain hours. We all agreed, and it never occurred to anyone to remind us that we had the freedom of assembly. They banned mass events, cancelled flights from country to country, everyone agreed without discussion or protest.

The pandemic, with its amazing power, was able to prevent drug trafficking, which has always been very difficult to prevent. It was able to prevent the advance of terrorism, to temporarily stop the attempts of the invaders to occupy foreign territories, to silence the separatists. It proved to everyone that there is no greater value in the world than human life. It defeated many. Nevertheless, there was one disease that it could not overcome – double standards. Even when humanity was threatened with death, this evil was not abandoned. Double standards have once again come to the fore in addressing the issue of vaccine distribution.

I suppose it is very significant to learn from the past. Let's draw conclusions from the experience of the last two years and take a more consistent, more principled position in the struggle for at least two truths.

Let us be more united, resolute and uncompromising in the fight against those who lead people to deprivation, suffering, death and disaster!

And most importantly, let's be a little more intolerant of double standards that have managed to be stronger than even a pandemic.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV.

Next on our list is Mr Ahmet YILDIZ from Türkiye.

Ahmet, you have the floor.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Türkiye, NR): Thank you Mr President,

Dear colleagues,

I also would like to thank our rapporteur, our colleague Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, for the report which summarises the work of the Bureau of the Assembly and Standing Committee until now especially in Dublin, Ireland.

As has been the case until now, the Turkish delegation will continue to support the activities of the Assembly and the committees. I am proud that the Turkish delegation from the whole political spectrum is among the best in attending and contributing to activities of the Assembly, and they will continue to do so.

With this understanding, I am sorry that about the postponement of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) meeting in Turkey, but now we extended an invitation to the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development headed by Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE to hold its next meeting in Izmir, which is a lovely Aegean city in Turkey.

Dear colleagues,

We are at that time to prioritise the common challenges and to design the common answers to these challenges instead of prevailing upon the cynical approaches in disputes among countries. Of course the foremost challenge – the worst challenge – is now the war in Ukraine and its repercussions and consequences.

I hope in the future we will continue in the debate also on the Black Sea. We will make contributions to this.

About the summit, I think sooner is better; usually all other organisations have periodical summits, regular summits, but we don't have this. It has long been overdue – I remember in 2016 we had three summits in Turkey, in Istanbul, and the 2015 G20 in Antalya; we have a good experience of summits. I think everybody understands what I mean of course – there should be no specific reason for organising summits. I think we should think about making it periodical.

I congratulate the Serbian authorities and the Serbian people for the smooth elections.

I hope the elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina also will continue to be held smoothly, contributing to the further stability in the country.

In this understanding I thank the rapporteur, Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, again with congratulations to the Serbian authorities.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (Netherlands, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Ahmet YILDIZ.

I now give the floor to Mr Ivica DAČIĆ, Serbia.

Mr Ivica DAČIĆ (Serbia, SOC)*: Dear Chairperson,

Distinguished and dear Mr Aleksander POCIEJ,

Dear Colleagues,

I am very glad I can talk to you on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, as the speaker of the national assembly.

First of all, I would like to thank all colleagues, members of the Parliamentary Assembly, who participated in the work of the observatory mission. We have had excellent co-operation within our authorities in the national assembly, but I know that they have had excellent co-operation with other governmental institutions that were involved with the electoral process. I want to emphasise that we were satisfied that our colleagues were very much interested in the organisation and the course of our elections because it was our wish to have a completely open and transparent process, under complete control of the international and internal observers in order to achieve the confirmation that it was fair, democratic and that it enabled our citizens to clearly express their electoral will. I am sure that we have succeeded and that once again we had the elections conducted according to the highest democratic standards and most importantly that will result in true institutions governed by a state democracy that reflects the true will of our citizens.

I would like to remind you that in addition to the admission to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, we had observers, colleagues from the OSCE, European Parliament, which no doubt, talks about the transparency and openness of our election process for the international organisations that are dedicated to democracy and rights and freedoms. Elections are the biggest test of democracy in every country and I am deeply convinced that Serbia has now passed the exam with a high grade. I am sure you know, and without a doubt, this is an important part of this report, that parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia held on 3 April had important pre-history. I talk about inter-party dialogue, which preceded these elections within which all relevant political factors, parties, movements and individuals in a democratic atmosphere searched for solutions to improve the democracy of our electoral process.

I will remind you that this is not the first time that we have had this practice in Serbia. We had the same format of talks for the 2020 parliamentary elections and in both processes, an important role was played by the delegation of the European Parliament, which together with us from the national assembly represented the co-facilitators on this dialogue.

In the end, and I have to say that I am convinced, that in this process the Republic of Serbia has shown a very high level of democratic standards in these elections, complete openness of the election process and conditions that have enabled all political parties an openness and options to be presented. I am convinced that the citizens had a chance to vote for the ones who they think should represent them in the higher state institutions.

We would like to continue evolving our electoral system to improve it further and we are ready to work on this with international organisations. So first of all, with the Council of Europe and its Commission and Parliamentary Assembly, as well, which are the main authorities for democratic values.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (Netherlands, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I give the floor now to Mr Ruben RUBINYAN from Armenia.

Mr Ruben RUBINYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD): Thank you Madam Chair,

Dear colleagues,

In April last year this Parliamentary Assembly held discussions on the urgent issue of the Armenian prisoners of war and other captives who found themselves in Azerbaijani captivity after the war.

The debates were very emotional. Members of the Assembly emphasised the imperativeness of the immediate and unconditional release of all the prisoners and their repatriation, and stressed that the unlawful detention of these people constitutes a flagrant violation of the international humanitarian law by the Azerbaijani authorities.

Afterwards, the Assembly adopted a resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the humanitarian consequences of the recent war, expressing its utmost concern about the fate of the Armenian captives on the conditions of their detention, and called on the Azerbaijani authorities to release all remaining captives and return them to Armenia without delay.

Almost two years have passed since the signing of the trilateral statement on the ceasefire by which Azerbaijan undertook the obligation to return all the prisoners of war, hostages and other detainees. But up until this day there are still 38 captives confirmed by Azerbaijan, three of whom are civilians.

Azerbaijan refuses to return the remaining prisoners of war and is using them as hostages, treating them as bargaining chips to receive further political gains. Many of the prisoners have undergone false and speedy criminal trials on contrived charges.

The inhuman and degrading treatment and the massive human rights violations towards these people have been documented by many international organisations and NGOs; the Human Rights Commissioner Ms Dunja Mijatović has also addressed the issue and expressed concern in her memorandum.

Colleagues,

I use this opportunity once again to call you all to unite all the efforts to solve the urgent humanitarian issue of repatriation of the Armenian prisoners of war.

This is a humanitarian issue; this is not a political issue. The problem is very simple: Armenian prisoners of war and other captives should have been released, but they are not, and they are at risk of being killed every day.

The problem is that this very Assembly adopted a resolution and called on Azerbaijan to release all these people last year – but they seem not to care. And the problem is that instead of following up on this issue, you are again most probably going to focus on the heated debate between Armenian and Azerbaijani delegations, which I suspect may follow, and the real issue will be unsolved.

I have no problem with the Azerbaijani delegation – I have a problem with the fact that at least 38 people are held as hostages in a country that hates them institutionally. Everyone should have a problem with this. I hope you will have a problem with this.

Thank you.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (Netherlands, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I go now to the last speaker in this debate, Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, also from Serbia.

Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD): Thank you.

This thing we share, dear colleagues, it is valuable that we meet, talk, and use our experiences to try to improve our institutions and our procedures.

As you know, regular presidential elections as well as the early parliamentary elections and local elections in 13 locals have government units and in one city municipality were held on 30 April this year in Serbia. The republic electoral commission is in charge of conducting the election and announcing the final results. Electoral activities at the national level, parliamentary elections carried out by the republic electoral commission have not been finished yet from the legal aspect.

On 4th February this year the National Assembly passed new electoral laws. The law on the election of members of parliament, the law on the election of President of the Republic and the law on local elections. Actually amended laws. These laws are the result of two inter-party dialogue mentioned by the speaker carried out simultaneously. One of them was facilitated by representatives of the European Parliament, while the other was held without their participation. Besides some legal solutions resulting from the agreements reached within the two inter-party dialogues, the new laws also included some provisions aimed at following up on the recommendations put forward of the OECE ??? observation ??? reports.

In accordance with one of the priority recommendations, the new electoral laws extend the general deadline for filing complaints from 24 to 72 hours and the deadlines for taking decisions on the complaints and appeals have been extended from 48 also to 72 hours. The deadline for lodging an appeal against the decision on complaints has also been extended from 48 to 72 hours. So, bearing in mind that the new law on the election of members of parliament was passed on February this year extending the deadlines for conducting election activities and that voting has been repeated at certain polling stations, the republic electoral commission has not yet announced the final results of the parliamentary elections. Under the Constitution, the first session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in this new term of office must be held no later than 30 days from the day of the announcement of final election results, therefore we expect to work in full capacity during the summer.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (Netherlands, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much Ms Elvira KOVÁCS.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, who is the next speaker on the list came to see me; he declared to me his love so I gave him two minutes – that's what he wanted to have.

You are finally the very last speaker.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA): Thank you Madam Chair.

First of all, thank you for the possibility to speak.

Secondly, I would like to address all of you, my dear colleagues,

I just want to remind you that our organisation, the Council of Europe, was created as a fortress for democracy, human rights, rule of law – for the general values which unite all of us and all civilised people on the continent. In this meaning Strasbourg has been the heart of Europe – I'm saying "has been", because I think now Mariupol is the heart of Europe.

And like this palace was the fortress which was defending these values, now Azovstal is the fortress in which these values were defended – not just by speeches, not just by resolutions, but by people with weapons in their hands. These people saved Europe; these people saved us from terrible consequences.

Last time we were here in April 2022, I spoke about these people and all of you stood up in support. Now all of them, many of them, some of them have died, but many of them now are in Russian prisons. Now some of them are tortured by Russians. I think it's very important and I address all of you, to all your governments, to our organisation: to help to save these people.

I want not just to speak about some anonymous people, I want to name some of them:

Mr Denys Prokopenko, Commander of the Azov Regiment; he is a teacher of the English language. He was fighting for our values.

Mr Dmytro Kozatskyi, a photographer who won many prizes as a photographer.

Mr Serhiy Volynskiy, Commander of Mykolaiv Marines. He is married, he has a son, and I know him personally.

Mr Sviatoslav Palamar, Deputy Commander of the Azov Regiment. He has a son.

Ms Katya Ptashka, a paramedic, she is in prison.

Ms Victoria Obidina, a doctor, a mother of a four-year-old daughter.

So I just want to ask all of you to help us to save them, save our souls.

You know this signal – save our souls – today by saving their souls, we will save our soul.

Thank you.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (Netherlands, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister Oleksii GONCHARENKO, I now have to close the debate.

You know that if you want to send your speech to the table office, you have to do that within 4 hours after the debate. I give the floor to.. yes, yes, I give the floor to Mr Aleksander POCIEJ.

You get 3 minutes. Is it enough for you? Thank you.

You have to floor.

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

After what Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO just said it is very difficult to go back to normal procedures.

I remember in Kyiv there is a wall with the pictures and names of people killed, but killed over the last seven or eight years. It was hundreds of people. When we went there I was told by one of the Ukrainian colleagues, "You will see there are many places because this is the big wall."

I didn't believe what he said: that he was expecting the war and the many other names to be put there.

Now this is the truth, and this is the biggest tragedy that we are going through.

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER expressed his worries about the fourth summit. I must partially agree, because the last third Summit, 2005 in Warsaw, also raised many expectations. This organisation did not change very much, so I hope that we are going to be invited to this procedure.

Unfortunately, today at the Bureau of the Assembly's meeting I did not hear from our Secretary General about how she wants to include us as the Parliamentary Assembly in this process at this fourth summit – this is not 100% our task – this is the governments', head of states'. I would like to know very soon how we can contribute, because we were asked. I want to have the answer. How?

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): One last thing: I would like to pick up on what Mr Jacques MAIRE said about the Russian society. He is absolutely right.

Today we spoke to Mrs Kara-Murza, the wife of the person who is now in prison. I must emphasise what she told us during our meeting: there are many people in Russia who think like Mr Kara-Murza and we need your help - that is, our organisation - to be strong, to debate, to fight Putin's regime. We need to keep this in mind.

Thank you very much, Ms President.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (Netherlands, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I close now this debate but I have to give some information and some decisions have to be taken.

The Bureau has proposed references to committees for ratification by the Assembly. They are set out in Doc. 15550 and Addendum 1.

Is there any objection to the proposed references to committees?

I don't see. So I can go on.

I now propose that the other decisions in the Progress Report (Doc. 15550 and Addendums 1 and 2) be ratified. Are there any objections?

I don't see. Then I go on to the next one.

The Assembly will hold its next public sitting this afternoon at 3 p.m. with the agenda which was already approved this morning.

The sitting is adjourned and I wish you a good lunch.

Thank you very much.