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Official report of debates

Ouverture de la séance n° 5

Débat : La multiperspectivité dans l'enseignement de la mémoire et de l'histoire au service de la citoyenneté démocratique

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues,

Good afternoon.

The sitting is open.

I remind members that they should insert their badge before taking the floor. As you begin your speech, please press the microphone button once only.

Our next business is to consider a change proposed in the membership of the Committee on Equality and Non Discrimination.

This is set out in Document Commissions 202501 Addendum 3.

Is the proposed change in the membership of the Committee on Equality and Non Discrimination agreed to?

I see it is agreed.

The next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship" (Doc. 16090) presented by Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media.

In order to finish by 12:00 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 11:45 a.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, the rapporteur. You have 7 minutes now, and 3 minutes at the end to reply to the debate.

Please, the floor is yours.

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.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Thank you, Madam President,

I have the honour to present this report on a particularly important day – when we are going to celebrate the anniversary of the Holocaust right here.

Memory is precisely the subject of this report, which analyses the importance of teaching history and the use of memory to promote democratic citizenship in a European environment of multiculturalism and polarisation. It is a report started some time ago by Mr Roberto RAMPI.

It deals with current social and educational challenges, promoting democratic values, critical thinking and respect for diversity. The report points out that the teaching of history isn't only about the conveying of facts but helping students to critically analyse the past, understand the present and construct a more inclusive future, using a skills-based approach to differentiate between facts and propaganda from multiple perspectives and developing critical thinking.

This particular report emphasises that for democratic citizenship, such teaching must be incorporated into all levels of education, from primary to higher education and non-formal education. Teaching history, making it participatory and student-focused, plays a crucial role in this process.

The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture is a guide to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to participate in democratic societies. This model includes competences such as critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, and respect for diversity.

However implementation of education for democratic citizenship involves structural challenges: inflexible curricula, insufficient initial teacher training on citizenship competencies and a pedagogical approach based on memorising facts, making critical and participatory thinking more difficult.

Secondly, the report stresses that sensitive and cultural issues also have to be incorporated into history curricula, for example war, genocide, totalitarian regimes. This report seeks to foment respect for different points of view and tolerance for ambiguity. The report underlines that students understand that there are numerous different perspectives. It also establishes the difference between memory and history – the first is subjective and collective, while history seeks to interpret the past through critical analysis and evidence. Both are valid but must be rigorously covered in the classroom.

Thirdly, historical memory is essential for promoting inclusion, reconciliation and democratic values. Its use helps reflect on injustices of the past and prevent the repetition of atrocities in the future. The report calls for a participatory approach, involving using memory, questioning, analysing, reconstructing historical moments, along with students.

The memory of the Holocaust is a wonderful example here: how we bring all of this information here together, and this in order to educate about human rights and bolster social cohesion. Memory has an important role in repairing historic traumas, it offers victims the ability to participate in the process through dialogue. However the report warns about avoiding distortion and as well, of course, also excluding closely, being very very careful about incorporating alternative narratives, uncomfortable for some sectors.

Fourthly, we mention the need to connect formal education with non-formal initiatives, such as visits to memory sites, museums, or cultural routes. Such experiences help students explore history immersively and understand their contemporary relevance, including good practices and locations such as the memorial in Sere, the War Childhood Museum in Bosnia, tackling historical traumas using innovative methods and promote reconciliation. European cultural route programmes which promote a shared heritage through themes such as Jewish history and the liberation route. I'd also like to mention European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, and ask you to visit the exhibition at the exit of the hemicycle showing solidarity in difficult circumstances.

These initiatives show us that non formal experiences can complement formal educational curricula techniques and introduce participatory and interactive methods as well.

The report also includes the case study of Spain, in the Navarra region. This year commemorates the anniversary of 1975, a time of great political uncertainty in Spain following the death of FRANCO, when Spanish society decided to choose democracy and freedom. Spain is a good example of historical memory being included in education. The contemporary history of the civil war and dictatorship has led to legislative and educational initiatives to tackle its traumatic past. The democratic memory and education laws include measures to include historical memory in the curriculum and promote civic education and values. Navarra is a wonderful example of managing historical memory at the regional level. The Navarrese Institute of Memory runs programmes foment peace and co-operation such as schools of memory, which combine teacher

training, research and school activities to provide knowledge, repair harm and promote reconciliation. Also, a network of memory sites exploring themes of forced labour, gender repression and exile, offering students a direct connection to the past.

Finally, the report calls for a multi-perspective approach to teaching history, allowing students to explore different events and critically analyse the historical events of the past. This approach promotes inclusivity, critical thinking and understanding which is more adjusted to the needs of historical education. In short, teaching history is fundamental in order to strengthen democratic values and to counter authoritarian tendencies and foment social cohesion.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam rapporteur.

Now we start our debate, and in the debate I call first the representatives of the political groups.

And the first one on the list is Ms Sevilay ÇELENK ÖZEN from the Group of the Unified European Left.

The floor is yours, please.

Ms Sevilay ÇELENK ÖZEN (Türkiye, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, President.

Dear colleagues, first let me express my sincere appreciation to the rapporteur. This is an excellent contribution to understanding how we can approach history and memory in a way that fosters democratic values and democratic citizenship. As we discuss this report today, I am reminded of the words of French historian Fernand BRAUDEL.

He tell us that the past, like the present, is no more than an interpretation of the facts. This insight challenges us to reflect critically on how we narrate history. It also highlights a responsibility. Who gets to interpret? Who gets to tell the story? Is it those in positions of power, or is it the citizens themselves?

BRAUDEL also reminds us that history doesn't progress only through great events, but also through the everyday lives of ordinary people. This, I believe, is the foundation of a democratic approach to history education.

When we focus solely on leaders, treaties and wars, we risk losing sight of the lives, struggles and resilience of ordinary people who shape and are shaped by history.

Today, as Europe is surrounded by conflicts and wars from Gaza and Syria to Ukraine, this report's emphasis on democratic citizenship through multiperspectivity couldn't be more urgent.

These conflicts are not only geopolitical crisis. They are also crisis of memory and narratives. They remind us that remembrance is not neutral. It is a political act, a choice, what we choose to remember and what we choose to forget shapes our collective identity and our future.

This approach is particularly urgent in a time when divisive narratives and memory conflicts fuel tensions. By promoting multiperspectivity in schools, we foster peace, reconciliation, and democratic citizenship. History education becomes not just a lesson about the past, but a foundation for a shared, inclusive future.

Let us ensure remembrance serves as a tool for understanding and unity, not division. Together we can construct a more democratic and peaceful Europe.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Çelenk Özen.

The next speaker is Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN from the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Please, the floor is yours.

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN (Türkiye, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear colleagues,

Political debates taking place in Europe today are not independent of the suffering experienced in the past, nor of the fear that such tragedies may be repeated. The crises that Europe and its institutions are facing today, the European responses, the rise of far-right movements, and the stances taken by young people in the face of these crises are often discussed from various perspectives: law, human rights, hate speech, politics.

However, we place our trust in democracy and how open discussion contributes to it. We can build democratic citizenship not only by looking anxiously from today to tomorrow, but by looking from today to the past with self-confidence and with a mindset that is not afraid of debate.

Bringing memory back, realising what we have forgotten, and seeing how children and young people can improve democracy when they have access to real knowledge. These are, of course, related to history education.

Dear colleagues,

The qualities Europe represents – tolerance, pluralism, peace, security – were not gifted to Europe in a single day.

World wars, conflicts, totalitarian regimes, racism, xenophobia and violence: these were the reminders of Europe not so long ago.

Yet, it is also a fact that history, when told as the history of wars, nations, and states, often fails to fully convey the costs borne by people. People lived through real human stories, made great sacrifices, suffered so much. And, societies which made the best analysis of the suffering they faced, that engaged in difficult conversations, and that found the truth with confidence, are the ones that met democracy.

And democracy should not be taken for granted. It is a gain that is hard to win and easy to lose.

For this reason, the Guiding Principles for History Education and the Reference Framework should serve as key principles. States should update their history education, both in terms of curriculum and methodology, ensuring it reflects multiple perspectives.

Co-operation should be established between formal education and non-formal education, including the contribution of remembrance sites and museums.

History education is a tool that can help turn a new page to understand where we are and what we are.

For these reasons, we fully support the report and thank Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for this well-thought work.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Gökçen.

And the next speaker is Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE from the Group of the European People's Party.

The floor is yours.

Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE (Romania, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear colleagues,

As we see worrying trends of democratic backsliding and societal polarisation across Europe, it is critical to reaffirm education's fundamental role in protecting our shared values. The Group of the European People's Party welcomes this timely contribution on multiperspectivity in memory and history education for democratic citizenship, and we fully support the central message of this report.

In an era of misinformation and historical revisionism, young people must develop critical thinking skills in order to analyse historical sources, understand different interpretations of the past, and distinguish between facts and propaganda.

This is not about relativising historical truths, but rather about fostering a nuanced understanding of complex events and preventing the manipulation of history for political purposes. In doing so, this only strengthens young people's ability to detect distortions and propaganda, a crucial skill in today's information landscape.

We believe that a strong emphasis on civic education, rooted in our shared European values, is essential for building resilient and inclusive societies. This includes introducing education for democratic citizenship as a distinct, compulsory subject and incorporating related competencies and topics into other relevant subjects, such as history teaching, throughout all stages of formal education.

History education should not become a tool for division, but rather a bridge for dialogue and mutual understanding. The emphasis on human rights and democracy is vital, as is the focus on studying different forms of totalitarian regimes which have devastated Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Partnerships between schools, cultural institutions, remembrance sites, museums and civil society organisations can provide invaluable learning opportunities for students. These "safe learning spaces for democracy," as the report refers to them, provide opportunities for interactive learning, intergenerational dialogue, and a deeper understanding of history.

We at the Group of the European People's Party believe that member states need to actively promote and support these partnerships, together with solutions for adequate funding and resources.

The Group of the European People's Party is committed to promoting quality education for all European citizens. We urge all member states to take these recommendations seriously and to work together to ensure that future generations are equipped with the skills, critical thinking, and values necessary to uphold, promote and defend our shared democratic heritage.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Stroe.

Our next speaker is Mr Markus WIECHEL from the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance. Please.

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

To my mind, there are two fundamental elements in our lives, there is time, which forms our history as communities and societies, and there is physical space, underlying geography, forming as it does the "stage", as it were, where events, or history, is constantly being played out.

This is why history, like geography, were considered such important school subjects for an earlier generation, especially after two devastating World Wars.

The thought was that, even though we cannot look into the future, we can learn from the past, and thereby enable us to do our utmost to steer our civilisation toward outcomes likely to preserve peace and a more stable and humane international order.

Our ceremony in about an hour in memory of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945 is the kind of event we must bear in remembrance forever, so that the Holocaust or any similar tragedy must never ever be allowed to happen again.

More generally, the first word in the title of our debate, the near tongue-twister "multiperspectivity", means that we must hear and respect different opinions as regards to historical events.

This is indeed what we have in this Assembly ever since our founding in 1949. This is the essence of this Council of Europe of ours and of our very democracy.

In conclusion, I wish to congratulate the rapporteur and the Committee on a good report.

I sincerely hope that our vital debate and report on the importance of history in education will find its due echo in our schools, our universities and in public life.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Wiechel.

And the next speaker is Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Please.

Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA (Ukraine, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Madam President, dear ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to thank the Committee and Madam rapporteur for this extremely important and urgently needed report.

This report deals with the very core of the Council of Europe and democracy: a need to remember our past, learning from history, and educating people how to be true citizens of democratic nations.

These are the key ingredients of Europe as a project of peace. Peace that comes with and from knowledge, values and actions to protect our world from wars. This is why we are here, ladies and gentlemen, this is why the Council of Europe, the United Nations, and finally the European Union were established.

And now we have been witnessing how Russia is trying to undermine the whole world by brutal falsification and fabrication of the whole history from before and after World War II. And it is not just about Ukraine or Georgia, Moldova or Belarus, Slovakia or Hungary, Germany or France.

A well-designed history education is essential for gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the past. It equips us to evaluate the present critically, differentiating between facts, memories, interpretations and perspectives. History education should be a key part of human rights education and a foundation for young people to develop democratic citizenship.

Education systems must adapt to social changes and respond with new curricula and interactive methodologies. They must counter the erosion of democratic values, particularly among young people in Europe. For these reasons, education for democratic citizenship should be a distinct compulsory subject, included in other relevant subjects such as history teaching, during all stages of formal education, and form a constituent part of vocational training and non-formal education.

We must include competences for democratic culture in teacher education and vocational training, multiply teachers' opportunities for professional exchange and development.

In an era when historical narratives are increasingly manipulated to justify aggression, most notably in the context of the ongoing war in Europe, the role of critical history is very, very important. So let us embrace this mission with dedication and commitment, ensuring that history education remains a pillar of our democratic societies.

Let us unite in building a future where no aggression goes unanswered, no crimes go unpunished, and no nation stands alone in its fight for sovereignty and dignity.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Ovchynnykova.

In the debate I call next Lord George FOULKES.

Please.

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

Can I too congratulate Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on an excellent report on this important issue?

History is an incredibly powerful tool, and in the right hands, it can be used to foster democratic citizenship and build mutual understanding. But in the wrong hands, it can be misused to undermine diversity, erode democracy and increase polarisation. But interpretation is the key. And as the old saying goes, there are two sides to every story. Hiding the wide range of viewpoints which exist by only teaching history from one perspective is dangerous and a disservice to future generations. Because it's by critically engaging with the past that young people can develop the necessary skills to navigate contemporary challenges and recognise fact from fiction, so important in this age of social media.

If I can take an example from British history: the relationship between Scotland and England. Centuries of conflict, including the wars of independence and tensions following the union of the crowns, created a legacy of animosity between the Scots and the English.

But now both nations have managed to create a balanced history curriculum that explores the Scottish and the English perspective, helping to break down stereotypes and foster mutual respect.

Teaching the Act of Union of 1707 alongside moments of division, like the Jacobite risings, highlight the complexity of unity and division. While the English have Flodden, we have Bannockburn. And while they may claim that Scotland was subsumed into the Union, we can remind them that it was our King James VI of Scotland, that became their King, James I of England.

Ultimately, the recognition of the great Scottish contributions to British history and the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution and the ongoing healthy debates around evolution show how multiple perspectives can create and combine the narratives which unite us.

So, in conclusion, by teaching history responsibly and inclusively, we strengthen democracy and create resilient, informed citizens. So we must ensure that young people across Europe and beyond, particularly now in the United States, learn to engage critically with the past, embrace diversity and uphold the principles of pluralism and democracy.

Because with recent surveys sadly indicating that Generation Z Brits are increasingly supportive of the idea of authoritarian rule, we need history education to remind them that democracy was hard won and should never be taken for granted.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Ms Marianne BINDER-KELLER.

Please, Madam, the floor is yours.

Ms Marianne BINDER-KELLER (Switzerland, EPP/CD): Dear Madam rapporteur,

Thank you for this report and I support it wholeheartedly.

"Never again" is how I saw myself in my youth. In my family, with parents who lived through the war, the war was omnipresent. Coming to terms with the madness of the Third Reich with 80 million deaths worldwide, the murder of political prisoners, the genocide of Jewish people, the targeted extermination of six million Jewish women, men and children sank into the collective consciousness. The horror was omnipresent and, as I grew older, I read the transcripts of the Nuremberg Trials with bewilderment. But I am just as stunned today when I look at the streets of Europe and people are actually shouting: Death to the Jews. Students are shouting down Jewish professors. Jewish children are being persecuted by mobs and Jewish students are experiencing hostility. No further enumeration is needed. But we all ask ourselves the question: what happened not even 80 years after the Holocaust?

Change of scene. Europe was divided for almost thirty years. As a child of the Cold War, I experienced a wall that went right through the middle of Europe. On one side were the democracies of the West, on the other the Soviet dictatorship and its satellite states. Anyone in Berlin who wanted to flee from the East to the West was shot at the Wall. And thirty years later in Europe, after the fall of the Wall, we are experiencing movements in democracies, in times of unparalleled freedom, that pay homage to an autocrat like Putin and yet actually make a victim-perpetrator reversal on the occasion of the brutal invasion of Ukraine in violation of international law. Who, for example, have also forgotten about the Stalinist terror in Ukraine, the Holodomor, and are ignoring it. What has happened?

I can go on like this. For example, with the podiums on which I sit with people who finally want peace in Europe, but do not make their demands to the aggressor, but to the invaded Ukraine, to give the aggressor what he wants. Then there would be peace. What kind of peace? We know what Chamberlain's appeasement policy led to. But on these podiums, history is often completely ignored. This is what we see on talk shows and social media, where opinion becomes fact and propaganda becomes brainwashing. 1984, the famous novel by George Orwell, sends its regards. History is adapted on a daily basis and the individual loses their freedom. And that is why this education, which we must have now, is the salvation against this loss of freedom.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Binder-Keller.

And the next on the list is Sir Edward LEIGH.

The floor is yours, please.

Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Madam President, the teaching of history is indeed essential for the future of Europe.

And I agree with Lord George FOULKES that there is a multiplicity of narratives and modes of interpretation.

The essential purpose of history must remain the search for truth, being able to relay, based on evidence and intellect, what actually happened at a given time and place and what the effect has been.

Truth must always be the most important thing. But there's great value in examining a multiplicity of perspectives in order to arrive at the truth.

Now, this resolution rightly points out that including sensitive and sometimes controversial parts of history and considering multiple perspectives when analysing sources can reinforce democratic culture. That's correct.

It's clear that we need to foster greater respect for differences of opinion. But for too long, comfortable political elites across Europe have operated as an intellectual closed shop.

Anything from outside a cosy, liberal, manufactured consensus is viewed with at best disdain, but often outright contempt.

This has undermined the operation of our national and European institutions. It has undermined our democratic culture. It explains why the voters of the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union. It helps to understand why there's been such an upsurge of populism, not just here in Europe but around the world, as a recent election in the United States has shown.

At the same time, anyone who supports this multiperspective approach can see the dangers of what this resolution calls for.

Section 611 calls for the introduction of "education for a democratic citizenship as a distinct and mandatory subject for all stages of formal education". This is exactly the kind of heavy top-down approach which we should be seeking to avoid. And I fear that mandatory lessons in "democratic citizenship" will, in each country in which they are introduced, merely reinforce existing liberal centre-left conformist narratives.

This will undermine precisely the multiperspectivity which this report and resolution seek to promote.

In reality the skills and approaches needed to fostering a democratic culture are the skills which are eternally useful. In the Middle Ages, the great centres of learning – Paris, Bologna, Oxford – were founded upon the seven liberal arts divided into trivium and quadrivium:

Grammar, the art and structure of language;

Logic, the study of reason, of validity;

And rhetoric, the art of speaking, discussing, and persuading.

What these three sets of skills or competencies could be better suited to living and engaging as citizens of democratic societies. Instead, I suspect lessons in democratic citizenship will only force-feed more of the anti-intellectual and effectively substanceless diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda. The DEI agenda is being comprehensively rejected by the voters in democratic mandates across Europe and the world, and we should reject it too.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Sir.

The next speaker is Mr Bertrand BOUYX.

"You have the floor." [spoken in French]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE): Thank you, Madam President.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before getting to the heart of the matter, I'd like to say why I'm so passionate about this subject, and why I consider it fundamental in the world as it is and as it is evolving before our very eyes. For the simple reason that we can no longer afford to live divided, each in his own corner, sure of his point of view against his neighbours, but faced with geographical, economic, technological and now military giants.

There are various reasons why we cannot unite even more closely. I'm not going to mention them all, but in any case, there's one that strikes me as primordial: it has to do with the feelings of the European peoples, feelings that have often been built up against each other. In short, in 2025, history will not go away and is still blocking future prospects.

Without going back to the Battle of Bouvines or the exploits of Joan of Arc, 1848, 1870, 1919, 1945 and 1989 are dates that are still having an impact today. For some, the catastrophe was the fall of the Ottoman Empire; for others, it was the Ottoman Empire that had long prevented their nation from playing its full role and benefiting from opportunities they were still paying for; for others, it was the Soviet Union; and for still others, both. Sometimes it's a question of disputed territories. I'm not going to name specific regions, so as not to rekindle the wounds.

Or rather, I will mention one, in my country, where we are today: Alsace. A region that changed nationality four times between 1870 and 1945, a region that today is a link between France and Germany. What is this reconciliation based on? Not on forgetting, but on teaching history to French and German children in the most shared way possible. So, you may say that reconciliation preceded the Franco-German history textbook, which is not very old since it was published some twenty years ago. We can already promote the idea of a German-Polish, Romanian-Hungarian or even Greek-Turkish history textbook and, *ultimately*, why not a European one, with the ambition of creating a common affect enabling us to face the challenges of the future, because that's what it's all about.

The report by Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, our Spanish colleague, does not stop at educational issues, even though they are obviously at the heart of the matter. She brings all the expertise of her country, which had to work titanically to reconcile Franco and Republican memories after the dictator's death, in order to enter fully into democracy and progress as a unified nation.

The report is full of interesting ideas on places of remembrance, museography and European cultural itineraries. This is a major issue, one of those that cannot be seen but which are essential to building a future.

I'd like to take this opportunity to reiterate my modest contribution, with a proposal I put forward to create an Order of European Solidarity to decorate citizens who have distinguished themselves in this field. I will therefore be voting enthusiastically in favor of this report. I would also like to take this opportunity to salute all the members of the Observatory for History Teaching at the Council of Europe, and in particular the person who heads it, Mr Alain LAMASSOURE.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): "Thank you." [spoken in French]

The next speaker is Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA.

Please.

Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA (North Macedonia, SOC): Thank you, Madam President.

I would first like to congratulate the rapporteur for this utmost timely report.

As we can see, history has never been misused like today and in recent times. This balanced, yet innovative approach that this detailed recommendation portrays puts teachers and students in the centre and leaves history to tell its story and not politicians.

We can all agree that education system must adapt to social changes and respond with new curricula. And they should contribute to countering the erosion of democratic values, particularly among young people in Europe.

We also have to help students develop their critical thinking through learning how to evaluate historical sources and make well informed judgments.

We have to help them to develop human rights-based analysis of historical events, multiperspectivity in historical education, and critical consideration of different standpoints.

We have to guarantee free access to virtual learning environments. And we have to help them facilitate partnership between schools, cultural institutions, and other relevant stakeholders, such as sites of remembrance, museums, archives, civil societies and artists together.

In the end, let me say that we have to let history be our teacher and not our prison.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO.

Please, Madam, the floor is yours.

Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues,

I'm sure that you've been wondering many times why we Ukrainians are so crazily brave. We want to talk so much about history, about our self-determination. I'm sure you were wondering that many times.

And one of the answers is in our history, that in the past, in the centuries of the past, our historical memory was taken away from us. It was always an attempt from an aggressor, from Russian Empire, from Soviet Union, to delete our memory. About our family roots, about our history.

And now we know what never again means. We know it better than anyone, probably, because it is happening to us in the present time as well.

Almost each family knows that some of us, our family members, were sent to Siberia, or were tortured, or were killed in prison. But we were actually never able to access the files of the archives, because they were always taken by Soviet Union, by KGB, by so many who wanted to erase our memory. And luckily, in 2015, we opened our archives and, as someone who was working on some of these files, it was incredibly scary to see some of the folders of executions of STALIN times, of hundreds of names of people who were sent, executed, sent to Siberia.

This only serves of how many methods of evil existed and still exist to distort our memory, our history and to distort our reality.

Another example I want to raise here today is I'm sure that you listened to the Russian narrative many times that Donbass is Russian, that Donbass enterprises were Russian-built. But in fact, if you look at the history, you will find that the majority of industrial factories in Donbass were built by Europeans. People were speaking different languages. Donbass always had ethnic diversity. There were many, many people from different ethnic backgrounds. Greeks are one of them. That's why Mariupol is actually a Ukrainian Greek city.

Talking about all of this, I want to encourage you to invest in the education of your children, that they remember, they study different pages of the history and the archives. And the ability to look to that truth for the future is open to all of us.

Please invest in the policies and all possible initiatives to fight propaganda and disinformation and fight for the truth of the history.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Miss Yasko.

The next speaker is Mr Andries GRYFFROY.

Please.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR): I have to thank our rapporteur, Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, for this wonderful report, because what I have heard already from the previous speakers is that in fact every country, every nation has a history.

We are talking about Ukraine and we are talking about the commemoration of the Holocaust. And I can also tell you what we have, for example, in Flanders, we have Flanders Fields, which is very known by the British people, the poppies. This is about the World War I, where we have symmetries of the Germans and the British and the Canadian side by side, where we have a huge sight of memory with a big sign, no more war again. And, 22 years later, we had war again.

But for some of us it's still difficult to talk about their past. They cannot talk about it openly. And that's where it comes that we have to say, okay, this history teaching should indeed not be limited by transmitting facts, but should help students critically analyse the past, understand also the present, and build by this a more inclusive future through a competence-based approach.

And how we can do it. But of course this means that we have to integrate it in all levels of education. If we do not talk about lower school or we talk about the university, and this means, depending from each country to each country, that maybe we have to reform curricula, but for sure we have to look for reforms for teachers, if needed.

But second part is also historical memory is not only through books. We need this museum, we need this memorial site, we need these cultural roots where you look beyond your own borders. And so we have to connect this formal education by this non-formal education.

And yes, for that reason we have to protect our heritage, we have to conserve our heritage, because it's also a question of our identity. And we can do that by interactive mythology. But we can also do that by support for this non-formal education, we call it, by ensuring funding, and I emphasise it here, the autonomy for museums and places of memory.

So in fact, my conclusion, thanks to the rapporteur, this report offers in fact a very good framework for how we can rethink the history teaching as a means of fostering our cultural diversity and preparing future generations to meet the democratic challenges of the 21st century.

Thanks for the great report.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Attila TILKI.

Mr Attila TILKI (Hungary, EC/DA): Thank you for the floor.

Is it working? Yes.

The Hungarian National Curriculum which was introduced in 2013 and it was amended in phasing a system from September 2020. It includes key educational objectives like education for citizenship and democracy, the development of self-awareness and social culture, and moral education as well. Each of these objectives is particularly important for an accepting and open attitude towards others and for a democratic co-existence in society.

The National Curriculum, revised in 2020, breaks with the previous strictly chronological order of history teaching and in some cases follows the thematic principle. Thus, it deals with topics that span entire historical periods, such as "The democratic state: the roots of modern democracy". The textbook authors also aspired for presenting different points of view on a sensitive topics, therefore giving greater emphasis to multiperspectivity than in previous textbooks.

History teaching must be a "deliberately patriotic, child-oriented and twenty-first century curriculum" that gave schools "more freedom" than its predecessors had.

We must be able to hand our heritage on to future generations. If we have a clear idea of what we mean by family, work, respect, love of the homeland, then we're duty-bound to transmit that. That's what history education is about.

There's no such thing as a neutral education. Educational systems are about values, about teaching what we think are the values of Hungarian society. And among the values we very much adore are those heroes who helped us survive the centuries behind us.

The students must know who we really are, to show that we are the Hungarians with one thousand years of Christian statehood, monumental cultural achievements, 19 Nobel prizes, 184 Olympic gold medals, and a beautiful capital city, and beautiful countryside.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Mr Sergio GUTIÉRREZ PRIETO.

Please, sir, the floor is yours.

Mr Sergio GUTIÉRREZ PRIETO (Spain, SOC)*: President,

First of all, I'd like to congratulate our colleague Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for a report that offers a broad range of possibilities that would allow us to create a sense of reconciliation with the past, to recognise who we currently are and to collectively make ourselves stronger for the future.

Who could be against learning and understanding our past? Who could be against knowing, as José SARAMAGO has spoken about, the historic memory as collective conscience created as a knowledge created by the people? Naturally, it would be those who are ashamed of their past or who wish to hide that is that so we don't learn the lessons that have to be learned.

Historic memory is not simply learning the facts of history of the past. It allows us to understand who we are, learn from our mistakes and consolidate, the most important of all, our fundamental values with which we develop a sense of civic citizenship.

Learning about our historic memory helps us to develop a greater sense of civic compassion as well with those who are different to us, who think differently or who wish to exercise their rights in a different fashion.

That's why the relativism with which some defend against our past or our memory is one of the major problems or pitfalls of our democratic system and their consolidation.

That's why it is important for schools to teach democratic memory. We need to learn to teach about democratic memory for three reasons. First of all, because understanding the past bolsters our liberty, our collective identity as a democratic system. A society that forgets its past, really undermines the possibility of paving a proper future as well.

Secondly, because it's a powerful tool against information and against manipulation because those who know about their past can develop a sense of critical thinking concerning what happens at present.

And above all, and fundamentally, it's an act of serving justice to those who fought for creating democracies, our human rights systems and public freedoms too.

To this end, and as BORGES said, "what is forgotten will undoubtedly be repeated".

And what the rapporteur underlines here in this report is that it is absolutely key to remember our past, to know our past in order to not repeat the errors and mistakes of the past.

Congratulations to the rapporteur.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, sir.

The next speaker on the list is Ms Denitsa SACHEVA.

Please, Madam, the floor is yours.

Ms Denitsa SACHEVA (Bulgaria, EPP/CD): Miss President,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot but commend the work done by the rapporteur Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO which is bringing back to our attention the issue of democratic citizenship and education.

Let me first remind that the Declaration and a Program on Education for Democratic citizenship, based on the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 1999 in Budapest on the occasion of 50th anniversary of the Council of Europe. It was initiated by Mr. Svetlozar RAËV, the first Bulgarian Ambassador to the Council of Europe back in 1992, who fought 7 years to approach the member states to support its adoption.

Here I would like to pay tribute to the then French Ambassador Jacques Warin, who managed to work out a consensus between all then 41-member States of the Council of Europe and to negotiate an agreement between them.

Now we are returning back to this debate and I would point out one important element which is missing. And this is education for peace. Education systems have the great responsibility to build in the future generations the knowledge to understand the world, to foster culture of co-operation, to close digital and information divide.

Peace education should be and must be part of the formal education through the national policies of school curricula in history and civil education.

As it comes to multiperspectivity, here I am very reluctant. I could provide you with many examples from the Balkan states, where the history is deviated in such way, that it may cause conflicts instead of mutual understanding.

It is not a multiperspectivity to create wrong imaginations, fantasies, and fictions which would fuel the conflicts among the neighbours.

It is better to create an independent body for verification of the historic facts rather than to support creation of moon dreams. Of course, the facts could be interpreted differently, but it is not recommendable to falsify them.

Encouragement of multiperspectivity in teaching the history at current stage would not be supportive and we should think twice before endorsing it to members states.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Sacheva.

Now I ask Ms Sona GHAZARYAN to take the floor.

Please, Madam.

Ms Sona GHAZARYAN (Armenia, ALDE): Madam President, thank you.

Dear Luz, thank you for your very timely and important report.

I would like to thank the organisers of the 4th Annual Conference of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe and reaffirm Armenia's strong support for the Observatory's mission.

Europe and the broader world are navigating turbulent times, facing challenges that echo darker periods in history. The international order and multilateral institutions established after the Second World War to promote peace and stability are now under serious strain, as war has returned to Europe and beyond, eroding the foundations of security and cooperation.

We are witnessing a troubling normalisation of force, a backsliding of democratic institutions, and a surge of populism - developments that threaten our shared values sustaining peace in our societies. Adding to this crisis, hate speech and disinformation are gaining ground, often fuelled by narratives that manipulate history for political ends.

Armenia is acutely familiar with these challenges. Beyond our security concerns, we daily face history and cultural identity possible distortions. The instrumentalisation of history to advance divisive agendas threatens the peaceful coexistence we all seek.

It is absolutely unacceptable to deny historical realities or to manipulate and falsify history to justify territorial claims against neighbouring countries. History should serve as a foundation for truth, paving the way for reconciliation and not as a tool for advancing divisive and misleading agendas.

Another serious thing I wish to bring your attention to is hate speech in state-sponsored history textbooks, which fosters aggression, intolerance, and racism. When educational resources are weaponised to instil prejudiced narratives, they undermine peace and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

It is essential that we counter this dangerous trend by promoting accurate, balanced history teaching that respects diversity and rejects all forms of hatred and discrimination preventing ethnic cleansings, hate-motivated conflicts, and crimes against humanity.

Identifying these challenges is only the beginning. Our responsibility now is to work collectively toward solutions. Building a culture of peace starts with innovative, citizen-centered education that empowers young people to critically engage with history rather than passively accept it.

This requires sustained effort and cooperation to develop educational systems grounding democracy and the concept of "living together". Armenia is committed to this endeavour and to supporting initiatives that bring historical truth to the forefront.

Thank you very much.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Ghazaryan.

Our next speaker is Ms Marietta KARAMANLI.

Please, Madam.

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

Madame rapporteur,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I'd like to thank the rapporteur for her work, which is timely in terms of improving the teaching of history to today's young people; challenging in terms of the implications that this paradigm shift may have; and equally concrete in terms of her recommendations and points of departure.

Multiperspectivity in teaching, whether formal or informal, to borrow a distinction made by the rapporteur, can be summarily defined as an approach aimed at taking into account a diversity of perspectives that enriches understanding of the world over time.

The human and social sciences are, by their very nature, fields that leave room for interpretation. The current situation is marked by the denial, by some, of what differentiates science and research. Certain events, facts or movements are established and must be considered as such, until proven otherwise, as a basis for research and interpretation. That's the point.

While we commemorate the liberation of concentration camps and the end of genocide, radical extremists still question their existence and purpose. In France, this is not an opinion, but an offence aimed at disputing the existence of crimes against humanity. The joint contribution of historians, researchers, teachers, actors and, of course, victims is not only useful, but also necessary to advance knowledge and ensure commemoration.

I would therefore like to make two observations, Madam rapporteur.

Teacher training is a key issue. There can be no progress without taking into account what their training means, at a time when the media, social networks and the cultural and societal environment have been radically changed by the Internet. Media education is important from this point of view. This does not mean diminishing the place and role of teachers, but, on the contrary, asserting their place and role.

At the same time, there can be no progress without opening up the school to partners and in partnership, I would say, with all cultural, civic and research institutions. Here again, collegiality, the principle of listening, the diversity of venues and research must ensure quality expertise.

That's what I wanted to share with you very quickly, and I thank you for your attention.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Our next speaker is Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO.

Please, Madam, the floor is yours.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): "Thank you, Madam President" [spoken in French]

Thank you very much, dear colleagues,

I want to start with a very unknown and interesting history of 400 young students from Ukraine who on this day, 107 years ago in 1918, prevented the possible annexation of the current capital of Ukraine, Kyiv.

They fought to death against a 4 000 group of Bolsheviks and defeated them and protected the current modern territory of Ukraine. Commemorating them today, we understand how important it is in the school and university curriculum to study and learn history: history untold, history reversed, history mixed. And in the end, we are finding ourselves in multiple dimensions of war of aggressions, mass war crimes, crimes against humanity, deportations, starvation, killings and rape.

My family and many Ukrainian families, as well as many European families and across the globe were experiencing this historical injustice. If my great-grandma wouldn't have survived the great famine of the beginning of 20th century, I wouldn't have been speaking here in front of you. But when STALIN was committing this crime, a crime of genocide, intending to wipe us off from planet earth, as PUTIN is doing today in the 21st century, I would just be not telling the true history today.

I want to remind you colleagues that we are all interlinked here in the Council of Europe, the queens of the 11th century, and I would like to name them: Queen of France Anne, Queen of Norway and Denmark Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary Anastasia, Queen of Scotland Margaret. All of them have Ukrainian roots actually, we're all interlinked. Our history has to be properly told.

And because until today, such terrorists as PUTIN, such terrorists as LUKASHENKO, who wrote himself 83% of the recent elections, such people who are oppressing today the democratic forces in Georgia, all these people are trying to rewrite our common history. To prevent it, in the school curriculum, Assembly underlines the possibility of this possibility of manipulating research and facts and the tools of propaganda.

And that's why history has to be strengthened and taught properly, specifically of the, of course, 19th and 20th century.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for her courage and the Committee for developing this text. I'm sure it must be implemented by all our Ministers of Education, locally and at the government level.

Thank you very much.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Now I invite Ms Victoria TIBLOM to give her speech. Please, Madam.

Ms Victoria TIBLOM (Sweden, EC/DA): Thank you, Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" – wise words from the philosopher George SANTANYA back in 1905.

I came to think of that quote as I read the quite thought-provoking report of our rapporteur Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on behalf of our Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media: entitled "Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship".

"Multiperspectivity" may be a newly minted word. But it simply means that in studying different historical periods or personalities, we should do so not just from only one viewpoint, but from several - whether it be the American Civil War, the Russian Revolution, or the First World War.

And we must do so in discussions with others, with due respect for their opinions – opinions which may differ from our own views, just as ours may be at variance at times.

As the rapporteur points out, such dialogue and tolerance are all the more called for at the present tense moment of international tensions in Europe and beyond, where an erosion of democracy and social polarisation seem to be taking place.

And that the number of countries that are democracies are diminishing instead of increasing, that is a very sad development and something that definitely will affect our coming generations.

The report in conclusion argues that the time has come for the subject of history to be given back its due place at all levels in schools, universities and the media - and I fully agree.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

(Light applause)

The next on the list is Ms Margo GREENWOOD. Please, Madam.

Ms Margo GREENWOOD (Canada): Thank you, Madam President, honourable colleagues,

I begin by acknowledging and thanking rapporteur Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for her work on the report.

As an Indigenous woman and professor for 27 years, I unequivocally agree with the inclusion of sensitive histories in school curricula and consideration of multiple perspectives as a fundamental means to reinforce democratic culture, pluralism and human rights within society, and for all the reasons that previous speakers have already articulated.

In Canada, this fact remains true. Since the creation of Canada as a country in 1867, recurrent governments have been complicit and committed acts of violence and discrimination against Indigenous peoples.

The establishment and forced attendance of Indigenous children in residential schools is one of the most distressing chapters in Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

In the name of cultural assimilation, the state forcibly removed Indigenous children as young as three years old from their families, placing them in far-flung boarding schools, where many endured unimaginable harms and often never returned until they were 16 years old – if they returned at all.

Between the 1870s and 1996, at least 150,000 First Nation, Inuit and Métis children suffered this fate. At least 6 000 children perished as a result.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued its final report, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future," an eight-year-long investigation into Canada's brutal residential schools.

The final report issued 94 calls to action.

They addressed various areas highlighted in rapporteur Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO's report, including the need for countries to address their difficult and sensitive pasts through education and remembrance.

As a case in point, Call to Action 62 calls on all governments in Canada to: "make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' contributions to Canada."

Many schools across Canada have mandated Indigenous curriculum.

As for remembrance, since 2021, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was established on 30 September. Many know it as "Orange Shirt Day" as we wear orange shirts to remember the children, and their families, of residential schools.

Many of these calls to action have yet to be fully implemented, but we are hopeful that Canada will continue to address these harms of the past.

In conclusion, education and remembrance play a key role in addressing these wrongs while promoting the democracy we all strive for.

"Thank you" [spoken in Cree].

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): *(Light applause)*

Thank you, Madam Greenwood.

Our next speaker is Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK. Please, Madam, the floor is yours.

Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you, Madam Chair, dear colleagues, dear Luz, thank you for this report.

You know, in Ukraine we say that our kids do not need textbooks to learn history. They can just look out of the window.

My daughter turns 11 tomorrow. And that's actually the amount of years the occupation lasted, because it was in February, the end of February 2014 when the Green soldiers appeared in Crimea and the annexation began.

And first, what the occupiers did, they threw away history books that were in the schools. And right now, peers of my daughter are learning in schools that Ukrainians are not a nation, they do not have a language. Those teenagers who were, you know, 15 or 14 in 2014 are now being drawn to the Russian army to fight their fellow Ukrainians.

And actually Russia is just continuing to do what the Soviet Union did.

How many of you know what the contribution of Ukrainians during the Second World War is? Did you know that 7 million Ukrainian soldiers served in the Soviet army? Did you know that half of them didn't return home? Did you know that 5 million civilians were killed? Every fourth Ukrainian was killed during the Second World War.

But Russia tries to privatise the great victory in the Second World War, forgetting the contribution of other nations.

Actually it was a Ukrainian soldier, a Soviet soldier at that time, who put the flag of victory on the Reichstag in May 1945.

And you know what else Russia does right now? They manipulate history to justify the aggression. They actually say that Ukraine is not a nation, Ukrainians are not a nation, Ukraine is not a country. So that's why they can occupy and forget about the rules and internationally recognised borders.

Should we allow [them] to do that? I urge you to continue to support Ukraine in its fight for independence, for sovereignty, because right now, your support depends on what your kids will learn in the history books, in textbooks about this war. Whether you, [or] those who started the war, as Russians say – that "the NATO countries are the aggressors", or we [can] put the facts and the peace will be just and full. We will be sure that our kids will learn history that is based on facts.

Thank you so much, and please support the resolution.

(Light applause)

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Kravchuk.

Now I ask Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS to take the floor, please.

Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS (United Kingdom, SOC): Madam President, friends and colleagues,

One of the main streams of historiography right now is called post-colonial history, and it examines the way that countries, often represented in this very hemicycle, manage the affairs of countries far away.

If you asked historians, even historians, what was the first significant defeat of NAPOLEON, for example, they might debate between the withdrawal from Moscow in 1812 or the defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Few of them would talk about 1 January 1804, when NAPOLEON's great army was defeated by slaves in Haiti, Saint Domingue, at the time, and instituted a new republic, the Republic of Haiti, which was abandoned by France 200 years ago this year, France imposed an indemnity on Haiti of several million francs of that time, now billions, it would be its equivalent, in order to recognise the existence of Haiti and to receive money that was on an installment basis three times each year, the total of the gross national product of the independent Haiti. I could tell the story in far greater detail, but that's enough for the moment.

But we could talk, too, about the humiliation of Haiti by Germany with its war boat diplomacy, rubbing the Haitian flag, imposing indemnities and sanctions on Haiti, which was barely surviving.

Or a British diplomat writing a scandalous book that trashed the reputation of Haiti in the 1870s and all that without coming to the American occupation that lasted 20 years and that just quite simply violated, raped Haiti of all its resources and imposed on it debts that it could never repay.

You think it's strange that I bring into this august Assembly tales of somewhere that has nothing to do with Europe? It has everything to do with Europe. And I've spent my entire life trying to articulate the needs of people who had no chance to articulate it itself.

History belongs to the strong, those who can write, those who can organise. 500 000 slaves had none of those luxuries. History has to be learned in order to do justice, not just to the strong nations represented here, but to those with no voice, no place.

If I were to ask people here to give me three words to describe my beloved Haiti, where I lived for ten years, if I asked everybody here to put three words down, they'd all be scandalous, believing the trash that is written about Haiti, which is a basket case where "the most miserable on earth" [said in French] live, the poorest country in the Western world and all the result of nations represented in this hemicycle.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Lord Griffiths.

And now the next speaker is Mr Konur Alp KOÇAK. Please.

Mr Konur Alp KOÇAK (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteur for this well-crafted report, which underscores the essential role of history education in fostering democratic citizenship. In today's Europe, where societies face increasing polarisation, and where we witness the alarming rise of xenophobia, hate crimes and discrimination, it is vital for young people to engage with the past in a way that is free of prejudice.

History education must serve as a tool to counter these divisive trends by promoting critical thinking, empathy and an appreciation of diversity. Understanding the consequences of prejudice and intolerance is vital in recognising the untold stories of oppressed minorities, such as the Meskhetian Turks, whose tragic history deserves our urgent attention.

I wish to draw attention to the plight of the Meskhetian Turks and remind you that last year marked the 80th anniversary of their forced displacement from their homeland in south-west Georgia by the Soviet regime.

In 1944, they endured a forced exile under unbearable conditions, leading to the loss of thousands of lives, tragedies that remain largely unknown and insufficiently acknowledged in many parts of the world.

Today, the Meskhetian community remains scattered across countries. Despite the passage of decades, Meskhetians continue to face systemic injustices and the enduring consequences of their forced displacement.

It is, I believe, the moral responsibility of this august Assembly to recognise their suffering and take concrete steps to address their grievances. Acknowledgment is a crucial step toward justice and reconciliation.

I am pleased to note that this Assembly has previously addressed the plight of the Meskhetian Turks in 2005 with a Resolution number 1428, where it urged Georgian and Russian authorities to remove the legal and practical barriers denying their civic rights. However, these efforts have proven insufficient.

Therefore, I call on all members of this Assembly to support the written declaration that I have tabled on pape-apps, with the aim of remembering one of the darkest chapters of history. A strong show of support will send a clear message of recognition and solidarity, and hopefully pave the way for further action to address the plight of the Meskhetian Turks.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Koçak.

Our next speaker is Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI.

Please, sir.

It seems that he is not here, so we'll move to Ms Esther PEÑA.

Please, madam.

Ms Esther PEÑA (Spain, SOC)*: Good morning,

Congratulations to the rapporteur, because she has got it right: liberty, remembrance and responsibility.

Real liberty is that which allows us to vote, demonstrate and to express our ideas and live according to them, without fear of repression and censorship or that somebody would drag us out of our beds, throw us out of our jobs, or socially ostracise us.

It allows us to build a free society, a society free of hatred, and create alliances on the basis of human rights and co-existence. Europe is what it is today due to collective remembrance rooted in tolerance, respect and remembering our past. As convinced democrats, it is our responsibility to maintain and defend the memory of resistance against the barbarians.

Education, pedagogy and political policies on remembrance are absolutely key, so that young people who have grown up in democracy don't fall into the web of hate speech of the heirs of terror.

This knowledge should not be just passing on knowledge but requires a profound reflection in classrooms to provide responses to questions that couldn't be given at the time.

The government of Spain has a clear commitment to the education system, to disseminate knowledge about exile, resistance and the struggle to re-achieve those liberties and democratic values that were lost for many years. This year is fifty years since the dictatorship in Spain collapsed, and so we pass on to the new generations the value of living in a democracy, reminding them that nothing is guaranteed and that they need to protect themselves from those who seek to restrict freedom with promises of order or wealth, for example.

Even so, not everyone in Spain shares this pride of democratic freedom, and I remind you that Spain is the country with the second most mass graves in the world, for example, Pedraja in Burgos, the grave of 45 brains and one heart. Some in our country have asked that we not pay tribute to the Spaniards who suffered in Nazi extermination camps.

So more than ever education and civic values are crucial to create a society – peaceful, tolerant –, able to think critically about a terrible past, which will eliminate those extremes of moral degradation caused by human thinking under dehumanising and intolerant ideologies, and undoubtedly we will achieve this through truth, justice and reparation.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Peña.

Now I ask Mr Damien COTTIER to take the floor.

"Mister Cottier, you have the floor" [spoken in French]

Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE): Thank you, Madam Chairman.

This is an important debate, and its context makes it all the more important.

I'd like to thank the rapporteur for the work she has done and for putting this topic on the agenda of our Assembly once again, because our Assembly has already addressed these issues, but it's important to return to them regularly in a historical context where this debate takes on a very special dimension.

I'm fortunate enough to have trained as a historian and, I must say, it's striking to see the extent to which, when you work in this field, one of the fundamental things you learn at the very start of studying history is to think critically, to analyze sources, to analyze the fact that sources, even if they are true documents, can lie to you.

In the history of the Middle Ages, for example, the beginning of the civic year was not always 1 January, so you have a document dated February of one year, and then you imagine that it's the year that corresponds to our calendar today; and in fact, it's the year before or the year after. So you need a culture and an ability to analyze things in context. It's something that takes time, that's complex, but that's essential in today's society, which is inundated with false information, inundated with prejudice, obviously, in particular, on social networks but not only; even in the quality press, you sometimes read things that aren't necessarily put into context, or that are only partially right, or just with a perspective.

And as I was listening to today's very interesting debate - and I'd like to thank the colleagues who spoke - I was thinking back to these two wonderful films by the great American director Clint EASTWOOD, who made this film called *Mémoire de nos pères* in French, *Flags of Our Fathers* in the original version; and *Lettres d'Iwo Jima*. These two films tell the story of the same historic battle, a World War II battle on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima, one from the perspective of American soldiers and the other from the perspective of Japanese soldiers. It's fascinating to watch these two films to see how the perspective from which we read a dramatic historical event like this can completely change our interpretation of events.

So these are things that you have to acquire, that you absolutely have to work on. In the very dangerous world in which we live, with the dissemination of false information by certain autocrats or populists, it is essential that, in order to defend democracy, everyone knows how to read, how to interpret, how to put things into context, and teaching history makes an essential contribution to this.

Thank you, Madame, for reminding us of this.

I'm delighted that our Assembly will be reminding us of this in a powerful way - before a very important commemoration, that of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, which we'll be commemorating in a few minutes' time - that we'll be reminding ourselves of this in a powerful way in a few minutes' time.

Thank you very much.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): "Thank you, Mister Cottier"
[spoken in French]

Now I ask Mr Pedro Miguel HACES BARBA to take the floor.

Please.

Mr Pedro Miguel HACES BARBA (Mexico)*: If you would allow me, Madam President, I'd like to congratulate our colleague Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for the work she is doing as rapporteur with respectful greeting from Mexico for all of you.

Ladies and gentlemen, as members of parliament of the world, in the context of the recent commemoration of International Day of Education on 24 January, we spoke out to defend pluralism and truth over and above ignorance, violence and the threats which are evermore polarised in today's conflicted world.

Education should be the best vector for transforming the lives of people for fairness, equality and respect. And the voices and perspectives for new development are linked together so as to bring together sustainable peace in an environment of trust, peace and well-being for today's and future generations.

Education needs to be based on by a relevant idea of history to build a new present and a better future. Education should therefore be the bridge that unites the divisions and not a wall that separates people.

Historic memory shouldn't be something that is just on-sided, it should be a plural space that recognises diverse voices and experiences that are part of our collective pasts.

History is not a narrative that belongs to a few. It is a construction that each society has the right to have its own perspective, recognising both the achievements and the mistakes that have been made.

In Mexico, the government of our President Claudia SHEINBAUM is implementing an educational model for Mexican schools with a historical vision of the great transformations that took place in our country with a critical, humanistic and communitarian view based on principles of national identity and full self-determination.

And not an intervention and perseveration of our sovereignty national, respecting human dignity, culture, peace, participation and transformation of society and respect for nature and the environment makes us promoters consider these three proposals.

First of all, an all-round review of the humanist nature, secondly, ongoing teacher training, and thirdly, international co-operation.

All of this so as to promote transnationality, exchange of teaching materials and research resources, promoting innovation and science technology with multilingual digital platforms to which students may access testimonies and other documents that enrich their understanding of the shared past.

To this end, it is important to know what UNESCO has suggested, that we guarantee the need to have focus on integrating artificial intelligence and human learning so that students may develop the necessary needs to navigate the complexities of this technological world, respecting ethical principles and guaranteeing fair access to the same.

Historic memory can be found in hate speech and the discursive naratives. We build society not only at the voting booth, but also in classrooms.

Let us make this a tangible reality. Thank you for your kind attention.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Mr Christophe CHAILLOU.

Please.

Mr Christophe CHAILLOU (France, SOC): Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to take my turn in congratulating our colleague Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on her report, which bears witness to the very special link that exists between the teaching of history and the preservation of democratic values.

At a time when we are commemorating the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, and when there are fewer and fewer witnesses to that era, it is essential that we ask ourselves how we can keep alive the memory of this tragedy, the Shoah, which had such a profound effect on Europe.

On Monday, I took part in a commemoration ceremony at the Centre d'étude et de recherche sur les camps d'internement dans le Loiret (Centre for study and research on internment camps in the Loiret region) - there were indeed some, including Beaune-la-Rolande and the Pithiviers railway station, from which convoys with many children left for Auschwitz, one of the two Shoah memorials in my department, in the presence of Joseph WEISMANN, one of the few surviving children of the deportations from Beaune-la-Rolande, following the Vél' d'Hiv round-up in 1942. A large number of schoolchildren took part in the event, and I'm convinced of the importance for young people of visiting places of remembrance, and exchanging views whenever possible with those who witnessed tragic events that have shaped the history of our nations and our European continent.

I am therefore very sensitive to the emphasis placed by our colleague MARTINEZ SEIJO on the synergies to be developed between formal and non-formal education, on the need for partnerships between schools and cultural institutions, in particular museums and places of remembrance.

The very notion of places of remembrance invites us to reflect on "multiperspectivity", to take up the theme of our debate. The French historian Pierre NORA, who has directed major works on places of memory, wrote that "history is now written under the pressure of collective memories", which seek to "compensate for the historical uprooting of society and the anxiety of the future by the valorization of a past that was not hitherto experienced as such".

He explains that an object "becomes a place of memory when it escapes oblivion, for example through the affixing of commemorative plaques, and when a community reinvests it with its affect and emotions".

In this way, our relationship with history reflects the tensions that run through our societies, a key issue at a time of heightened polarization in all our countries. It also sheds light on how we revisit our past in the light of our perception of contemporary issues. The proof is in the debates that can arise in our communes, towns or villages over the appropriateness of maintaining a statue or the name of a street.

I therefore fully agree with the thrust of this report, which calls on our States to develop their ability to take into account multiple perspectives on history, as I believe this is an integral part of civic education and the building of an enlightened citizenry, capable of critical analysis that enables us to understand the scope and consequences of certain discourses, particularly populist and xenophobic ones.

I shall therefore be voting resolutely in favor of this draft text and the draft recommendation before us.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): "Thank you, Mister Chaillou" [spoken in French]

And our next speaker is Ms Mira NIEMINEN.

Please, Madam.

Ms Mira NIEMINEN (Finland, EC/DA): Thank you, Madam President and dear colleagues.

History is an extremely important subject. It is not merely a list of dates or events but a story of where we come from, where we are, and where we are headed. History plays a central role in shaping the future because, without an understanding of the past, we cannot make sustainable and wise decisions for the future.

Studying history allows us to understand the past and learn from the mistakes made by previous generations. History provides examples of both successes and failures, and these examples are crucial when building societies and new generations. By knowing why certain events led to specific outcomes, we can avoid repeating the same mistakes. History thus serves as both a guide and a warning.

Passing knowledge from one generation to the next is essential. If this chain breaks, we lose our connection to our roots and where we come from. Teaching history is a way to ensure that our culture and values remain vibrant for future generations. Without this continuity, we cannot understand our shared identity and our place in the world.

Additionally, studying history helps us understand different cultures and their values. By learning about the history of other countries and peoples, we can better appreciate their perspectives and understand why they think and act in certain ways.

Teaching history is not just about memorising facts, it is also about developing critical thinking and judgment skills.

Through history, we learn to question, analyse events, and understand cause-and-effect relationships.

These skills are needed in all areas of life.

Therefore, teaching history is not just about preserving the past, it is an investment in the future.

Thank you.

Ms Nadejda IORDANOVA (Bulgaria, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Madam Chair, distinguished colleagues,

I will vote for the draft resolution. It is very true that quality history education is particularly important for understanding the conflicting nuances of the past and the complexities of the present.

History of each and every one of our countries unfortunately has such events.

In two days, my country Bulgaria marks the Day of Appreciation and Tribute to the Victims of the Communist Regime. Eighty years ago, on February 1st, the Soviet-installed authorities acted on orders from Moscow sentencing to death and exterminating 67 Members of Parliament, 22 Ministers, 47 army generals and officers, 8 royal advisors and the three regents of the underaged Tzar Simeon II. Opposition supporters, intellectuals, bright and independent minds were sent to concentration camps, just because they thought differently from the Communist Party.

Even after the collapse of communism, most history lessons at Bulgarian highschools omit any extensive focus on the regime and its nature. As a society, we have a long way to go, in order to explore the darkest chapters of our history without mutual prejudice and conflict.

I heartily support the notion that synergies between formal and non-formal education are needed to overcome this hurdle. I can give you as an example the work of the civil society organization Sofia Platform in my country. Their learning activities do not take place merely in class, but in communist-related sites through informal games, open debates and generational dialogue with victims of the regime. One of their most successful annual projects has engaged hundreds of students in a Summer School at the Belene Island - home of a dreadful communist concentration camp in the past.

I do believe that consideration of multiple perspectives and the analysis of historical sources of sensitive and controversial parts of history cannot be achieved without adequate research of the relevant archives.

We don't need the dissolution of the institutions working with the archives of former communist collaborators, even though there are such voices. We need to strengthen their research capacity and there are successful examples of Member States. Following them, for example, I and my political fellows will work towards strengthening the Bulgarian Committee on archive files of former communist police collaborators and establishing an Institute for National Memory.

The more we preserve our socio-political history with all its bitter lessons, the better equipped we will be to prevent the worst horrors of the past from destroying our common future.

Ms Wanda NOWICKA (Poland, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Today we commemorate in the Council of Europe the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp. This is important day for all of us in the Council, including myself, as my two fathers – biological and step father – are survivors of Auschwitz camp.

My experience is unfortunately not unique. Many of us here have painful stories related to the past of our countries, including outrageous atrocities of wars. It shows that history is important component of our personal and national identity. We could and should learn from it as our ancient predecessors advised. „Historia vitae magistra est”.

First of all, we should learn so that wars would happen never again. We are far from achieving this goal in near future, nevertheless, we should do our best.

Secondly, we should focus on educating new generations not only to learn history but also to participate actively in democratic processes leading to peace in the world.

Finally, we should not use history for current political fights and struggles which feed populist attitudes and divisions in the societies. History should remain in the past not to be instrumentally and cynically used for current political divides.

Ms Louise MOREL (France, ALDE): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

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

Ms Flordeliz OSLER (Canada): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

I would like to commend the rapporteur for producing a compelling report addressing the need for societies to grapple with their difficult and sensitive pasts.

In this context, she underlines that museums and sites of remembrance have a crucial role to play in illuminating past atrocities and educating the public, especially young people, about historical state conduct.

To quote the rapporteur: “The world outside the classroom – whether real or virtual – can restore many victims of historical atrocities to historical significance and recognition and send powerful messages of inclusion and respect for diversity.”

In Canada, we have many museums and sites of remembrance that allow us to engage with our country’s sometimes complicated past.

I am honoured to say that the Canadian Museum for Human Rights is located in the province of Manitoba, the province I represent as a senator.

The museum does not hide the dark periods of Canada’s history, not least its treatment of Indigenous peoples.

For example, the museum offers students the opportunity to learn about Canada’s former system of residential schools and their devastating impact on Indigenous peoples and communities.

Following a fact-finding visit to Canada in 2023, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples observed: “The current human rights situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada cannot be fully understood without considering the negative legacy of the Indian residential school system and the intergenerational trauma it created.”

In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or TRC, launched a national inquiry into Canada’s residential school system and issued its final report in 2015.

It described the residential school system as an episode of “cultural genocide.”

Yet despite all that is known about the system, some Canadians openly refute the truth, just as others deny the horrors of the Holocaust. They downplay the atrocities of the system, in what has been termed “residential-school denialism.”

The TRC report issued 94 key sets of recommendations known as Calls to Action.

Several underscore the importance of remembrance as a means of reconciliation.

Two of the Calls to Action, numbers 81 and 82, appeal to governments in all jurisdictions to commission residential school monuments in their capital cities to honour the system’s survivors and the children who were lost to their families.

The placement of truth before reconciliation emphasises that an honest accounting of the past, however difficult, is necessary for reconciliation to occur.

Thank you, merci, meegwetch.

Ms Liliana TANGUY (France, ALDE): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

Ms Nicole DURANTON (France, ALDE): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam.

Dear colleagues, I must now interrupt the list of speakers.

The speeches of members on the speakers list who have been present during the debate but have not been able to speak may be given to the Table Office for publication in the official report.

I remind colleagues that the type-written texts can be submitted electronically if possible, no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

We will now hear from the Committee.

I call Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, the rapporteur, to reply.

You have 3 minutes, Madam.

Please.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Thank you, Madam Chair,

Many thanks.

As an educator and a politician, I feel deeply thinking for this unanimous support from practically each and everyone of you concerning my report.

This report shows some very important aspects of the futures of our society. It is clear that we need to commemorate freedom and democracy which don't come for free. In Spain, we know this very well. Spain was at the bottom of international rankings for democratic quality, but today it's one of the fullest democracies on the same ranking list.

What is important is to be able to transmit to our young people the importance of living in democracy, because if you have spent your whole life living in democracy, it's easy to forget the enormous strengths of such a system. This has to be shored up by messages and things concerning safety, traded in for restricting rights. This is a threat we see in all of our societies today.

History however shows us that freedom is never gained forever. You can have it for a century and then you can see a situation where democracies are turned into dictatorships, and the rights of one out of three Europeans are eliminated. This has happened before but it must never happen again.

In this report we have a whole series of detailed recommendations to improve history teaching and to promote democratic citizenship. More flexible curriculums which give priority to development skills, focusing on students needs; integrating democratic citizenship education.

(The speaker's microphone momentarily goes off)...

As a subject which is obligatory and strengthens skills for democratic citizenship at all levels of education, as we mentioned before.

It is necessary to make teacher training part of the reference framework of skills for democratic culture. Both basic and ongoing training of teachers with innovative methodologies and resources. Forms of co-operation that facilitate alliances between schools, museums, institutions, NGOs and artists, so as to create educational units and map more significant and dynamic forms of history teaching.

Also, informal methods of guaranteeing resources and finances for places of memory and museums, and make sure that they are safe spaces to learn about democracy. It's the opposite of what happened at the Gulag History Museum in Russia, which received our prize and whose director was fired for refusing to change texts on Mr Josef STALIN's errors.

Finally, I think about the role of places of memory as spaces of truth, reconciliation and human rights.

The report tries to provide an overall framework for rethinking history teaching as a means for reinforcing social cohesion, encouraging social diversity and preparing future generations to confront democratic challenges of the 21st century.

Thank you very much.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam rapporteur.

Now I have to ask Mr Yunus EMRE if he wishes to speak on behalf of the Committee.

Please, sir.

Mr Yunus EMRE (Türkiye, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): History education should be a key part of human rights education and a foundation for young people to develop democratic citizenship, which is based on the respect for different opinions, pluralism, tolerance, and diversity.

In our Committee, we strongly believe that multiperspectivity and the appropriate handling of controversial and sensitive issues in history lessons can be a powerful tool to support peace and reconciliation in our societies.

However, delivering quality history education in schools can be very challenging due to overloaded curricula, traditional teaching practices, and, in many instances, highly centralised education systems.

Education systems must therefore adapt to social changes and the growing diversity in our societies and adequately respond with new curricula and interactive methodologies.

In September 2023, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education provided political momentum for the renewal of the civic mission of education as part of the new Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024-2030 "Learners First – Education for today's and tomorrow's democratic societies".

The Council of Europe guiding principles for quality history education and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) are indeed excellent tools to be promoted and broadly implemented in our member States.

We propose in the draft resolution that education for democratic citizenship should be included in school curricula, both as a distinct compulsory subject and as part and parcel of other relevant subjects such as history teaching. This should be done during all stages of formal education (primary, secondary, and higher education). It should also form a constituent part of vocational training and non-formal education.

In the draft Recommendation, we call on the Committee of Ministers to provide support and assistance to member states to review their education policies and integrate in national education curricula the Council of Europe guiding principles for history education and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

To achieve this important mission, it is necessary to continue to financially support the different Council of Europe activities relating to history education and ensure synergies between the different strands of the intergovernmental program and the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe.

We also propose to encourage creating further links and transversality between the Council of Europe activities on culture, heritage, education, and youth.

Finally, all member states are encouraged to join the Partial Agreement and take part in the activities of the Observatory.

On behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, I invite you to back the proposals that are outlined in the draft Resolution and draft Recommendation with your vote today, and in your parliaments tomorrow.

Thank you for your support.

Vote : La multiperspectivité dans l'enseignement de la mémoire et de l'histoire au service de la citoyenneté démocratique

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Emre.

Dear colleagues,

Our debate is closed now and we'll move to the voting.

So the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft resolution to which seven amendments and two sub-amendments have been tabled and a draft recommendation to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will start by considering the draft resolution.

Any amendment which has been unanimously approved by the Committee seized for report shall not be put to the vote in plenary and shall be declared as definitively approved, unless 10 or more members of the Parliamentary Assembly object.

I understand that the chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Parliamentary Assembly that Amendment 3 and 4 be declared as approved.

Amendment 1 was also unanimously approved, but was sub-amended and will therefore require separate consideration.

I repeat, Amendment 1 must be called separately as we must deal with the sub-amendment.

Is that so, Mister Emre?

Mr Yunus EMRE (Türkiye, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): Yes, it is unanimously approved.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

If no one objects, I will consider the amendments to be approved.

Is there an objection? If there is, we will need to verify that the objection has the required support of 10 people. Please, could those who object raise their hand? I see no objection.

Amendments 3 and 4 to the draft resolution are therefore approved and will not be called.

Any amendment which has been rejected by the Committee seized for a report by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast shall not be put to the vote in plenary and shall be declared as definitively rejected, unless 10 or more members of the Parliamentary Assembly object.

I understand that the chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Parliamentary Assembly that Amendments 2 and 7 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as rejected.

Amendment 5 was also rejected by a two-thirds majority, but as it was subsequently sub-amended, it will require separate consideration.

I repeat, Amendment 5 must be called separately as we must deal with the sub-amendment.

Is that so, Mister Emre?

Mr Yunus EMRE (Türkiye, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): Yes, Madam, that's true.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. If no one objects, I will consider the amendments to be rejected.

Is there an objection? If there is, we will need to verify that the objection has the required support of 10 people. Please, could those who object raise their hand? I see no objection.

Amendments 2 and 7 to the draft resolution are therefore rejected and will not be called.

Now I call Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK to support Amendment 1. You have 30 seconds, Madam.

Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you.

The amendment is about how the Russian Federation distorts history and uses it to justify the aggression.

And also it underlines the role of evidence-based history to fight disinformation, such campaigns as the Russian Federation is waging against Ukraine and against other countries.

Thank you.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Kravchuk.

And now I call Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on behalf of the Committee to support the sub-amendment. Please, Madam.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur): Yes, Madam Chair,

We have agreed on a text as a sub-amendment which is included in the amendment's proposed text, which is recalling its Resolution 2558/2024 and Recommendation 2280/2024 on countering the racial and cultural identity in war and peace.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues,

Is there anyone who wishes to speak against the sub-amendment? Yes? No. Okay. There is no one.

Does Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK want to provide her opinion on the sub-amendment? Please.

Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK (Ukraine, ALDE): I agree, Madam Chair.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Kravchuk.

So the Committee is obviously in favour of the sub-amendment.

I shall now put the sub-amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

The sub-amendment is adopted.

Now we come to the main Amendment 1 as sub-amended.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment? I see no one.

The Committee unanimously accepted this amendment and supports the sub-amendment.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote as a sub-amendment, as sub-amended.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The amendment is agreed.

Dear colleagues, I understand that Mr Pablo HISPÁN wishes to withdraw Amendment 6. Is that so?

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD): Yes.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Okay, thank you, Mister Hispán.

Does anyone else wish to move it? I see no one.

The amendment is withdrawn.

Page 15. Now I call Mr Pablo HISPÁN to support Amendment no 5. You have 30 seconds... (Have you put your badge on?)

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD)*: No. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I call now Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on behalf of the Committee to support the sub-amendment.

Please, Madam, you have 30 seconds.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Yes, we talked about not changing the term that they suggest, but rather adding after the original text of the amendment, the words "victims of terrorist groups".

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam.

Does anyone want to speak against the Sub-amendment?

I see no one. Does Mr Pablo HISPÁN want to provide his opinion?

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD)*: I accept the sub-amendment.

Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The Committee is obviously in favour of the sub-amendment.

And I shall now put the sub-amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call now for the result to be displayed.

The sub-amendment is agreed.

Now we can come to the main Amendment 5 as sub-amended.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

I see no one.

The Committee unanimously accepted the amendment with the sub-amendment, I shall now put the amendment as sub-amended to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

And I call for the result to be displayed.

So Amendment 5 as sub-amended is agreed.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Doc. 16090 [as amended]. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open, dear colleagues.

The vote is closed.

And I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft resolution in Doc. 16019, as amended, is adopted.

Dear colleagues,

We will now proceed to vote on the draft recommendation contained in Doc. 16090. A two-thirds majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

And I call for the result to be displayed.

Dear Colleagues, the draft recommendation in Doc. 16019 is adopted.

Dear colleagues, I proposed that the urgent debate titled "European commitment to a just and lasting peace in Ukraine", currently scheduled for the afternoon session on Thursday 30 January, be moved to the morning. Does anyone object to this proposal?

I see no one.

So the proposal is adopted.

Thank you, dear colleagues.

Cérémonie de commémoration du 80ème anniversaire de la libération du camp d'Auschwitz-Birkenau

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues,

Good morning.

As set out on the agenda, we will now turn to the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and hear several speeches.

Dear Chief Rabbi Meir Lau,

Dear Secretary General,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen, we gather today in our hemicycle to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The presence of Chief Rabbi MEIR LAU under the vaulted ceiling of this hemicycle is profoundly symbolic. I would describe this chamber as a temple of democracy, a central place to worship the shared values of European democracy. European democracy, as we know it, would be unimaginable without a commitment to remembrance.

Chief Rabbi, I express my deepest gratitude to you for travelling such a great distance to share your invaluable testimony, the living voice of those who endured the unimaginable horrors of the Holocaust. We listen to your words with reverence, we record them, and we pledge to pass them on to future generations.

“Never again,”

“No more,”

“*Nie wieder*”.

Sadly, the memory of the Shoah has not yet transformed these words into an enduring reality. First proclaimed by pacifists after the World War I, the slogan failed to prevent the devastation of the Second. Revived in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the horrors of the death camps like Auschwitz, it could not stop the genocides (in Rwanda and Srebrenica for example).

Even in today’s world, shaped by progress and transformation, “never again” does not shield us from exclusion, scapegoating, and the eruption of hatred towards certain groups.

As we come together to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, we are reminded of a tragedy so profound that it challenges our understanding. The Holocaust, a devastating assault on humanity and the human spirit, continues to demand reflection on how such darkness was allowed to emerge.

We know what has happened, but do we fully understand why? This incomprehension should not deter us from fulfilling our duty to remember and to act. It is vital for our Assembly, which must lead by example and set the tone.

It is equally crucial for support and development of remembrance sites and the need for mainstreaming their history into educational curricula. Just this morning, we debated and adopted a resolution on this critical topic.

While we may never fully understand Holocaust, your testimony, Chief Rabbi, along with our collective efforts to preserve and transmit memory, will bear fruit.

Your legacy will help to build and sustain a community of righteous, a community that endures today and continues to oppose tyranny and injustice wherever they appear.

They act for us now and give us the hope for the future.

I want to believe in it with all my heart.

Thank you again, Chief Rabbi, for joining us today.

I now call the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Alain BERSET, for his statement.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Dear Chief Rabbi Lau,

Dear President Rousopoulos,

Excellencies,

Dear guests,

“There is hope for your future,” says the book of Jeremiah, “and your children will return home.”

It is with this passage that Chief Rabbi Yisrael MEIR LAU, our keynote speaker today, begins his memoir.

There is hope for your future, and your children will return home.

But too many children never came home from the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Too many mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts were lost. Entire families were destroyed.

That is why we are here today, in this chamber of the Council of Europe, a centre of action for European democracy.

To honour the victims of the Holocaust. To listen to the survivors who are still with us. And to heed their call to keep watch, to not let history repeat itself.

It is not just our duty, it is a sacred obligation.

So on this day, 80 years after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, we stand against the surge in antisemitism. We remember that the crimes of the Shoah were committed in Europe, by Europeans. And we commit to our young people and their future.

And I say this as the Secretary General of our organisation and as a father of three.

A new survey by the Claims Conference found that many young Europeans have never heard of the Holocaust, including 46% here in France.

These shocking numbers are a wake-up call.

What would Simone VEIL, the French Holocaust survivor and first woman President of the European Parliament, say about this moment?

"She who said: 'When we were in the camp, it was important to hope that some of them would come back, that we'd know how this happened.'"

[spoken in French: Elle qui disait : « Lorsque nous étions au camp, c'était important d'espérer que certaines rentreraient, qu'on sache comment ça s'est passé. »]

To know what happened in Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buchenwald, and all the other Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

And to act so that it never happens again.

Ladies and gentlemen,

That is the test before us, one of the very reasons why our founders created the Council of Europe.

Because when we allow impunity to go unpunished, we empower the enemies of democracy.

Because hatred has no place on our continent.

And because, as Auschwitz survivor Marian TURSKI, 98, said on Monday: "Let us not be afraid to convince ourselves that problems can be resolved between neighbours."

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Secretary General. Dear colleagues,

Chief Rabbi Lau will now proceed to listening to the statements by the leaders of the five political groups of this Parliamentary Assembly.

I call Mr Frank SCHWABE, the leader of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, to take the floor. Frank.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Mister President, dear honourable guests,

I'm speaking today not only as group leader, but also as the head of the German delegation.

That fills me with awe.

The Holocaust is a crime against humanity that to this day exceeds my imagination. It has brutally cost the lives of various population groups, including LGBTIQ, the community of Roma and Traveler, and six million Jews.

There are so many terrible images that are burned into the memory, and there are no pictures of many more terrible events.

This house, the Council of Europe, is built on the ruins of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

I remember the meeting with my friend Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS, the story of his family, the story of his mother as a Holocaust survivor in Struthof, close to Danzig. The history of the theatre in Vilnius, which is now a museum. And I had the honour of visiting the museum last year at Emanuelis's invitation. Thank you so much for this trust.

I also particularly remember the stories of the children who fell victim to the madness of the German National Socialists. Little innocent children. And it is the works of art of Samuel BAK, an impressive artist who created images that express the incomprehensibility of this genocide and the struggle of Jews for their own identity that the Nazis wanted to erase. Please look at these pictures.

Today we commemorate the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. These images are completely emaciated prisoners, corpses, things like glasses and shoes are also burned into the memory. But it was a relief. And with it a hope that something like that will never happen again. But we must be vigilant. Nothing is over. Everything is still there.

And that's why I want to conclude by quoting Ms Margot FRIEDLAENDER, a Holocaust survivor, 103 years old.

"Be people. Be careful. Think of yourselves. Think of what was. Remember that they were people. People. We all have the same blood. No Christian, Jewish, Muslim blood. Human blood."

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Frank.

I now call Mr Pablo HISPÁN, the leader of the Group of the European People's Party.

Pablo, you have the floor.

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, President, Secretary General, ladies and gentlemen, Chief Rabbi LAU, representatives of family of the deceased and survivors of the Shoah,

In this temple of democracy, as the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has called this room, we are gathered together today to mark in a solemn manner one of the blackest periods, nay, the darkest periods in humankind.

We may feel that it is our credit to gather together to mark this anniversary. But, my friends, it is our eternal shame that these events which we meet to mark could ever be allowed to have taken place. This must not happen again, we have heard many times. Unfortunately this has happened in form of antisemitism or terrorism, as we saw on 7 October.

During the course of this week, our media channels have broadcast images of the events taking place this week in Auschwitz. One commentator reflected that her gaze fell not on the world leaders, but on the faces of the few remaining survivors of the camp, some of them revisiting Auschwitz for the first time since the liberation.

Here in this Assembly we have relatives of victims of the Holocaust that are members of this chamber, as Frank said, our Group of the European People's Party colleague Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS.

None of us who did not experience that horror can know the pain of the camps, of the loss, of the emotional torment of families and communities being ripped apart, of the not knowing, and the survivor's guilt carried by so many.

As many have reminded us today, not knowing our history leaves us bound to repeat the mistakes of our past.

For this reason, I thank particularly the authorities of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe for inviting to this event a group of schoolchildren. And I look forward to listening to their perspectives on these events.

It is our duty to bear witness to the events of the past and to pass that memory [on] to the generations not yet born.

On behalf of the members of the Group of the European People's Party of the Parliamentary Assembly, I bear witness to the past. I commit to remember it and sharing it with the future generations.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Pablo.

I call now Mr Iulian BULAI, leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mr Iulian BULAI (Romania, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Dear President,

Dear Secretary General,

Dear Chief Rabbi Meir Lau,

Allow me to start by quoting a bit of your remarkable memoir entitled "Out of the Depths", which I find very striking.

"Today, looking back on the six years of that war, I realize that the worst thing I endured in the Holocaust was not the hunger, the cold, or the beatings; it was the humiliation. It was almost impossible to bear the helplessness of unjustified humiliation. Helplessness becomes linked with that dishonor."

Auschwitz-Birkenau is a symbol of the abysmal Nazi political project based on dishonour and dehumanisation in a methodical and radical way, turning people into numbers. Our organisation was founded to fight against the aberration put to practice by this extreme ideology.

Today, of course, there are no more death camps in Europe, but we still see dehumanisation, the blatant disregard of human life, freedom, rights, feeling that the Russian aggressor is bringing to Ukraine, where again the death of countless of people is considered not as an acceptable tragedy, but as statistics.

For too long we thought it was enough to believe that our dark history would not be repeated. But we see that is that it was not enough. We must do more than just believe, more than just hope. We must be extremely vigilant and relentless in fighting for our values of human rights and individual freedoms. No ideology, no reason, no budgetary consideration should be above that.

We have no excuse.

But the story of Auschwitz-Birkenau has another dimension that resonates with current events and debates. For it was also a cruel, bitter, and monstrous lesson of how technological progress can become a source of pain, suffering and that, if it is not accompanied by humanistic perspective based on the values of human rights.

The promise of artificial intelligence, big data, social networks, and automated systems can bring progress and prosperity, but our quest for technological progress should not be unchecked. It should obey the humanist ideals of a just and free society based on the principles of individual liberty. Otherwise, we risk creating new horrors, as our civilisation has done many times before.

Finally, today we cannot avoid the issue of far-right populism, which continues to corrode and corrupt our societies.

We hoped that the atrocities of World War II would be an antidote to anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and homophobia. But today we see that this is not the case. What is even more striking is that denial of Holocaust, homophobic, and xenophobic hatred are widespread and growing, including on social networks.

Therefore, the commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp should remain an occasion to renew our commitment to fight against hate speech and far-right ideas.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Iulian.

On behalf of the European Conservatives Group, I will call now the Vice-President of the group, Ms Elisabetta GARDINI. Elisabetta.

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, dear Mister President, honourable guests, dear colleagues,

The Shoah stands as one of the darkest chapters in human history, a chilling reminder of what can happen when hatred goes unchecked. But let us remember this: the Shoah did not begin with gas chambers. It began with words. It began with propaganda, dehumanisation, and the slow, insidious erosion of empathy. It started with the labelling of Jews as “the other”, with hateful rhetoric, discrimination, and a normalisation of bigotry that paved the way for violence.

This is a vital lesson for us today. Genocide and oppression are not sudden — they are the result of gradual steps, each one eroding moral boundaries. The words we use matter. Silence in the face of hate enables it to grow.

Yet, antisemitism, the same poison that fuelled the Shoah, is still alive. It lurks not only in extremist ideologies but also in subtler forms — in conspiracy theories, casual stereotypes, and denial of Jewish suffering. Alarming, it is increasingly visible in certain migrant communities in the West, where antisemitic beliefs, often imported from regions of conflict, are allowed to fester. This is not a comfortable truth, but it is a reality we must confront.

It is our responsibility to push back against this hatred, no matter where it comes from. Education, dialogue, and courage are our tools. We must teach the next generation that tolerance is not a weakness, but the foundation of a just society. And we must stand together against antisemitism in all its forms — whether it's on the streets, in politics, or online.

The Shoah taught us the cost of indifference. Let us never forget that, and let us commit to being vigilant, to standing up for truth and humanity, so that “never again” is not just a phrase, but a promise we uphold.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Elisabetta.

On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, Mr George LOUCAIDES.

George.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President, dear colleagues, distinguished guests, survivors and dear Chief Rabbi LAU,

Today, 80 years after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Red Army, we reflect upon the unimaginable suffering endured by millions of Jews, but also by thousands of Communists, anti-fascists, trade unionists, Roma people, disabled individuals, political prisoners and homosexuals who were brutalised by the Third Reich. We pay tribute to all victims.

However, Auschwitz-Birkenau is not just a symbol of suffering. It is also a testament to the strength of the human spirit, the resilience of those who survived and the profound lessons we must carry forward in order for history not to be repeated.

On the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, it is important to recall the dangerous ideologies of hatred that gave rise to such horrors and take stock of their historic significance as these atrocities were not born in a vacuum, but we are rather the result of deeply entrenched systems of oppression, discrimination and dehumanisation.

As the Group of the Unified European Left we underline that our commitment to human rights is inseparable from our fight against the systems of inequality and injustice that still pervades our societies.

Intolerance, racism, antisemitism, fascism, Islamophobia and xenophobia are not merely issues of the past, but pressing issues of the present that we must condemn and eradicate with concrete action.

Dear colleagues,

We should not ignore the rise of far right and neo fascist movements across Europe, the US and beyond that often seek to resurrect Nazi ideologies.

Fascism of the 21st century is a threat not only to the Jewish community, but also to our democratic values and principles.

The Group of the Unified European Left will stand in solidarity with all vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed peoples, regardless of their background, and embrace diversity.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, George.

I will call now Ms Georgina LABODA, who will speak on behalf of the community of Roma and Travellers.

(Can you please press the button? Just a moment, just a moment. Dear Iulian, can you give your badge, please? Thank you. Can you please come to the rostrum? Please come to the rostrum. Yes, yes. Here. Thank you.)

Ms Georgina Laboda (on behalf of the community of Roma and Travellers): Dear Secretary General Berset,

Dear President of the Parliamentary Assembly Rousopoulos,

Dear excellencies,

Dear all,

"I'm afraid that Europe is forgetting its past and that Auschwitz is only sleeping."

These are the poignant words of Ceija STOJKA, an Austrian Roma survivor.

Looking around Europe and the world today, we could not agree more with her. Soon, we will enter a time without survivors.

The personal testimonies of Roma and Sinti, and their decades-long efforts to shed light on the horrors they endured during the Holocaust, reveal not only atrocities but also the resilience and strength of our people.

The history of the Roma people is part of European history. And must be treated as such. Yet even now, the truth and the full dimension of the Roma Genocide during the Holocaust remain insufficiently acknowledged, too often ignored. This is the "forgotten genocide" of the Roma people.

As a young Roma, I make the following plea today: continue to fight in your own country so that in every history class, every child in Europe will learn about the Roma Holocaust and the centuries of discrimination and intolerance endured by Roma.

Every year, on 2 August, the Dikh He Na Bister Initiative gathers together hundreds of Roma and non-Roma young people in Auschwitz for Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

We want to ensure that the memory of the victims reaches the newest generations and creates an alliance for an inclusive future.

Dear President Rousopoulos, in 2024 for the first time you headed an important delegation of this Assembly to pay tribute to the Roma victims. This was such a strong message for the young people present in Auschwitz.

We rely on the Council of Europe to uphold its mandate, to continue advocating for proper education and research on history and for social justice for Roma people across Europe.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam LABODA.

I will call now Mr Tim STEFANIEK on behalf of the LGBTI community.

You can come to the rostrum as well. Thank you.

Mr Tim Stefaniak (on behalf of the LGBTI community): Dear Mister President of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Dear Mister Secretary General,

Dear Chief Rabbi Meir Lau,

Dear members of Parliament,

Today, 80 years after the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, we remember one of the darkest chapters in Germany and European history. We remember all people and all social groups that were persecuted by the National Socialists. We also remember their courage, their resistance, and their solidarity.

I would like to focus today on the persecution of queer, trans and intersex people, who were criminalised, denounced, imprisoned, tortured and murdered.

The pink triangle marks bisexual and gay men in concentration camps, as well as trans women who were seen as men by the regime and prosecuted under the paragraph 175.

They commonly found themselves at the bottom of the camp hierarchy and received little solidarity from their fellow inmates.

After the concentration camps were liberated, many of them remained in prison.

It took a long struggle, both in Germany and in Europe, until their persecution and suffering were officially recognised.

Their stories must be part of our collective memory in order to draw lessons from the past for our political present and future.

In many parts of the world, queer people are still criminalised, and almost everywhere they continue to experience social discrimination, exclusion and violence, including here in Europe.

It is our shared responsibility to end such discrimination and to ensure that queer people have the same opportunities as all others to live a life in freedom and safety.

Especially in this dangerous moment, when anti-democratic forces are gaining strength and finding their way into the democratic parliaments of Europe.

Today and every day, let us not only remember, but also act.

Let us work tirelessly together for a Europe and a world in which no person is marginalised, persecuted because of their identity.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Stefaniak.

I call now Chief Rabbi of Israel, MEIR LAU, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council and survivor of the Holocaust, to take the floor.

Chief Rabbi LAU.

(Applause)

Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau (Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council): President of the Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Members of the Council of Europe from all over the Continent,

Guests, leaders and friends,

I will start with something very, very personal. I was six years old when my father was killed in Treblinka, together with my brother, who was 13 years old only. My mother was with us until she died in Ravensbrück in Germany when she was 42 and I was seven and a half years old. So by the age of seven and a half, I had lost my father and my mother, a brother and an older brother – 11 years older than me – saved my life, for the last three years that we stayed during the war, Second World War, in Piotrków Trybunalski, then in Częstochowa in Poland, and lastly in Buchenwald, Germany, where we were released by the American troops.

When I was liberated from Buchenwald, I was younger than eight years old. I was sure that this was the end of the world. My brother at the end was very sick, with over 42 degrees, before he separated from me in Buchenwald. He didn't believe that he would continue to exist. And he told me, "Lulek" – that is my Polish nickname – "Lulek, they're taking me and we will never meet again. I want to speak to you very openly – you are adult enough to understand – I think that this is the end of all of us Jewish people. And you are Jewish. You know that Father was the Rabbi of Piotrków. We are Jewish." I spoke only Polish at the time. "I don't believe that you will live. But in case – and a miracle may happen and you will stay alive – everyone will want to take you with them. I had a good friend in Russia. I had a good friend in France. I had friends all over from Buchenwald, Jewish and non Jewish survivors. Don't go with any of them. Never! Say to them kindly, 'thank you, but I'm not going with you'".

So I asked him, "Tulek", Tulek is Naphtali. "Where shall I go? Tell me, where shall I go?" He said, "There is one place for you – for us. Repeat the name of this place with me. Say it. 'Ereṣ Yisra'el' – the land of Israel." I looked at him, and didn't understand. I didn't know one word in Hebrew. He said, "Repeat it: 'Ereṣ Yisra'el'. And if you survive, remember, this is your place – only there. From behind my coat, I asked him, "Tulek, but why 'Ereṣ Yisra'el?" He said, "this is our homeland".

I said "I was born in Poland, in Piotrków Trybunalski. How is 'Ereṣ Yisra'el my homeland?" He said, "This is the historic homeland. And this is the only place on Earth that they don't kill the Jews. This is the place for you, the place where they don't kill Jews. Remember, you will go to 'Ereṣ Yisra'el."

By miracle, he overcame the disease and we went to 'Ereṣ Yisra'el before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1945, we were the first newcomers to the land of Israel after the Second World War. We were only boys, only children, only orphans, and we went there.

Less than three years later, the United Nations had decided to create a Jewish state in part of the historic Land of Israel – the State of Israel. In November 1947, the Israeli state was established. We danced in the streets. I remember that night. I was about 10 years old. No one was going to sleep. The whole Jewish population – over half a million at the time – were dancing in the streets all night. "We have a land! We have a home! What is a home? Nobody will kill us anymore. No more concentration camps, no more ghettos. We are in our home." We were so happy.

But at the same time, in 1947 and 1948, seven neighbouring countries – a little bit further, Arab countries – disappeared. They disagreed with the decision of the United Nations. And they fought us. This was our independence war, which took a year and a half. A year and a half. And the army was very poor. We didn't have one aeroplane at that time. Not even one helicopter or whatever. Some tanks and foot heroes. Some of them with numbers on their arms – survivors of the Holocaust, fighting for themselves and for the new.

Seven Arab countries fought against us. But lately, during the history, two very important of them, the very close neighbours of ours, made peace with us – Egypt and Jordan. Till this very last day. We have ambassadors in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem, from all these countries, including Egypt. And now we have with other people, Arab people – from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain – who made peace with us in recent last years – only in the last 5 or 10 years. We have a good relationship. I have a friend, German, what's his name? German ZACHARYAYEV. He told me about an Arab state where all the people speak Arabic and they are Islamics. Azerbaijan. It's not in the Middle East, but somewhere in Europe, ancient Europe. Azerbaijan. Very close friends to Israel. They agree to our existence, to our independence, to our freedom. Azerbaijan. Remember the name ZACHARYAYEV.

But this is not the picture of the whole world. In the world of today, some – very many people – forgot about the Holocaust, doesn't know about the Second World War. They are not in this Assembly now. They are denying the very future and existence of the Jewish people till this very last day. They call it anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism. Who would believe 80 years ago – I was in Auschwitz the day before yesterday, where we spoke about 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. No more war, no more bloodshed. That's what we meant, that what we hoped. But today we speak about liquidation, about war, about bloodshed again.

I must tell you one short memory that I have from 40 years ago. Australia, the edge of the world for us in Europe. Australia. Melbourne, a very Jewish city. Melbourne. After Sydney comes Melbourne. I was there 40 years ago for a lecture. It was a Saturday, Shabbat. I went with a friend who followed me from home to the hotel. It was almost midnight, Friday night. We stopped at the red light on the street, the two of us. I was dressed like here, like now, Jewish uniform of a rabbi. My friend was dressed almost the same. A car stopped. In the car – a beautiful car – was sitting two young people, who were around 40. He stopped the car. He had a green light. But he stopped, looked at the two of us and shouted out. I will never forget although it was 40 years ago. "Jews! Did you pay the bill for the gas you used in the chambers?" I looked at my friend. He was

Australian. Maybe my English was not good enough? Maybe I didn't understand? If we paid for the gas used in the chambers in Auschwitz, in Majdanek, in six places where the gas was used by the Nazis to liquidate the Jewish people? And we had to pay for the gas and we didn't pay 40 years after the war. "Did you pay the bill?"

I asked my friend, "You are an Australian, born here in Melbourne. Are you used to hearing expressions like this?" I said. "Doesn't Australia know about the Second World War on the edge of the world?" He said, "Unfortunately, I hear words like this very often." Today, anti-Semitism... You can speak about today's underground movements, speaking about liquidation of Israel, of the Jewish people.

Believe me, I live in Israel for almost 80 years. Just after the war, as I told you, the first youth who came to Israel after the Second World War. We never began a war. We never started to fight with any of our neighbours. Even the United Nations gave us in 1947 a very narrow, small country. Tel Aviv was divided according to the UN between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, the Arab station and the Jewish station.

The only airport at that time in Israel wasn't in our hands – International. Jerusalem didn't belong to the Jewish people, according to the United Nations in 1947. Jerusalem was not ours. And in spite of that, we were happy. As I told you, we were dancing in the streets. And we never started the war. Not the independence war, not in the 1940s or in the 1990s – five wars. None of them was started by us. Believe me, we want peace. We will not pay for the bill of the gas chambers. We don't understand what is the human being gas chambers. Is this how human beings behave? Killing innocent people? 1 200 000 children younger than me at that time were killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust and the partners.

We never will start a war. We love peace, we love friendship, we love people. And we have the Bible, we have our history, we have our tradition, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Moses, of King Solomon and all the other leaders of the Jewish people during the history of 4 000 years' existence of the Jewish people. In spite of all the exiles and all of the troubles. We love people. We love freedom. We love to love each other, to respect one another.

And that's why I'm so happy that you have invited me to say these warm words, what I feel in my heart. No, please. In Europe and all over the world. We love mankind. We love people and we want to grow up. We wanted our children to know freedom, know peace and never a war. Never again. Only peace, friendship and love.

Thanks a lot.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Chief Rabbi.

Thank you.

Chief Rabbi has accepted my proposal to invite in our hemicycle six secondary school students who will address to him each asking a question.

We will listen first to the question and then Chief Rabbi will reply to all of them.

So I would like to ask you to listen to the children's questions and then reply to all of them.

I'll take all questions now, and then you will have the time to reply.

I'm asking now, Roubine ASHOR to take the floor first. Madame Roubine ASHOR.

Sorry we could not have the ability to listen to you. Closer to the microphone, please.

Roubine ASHOR (Secondary school student): Hello.

What has this experience changed in your view of humanity and life in general?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): And then we will go to Ms Salsabil BENSACI.

Salsabil BENSACI (Secondary school student): Good morning, sir,

What was the most significant event during your deportation?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Salsabil.

Mr Zouhir DAHMANI is next.

Zouhir DAHMANI (Secondary school student): Good morning, sir,

Can you tell us about your liberation from the Buchenwald camp?

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Next is Ms Hoang Phuong Thao HUYNH. I hope I pronounced it in the most appropriate way.

Hoang phuong Thao HUYNH (Secondary school student): Good morning, sir,

Are there any memories you haven't told us about?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Yvette KWADWO.

Yvette KWADWO (Secondary school student): Good morning, sir.

Was it possible to make friends in the camp?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And now we have Ms Lina WANDHAMMER - BENDOU.

Lina WANDHAMMER - BENDOU (Secondary school student): Hello.

What was the hardest part of returning to a normal life?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): So thank you.

I want to thank the students for being with us.

Chief Rabbi, would you like to respond to the children? Yes.

Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau (Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council): Thank you for the questions. I'm not sure that I got all of them, and I will try to answer some of them at least in a short time. Right?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Yes. We have five minutes.

Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau (Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council): I will try with the last one. How was it to get friends in the Holocaust?

Yeah. I was adopted already in Buchenwald by a Russian young man, also in the camp, Feodor [MIKHAILICHENKO] of Rostov. He cooked potatoes every day for me, not for himself. He made a cover of wool for my ears and froze in the morning not to leave, not to leave me with them. He was older than me, with 10 years. He was a Russian, I was a Jewish. He knew that I'm a Jew. He saved my life and he endangered himself for me. I met his daughters and his son, and he himself passed away already, as mentioned, in Yad Vashem, in the mount of Yad Vashem, as one of the of the righteous of the war.

So we could find friends in the war.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): If you want, I can help by repeating the questions one by one. If it helps you. Would you like me to repeat the questions one by one?

Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau (Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council): The question?

No, not all the questions, no.

I was asked what was the most hard moment during the war.

One moment that I will never forget is, I think this is most, not when I saw killing people, children, women, elderly. We are used to see it.

But one moment and one move I will never forget. When the Russians came close to Poland, to Piotrków, where I was born. The Germans pushed us to the train to take us out, away from the city not to be free. We didn't know where they take us. I went with my mother. I was seven and a half. And my brother was 18 already. And there were two groups in the train station. They divided us into two troops: men, women. And I went with my mother: the women.

My mother was very smart. She understood if the Nazis find time to make two parties, we are not going to the same direction, the same train, but not in the same wagon. And the ladies were pushed first. Ladies with babies and the men not yet. She pushed me to my brother. She understood that the men had more chance to exist, to survive, because they are workers, not ladies and not babies.

So in order to save my life, she separated me from her. She pushed me away to my brother, crying to him: "Tulek! Naphtali! Take the child. Take the *dziecko*. Take the child!"

She was pushed with the ladies to the wagon. I was crying out: "Mama, I want to go with you! Mama!"

And the only thing that I saw from her was her hand. To my brother and to myself, this was the last move that I saw. The last moment we met her in our lives.

Only much later, after the war, we were told that she was killed in Ravensbrück, in this German city, in the camp with the ladies. And we didn't see her anymore.

This was this move with the hand. And unforgettable for me more than all the six years of the war. This is for your question.

I think that this will be enough.

Will you let me go?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Chief Rabbi LAU, dear participants, guests and dear colleagues,

I want to thank you all for participating in this commemoration of the 80th anniversary.

I will now invite you to join me at the front of the Palais de l'Europe for the continuation of the ceremony. We will lay a wreath and have a minute of silence.

The Assembly will hold its next public sitting this afternoon at 3.30pm with the Agenda approved on Monday.

The sitting is adjourned.