

**Provisional edition**

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## Official report of debates

### Ouverture de la séance n°25

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

It's time for the fourth day of the session. Good morning. I declare this 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.

And also I remind the Assembly that members who have not submitted an annual declaration of interests are required to start any intervention in the Plenary with an oral declaration of interest under paragraph 20 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Now for the next item of business. This morning is the debate on the Report titled "Saving the lives of migrants at sea and protecting their human rights". It's Document 16195, presented by Mr Paolo PISCO on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.

In order to finish by 11.10 a.m., we must interrupt the list of speakers at about 11.00 a.m. allow time for the reply and vote.

I call now Mr Paolo PISCO, the rapporteur. You have 7 minutes now and, then after, please respect the time limit of a 3-minute intervention at the end to reply to the debate.

Thank you. Mister PISCO, please.

### Débat : Sauver la vie des personnes migrantes en mer et protéger leurs droits humains

**Mr Paulo PISCO (Portugal, SOC, Rapporteur):** Thank you Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

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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.

One of the biggest tragedies happened in the central Mediterranean 10 years ago, one of the deadliest routes in the world. Around 1 000 migrants died or disappeared in the sea in a journey from Libya to Lampedusa. Two years ago, the Adriana vessel sank off the Greek coast of Pylos, causing the death of more than 600 people.

Just some days ago, IOM reported two more shipwrecks in the central Mediterranean, with at least 60 people dead or missing off the coast of Libya. And we find a similar dramatic situation off the Spanish coast and in the English Channel.

Over the last 10 years, according to the United Nations Organisation for Refugees, at least 34 000 people died or disappeared at sea, in the hope of reaching European countries.

But, paradoxically, this reality seems to be non-existent, because the media seem to have lost the interest in those repeated tragedies apparently without solution. The fact is, unsafe boats crowded with migrants keep on crossing the seas every day and the Mediterranean is transformed into a huge graveyard.

Dear colleagues, we must recognise that we have failed completely in stopping this shameful massacre of desperate people knowing very well that, when they start the journey, the probability of dying is very, very big. But still, they risk it in the hope of a decent life. Men, women, children, all equally vulnerable, although some more than others.

And how does Europe react? Europe and some member states try to create the illusion that migrants are not arriving and that tragedies don't happen, externalising the management of migration flows which is, for many, a death sentence. Especially if they fall into the hands of militias and mafias that are benefiting from European funds and, at the same time, making a lot of money with the business of human trafficking, like in Libya and Tunisia, where migrants are victims of assassinations, slavery, sexual violence, torture, human trafficking and other forms of inhuman treatment. So, there are no doubts about our complicity in this horror.

Therefore, the cooperation with Libya and Tunisian authorities is unacceptable and must be suspended and re-evaluated at the light of the respect for human rights.

This also mean that the approach to migration flows must be radically different. But not in the way extreme-right parties and populist movements want, because they live in a dark place where there is no empathy, nor humanity or solidarity. The approach must be morally and politically honest, taking into consideration respect for human rights, the shortage of labour force, demographic decline and sustainability of social security systems. Migrants give a relevant contribution to dynamize and regenerate our societies. We just have to manage it in the proper way.

This report is a reminder that if all the framework of international law were respected, namely the law of the sea expressed in several legal instruments, thousands of lives would be spared. Thousands of human beings would not fall into the hands of smugglers and criminals and would not suffer so much violence and inhuman treatment. European waters should be considered as maritime humanitarian spaces.

Of course, if there is no solidarity among member states, it's difficult to have solidarity towards migrants. Therefore, a true solidarity and a shared responsibility among member states, together with more human and financial resources to search and rescue operations are fundamental. As is fundamental to build an effective co-ordination among state authorities and civil society, namely NGOs specialised in search and rescue operations. Is not acceptable that maritime authorities know about a boat in distress and don't send the alert and act immediately, often the cause of many deaths.

But for this, countries must stop creating all kinds of absurd administrative difficulties to the activities of NGOs working in search and rescue operations, with inspections of boats with the only purpose of applying sanctions, apprehending their boats, unbearable rules for disembarking migrants, like happens in Italy with the Piantadosi Decree. It happened, for instance, with the boat Geo Barents, from the organisation Doctors Without Borders, forced to suspend its activities, and with the Sea-Watch 5 boat, one year ago, in spite of their important work in saving thousands of migrant lives.

That's why humanitarian assistance should be recognised and never criminalised.

Unfortunately, the European Union and member states disinvested in search and rescue capacities to reinforce the border patrol priority, and they should not. On the contrary, operations like Mare Nostrum, Triton, or Sophia have saved thousands of lives. But it seems that in our days saving lives is not the priority.

Dear colleagues, our Assembly has an imperative to defend the right to life and protect migrants' human rights and dignity. A more human and effective approach to migration flows is needed. And it is clearly possible to protect borders and defend our security without breaching international law. Above all, we must not close our eyes to the tragedy that we have at our doors.

Dear colleagues, since this is my last time in this Plenary, allow me to give some words of gratitude for the irreplaceable work of the Council of Europe. I also want to express my gratitude for the support that I always had from the secretariat in the Migration Committee.

Thank you very much and please, colleagues, never let down this fight for human dignity.

Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr PISCO, and also good luck with your last session.

Then we have the speakers on behalf of the political groups, and we start with the presentation from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Lord Michael GERMAN.

**Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Madam President.

Yesterday, here in this hemicycle, the Prime Minister of Malta said that the solution to migrant crossings by sea was "on the land, not on the sea". I agree with him. Trying to take dangerous actions at sea with vessels which are unseaworthy puts those in the boats at serious risk of harm and death.

This report and its recommendations correctly draw attention to the laws, the rules and the regulations of actions at sea. And I draw your attention to paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, where they are all listed. These are rules which, at their heart, concern saving lives and removing people from danger.

These laws and rules are not just those of the ECHR, but a multiplicity of interlocking international laws and conventions spanning seas across the globe, the majority of which are designated as international waters.

The recommendations before us today contain a plea for respect for these laws and for those countries that have not ratified them to do so rapidly.

The key issue placed before us is the matter of the pushback of boats. This action endangers both the lives of all those in the boat and fails to distinguish between genuine asylum seekers and economic migrants. We should be punishing the smugglers, not the migrants.

A week or so ago, I spent a day on the coastline of northern France with French authorities looking at all aspects of the migrant small boat people smuggling they're dealing with. And I learned a huge amount. Simple fact: if you put a knife through one of these boats, these inflatables, it will fold in upon itself, and all the people in the middle, squashed and huddled there, are then subject to drowning quite instantly. So they want to try it to stop the engines, the motors, from working. But all the answers I got from the French authorities were that you have to work upstream if you want to stop these cruel people smugglers.

These actions against smugglers have the potential to dent the number of boat crossings, but they're not a solution on their own when we have some troubled countries on Europe's doorsteps.

The three things that come out of this report are very important recommendations. Safety at sea applies universally in international law, and for people to put people at risk when they have a duty of protection is not simply a request. Two, solutions are to be found on the land rather than the sea. And thirdly, that discrimination at sea is objectionable, and it is particularly harmful when faced with rescues from totally unsuitable craft. Treating all migrants as illegal rather than irregular or undocumented means that those fleeing for protection are denied the safety our international laws require.

I recommend we all approve these very important recommendations in this report.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And the next speaker from UEL, Mr Vinzenz GLASER.

**Mr Vinzenz GLASER (Germany, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear Chair, ladies and gentlemen, many thanks to the rapporteur for a very interesting and good report.

Just a few days ago, dozens of people drowned again in the Mediterranean. Since two shipwrecks off the Libyan coast, more than 60 people have gone missing, including women and children. According to the International Organization for Migration, at least 743 people have died in the Mediterranean this year alone while fleeing to Europe. These people did not die because they underestimated the risk, but because there are simply no safe and legal entry routes. That is why we are calling for the creation of safe entry routes!

Yesterday, the German government decided to completely cut the budget for sea rescue. I think - and I have to say this very clearly - this is a fatal signal in these times. Because instead of offering protection, European states are already delegating their responsibility to regimes and militias that systematically violate human rights.

Malta, for example, is leaving its search and rescue zones to Libyan militias, contrary to its obligations under international law. Since 2020, Malta's state rescue operations have decreased by 90%, while armed forces brutally return refugees to Libya, where they face imprisonment, torture and even death.

The EU border protection agency Frontex is also acting with absolute criminality. In thousands of cases, it transmits the coordinates of refugee boats to the so-called Libyan "coast guard". These operations regularly lead to repatriations to camps that violate international law and are known for the most serious human rights violations. We demand a clear condemnation of the pushbacks by Libyan and Tunisian actors and European involvement in them. Frontex must not pass on any information to these authorities, who are involved in torture and human rights violations. Cooperation with Libyan authorities must end as long as human rights are systematically violated there.

In addition, Frontex needs to be transformed into a genuine European rescue mission, an effective monitoring mechanism against pushbacks, an EU-funded sea rescue mission and impunity for supporting civilian sea rescue. Europe must finally take responsibility. A Europe that takes human rights seriously must no longer stand by while people die in the Mediterranean and must stop fueling them.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Our next speaker on behalf of the SOC group is Mr Denis BEGIC.

Please [In Swedish].

**Mr Denis BEGIC (Sweden, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Chair.

Dear colleagues,

Thank you Mr Paulo PISCO for the report.

We talk a lot in this chamber about values about human rights, dignity, justice. But let me ask you honestly: what are those values worth if they don't apply to a mother drowning with her child off the coast of Lampedusa?

People don't get on those boats because they want to. They do it because they've run out of choices. No one risks everything for fun. They're escaping war, dictatorship, poverty, and, in many cases, climate crises. And yet, we treat them as a problem to be managed, not as people to be protected.

We know what international law says. We know what the European Convention on Human Rights says. We know what basic decency says. But somehow we've still created a situation where helping someone in distress at sea is seen as controversial or even criminal.

Let me be very clear: saving lives is not a political act. It's a moral obligation. And we cannot accept a Europe where humanitarian NGOs are harassed, rescue ships are impounded, and governments quietly co-operate with actors like the Libyan Coast Guard, knowing well what happens after the pushbacks.

And let's be honest about one more thing: the idea that rescue operations are a "pull factor" is not just wrong, it's a convenient excuse. People don't flee because they heard there is a boat. They flee because they are desperate. And as long as we ignore that, people will keep dying.

So what do we do? We re-establish large-scale search and rescue operations – with proper European coordination and funding. We stop criminalising NGOs and start recognising them as partners. We end funding and cooperation with actors who systematically violate human rights. And we open safe, legal pathways because the best way to fight smuggling is to make smugglers irrelevant.

I didn't come to politics to look away while people drown. None of us did, I hope. This report gives us a path forward. But reports don't save lives, action does.

So let's stop debating whether people deserve dignity. Let's act like the Europe we say we believe in.

Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And the next speaker is on behalf of the EPP, Ms Albana VOKSHI.

**Ms Albana VOKSHI (Albania, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear Chair, dear colleagues,

I rise today with both conviction and deep personal understanding of this crisis. The report before us is a powerful reminder. Many routes migrants used to arrive in Europe, the Mediterranean and other sea routes, have become deadly paths. Since 2014, thousands of migrants have died at sea. The Adriana shipwreck in June 2023, where 600 people perished, was not an exception. It was the result of systemic failure. Large-scale search and rescue missions were dismantled and replaced with border control operations, as the report mentions. NGOs trying to save lives were criminalised, obstructed and fined. Over 80 legal cases have been launched in five countries.

Meanwhile, Europe has outsourced responsibility to actors like Libyan and Tunisian coast guards, despite overwhelming allegations of torture, rape, slavery and pushbacks. The report mentions that even Frontex has been accused of delaying mayday alerts and sharing migrant boat locations and abusive militias. We are witnessing the collapse of our legal and moral responsibilities.

Coming from Albania, a country of millions of migrants, especially after the fall of communism, I feel and I understand this very big issue. In 1990, thousands of Albanians fled on old, overcrowded ships, risking their lives across the Adriatic. And in recent years, small boats towards the UK have replaced them. People paying smugglers thousands of euros, the saving of their lives, escaping corruption, poverty, discrimination and hopelessness. Today, more Albanians are fleeing than countries in conflict zones.

So, I know what it means to leave everything behind, to risk the lives of children and mothers, not for luxury, but for survival. And they will not stop, no matter how high the walls, because they have lost faith that things will change. If one path is closed, they will use other, riskier paths. That's why we have to react. Now is the time. But not all migration is natural and spontaneous. There is also artificial migration, forced migration, used by authoritarian regimes like Belarus and Russia to destabilise Europe's borders, using human suffering as a geopolitical tool. We must not confuse those fleeing for survival with those being used as instruments of pressure.

A well-co-ordinated effort is needed, legally, instrumentally, and not leaving those people alone. Migration can be managed, but only if it is grounded in solidarity, legality and humanity. Europe must not let its sea become a graveyard. Let us act before more lives are lost.

Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And then, on behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Sir Edward Lake.

**Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group):** Madam President,

I'm a sailor. I know the English Channel well. It's very dangerous. We've always had a precious principle, sailors, in international law for centuries, that if somebody is in distress at sea, you pick them up. I support that. But because we've been very weak over this issue, people are dying every year because they're attempting to cross the Channel. And this report is not the answer. If this report was adopted, more and more people would make these hugely dangerous journeys. More and more people would die and who would be enriched? Horrible people smugglers, gangsters, who are making tens of millions of pounds out of human misery.

I've seen a video of the Royal Marines practising in Portsmouth Harbour. It would have been perfectly possible on day one that these people attempted to cross the Channel, to pick them up safely and take them back to France. There would have been a row, I know, but it would have solved the problem immediately. And then we tried. The only solution, frankly, the moment they land in a country, you have to deport them to a safe location, a third country, where their asylum seeking claims can be considered.

But of course, these are not, 99% of them, genuine asylum seekers. They are perfectly good people, they are young men, they want to improve their life chances and England is a draw. And maybe we are at fault for not having national identity cards or, or liberal employment laws, maybe we're at fault because we speak English and they want to come to England. But the fact is, you will never stop the people smugglers, you will never stop this misery, you will never stop people dying, unless you push people back, take them aboard and take them back from where they've come from, or deport them to a third country where you can consider their asylum claims.

The principle of *non-refoulement* is frankly ridiculous. And I say to this Assembly that the Conservative Party in England is on the very verge of getting out of the Convention of Human Rights and this Assembly, because the whole political system in Britain is breaking down because of lack of trust. Because people see on their 10 o'clock news every night the gendarmes of the French coast just watching as these people illegally pour across the channel. And I'm sure it's a principle in other nations.

Frankly, the report is vague and dangerous. The proposal to label European waters human humanitarian status is just ridiculous. We should reject this report. We should actually do what we have to do to save lives. And we should have a principle, yes, that when people cross illegally from one European country to another and they're perfectly safe in France, we can send them straight back to where they came, a third country. So reject this report and be sensible and stop these illegal migrations and stop these people smugglers. Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** That concluded the round of speeches on behalf of the political groups.

And now we go to the list of speakers, and it is better if you respect the speaking time of 3 minutes. Then, we can have more speakers.

So we will start with Ms Nerea AHEDO.

**Ms Nerea AHEDO (Spain, ALDE)\*:** I will speak in Spanish.

Some people are fleeing conflict, poverty and persecution and they take to the sea hoping to reach a better life but they don't always achieve this because our seas today have become huge cemeteries.

According to the International Organization for Migration, at least 25 500 people died during the last 10 years in the Mediterranean. According to the NGO Movement Without Borders, in 2024 alone, 10 457 migrants died trying to reach Spain. That is 58% more than the year before, and 93% of them died on the Atlantic route, which is the most dangerous. There are also many victims in the Channel.

According to the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR), it is very difficult to recover information, data and to recover the bodies of these people. Apparently, only one out of every three people who die at sea and in these circumstances is identified.

Now, one might think that the objective is to save lives, but sometimes it seems that the actual objective is to prevent people from reaching our coasts.

According to the reports from coastguards, many violent incidents occur with these pushback operations, which are sometimes very violent, and I think we need to take a new look at our co-operation with the Libyan or Tunisian coastguards. We have also seen that on some occasions, from texts, they are acting as an accomplice in these incidents.

And if we listen to the testimonies of survivors or persons working for NGOs, it is often very difficult for organisations to help these migrants at sea. They are accused sometimes of contributing to trafficking of migrants and they're prevented from doing their work. And we know Germany has decided to suspend its funding of these organisations working in the Mediterranean. Many of these organisations working in the Mediterranean are German. This is very worrying, and we are also very concerned about the lack of co-operation from a number of countries.

We have also seen that in many cases, it is impossible for these people to reach the shores, to reach harbours, which puts their lives in danger.

Assisting people at sea is a humanitarian, ethical obligation.

To conclude, I would like to thank our rapporteur, Mr PISCO, for his report, but not only for this report, which we will probably adopt, but for all his work over all these years at the Council of Europe.

Thank you very much, Paulo, we will miss you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And the next speaker is Ms Saskia KLUIT.

**Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC):** Thank you very much, speaker.

To my honourable colleague on the other side. I don't think you will ever stop people who want to look for peace and happiness in their lives. We have thousands of years of history of people migrating from one place to the other looking for a better condition. So if you want to do something about that, the solution can never ever be to let them drown at sea.

It is very important that we see the people who travel still as people. They are normal people, families who bring their lives, the lives of their children, their lives of their parents, at stake to look for happiness and peace. And we must do all that we can to prevent them from drowning in terrible conditions. And not only for the people themselves, but also for our own people on the continent, the people who find the bodies on the shores and do everything to give them dignity in their death, but also the fishermen who hear the calls and try to reach out to people and save them and yet are not allowed or able to do so.

That is a terrible moral problem we lay down with the people who work at sea. So what must we do? We must make sure that there's better coordination between the NGOs who try to save lives at sea, the national coast guards and Frontex. They need to be well coordinated. They need to work together to save as many lives as possible at sea. Of course, smugglers need to be punished for the acts of putting people in danger. But that is not the reason why you should criminalise NGOs who try to save lives. It is not very difficult to distinguish between the two things.

The rescue operations that we make should be strong, they should be decisive, and as many lives should be saved as possible. And that will not be possible if we don't start investing more and equip the coast guards for their work. They need to be able to communicate better. They need to have enough personnel to save people. They need to have the competences and the knowledge to interact with different cultures to help people. And I think the report of Pablo is really, really great and necessary if we look from a human rights perspective to the lives and migration of people at sea. So, Pablo, thank you very much. I will miss you very much in our committee and SOC Group.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Mr Alain CADEC. Absent.

Then we go for Ms Victoria TIBLOM.

**Ms Victoria TIBLOM (Sweden, ECPA):** Thank you, Mme President.

Honourable colleagues,

The tragic loss of life in the Mediterranean is something none of us can accept. But we must dare to ask the difficult questions: why are so many risking their lives at sea in the first place?

Europe's current approach – built around rescue operations and relocation – has had the unintended effect of encouraging dangerous journeys. Human traffickers thrive on the assumption that Europe will receive all who attempt the crossing. This system, however well intentioned, is unsustainable and deeply flawed.

We must look to models that work. Australia, for example, has taken a firm stance: no one who arrives illegally by boat is settled on the mainland. The result? Smugglers lost their business model. Most importantly – people stopped drowning.

If we want to truly save lives and protect human dignity, we must break the link between irregular sea crossings and access to asylum in Europe. That means stopping the boats, dismantling the trafficking networks, and reinforcing external border protection. At the same time, we can support genuine refugees through controlled resettlement programs from safe zones – not from smugglers' dinghies.

Let us be clear: protecting lives and upholding human rights does not mean accepting chaos. It means restoring order. And I agree with Sir Edward LEIGH, we need to reject this report.

Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Ms Gala VELDHOEN.

**Ms Gala VELDHOEN (Netherlands, SOC):** Thank you, Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

First, I want to thank my dear colleague and friend Mr Paulo PISCO for his important report. His work is meaningful to me. As someone who is half Dutch and half Vietnamese/Somalian, and whose family members came to Europe as refugees in the 1970s, I know that behind every statistic is a story – a person. A family, a life full of hope and fear. Without the solidarity and protection they received back then, we would not be the beautiful and strong family that contributes to our societies today. I want to emphasise that we contribute to society.

I strongly support the report's central message: saving lives at sea is not a political decision, it is a legal and moral obligation. It pains me to see that today, people in search of safety are too often treated not as human beings in need of protection, but as threats to be deterred, pushed back, or ignored.

Mr Paulo PISCO's report clearly shows that in the name of so-called border protection, some member states are choosing to ignore their legal international responsibilities. Even worse, they enable, or even participate in, actions that lead to unnecessary suffering and death.

The criminalisation of NGOs that carry out life-saving search and rescue work is especially disturbing. These organisations are not driven by politics, but by the simple belief that no one should be left to drown. They are doing the work that some states have shamefully abandoned. They should be celebrated and supported, not punished.

Today, further conflict in the Middle East once again risks displacing countless people. Western nations, including ours, have repeatedly intervened in this region. When our actions contribute to instability and suffering, we have a responsibility not to abandon those who flee it. That is a matter of accountability and of conscience.

Finally, this report is a reminder that migration is a structural reality of our time. People said it before me. We need legal, safe, and dignified pathways for migration. By creating these pathways, we will not only save lives, we will also undermine the criminal networks of smugglers that profit from despair.

We call on all member states to act with urgency and compassion. We must rise to this challenge, not as isolated nations, but as a Europe that stands by its values. This report is a firm step in this direction.

Once again, I thank Mr Paulo PISCO for his report, he will be missed.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Mr Georgios STAMATIS.

**Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD)\*:** Thank you, Madam President. Allow me to speak in Greek.

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

A few years ago, the League of Nations divided Africa into states. Nobody was actually asked about this or consulted. A convention was drawn up, an arrangement was made, and nobody from Africa actually took part in this. Borders were drawn within Africa without consulting the people on the ground.

A few years later, a couple of European states had colonies scattered around the world, including Africa. There were colonies in Africa, and again, nobody was consulted. Nobody was asked whether they wanted to be under occupation, and then, more recently, over the last few years, decades, there have been revolutions. And these revolutions occurred in countries that had previously been under dictatorships.

We, European countries, had actually been cooperating or collaborating with these countries, but nobody consulted us either. A migrant or a refugee that crosses the seas, why is it that they come to Europe? Why? Because we have built a space here in Europe where we have democracy, where we have freedom. That, if you like, is the best-case scenario.

But what actually happens? What happens is that people are fleeing because they don't have democracy in their countries of origin, because there's trafficking of weapons in their countries of origin and, let's be honest, because there are smugglers, and in most of these countries, they are cooperating with the governments. They're actually authorising the smugglers to come to Europe.

Therefore, allow me to welcome this report, it seems to me that it goes in the right direction and it is very much focussed upon democracy. I think it's important to make sure that human beings, children, we must stop them from drowning at sea, we must not let this happen.

In addition to which, if you look at the statistics, there are thousands and thousands of people who have simply gone missing, we've never found them again. There are migrants who unfortunately have drowned in the Mediterranean and who are still there, and their families are still waiting for news. They want an acknowledgement of the fact that these people may have died at sea.

Therefore, we should be helping the countries concerned develop, we should empower them to become democracies, because if they were democracies, then migrants could come through regular, lawful channels, and that's the best way of fighting against people-smuggling. We should not be cooperating with countries that actually help, aid and abet these smugglers. Migrants who come from a colony can't be a good migrant, they can't be a bad migrant, just because they come from a country that is undergoing civil war.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And the next speaker is Mr László TOROCZKAI. Absent.

And then we go to Mr Francesco VERDUCCI.

**Mr Francesco VERDUCCI (Italy, SOC):** President, these are the horrific images of lifeless bodies floating in the waters off Libya, with no one, and not the Libyan militias we fund, having recovered them.

More than 500 people have died in the Mediterranean since the beginning of the year. Since 2014, that's more than 31 000. So many are girls and boys. Humanity has died countless times in European waters.

I think, every time, we say the word "migrant", as if it were the same as any other when it is not. We have a duty to be aware of all this.

And this is the main merit of the report compiled by Paulo PISCO: not to close our eyes to the enormity of the carnage going on. This is the political point. Don't subject human rights and the principle of non-discrimination, on which our entire constitutionalism is based, to the demands of realism, supposed national interests or the cynicism of instrumental electoral consensus.

I have respect for the disorientation of so many in the face of migration phenomena, but I have no respect for bad politicians who profit from fear, artfully creating monsters and scapegoats.

Migration is a structural, global fact and must be governed; it cannot be removed. It arises from vicious distortions and disparities in the development model and, as such, affects us. Saving every life at sea is a legal and moral and, I would add, political obligation.

NGOs play a very important role, filling a void, and we should thank them because they hold high the name of humanity and Europe.

President, we need to revive the need for a stable European mission on the model of *mare nostrum*.

Above all, colleagues, we must make sure that this document does not become waste paper and that, just a few steps away from here, the European Commission, the European Council and even the European Parliament do not continue to endorse policies of deportation, of externalising borders, of rejections, of building lager centers.

Let Europe show that it lives up to its values, which are its strength.

Let this House demand sharply that every member state of the Council of Europe say no to the renewal of the agreements with Libya, which have been an ignominy and still are, and which have caused and still cause systematic crimes against migrants, against humanity and are one of the darkest pages in the history of European countries.

Thank you, President.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Ms Boriana ÅBERG.

**Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD):** Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues, a great part of the blame for the tragedies at sea rests with the current asylum system. It is a system that is both inhumane and unsustainable, and primarily benefits migrant smugglers. Migrant smuggling, which profits from people's hope of a better life in Europe, is run by the same criminal cartels that traffic drugs, weapons and oil. In effect, the asylum system fuels these cartels.

Unfortunately, these criminals are expecting and counting on sea rescue operations and therefore are using unseaworthy vessels on dangerous routes in severe weather. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. And it is how these desperate people are subjected to being crammed together in minimal spaces without food or water.

The asylum system is effectively directly discriminatory. It is not those with great needs, but instead young, healthy men with the means to pay the smugglers. Women are underrepresented despite being more vulnerable. If the claim is to act humanely, it contradicts the reality that the fittest are prioritised.

A new system with asylum centres outside Europe needs to be established. Another issue is whether it really is Europe's responsibility to solve the migration issues of other continents. Is there any kind of limit at all on the number of migrants from Asia and Africa who can enter Europe?

In Sweden, we have bitter experience with uncontrolled migration, which has resulted in parallel societies and criminality that are directly destructive to society. We also know that migration flows have been orchestrated by Russia as a form of hybrid warfare aimed at destabilising Europe and its nations.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

**Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC)\*:** Thank you very much, Madame President.

I'll start off by congratulating Mr Paulo PISCO for this very timely and necessary report. At a time when hate speech against migrants is permeating our political sphere, it's full of falsehoods and it takes away any empathy, any humanity that should be the hallmarks of our societies. So, thank you very much Mr PISCO for bringing the human side to this debate on migration. I really, sincerely hope that this will connect with those who are the most radical and opposed to any type of migration.

Not all of our countries are facing the situation, but the humanitarian crisis on our European waters has now reached alarming levels. My country, Spain, is actually one of the main points of entry for migrants, and my country therefore plays a crucial role when it comes to responding to this emergency. The Atlantic route towards the Canary Islands has become one of the most dangerous routes in the world. And there's been a significant increase in irregular entries and also the number of tragic deaths.

So, with that as a backdrop, it's absolutely paramount for our member states to take urgent and co-ordinated measures to save lives and to protect the human rights of our migrants. Spain has an agency for rescue and security at sea in the Canary Islands and Spain has therefore shown that it is unwaveringly in support of this mission to save migrants who are in peril. But that's not enough. It's also necessary and urgent to re-establish search and rescue operations, broad-scale ones throughout Europe, through the establishment of a European agency for search and rescue at sea. And its only mission should be to save lives, fully respecting internationally agreed-upon human rights.

This collective effort would not only save lives, it would also demonstrate that Europe is committed to the principles of humanitarianism. And, with a view to that, there needs to be co-ordination between our member states and NGOs. It's fundamental if we want these search and rescue operations at sea to be efficient and effective.

Furthermore, we need to cut down on the legal and administrative barriers that make it difficult for NGOs to operate at sea and to save lives. It's not admissible for us to seize rescue vessels at sea or to start criminal proceedings against NGO staff. These measures are not only counterproductive, they also put lives in danger.

We need humanity, ladies and gentlemen: we need to guarantee the rights of migrants – they should be disembarked in a way that is safe, as close as possible to where they arrive in order to make sure that their security is not threatened, and in order to make sure that their basic needs are met. These measures are not only a moral imperative, they're also a legal obligation. According to our legal conventions, we need to look after the mental and physical health of migrants. It's absolutely essential in terms of their recuperation and their reintegration.

In sum, the crisis on our European waters warrants a European, co-ordinated response. It's a matter of urgency. We need to prevent more tragedies from occurring and we need to protect the fundamental rights of our migrants. So, Mr PISCO, I share your vision and I agree with the proposals contained in your report. All our member states need to shoulder their responsibilities, need to act with determination and humanity to save lives, and also to protect the human rights that should prevail on our seas. We need to make sure that Europe is a beacon of hope and humanity for those who are looking for safety and for a better life.

Mr PISCO, Paulo, we shall miss you.

Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And the next one is Ms Sandra ZAMPA.

**Ms Sandra ZAMPA (Italy, SOC):** In October 2013, there were 368 migrant deaths. That was how the Mare Nostrum humanitarian mission found impetus, 368 dead, drowned just a stone's throw from Lampedusa.

The extraordinary commitment to which the Italian armed forces and volunteers gave life prevented the repetition of that enormous drama and snatched hundreds of lives from drowning.

Lampedusa was the tipping point from which Pope Francis began his magisterium: he chose it to send a message to the whole world.

But then, after Lampedusa, after those rescues, after Mare Nostrum, the same voices that had judged unacceptable the image of those coffins, small and large coffins, in the airport hangar, began to change their minds and argue that Mare Nostrum was the cause of the migratory flows to Italy, to Europe, and that precisely because of its existence the flows were arriving and increasing.

Many years have passed since then. The flows have continuously increased. Mare Nostrum has been cancelled and it has been cancelled because people want to continue to close their eyes to the fact that the migration flows in the Mediterranean are children of the upheaval in many countries in North Africa, in the Middle East, in Libya, in Syria. And, instead of making the European Union change its mind by demanding more responsibility and more solidarity, we continue to accept that shipwrecks and deaths at sea can continue.

The solution cannot come from letting more people, more children, more women, more men continue to drown at sea. We need Europe to finally do its part, and that part is nourished by two words: responsibility and solidarity.

It takes the strength to give political answers to, actually, a phenomenon that is structural, which is migration. We have all been migrants, we are all children of migrants.

Our grandparents, our great-grandparents crossed the sea and crossed countries. We are, fortunately, different and that makes us richer. We are peoples who can express and bring with them so much history.

This is how it should be: responsibility and solidarity.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Mr Christophe LACROIX.

**Mr Christophe LACROIX (Belgium, SOC):** Thank you, Madame President.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I'd like to extend my warmest thanks to the rapporteur of this mission, our colleague Mr Paulo PISCO, who reminds us of our first mission here. What do we do?

Well, we serve to guarantee respect, respect for human dignity and to protect the sacredness – yes, the sacredness; I don't hesitate to use that word – the sacredness of human rights.

For more than a decade now, appalling images have been etched in our memories. These images are those of thousands of stranded and drowned bodies. Bodies abandoned to their fate in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, whose blue has been stained with these bodies for centuries and centuries. These bodies were, above all, individuals, human beings like you and me, who had no choice but to risk their own lives in the hope of saving them, and who in their thousands, including children and grandchildren, paid for this desperate crossing with their lives.

We can no longer continue to ignore this tragedy and try to erect walls, or to turn Europe into an impregnable fortress. What matters here and now is to have the bold courage and noble ambition of this resolution. We must therefore enable large-scale rescue operations to be organised, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement and fundamental rights.

We must support the NGOs that are fighting to rescue and care for people who migrate to our shores. All the more so, as our states have an obligation to provide assistance to anyone in distress, because the right to life, my dear colleagues, does not stop at maritime borders.

We must also ensure that our partnerships with countries of departure are suspended in the event of human rights violations, as we have already documented in the case of Libya.

And we must collectively assume the burden of reception among all European countries. A Europe of values is a Europe of solidarity, making a fair and balanced contribution to alleviating human distress and offering a future to those peoples left behind, crushed by war, crushed by famine, crushed by repression and the violation of fundamental human rights.

I therefore strongly support this profoundly humanist and responsible resolution, which recognizes and values the invaluable work of NGOs and makes it possible to build safe and dignified migration routes.

Thank you Mr PISCO.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** And then, the final speaker from the list, Ms Mira NIEMINEN.

**Ms Mira NIEMINEN (Finland, ECPA):** Thank you, Madam President.

Migrant tragedies at sea are humanitarian catastrophes. We must help those in distress, that is clear. At the same time, we must be honest about what works and what does not and what causes more harm than good, both for the migrants and for the receiving countries.

In 2023, over 2 000 people died trying to cross the Mediterranean. This is a horrific number, but it highlights the flaws of the current system. The sea has become a highway for human smuggling via illegal routes operated by international criminal networks, not under the rules of international law, but under the terms of economic exploitation and organised crime.

This draft resolution, although well intentioned, risks sending the message that Europe is accessible by exploiting loopholes in the system. Such a message might encourage departures and increase the risk that more people will fall victim to criminal networks and become part of these statistics.

Let's be clear. Illegal entry into Europe is not allowed. No one should be left to die at sea, but rescue cannot mean the right to stay. It should mean return to the nearest safe country or the return to the place of departure.

The majority of these people are not refugees as defined by international law, but economic migrants. Europe cannot carry the weight of the world's problems. We have a responsibility for our own citizens, their welfare and our security.

Large and uncontrolled migration causes harm in Europe: insecurity, cultural tensions and segregation, but also radicalisation and crime.

We must not close our eyes to this. Instead, we should support countries of origin so that people have fewer reasons to leave. We should effectively combat human smuggling and cooperate with EU and local authorities and develop a return policy that is functional and clear. The future of Europe cannot be built on uncontrolled migration. It must be built on stability, security and responsibility.

Thank you.

**Mr Adam BALTEN (Germany, ECPA):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in German*

**Mr Nuno FAZENDA (Portugal, SOC):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Thank you, Mr. President.

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank the author – and my friend – Mr Paulo PISCO, for this important and timely report.

As this was his final intervention as a member of this Assembly, I also want to express our heartfelt recognition for his tireless work in defence of human rights and European values, both in Portugal and across Europe. This report is a clear reflection of that commitment. Thank you, Paulo.

Saving the lives of migrants at sea is not a policy choice – it is a moral and legal obligation.

Every year, thousands of men, women, and children risk everything in search of safety and a better life. They embark on dangerous sea journeys, fleeing war, persecution, and poverty.

Too many do not survive the journey. They drown in silence, far from the headlines and often far from compassion.

We cannot allow the Mediterranean – or any sea – to become a graveyard. This must end.

We need stronger, coordinated search and rescue operations. We must guarantee safe disembarkation and uphold international law, especially the principle of non-refoulement.

Blocking humanitarian action or punishing those who help only adds to the tragedy.

Migration management must never be done at the expense of human rights. This is not just about borders or numbers – it's about our shared humanity.

When we protect migrants at sea, we protect the values of dignity, justice and solidarity.

This is not about privilege. People are simply asking for a chance to live – to live with dignity and in peace.

Let us not build a world of fear and indifference – but one of compassion and humanism.

Thank you.

**Mr Dimitrios MANTZOS (Greece, SOC):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

It is often necessary to start with the basics – which, however, are never to be taken for granted: migration is a human behaviour, a constant phenomenon throughout world history. People who migrate often try to escape war, poverty, persecution, or even the climate crisis.

There is nothing illegal about the human need for protection. That is why it is incorrect to speak of “illegal migration” – we should rather speak of “irregular entry.” In the Council of Europe, these issues are not just formal or legal matters but deeply political ones.

For us, it is not the migrants who are illegal, but the smugglers – the networks that exploit this need for profit, leading people down dangerous and harsh paths, even to death: in the desert, in forests, and, of course, at sea -in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.

The death of migrants and refugees at sea is a disgrace to the European value system. It is a crushing defeat for Europe and everything it stands for: human rights, freedom, dignity, and security -especially for the most vulnerable, for people in need.

This is why we insist on fighting migrant smuggling -not merely as a legal issue, but as a matter of principle. As a decisive step for protecting the vulnerable, upholding human dignity, and fostering international solidarity.

Solidarity has no price and cannot be bought or exchanged -unlike what is, unfortunately, permitted by the recent EU Migration and Asylum Pact. Solidarity takes shape in every resident, every fisherman, every doctor, nurse, rescuer, every coast guard who does everything they can to save human lives. In every corner of Europe, in the northern and eastern Aegean, in the Dodecanese, and now in Crete. People who prove every day that human life and dignity are non-negotiable. Solidarity means also transparency, investigation, and justice in every case of shipwrecks, pushbacks, in every death at sea.

In conclusion, I want to insist on something fundamental: For many years – even today – extreme political forces in Europe have presented a false dilemma between the right of states to control their borders and the rights of people on the move. These rights are not mutually exclusive. Border protection and the protection of fundamental human rights are not incompatible. It is our duty to strike the necessary balance, to find the “golden mean.” That is where our very humanitarianism will ultimately be tested and judged.

**Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD (Switzerland, SOC):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** So that concludes the list of speakers.

As I had to interrupt the list, 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 of the speech. I remind colleagues that the type-written texts can be submitted, electronically if possible, no later than 4 hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

And now I call, rapporteur, Mr Paulo PISCO, to reply. You have 3 minutes.

**Mr Paulo PISCO (Portugal, SOC, Rapporteur):** Thank you so much.

First of all, I want to thank all the interventions that have been made in this Plenary, including all those that do not present any answers to this dramatic situation. And they don't have an approach, which could be called a human approach to the situation.

I think that if we could stop wars and repression and climate change, and poverty, migrations would diminish. They will never stop. Because, since the beginning of humanity, migration has been part of our identity, of our culture. We are not, any of us, pure citizens. We don't belong to a pure race or whatsoever that someone could think.

I think that we have, as someone said here, the legal and moral obligation of not closing our eyes. And the models that are put forward here by some of the colleagues, like the one from Australia, are based on illegal action of pushbacks. Pushbacks are not ridiculous. Pushbacks are illegal under international law. And this principle must be fully respected because it is one of the cornerstones of international law.

And the question is, when we just stop the boats and send them away, the possibilities of people still dying are very, very high, as happened, including in Australia, in so many cases.

And this report is not dangerous, as I heard here. I can't understand why someone can say that it's a dangerous report when its objective is to save people's lives. Can you integrate that saving lives is not dangerous? It is our basic principle of humanity towards people who are in total distress. And these things will not stop. So we have to do something. We have to do something, and we have to manage it. That does not mean that we are not going to manage migration. Migration should be managed, of course, and should be controlled. Of course. We all agree on that.

But the question is, we have to use a totally different model, which could be more human and with more capacities to do what is right for those people who are seeking our countries. And because our countries need all those people for work, because of labour shortage, because of demographic decline, because of the sustainability of the social security. So it's a big paradox that you use that argument, and in reality, you don't give any answer to this dramatic situation.

So, dear colleagues, my main appeal is that countries need to respect international law. If international law is respected, many people and lives could be saved.

Thank you so much.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Now I ask if the Chairperson of the committee, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO wants to speak for three minutes, please.

**Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons):** Thank you very much.

Dear Chair,

I want to tell you that we see that it is a very important issue. There is a lot of debate, there are different views. That's why we exist, to debate and to find the right solutions.

Now I am expressing the position of my committee, as a chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. And I need to inform you that this report was adopted unanimously at the April meeting of the Committee, as well as the preliminary draft resolution and recommendation.

But first I just want to thank Mr Paulo PISCO for all his longstanding job here in the Assembly. Unfortunately, that's the last day for the moment for Mr Paulo PISCO to work this session. But I want to thank him. I worked with him for several years in the Committee and for several years here in the Assembly. And we can agree on something or disagree, but he is a man of sincerity and values and I appreciate and value this. And on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, I want to thank you for your job in the Committee as well as in the Assembly.

We're speaking about a very important issue because this is about human lives. And the Rapporteur underlined the importance of the international and regional instruments, primarily the European Convention on Human Rights, which safeguards the right to life in its Article 2. Also in the report, it is consolidated by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, including obligation to take appropriate steps to safeguard the lives of those within their jurisdiction and in the context of any activity.

We just need to remember that it's not a matter of origin nationality or any other argument, it's a matter of humanity. So we have the necessity to save people first. And I think this is not discussed and this is not doubted by anybody here in this Assembly. And this is a very important point which unites us, despite different political views on the question of migration. But we all agree that we need to protect lives and save people, also to save people in the seas.

As national parliamentarians and responsible national lawmakers and members of the Assembly, we need to act not only on a European level, but on the level of national parliaments. And this is very important. I want us not to forget that whatever we will discuss here, whatever resolution we will make here, in reality, it will come only when we will make serious steps, courageous steps and important steps in our own national parliaments. So finalising once again, our Committee adopted unanimously this report. And because of this, I want to ask all of you to support this report on behalf of the Committee on Migration Refugees and Displaced Persons. And once again, congratulations to Mr Paulo PISCO for the whole job he's done, and to the Secretariat for the whole job they did.

Thank you very much.

## **Vote : Sauver la vie des personnes migrantes en mer et protéger leurs droits humains**

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** The debate is closed.

Now I also inform you that the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has presented the draft resolution and recommendation to which no amendments have been tabled. So we will proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 1695. A simple majority is required.

Point of order, please.

**Mr Adam BALTEN (Germany, ECPA):** According to Article 42.3, I challenge the quorum.

Pursuant to Article 42.2, I request the verification of the quorum.

Thank you.

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Thank you. The Secretariat will look for the figures.

So, there is a request to a certain number of members present. If a quorum is not present, the vote of the business before the Assembly will be postponed. I need to know if the request is supported by at least one-sixth of the representatives authorised to vote, that is 49 members and at least five national delegations.

So, are there the people to support the quorum?

So, we all see that the figure of 49 members is not met. So, the requirement to call the quorum is not met. We therefore return to the voting procedures.

So, we are ready to vote. May I ask the voting to be opened?

And the vote is closed. I call the result to be displayed.

*(Applause)*

Thank you. Point of order.

**Mr Marco DREOSTO (Italy, ECPA):** One clarification: did one-sixth of those present have to be present for a valid vote or one-sixth of the whole Assembly?

**Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, President of the Assembly):** Yes, I said the wrong figures. It was not 49 members but one sixth of the representatives authorised to vote. And now we saw that there were 78 who voted and only 15 people stand.

So I read it from here. So it's one sixth of the representatives authorised to vote, and not vote here, that's what Rule 42 you refer to is saying.

So I called the result, it was displayed and I can now say that the Report is adopted.

And then we still have another vote on the draft recommendation and a two-third majority is required, counting only affirmative and negative votes. So we will proceed to vote on the draft recommendation contained in Document 16195. I remind you a two-third majority is required now for the draft recommendations. The vote is not clear. The vote is now open for the recommendations.

So I close the vote and ask for the result to be displayed. These figures show that two thirds of the votes have not been accepted so the recommendations are not adopted.

Then let me have a word with Mr Paulo PISCO. You have worked here as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe since 2017, and you have not only worked on the importance of human rights for migration management, but also denounced the forcible transfer and Russification of Ukrainian children, saying it shows evidence of genocide.

It shows that this Report on deported and the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, following a debate in which Ms Olena ZELENSKA participated online, that set the basis also for the network of situation of children from Ukraine that we see is working importantly. And after the historical night last night with President ZELENSKY here as well, I thank you for your work in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and good continuation on your life. Thank you.

We now also change the chair for the session.

## **Débat : Les défis et besoins des acteurs publics et privés impliqués dans la gestion des migrations**

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The next item of business is the debate on the report titled "The challenges and needs of public and private actors involved in migration management" in Document 16192, and should be presented by Ms Sandra ZAMPA on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.

We will check how much time we have. We now have five speakers on behalf of the political groups and eight on behalf of the list of speakers. We are already a little bit delayed, but we will manage it.

So, Ms Sandra ZAMPA, you now have 7 minutes and then at the end, you have another 3 minutes to reply to the debate. You have the floor, Ms ZAMPA.

May I ask you to be quiet and sit down over there. If you want to have a little chat, it is possible. There is a bar outside, and there is a terrace outside. You can do anything you want outside, but here, as a sign of respect, please be quiet and respectful of everyone. Be seated! Thank you.

**Ms Sandra ZAMPA (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur):** Thank you Mr President.

Dear colleagues,

We are all aware of the challenge posed by the management of migratory flows and how complex it is to address this issue while respecting international Conventions, insulating it from attempts to instrumentalise it in the public debate for political confrontation.

Precisely from this, I wanted to address a specific and very concrete aspect of the migratory sphere: analysing and understanding the role and needs of all the public and private actors, who confront the management of migratory flows on a daily basis, each carrying out their own task. In the same spirit, I turned my attention to the good practices implemented in the different member states of the Council of Europe, in order to present constructive and effective proposals.

First of all, who are these actors?

The public actors involved in migration management are the national and local public authorities, administrations, and international agencies that deal with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, with respect to arrival, initial assistance and reception in the institutional system, as well as what happens in informal situations on the margins of our territories.

With regard to private actors, there are two types: private entities that have contracts with public authorities and to manage, or co-manage, facilities at different stages of the reception system; there are private actors, such as guardianship bodies, foundations, and nongovernmental organisations, that work in close collaboration with the public sector.

The interactions between all these actors are inevitably complex but, we verified, can lead to positive results that are important to publicise and disseminate.

We focused on initial assistance upon arrival, reception of those who apply for international protection, with the existence of any dedicated pathways for vulnerable people (unaccompanied minors, trafficked persons); social and labor inclusion for people who obtain international protection.

It is necessary to reiterate, therefore, that we are talking about a segment of the migrant population, namely asylum seekers, refugees, vulnerable people, although, inevitably, in recent months we have also come across people who remain outside the system, in precarious and often extremely serious conditions.

A great deal of information has been gathered in these months of work: three fact-finding visits to three member states (France, Italy and the United Kingdom). We have been able to observe different situations up close, crossing, however, issues that do not only concern these three geographical contexts, but help draw a more general picture, with common dynamics observed along the various migration routes in Europe and at Europe's borders.

The report makes a clear call to member states to ensure procedures that respect human rights, establishing minimum standards for dignified assistance and reception, with particular attention to vulnerable persons, women, children, unaccompanied minors and victims of trafficking, who are really the most precarious and delicate participants in these migratory flows. We know very well how many critical situations there are, even in Europe, with respect to how these people are treated, particularly in border areas.

Audits have confirmed how important it is to intervene on the timeframe for processing asylum applications, which is too long everywhere. People, whether individuals or families, remain in limbo, in centres where living conditions are often not decent and services provided are minimal, without job training or anything else. Without sufficient preparation for autonomy and inclusion, once status is obtained, people leave the system and are forced, however, to turn again to support from associations or organisations to survive. Because one has not been prepared.

The moment of transition, from reception to inclusion in the community, turns out to be the most critical and often results in extremely precarious situations.

In the draft resolution, I refer to the importance of involving local authorities and the different realities of the territory (social services, schools, libraries, associations) in the paths of reception and inclusion of refugees, who only in this way manage to achieve their own independence and become part of the community. This means avoiding large-scale reception facilities and giving priority to smaller facilities, decent housing spread throughout the country. There should be no concentration in a few specific areas, in large cities, involving local authorities instead in the planning of interventions.

In addition to the critical issues, the report points to several cases of good practices, which enable the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in host communities through synergy between different actors. Inclusive reception practices in SAI centres in Sicily and initiatives such as the UK's Trinity Homeless Project are exemplary models, promoting mutual understanding between different actors, local development, and successful integration.

A reflection must also be made with respect to all those who remain excluded from the shelter system and live in informal settlements –present in many, if not all, of our states, and not just Calais. In addition to the lack of basic goods and services, health and safety risks are continuous. These people do not have effective access to their basic rights and often become victims again of exploitation at various levels.

Finally, let me mention an issue that is very close to my heart: unaccompanied foreign minors, the most vulnerable. Yet, for them it is necessary, first of all, to assume, to refer to recommendations that the Council of Europe has already issued and to prioritise the presumption of minority.

Finally, I would like to thank the Secretariat of the Commission on Migration and the Secretariat of the Italian Delegation for the attentive and competent support they have given to this report and to me personally.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** "Many thanks" [spoken in Italian], Ms ZAMPA.

Now I will first call Emmanuel FERNANDES from France for the Group of the Unified European Left.

**Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES (France, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The report before us - and my group salutes the work of rapporteur Sandra ZAMPA - makes a clear observation. The management of reception conditions for migrants in Europe all too often flouts their fundamental rights. Urgent action is needed to ensure that the rights of migrants are respected throughout the member states of our institution.

This report rightly stresses the importance of a dignified welcome, in line with human rights. Along with my group, the Gauche Unitaire Européenne, we support the report's recommendations, including the one calling for minimum standards to be set with particular attention to vulnerable people, especially women and unaccompanied minors, ensuring that these vulnerable people have access to dedicated reception facilities.

We know that, in addition to the violence of exile and the migratory process, women and unaccompanied minors are exposed to increased risks during their migratory journey, including gender-based and sexual violence, trafficking and torture. This heightened vulnerability imposes reinforced protection obligations, which states must imperatively assume.

The report stresses the need to strengthen co-operation between public and private players. We fully subscribe to this, and I was able to see this need for myself, alongside Sandra ZAMPA, during our visit, with other colleagues, to Calais, a visit whose conclusions feed into this report. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the invaluable work carried out by foundations, associations and, in some cases, citizens' groups, all working to ensure the dignity and, all too often, even the survival of migrants.

But how can we cooperate effectively when the State itself is withdrawing? In France, we are witnessing a gradual disengagement on the part of the State, which is cutting back on subsidies to associations and grassroots players. Yet it is they who, on a daily basis, guarantee what the State no longer guarantees: the effectiveness of fundamental rights.

If associations and NGOs are so present in reception centers, camps and emergency shelters, it's because the State is no longer fulfilling its responsibilities. It's not up to civil society to make up for public shortcomings. It's not up to associations to guarantee fundamental rights. In principle, it's up to the State to do so. Guaranteeing the effectiveness of human rights for all is neither an option nor a budgetary adjustment variable; it is a legal and moral obligation. The report points to violations of the right to housing for people seeking international protection.

In Strasbourg, these violations are a daily occurrence. Many asylum seekers sleep rough for lack of space in reception centers and emergency accommodation. Tents and encampments are springing up, and the state continues to close places and reduce the number of housing units available.

Let me conclude by saying that this is an undignified reality that we cannot ignore. Our states must assume their responsibilities. What we owe exiles is not charity, but justice. They must not be condemned to precariousness, but must have access, like everyone else, to dignity. This is not a privilege, but a right - the universal human rights that our institution is charged with protecting and promoting.

Thank you very much.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES.

I now give the floor to Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

You have the floor.

**Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

It's often said that a democracy is judged by the way it treats the most humble, the most fragile, the most disadvantaged. And migrants undoubtedly fall into this category.

In the 10 years I've spent on the Committee for Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, I've seen many difficult situations: the absolute misery of lives totally dependent on outside aid, the Calais Jungle, refugee camps in Lesbos, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Jordan, reception centres for unaccompanied minors in Greece, and many other places where I've been able to observe the importance of the various forms of aid given to migrants, especially the fragile and vulnerable.

Coming from the ends of the earth, having fled war, persecution, the consequences of climate change, misery and hunger, migrants, often at the risk of their lives, have crossed seas, climbed mountains, broken through walls set up to prevent their passage, to finally reach Europe.

Dear colleagues,

Imagine yourselves arriving in an unfamiliar country, exhausted and helpless, without money, sometimes without papers, speaking little or none of the local language, having suffered by hunger and thirst, freezing or overwhelmed by the heat, unable to remember your last real meal, or your last shower, feet bleeding from too much walking, shoes and clothes worn and torn, clutching at your modest luggage, fearful of insecurity, the risks involved and the constant threat of being checked and eventually arrested and deported, and often desperately searching for a loved one who has disappeared on the journey.

I have just described the daily life of a migrant or refugee who has been forced to use an irregular route to enter one of our countries, often the only possible way. What would become of these people, the damned of the earth, without the help they need to survive? The needs are enormous, the resources often limited, and the burden is unevenly distributed, falling largely on the shoulders of the countries of arrival - I'm thinking of Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain, not to mention the more than 3 million migrants living in Türkiye.

Solidarity on the part of many European countries remains insufficient. Help for migrants can come from either the public or private sector, and usually both, in an organized sharing of tasks for migrants who have entered the official asylum process. Infrastructure, housing, food, translation, identification, administrative procedures, care, especially psychological care, legal support, education for the youngest, language learning - the work involved is considerable. And the authorities in most of our countries have to rely heavily on NGOs, to whom they delegate large parts of these tasks.

However, many migrants remain outside the official channels and are totally dependent on the help provided by NGOs. I saw this for myself in the Calais Jungle, where I witnessed the most wretched of the wretched, supported as best they could be by the admirable volunteers of charitable associations. In some countries, these NGOs are accused of encouraging illegal migration, even criminalizing it, likening them to common smugglers. This is shocking.

I would like to thank our colleague Ms Sandra ZAMPA for reminding us of the essential role played by all those who are committed to helping migrants in a humane way.

I see this report as a tribute to NGOs.

Thank you.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** "Thank you" [spoken in French] Mister FRIDEZ.

I now give the floor to Mr CARVALHO from Group of the European People's Party.

**Mr Ricardo CARVALHO (Portugal, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues,

I speak today guided by the fundamental values of the Group of the European People's Party (EPP): speak for human rights, human dignity, solidarity, responsibility and the rule of law.

These principles must be at the core of Europe's response to migration. We can never be populist about migration, just to win votes and win elections in our countries.

The migration challenges we face are not only humanitarian, but structural. They test our capacity to defend borders while remaining faithful to our European values.

This report rightly underlines that migration cannot be managed effectively without strong co-operation between public institutions and private actors – NGOs, local authorities, civil society and international agencies.

I'm particularly proud of our Portuguese example, where a central-right government signed an agreement with the major private sector representatives, including them in the public response to migration and labour market integration.

As EPP representatives, we believe in subsidiarity and local empowerment. That's why we support integrated community-based reception models. Partnerships with local municipalities and trusted non-profit organisations have proven more effective in delivering human care, preventing segregation and fostering real inclusion. At the same time, we must ensure security, order and fairness. Border procedures must be efficient, but they must also be rights-based. The identification of vulnerable individuals, women, children and trafficking victims cannot be rushed.

We support age assessments and screening mechanisms that are multidisciplinary, accurate and child-sensitive in full compliance with international human rights standards.

Above all, we must act together as Europeans. Migration is an European challenge that requires co-ordination and long-term solutions. We need stable funding, coherent policies and stronger alignment between national and European frameworks. We need to lead with conviction and compassion. We need to deliver policies that are both fair and firm. We need to stand for a Europe that protects its people, honours its values and does not leave anyone behind.

Congrats on your report, dear colleague. Thank you very much.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister CARVALHO.

Now I give the floor to Sir LEIGH from the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates.

**Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group):** Mr President,

I acknowledge the report's intention to improve co-operation amongst public and private actors involved in migration management. Co-operation is valuable, but it cannot replace firm enforcement. The report underplays the need for robust measures to deter illegal crossings and disrupt smuggling networks. There is a noticeable lack of focus on deterrence strategies. Without clear intentions to discourage dangerous journeys, more lives will be lost and put at risk in the Channel and in the Mediterranean.

Return and readmission agreements are mentioned, but lack detailed proposals for strengthening these crucial tools. Effective returns are essential to prevent repeated illegal crossings. Border security receives limited attention in the report. We must invest more in surveillance patrols and early detection to prevent unauthorised entries, especially across the Channel. The Report leans heavily on humanitarian approaches, but these risk creating incentives for more migrants to attempt hazardous crossings. Compassion, Mr President, must be balanced with practical deterrents.

While the report acknowledges the smuggling networks, it stops short of proposing concrete actions to dismantle these criminal operations that profit from human misery. The concept of safe third countries is discussed without clear criteria, leaving ambiguity about where migrants can be returned safely. Clear definitions are vital to ensure returns comply with international law and protect individuals from harm. Increased European co-operation is welcomed, of course, in principle, but it must not erode national sovereignty over border control and immigration decisions. The national governments of European countries must retain full authority over who enters their territory. That is a fundamental national right. Public perception and social cohesion receive inefficient consideration. Migration policies that ignore public concerns risk undermining trust and social harmony.

This report does not go far enough, Mr President. Thank you.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr LEIGH. Then I give the floor to Ms BILOZIR from the ALDE group.

**Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** President, dear colleagues, Madam Rapporteur,

This is an important and human-focused report. As a Ukrainian, I understand displacement and migration not only as a crisis, but as a test of humanity. We also understand the power of civil society and how essential it is to empower local actors, municipalities, NGOs, with tools, funding and the recognition they need. Those who respond to the crisis are not always national governments, but often local communities, NGOs and frontline service centres.

Let me share the Ukrainian experience. During the first weeks of the full-fledged invasion, we had 6 million Ukrainians that became internally displaced. This was, I think, the fastest and largest displacement in modern European history. And before international aid came, it was Ukrainian civil society, municipalities and even centres providing administrative services that became the first line of humanitarian response. Local NGOs mobilised overnight. They provided food, clothing, advice, shelter. Centres of administrative services that before were to issue documents became emergency assistance hubs, issuing temporary IDP certificates, co-ordinating volunteers, providing medical help, even settling people in the houses of those who wanted in the local level, local people that proposed. Local schools, vocational dormitories, churches, opened their doors.

This experience taught us something vital. Successful migration management starts locally. It starts with trust, co-ordination and the courage to act fast under pressure. That's why, on behalf of ALDE, I would strongly support the report's recommendations: strengthen the role of local authorities and NGOs in reception and integration, invest in smaller dignified housing instead of over-reliance on hotels or mass shelters and ensure funding to local communities and NGOs.

The way Europe welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees was remarkable. It showed that when political will and community compassion align, refuge can become renewal. This model of decentralised human approach migration management must now be extended to all people fleeing war, persecution or disaster, no matter where they come from. Let us not wait for the next emergency to apply these lessons. Let us act now with vision and solidarity.

Thank you, friends.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Then I go to the list of speakers. The first one is Mr Nuno FAZENDA from the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group. You have the floor.

**Mr Nuno FAZENDA (Portugal, SOC):** Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank the author, Ms Sandra ZAMPA, for this important report.

Migration management is a reality that demands cooperation, coordination, and clarity of roles.

Public and private actors; from border authorities to local governments, NGOs to service providers; are on the front lines of a system that is under pressure.

They face legal uncertainty, lack of resources, inconsistent policies, and at times even political hostility. Yet, their work is essential to ensure that migration is managed in a way that is safe, human, and sustainable.

We must support these actors with proper funding, clear legal frameworks, and capacity-building tools. But more than that, we must foster trust between institutions, with civil society, and most importantly, with the migrants themselves.

Migration is not a temporary emergency. It is a structural feature of our world. Managing it responsibly requires long-term vision and shared responsibility.

Migration is not a crisis to be contained. It is a human reality to be managed with responsibility and solidarity. If we want a system that works, we need to invest in cooperation, capacity, and also compassion.

In fact, migration management must never be done at the expense of human rights. This is not just about borders or numbers, it's about our shared humanity.

Also, this is not about privileges for migrants. People are simply asking for a chance to live. To live with dignity and in peace. In fact, we don't need a world of individualism and indifference. We need a word of solidarity, hope and humanism.

Thank you, Mister President.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Nuno FAZENDA. And to be so beautiful in time.

So I can give now the floor to Mr Johann MARTEL from the ECPA. You have the floor. Three minutes. Thank you.

**Mr Johann MARTEL (Germany, ECPA):** Thank you very much, Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Migration has been a fact of human history since time immemorial. Despite almost 300,000 naturalisations per year recently, around 14 million people in Germany do not have a German passport. Up to two and a half million people come to Germany every year. And many of these people even come without a passport. In a world that is increasingly characterised by bureaucracy and structure, it seems absolutely... [interrupted by the President].

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Please, please, we take the time again, because there was a problem with the translation. So you can restart.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** You can start again, there was a problem with the translation.

**Mr Johann MARTEL (Germany, ECPA):** Mister President, dear colleagues,

Migration has existed throughout human history. Although almost 300 000 individuals are granted citizenship each year, there are more than 14 million people in Germany that do not have a German passport. And up to two and a half million people come to Germany each year, many without any type of travel document.

In a world that is increasingly characterised by bureaucracy, it seems absurd that migration, of all things, takes place without proper control. Everyone wants to know who is in their country. And it is the obligation of each state to know who is in their country.

Strict controls at airports demonstrate the desire for control. But at the same time, many external borders remain inadequately monitored, which is completely illogical. Uncontrolled migration leads to a loss of control, which in extreme cases can result in the disintegration of entire states and societies. A look back at history reminds us: let us not allow ourselves to be duped again by the mistakes of past societies.

Thank you very much.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** "Thank you" [spoken in German], Mister MARTEL.

Then we go to Lord GERMAN from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

**Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE):** I'd just like to say that I think I ought to stick to the report which is before us, rather than looking at very much wider issues, because there are some very significant matters inside this report which relate to the way in which public bodies and charities and NGOs operate together.

Migration management is a very, very complex operation. It involves people at all levels of society, in lots of places and across whole countries. And the value of locking together the voluntary non-governmental bodies with the public bodies – the bodies who are paid by, entirely put in place by governments and local authorities – must be complementary, they must work together, because both provide essential services which are needed for a proper functioning migration system.

We know, and we have heard in the report, that there are some unfortunate places where one side regards the other with great suspicion. And that is very unfortunate as well, because if these systems overlap or if they are contradictory, then they actually reduce the quality of the overall service which is being provided. So the obvious way, as described in the report, is to deal with this. There should be formal talks, negotiations and

ways of working, which are agreed both nationally and supranationally and locally, in order to make the maximum advantage that you can get from the huge added value which non-state bodies, charities and NGOs can bring.

Some NGOs rely almost entirely for their funding on public bodies, but many balance that with private and philanthropic funds. And what this report calls for is smaller-scale operations, moving things outwards and downwards to communities, dispersing people's help around each part of our member states. Because where NGOs are best suited to provide support is locally. And localised support is often related to the very important issue of housing. So breaking down the barriers between public and voluntary organisations can ensure that public spending will give the maximum return on this investment.

So this Assembly, I think, should recognise that this report opens a way for ensuring that we all, citizens of all of our states, get more bang for our buck. In other words, we get better quality of services from investing and supporting local community operations and voluntary bodies. It makes absolute sense to use and support NGOs in order to build better services to help the most vulnerable to live better lives.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Lord GERMAN.

And then I give the floor – and this will be then the last one – to Mr TOROCZKAI.

No. then I give it to Dame BRADLEY.

This is the last one. Then I will interrupt the list of speakers.

You have the floor, 3 minutes. You have to put your card in.

**Dame Karen BRADLEY (United Kingdom, ECPA):** Thank you very much, Mister President.

And as we would say in the UK Parliament, it's a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mister President, for the first time, I think, that I've served under your chairmanship.

I, like my colleague Lord Michael GERMAN, want to focus on the aspects of the report. And I want to start by saying that the opening paragraph, which states that we're convinced that co-operation with public and private actors is one of the crucial aspects of managing migration, I would go further and say it is essential. It is utterly impossible for the state alone to manage the accommodation for migrants and the management of migrants. The state might fund, but it cannot provide the accommodation, the food, the clothing, the emotional support that's needed and other matters. So I would say that we go further and not just say it's crucial, but this is essential. And not just the private sector, but also the voluntary sector, NGOs, they're incredibly important in this process.

Now, in the UK House of Commons, I chair the Home Affairs Select Committee, and in that capacity, we are currently carrying out an inquiry on the contractual arrangements that the UK government has with the providers of asylum accommodation in the UK. Now, our report is not finalised yet and we are still working on it, so I can't talk about our findings. But I do think many of the things in this report in front of us today match things that we have found. But there are some slight differences I wish to point out.

I'd also just want to make the point that we too often conflate the issues of people smuggling and human trafficking. This report does not do that. It is clear about trafficking being a separate issue, but smuggling is a consensual crime and trafficking is a coercive crime. And if somebody is forced to travel to another country, that is different from somebody who has chosen to take that path. And that is why it is incredibly important that we have quick decision-making in the process, so that we can identify those that are genuine refugees, genuinely here in a country for a better for escaping persecution, rather than those that wish for a better life. I don't blame those individuals for wishing for a better life, but I think that we do need to make a very quick decision and we also need NGOs and other actors to be able to help to identify those people who are victims of trafficking.

The other point that I just wanted to pick up was the point that's made in the report about the type of accommodation. And whilst I appreciate that there is a view globally that we should move to smaller-scale dispersal, rather than larger-scale, in fact, what I have seen is, is that in a larger site, it is possible to provide more of the services that asylum seekers need. It is possible to have on-site decision-making, it's possible to have on-site medical support, it's possible to have on-site facilities that simply aren't possible in dispersal accommodation. And I would just ask us to think carefully about that.

Thank you.

**Ms Victoria TIBLOM (Sweden, ECPA):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mister President,

Honourable colleagues,

Migration management today is more than border control – it is a test of our shared values, our capacity to cooperate, and our commitment to human dignity. Public and private actors, from coast guards and municipalities to NGOs and shelter providers, all carry an enormous responsibility. But they also face immense challenges.

One of the most urgent is the growing strain on infrastructure and personnel. Local authorities are often left to handle complex humanitarian, legal, and security issues with insufficient resources. Meanwhile, private actors – including transport operators and housing providers – are expected to comply with shifting policies, often without guidance or support. We must make sure that we have clear legal frameworks, and proper training for all involved actors – both public and private.

But beyond the logistical difficulties lies an even darker reality – human trafficking. Smugglers and criminal networks exploit our lack of coordination and the desperation of vulnerable people. Trafficking in human beings is modern slavery, and it thrives where there are loopholes, lack of data sharing, and gaps in law enforcement.

The hard truth is this: the more we open the door, the more these networks profit. Irregular migration creates chaos, feeds organised crime, and undermines the rule of law. If we truly want to protect human rights and combat trafficking, we must take control – by securing our borders, reducing pull factors, and making it absolutely clear that illegal entry will not lead to permanent settlement in Europe.

It is time to stop managing mass migration and start preventing it.

Thank you.

**Ms Salma ZAHID (Canada):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Honourable colleagues,

I would like to thank Rapporteur Ms Sandra ZAMPA for her invaluable work drafting her report focusing on the challenges and needs of public and private actors involved in migration management.

As a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, this is a topic close to my heart.

There have been some very positive practices in Canada, involving public and private actors, particularly in relation to the settlement of refugees.

Canada has been a global pioneer in terms of the private sponsorship of refugees, and for many years it had the only such program in the world.

As well, since its launch in 2017, the Canadian government has been a core supporter of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, which works to promote the adoption and expansion of community sponsorship programs for refugees around the world.

Despite these success stories, the global scale of forced migration is without precedent in recent decades.

As a result, no country has the capacity to welcome everyone seeking resettlement, and Canada is no different in this regard.

Ideally, states would work collectively to improve conditions in countries around the world, recognising that immigration levels need to be in line with host countries' capacity and infrastructure for processing applications and welcoming newcomers.

As well, in recent years, the surge in forced migration prompted the international community to implement cooperative mechanisms for managing migration flows, resulting in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Since their adoption at the international level, I am gratified to say that Canada has been a strong supporter of the two Global Compacts.

On a final note, climate-driven migration is also a growing issue, pointing to the need for stronger global action on climate change.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has stated that the present climate crisis is amplifying displacement and making life harder for persons already forced to flee.

Thank you.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you. Thank you, Dame BRADLEY.

So I interrupt now the list of speakers and the speeches of members who have not presented here can always be given to the Table Office for publication and official report at least 4 hours after this debate.

So I call on Ms Sandra ZAMPA, as rapporteur, to reply. And you have 3 minutes max.

**Ms Sandra ZAMPA (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur):** Thank you President, and to those who have spoken. The debate has been very interesting.

I take advantage of this rebuttal to thank the NGOs, associations, and civil society that are mobilising and collaborating to manage migration flows.

There is an African fable about a big forest fire and the animals fleeing. Only the hummingbirds stay and run back and forth to fetch water with their beaks and carry the water, fill their beaks, and spill it on the fire. And a rhinoceros says to the hummingbird, "What do you think you're doing this way?" And the hummingbird replies, "I do my part!"

So I want to thank all the people who do their part, the people of good will, who together with the institutions, and we have to make sure that the institutions make water available, that is the essential point.

Institutions have a responsibility to organise, together with civil society, to facilitate, to manage migration flows more intelligently and rationally.

The good practices that we have seen in the countries we have visited, but which are also elsewhere, and I have met many others, show that intelligent use can be made of migration policies, that migration policies can respond to many needs of societies, and I am sorry that there are those who have not understood even today, and even in the face of this pragmatic report, what is the role of the hummingbird, which is to bring water, and what is the role of institutions, which is to make that water available.

All together we have to get used to the idea that migration flows are structural phenomena, that migration will have to be managed.

I especially want to thank my colleague Ms Larysa BILOZIR, who spoke.

I'd like to remember the Ukrainian women I met in London who were guests of a large association, a large NGO that we visited and whose task, with the support of local and national institutions, was precisely to, in some way, accompany the presence of migrants, to make life easier and simpler not only for them, but also for the society that receives them.

The memory of that Ukrainian woman, who was together with her daughter, I will not forget in the coming years.

Thank you.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** The Chairperson of the Committee, Mr GONCHARENKO, do you want to speak? Can you make it short, because we are running late.

**Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons):** It's absolutely great.

As I understand, the Croatian Foreign Minister is already here, so we need to move forward. And I just want to be as short as possible.

Our Committee unanimously supported this report in May. So I ask everybody, on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, to support the report. And I want to thank Ms ZAMPA and the Secretariat for the great work done.

Thank you very much.

## **Vote : Les défis et besoins des acteurs publics et privés impliqués dans la gestion des migrations**

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you. So the debate is closed. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has presented the draft resolution to which no amendments have been tabled. We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document number six.

**Mr Marco DREOSTO (Italy, ECPA):** Excuse me Chairman, again with reference to Rule 42 of our Rules of Procedure, I emphasise how embarrassing it is to put resolutions, motions and projects like this of such importance to a vote with less than one-third of the honorable parliamentarians present, and therefore it would be appropriate to review at least how a quorum is considered for these votes.

Thank you.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

A request is made for a certain number of members to be present. If a quorum is not present, the vote on the business before the Assembly will be postponed.

I need to know if the request is supported by at least one-sixth of the representatives authorised to vote, and that is 49 members, from at least five national delegations. So, will those who wish to support the request please insert their voting cards and vote "Yes".

And can we see the results?

Or you can also stand up. It's easier. Can you just stand up?

**Mr Marco DREOSTO (Italy, ECPA):** No Chairman, I was not asking for a quorum check because I know that the Rules of Procedure as they stand do not allow it, there are no numbers, however, I think it is inappropriate and it is inadequate to have the evaluation system in the Rules of Procedure today.

**Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly):** This is not a point of order. And you take just the floor like that, so the translation is not okay, so we don't go to that point.

So we will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 16192. A simple majority is required. The vote is now open. The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed. 66 approved, 14 against.

So the draft resolution in Document 16192 is adopted.

Before we go to the next point, I'm very sorry, I have to apologise, but we have a correction of the result announced at the end of the debate on the report "Saving migrants' lives at sea and protecting their human rights" presented by Mr Paulo PISCO. This was Document 16195. The automatic counting by the machine has only taken into account all people who have their badge to vote. This means also the people who have abstained.

And the rule is that you need two-thirds of the people who voted yes or no. So then, if you take yes or no, 70 has voted yes or no, 54 has voted yes. So this means that the two-thirds majority was approached. So these recommendations were also adopted.

I'm very sorry for that. Very, very sorry. Human beings are sometimes even better than a machine. Thank you very much. I know. We give the floor to the real President.

## **Discours : M. Gordan GRLIĆ RADMAN, ministre des Affaires étrangères et européennes de la Croatie**

**Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** So now we all understand why we should not trust AI.

Dear colleagues.

Dear colleagues, please be seated.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues.

Now I have the pleasure to welcome among us Mr Gordan GRLIĆ RADMAN, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia.

Dear Minister, you have held the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of Croatia since 2019, when you took over the role from Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, when she became our Secretary General here at the Council of Europe. Before that, you have held a number of positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Croatia and several diplomatic postings, including to Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany.

Dear Minister, next year, it will be 30 years since your country joined the Council of Europe. Since then, much progress has been made, and there have been many changes to the political landscape in Europe. We look very much forward to your address and hearing your views on the current challenges facing our continent.

Dear Minister, thank you for being with us today and for having kindly accepted to reply to questions from parliamentarians after your address.

Without further ado, I have the honour to give you the floor.

**Mr Gordan GRLIĆ RADMAN (Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia):** Thank you so much. And Mister President, [spoken in Greek]. Mister Secretary General, [spoken in German].

Honourable members of the Parliamentary Assembly, your Excellencies, esteemed colleagues, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you so much and I am always pleased to be here in this high House, keeper of our democracy, our values, human rights, and I feel here at home and I'm very proud of the fact that you, Mister President, you mentioned that next year we will mark, we will celebrate our 30-year anniversary of our membership of this very, very very important organisation.

And thank you so much for the opportunity to address the distinguished Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It is really a pleasure for me to address you in this remarkable institution. As I mentioned, a symbol of reconciliation and shared progress among the people of our continent, of our European continent. My presence here is a token. It's a sign of Croatia's gratitude to the Council of Europe for its commitment to European unity and the defence of the core values that bind us together.

This occasion also holds special meaning, and as we approach the 30th anniversary, as I mentioned, of Croatia's membership in the Council of Europe next year, last I was here, it was on the same day when we entered the Council of Europe on 6 November. The New Democratic Pact for Europe represents a vital initiative launched by the Secretary General at the beginning of 2025, which we strongly support. Building upon the Reykjavik foundation and the ten Principles of Democracy, this Pact addresses the critical challenges facing European democracy today.

Democracy requires our vigilant protection against contemporary threats, namely democratic backsliding, socio-economic inequalities and technological disruption that amplifies divisions, rather than fostering dialogue. Eroding trust in institutions and increasing polarisation demand our urgent attention. We support a three pillar approach. First, learning democracy through education. Second, protecting democracy by reinforcing constitutional safeguards and combating disinformation. Finally, innovating democracy through new participatory governance models and digital transformation.

This process leading to a potential summit by the end of 2026 must remain inclusive, particularly engaging youth and civil society. We seek alliance beyond Europe, include with the global thought to create a positive democratic narrative that delivers tangible improvements in citizens well-being.

Mister President, Secretary General, dear colleagues,

Recent proposals to open-minded discussions about how international conventions address today's challenges, particularly regarding migration, require our captive attention and careful consideration of fundamental principles. We believe it may be helpful in this ongoing debate to consider the relationship between states sovereign prerogative to create and amend international conventions, on the one hand, and the judiciary's interpretative role within existing frameworks on the other. While the European Court of Human Rights exercises interpretative authority over the European Convention on Human Rights, there are legitimate discussions on the balance between judicial interpretation and state democratic processes for modifying legal frameworks through their legislative institutions. Regarding the Court's interpretative function, the Secretary General has noted the importance of institutional independence, stating the following: the Court must not be weaponised, neither against governments nor by them. Institutions that protect fundamental rights cannot bend to political cycles. If they do, we risk eroding the very stability they were built to ensure.

At the same time, and that is important to mention, as stated by its former President and not only once, the Court is not living in an ivory tower. This simply means that the Court should closely follow contemporary realities and should interpret the Convention as a whole and its particular provisions accordingly. In short, the principle of separation of powers and their balancing remains fundamental to our democracies. It is their starting point and their beacon. Constructive debate strengthens our system. But, at all times, we should keep in mind basic principles of our democracies, and particularly the preservation of the independence of judicial institutions.

Dear colleagues,

I'd like to dedicate a few words to our Croatian immediate neighbourhood, but, however, our European neighbourhood, Southeast Europe or Western Balkans. Probably Southeast Europe is a better explanation of the geographical position of those countries that are so-called Western Balkans. Although Western Balkans is neither politically nor geographically correct enough, but it's in the political process. If there is a Western Balkans, you can ask where is the eastern part of the Balkans? So, Western Balkans, it's only political process.

The Council of Europe provides an important platform for reaffirming Croatia's support to our neighbours in the Western Balkans, in their reform processes and efforts on their EU integration path. Croatia is a staunch advocate of EU enlargement via vocal proponent, and hopes to see progress on the EU path of the Western Balkan countries. But, in line with the merit-based approach and individual achievements in meeting criteria, like Croatia. So, we work hard to fulfil all the necessary criteria and benchmarks. However, the hard work does pay off.

More than two decades after the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit reaffirmed the European perspective of the Western Balkans, it is evident that now is the time to move forward. Countries of the region should seize this positive momentum and use it as an impetus for further internal reforms to complete the process as soon as possible. And we are ready to help them. We have expertise, we are experienced and it's in our interest to have a stable, institutional, functional Western Balkans.

Croatia therefore encourages all Western Balkan partners to intensify efforts in meeting the established criteria, particularly in the fundamental areas of democracy and the rule of law, which remain the cornerstones of the enlargement process. Addressing unresolved legacies of the past is also critical and necessary for reconciliation and long-term stability. Promoting regional stability and good neighbourly relations are overarching principles of the European Union, aligning with a common foreign security policy, rule of law and of course sharing European values.

In this regard, we welcome the progress that Albania and Montenegro have made on their EU integration path in recent months. We encourage them, as well as other countries in the region, to stay focused on continuing delivering. We put particular focus on Bosnia Herzegovina, which deserves the attention of the entire international community given its history and the responsibility of us all to support the country's European reform agenda. Assuring the equality of three constituents: peoples, namely Bosnians, Serbs and Croats, and the rights of all citizens is crucial for their political stability and democratic consideration of that country.

Croatia is doing its part in helping the states of Southeast Europe on their Euro-Atlantic path. We are sharing our EU accession experience, we are twinning projects, technical co-operation and bilateral support programmes. Croatia fulfilled all its most important foreign policy goals; what remains is the stability of the Western Balkans. Of course, we are on the way to achieve membership of the OECD, but it's on track. I will later on mention that.

Since joining the EU, Croatia has implemented 49 twinning projects, 41 of them in the Western Balkans, and organised more than 1 000 educational activities with over 9 500 participants. According to the European Commission data, Croatia is one of the most active EU member states in implementing training projects in the Western Balkans region. As a candidate for OECD membership and a responsible member of the EU, Croatia is firmly committed to fostering inclusive and sustainable development across Southeast Europe. We will continue offering political, diplomatic and technical support to all Western Balkans partners pursuing EU and, of course, some countries if they also want NATO membership.

The Council of Europe remains a key international partner in strengthening democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law across the Western Balkans. It acts as a vital catalyst for countries on their path to European integration and I express our gratitude to all what you are doing, Mister President, Mister Secretary General, in your very important role here, your efforts, which we really supported strongly.

Finally, Kosovo's admission to the Council of Europe would, in our view, fulfil our organisation's funding mission of promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law throughout Europe. In that sense, it represents both a strategic opportunity and an important step towards strengthening European values across the continent. Kosovo's submission would eliminate a significant gap in the Council of Europe's continental coverage, ensuring uniform European human rights standards across the Western Balkans. This inclusion would strengthen regional stability, support Kosovo's European integration and provide all communities, including the Serbian minority, full access to the European human rights system.

Ukraine, I take this opportunity to greet my friends from Ukraine. Yesterday's signing of the agreement between the Council of Europe and Ukraine on the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression and President ZELENSKY's address to this high House undoubtedly represent historic events, not only within this organisation, but also much more broadly. My country, Croatia, is ready to do its part quickly and effectively in the establishment of this Agreement.

The Russian war of aggression is the most serious threat to European peace and security in decades. This is not only a war against a sovereign state, it is a direct assault on the principles of international law and the rules-based global order. And, as my Prime Minister Andrej PLENKOVIĆ said in Odessa two weeks ago, helping Ukraine is not only the act of our solidarity, it's an investment in European security and international order based on rules. This is not only a war against a sovereign state, it's a direct assault on the principle of the national role and the rules-based global order. Should Ukraine fall? I hope not. But, should Ukraine fall, the message to other autocratic regimes would be that wars of conquest are profitable.

We remain deeply concerned by Russia's continuing attacks on civilian infrastructure and its unwillingness to engage in credible peace efforts. Ukraine has clearly demonstrated its readiness to pursue a just and lasting peace, including by agreeing on an unconditional 30-day ceasefire to create space for diplomatic negotiations. In contrast, Russia shows no urgency or genuine will to end the war. A future peace agreement must not legitimise or reward Russia's illegal territorial gains. Any peace that is unjust would risk setting a troubling precedent, encouraging acts of aggression and undermining stability in Europe and beyond. From our own experience, we know that only a peace rooted in justice can endure. We must keep doing everything we can to help Ukraine defend itself and pressure Russia into honest diplomacy. This entails additional military assistance to Ukraine and putting forth a strain on Russia through sanctions. Co-operation with the US remains crucial in this regard.

The war in Ukraine is in many ways a reflection of our War of Independence in Croatia, a homeland war, during which Croatia faced many of the same horrors that Ukraine faces today: territorial aggression, war crimes, so-called denazification, propaganda, attacks on civilian infrastructure representing bridges of international humanitarian law and human rights law. This is why we deeply understand Ukraine's struggle. Croatia has stood with Ukraine since the very first day of Russia's brutal aggression. Croatia has been with Ukraine since the war and will build with Ukraine in the future.

Croatia remains committed to providing continued and comprehensive support to Ukraine, including steadfast support for Ukraine on its EU path. Croatia can offer first-hand experience to Ukraine, particularly in areas such as humanitarian demining, prosecution of war crimes, peaceful reintegration of occupied territories and veteran cares. The project for the resocialisation of Ukrainian veterans, carried out with the support of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia, stands as one of the key efforts to share Croatia's post-war experience following the War of Independence. It is a testament to our commitment to solidarity, healing and long-term peace building.

This year we are organising the first International Conference on Comprehensive Care for Veterans of the War in Ukraine. Caring for veterans is a lasting responsibility, one that extends well beyond the end of conflict. This will be the fourth year in a row that Croatia has hosted a major international gathering with the aim of helping Ukraine. First, in 2022, First Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform. Then 2023, International Donors Conference on Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine. 2024, Ukraine Southeast Europe Summit organised by our Prime Minister. And upcoming, ministerial-level dinner within this framework in Dubrovnik this July.

Relative to our GDP, we have provided substantial support, almost 350 million euros in total, including 77 million euros in humanitarian aid. We have also welcomed over 30 000 Ukrainian refugees since the start of the war. According to the Kiel Institute, its May 2025 data, Croatia ranks 12th globally in total aid to Ukraine relative to GDP, 12th in military aid and 6th in humanitarian aid given the size of the country.

In short, Croatia strongly supports and greatly values all the efforts undertaken under the auspiciousness of our organisation in support of Ukraine. First and foremost, those related to the compensation of damages inflicted, but even more so those related to the establishment of responsibility and bringing to justice those responsible for major international crimes committed in and against Ukraine.

Mister President, Mister Secretary General, distinguished colleagues, Middle East. Regarding the dire situation in Gaza, we welcome the newly achieved ceasefire. We call upon the release of all hostages. Immediate, safe and secure flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Gaza must be established and a relaunching of the political process to end the conflict and reach a lasting political solution. We continue to support a two-state solution as the only sustainable path that can bring peace, security and prosperity to both Israel and Palestinians, as well as to the broader region. It must be the outcome of the peace process.

In all conflicts, humanitarian law and principles should be respected and civilians protected. We are deeply troubled by the devastating number of women and children that have lost their lives in Gaza. Croatia had sent urgent humanitarian assistance for the civilians in Gaza on several occasions, with an emphasis on helping children. In our War of Independence in the 90s, we faced a tragic experience of children losing their lives from bombing and shelling. This painful fact is one of the reasons why Croatia is particularly sympathetic towards similar sufferings and tragedies in other conflicts, and that solidarity is deep and sincere. Just a few weeks ago, the Croatian government sent urgent humanitarian assistance for children in Gaza amounting to 1 million euros via UNICEF. We continue exploring ways to offer additional help to the youngest ones in Gaza in the near future.

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

In the time ahead of us, we should do our utmost to save the lives of the most innocent in every society or community, especially in catastrophes and conflicts, the lives of children.

To date, Croatia has provided 2.75 million euros in urgent humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza. We delivered 400 tonnes of wheat flour to the Egyptian Red Crescent. Since 2016, Croatia has implemented health and education projects in Syria and in the neighbouring countries worth 1.2 million euros. Croatia is keeping its commitment to the people of Syria with 600 000 euros in the period 2025 to 2027. In 2025, we will implement projects focusing on education and healthcare infrastructure for civilian children in Jordan and Lebanon. Just recently, we have allocated additionally half a million euros in humanitarian assistance for the civilian population in Syria. Croatia expressed its solidarity with Lebanon by providing 350 000 euros in urgent humanitarian aid in 2024. We provided support for the socio-economic empowerment of Syrian women, education of Syrian children in Lebanon worth half a million euros in total. The Croatian government also contributed to the reconstruction efforts after the devastating explosion in Beirut. In Jordan, we reconstructed five inclusive playgrounds in refugee camps and conducted healthcare projects for Syrian refugees. Croatia is firmly committed to peace, coexistence and helping those in need. This is why we are supporting the revitalisation of our Community Centre in Bethlehem with 500 000 euros. I had the honour to witness the start of works on the centre, which will provide a safe space for children, youth and families affected by conflict.

Mister President, Mister Secretary General, dear colleagues, distinguished friends,

Transatlantic relations are very important. Having touched upon some of the tumultuous events around the globe, I believe it is worthwhile to remember that Europe can rely on and be relied upon by our partners across the Atlantic. Transatlantic co-operation has for decades been a cornerstone of global security, stability and economic development. This commitment transcends changes in administration on both sides. I just came from The Hague, where we had a historic summit, and this summit came at a crucial time for Euro-

Atlantic security. And, so the allies, we showed our unity and our strength. NATO is the strongest alliance in the world. However, we are also committed to a collective defence outlined in Article 5. First of all, we have to increase our budgets to adopt new technologies and expand also military production.

So, security is very important for us, having in mind the situation that security threats are growing, they are very serious, from Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and daily hybrid and cyber attacks. Croatia views the Atlantic relationship as vital, not only to its national interests, but also to addressing global challenges through co-ordinated and principled action. We believe that active US engagement, international organisation and forums is vital for upholding our rules-based international order that protects democratic values and human rights globally.

Co-operation and co-ordination with the US are particularly important to our neighbouring region of the Western Balkans, for example. The security and stability of the countries in the region is a shared priority for all of us. I believe we can agree that in the absence of negotiated solutions, US tariffs impact not only the transatlantic partnership, but also global trade, particularly supply chains and capital markets. Therefore, we consider it essential to de-escalate current tensions and pursue a mutually beneficial trade agreement. Historical experience has confirmed that by working together, the EU and the US can overcome existing challenges and reaffirm their leadership in global trade, innovation and economic stability. Croatia, both bilaterally and as an EU member, remains fully committed to these ties. By deepening engagement with our American partners, we strengthen the resilience of this essential partnership, ensuring shared prosperity and stability for the future.

Mister President, Mister Secretary General, esteemed colleagues,

We must also address a different type of crisis Europe is facing, namely the migration crisis. Our specific geographical position at the crossroads of central/Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean puts us directly on the main migratory routes. Therefore, it is clear why Croatia is committed to ensuring safe, yet legal, paths for migrants. Croatia is not only protecting the national borders, but also protecting the European borders. Having in mind that Croatia entered Schengen as of 1 January 2023, we are obliged to.

Croatia values strategic partnerships with various organisations on all aspects of migrations and mobility, including displacement of people and responding to their humanitarian needs. Only with the positive impact of safe, orderly and regular migration can countries of origin, transit and destination provide the protection of migrants and their human rights. On the other hand, we must focus on the fight against irregular and illegal migration, as well as fight against criminal organisation and traffickers.

Croatia is diligent in active implementation of the common EU migration policies, including on international protection. We are aware that asylum seekers treatment and proportion of positive asylum decisions greatly vary among member states. For this reason, some asylum seekers try to illegally reach those countries where they will have a better chance of obtaining international protection. That puts pressure on the EU's external borders, particularly Croatia, as I mentioned, which has the longest external and land border among the EU members. We remain vigilant in safeguarding human rights at our borders, mindful of our responsibility to balance security with compassion and legality.

Dear friends,

Allow me to now turn to another issue central to our democratic values. So, the freedom of media. Here again, the Council of Europe plays a pivotal role. Its strong legal standards help member states uphold press freedom and protect those who hold power to account. Freedom of expression is one of the key elements for the progress of society. Yet, we all see that independent media remain under pressure today. Journalists face threats all over the world on an almost daily basis. These different forms of violence against journalists have increased significantly, from physical attacks, to intimidation and harassment, targeted surveillance and cyberbullying. Digital technology is creating new threats. They range from online attacks against journalists, to orchestrated online disinformation campaigns and dissemination of news with no public accountability and little transparency.

This proliferation of false narrative by various factors, including national governments, is especially atrocious for the overall safety of every society. Yet, it is constantly on the rise, especially in times of various global conflicts and challenges. Being fully aware of these challenges, Croatia is placed to emphasise that we are a signatory to various international treaties and recommendations on the freedom of expression and media freedom. We are continuously improving our normative framework to ensure higher standards for all media operating in Croatia. Without safeguards for the safety of journalists, there can be no free media. Without free media, human rights and democracy are in peril. No community, country or region can prosper if media

freedom is denied. We have a collective responsibility and a moral duty to preserve the freedom of media. In the words of Benjamin Franklin: "Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech."

Mister President, Mister Secretary General, dear colleagues, distinguished members of the Assembly,

As I conclude my remarks today, let me emphasise that the challenges we face, from the assault on democracy and rule of law, to conflicts that threaten our shared security, to the protection of fundamental human rights, demand our unwavering unity and collective action. The Council of Europe stands as Europe's conscience, reminding us that our strength lies not in our individual capacities, but in our shared commitment to the values that define us: democracy, human rights and rule of law. Croatia's journey from war-torn nation to proud member of the European family demonstrates that with determination, solidarity and adherence to our common principles, even the most daunting challenges can be overcome.

A man asked his gardener, "Why do your plants grow so beautifully?" The gardener replied, "I don't force them to grow, I just remove what stops them." So, please remove all the obstacles so that everyone feels at home.

Today, as Ukraine fights for these very same principles, to feel at home, their own home, as our Western Balkans neighbours pursue their European path, and as we confront crises from Gaza to our own borders, we must remember that our response will define not only our present, but the Europe we leave to future generations. Let us leave Strasbourg more determined than ever to defend democracy where it is under threat, to extend the hand of solidarity to those who suffer and to ensure that the beacon of European values continues to shine brightly in an increasingly uncertain world. The world begins anew today, together, united and resolute.

Thank you.

*(Applause)*

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

Dear Minister,

Dear colleagues,

We have to conclude this sitting in eight minutes. So I will change the procedure a bit. Actually, what we are doing, Mister Minister, is that we have questions one by one on behalf of the political groups, but I will kindly ask the representatives to address their questions one after the other and then please make some notes to have some minutes to answer all of them. You can stay there if you want, or you can go to your seat, whichever is more convenient for you.

I will start with the speaker on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA. Bisera, you have the floor.

**Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA (North Macedonia, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Yes, I'm sorry.

Respected Minister, before joining the EU, Croatia had to resolve a border dispute with Slovenia. What did you learn from that process? And how would you apply those lessons to the blockage that Bulgaria is imposing on North Macedonia due to the constitutional amendment on the Bulgarian minority?

Do you see room for Croatia, maybe together with Slovenia, to take on an intermediary role in facilitating the Skopje–Sofia dialogue, similar to what the Brdo-Brijuni Process did for regional co-operation?

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Group of the European People's Party, Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU. Ingjerd.

**Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, President.

Bosnia and Herzegovina are neighbors Croatia. The current political situation has been described as a grid-lock and the most difficult since the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995.

What is your assessment of the situation? And can Croatia, as an EU member state, contribute to the European integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina? And what role can the Council of Europe play?

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Oleksii GONCHARENKO. Mister GONCHARENKO, you have the floor.

**Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for your support to Ukraine, and this January, Ukraine and Croatia signed and started their special task force against Russia's so-called "shadow fleet".

Can you inform us what are the current results of this task force?

And by the way, one month ago, it was the second Black Sea Security Forum in Odesa, where the question of maritime security was one of the most important. So I would like to invite you to next year's forum, which has already proven itself to be a very important regional platform for such co-operation.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Sabina ĆUDIĆ.

**Ms Sabina ĆUDIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Welcome to Strasbourg, dear Minister.

You spoke at length about your relationship, or Croatia's relationship, with the Western Balkans.

My question pertains to Croatia's support – or lack of support – for the implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina. Recently, you made a statement, "If Bosnia wants to join the EU, it better listen to what Croatia has to say".

In that regard, my question is, does the same apply to all Western Balkan countries? And whether you will use Croatia's foreign policy goals to condition membership of Western Balkan countries to the EU?

Thank you.

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

And on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, the Co-Chair of the group, Ms Laura CASTEL.

**Ms Laura CASTEL (Spain, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Chair.

Dear Minister, thank you for being with us.

We know Croatia is facing several issues that deserve our attention, such as judicial independence, in particular to protect whistleblowers and journalists investigating corruption, or even the pushbacks at the borders.

But also whether Chapter 31 of Montenegro's accession, which is common foreign and security policy, could be opened tomorrow or if Croatia will block it.

So, dear Minister, we would appreciate it if you would elaborate on all of these issues for us.

Thank you, Minister.

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

Dear Minister, you have the floor to respond.

**Mr Gordan GRLIĆ RADMAN (Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia):** Thank you so much for all these questions. I appreciate it very much.

Yes, and first of all, it was Croatia and Slovenia. I know very much about our neighbourhood and, together with Slovenia, we entered the European Union. First of all, Slovenia entered before Croatia did. And I can say that Slovenia helped our accession to the European Union.

But, however, I'd like to answer you briefly and properly. We, through our accession process, and prior to it, we repeatedly expressed our readiness to resolve the open border issue with Slovenia before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, as the most competent body for solving similar disputes, as well as before the International Court of Justice. Just in the history of this file, the border issue. In order to remove hindrances and to complete its accession to the EU, Croatia did accept the Slovenian proposal to submit this issue for settlement before the ad hoc Arbitral Tribunal under the bilateral arbitration agreement concluded between the two states, namely Croatia and Slovenia. As you all know, it did not go very well since the process was compromised and contaminated in a way that stands ready to resolve the dispute with our neighbour, because we honestly believe that all open issues should be dealt with through dialogue.

Our co-operation is very good and vibrant in so many areas, as the Prime Minister also emphasised two days ago during the recent Odesa meeting. We have a lot of things in our own interest. It is in strengthening, for example, the common traffic infrastructure in the interest of our citizens. We are now together in the Schengen zone. I think the political efforts need to be made, first of all, and the issue that can also be resolved later needs to be overcome, and we are a good example of that.

So I can say that since we have also very good and friendly relations with both countries, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, also. We're good friends. We are good friends. We would also be ready to act as an honest broker if both Bulgaria and North Macedonia were to deem it as potentially useful.

And that was the question of the distinguished parliamentarian from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Actually, it was misinterpreted that, you know, just someone wants to find something and the sentence of the war to disqualify someone who is setting very positively. Actually, I spoke in a positive manner, namely what I wanted to say, that Croatia is a member of the EU and, so in this regard, that Croatia is ready to help to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's Croatia that is a vocal proponent of the EU perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's in our interest to have Bosnia and Herzegovina, because we are the closest neighbours, and we share a common history. And it is Croatia that was actively engaged, first of all, for Bosnia and Herzegovina to get the candidate status in December 2022. Now, we have also helped in this process of negotiation with the European Union. Just what we need based on the negotiation framework, what we need, the substance of the framework, substance of negotiations. I think there are some laws required on the ground, and hopefully, Bosnia and Herzegovina will soon negotiate with the European Union. But now it's up to the political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to engage themselves really in the interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The responsibilities are in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their leaders. So, who, more than Croatia, knows the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina? Me too. I was born – my whole family was born – in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I like Bosnia and Herzegovina. I appreciate very, very much also my connection with Minister of Foreign Affairs KONAKOVIĆ. We always organised the Džepčani Forum, where we attended, and we organised a panel where the foreign ministers of the Western Balkans participated.

And, of course, when it comes to the Dayton Agreement, we should know that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multinational state. It's a multi-ethnic miniature. You know, the principles of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Agreement, the principles, they are one country, two entities and three constituent peoples with a system of checks and balances. It's power sharing. And the Dayton Agreement was designed just to prevent any domination of other ethnic groups. So it is the question. So, every constituent person should have equal rights. And it's Croatia who is helping, of course, all the political leaders, no matter who they are. And we are interested in having political stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We appreciate the territory and integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia was among the first to recognise Bosnia and Herzegovina on 7 April 1992. So we are honest brokers, we are honest friends. I think so, it must be visible and concretely proved.

Montenegro. Montenegro. It's not Chapter 23 or 24. And you know that Croatia supported the European and NATO perspective from the very beginning. And it was Croatia who, during the EU presidency in 2020 and at the end of June, I was also the Foreign Minister at that time. We opened the last chapter, namely competitiveness. And we also closed three chapters recently. And now we are going. We also closed Chapter 5. But Chapter 31 – it is good neighbourly relations. Good neighbourly relations. It must be proved concretely.

It's not blocked. So we give Montenegro a chance. Good neighbourly relations, promoting regional stability and good neighbourly relations is an overarching principle of the European Union. An overarching principle of the European Union. And we also call to refrain from any activities that can undermine good neighbourly relations.

I recently also visited Montenegro and we signed a very important agreement with Foreign Minister IBRAHIMOVIĆ. It's good and a step forward to the return of Croatian House to Croatian minorities in Boka Kotorska in Montenegro. I also visited my colleague in Belgrade. I visited my colleague in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I had good communication with everyone.

As I mentioned, Croatia fulfils all of its foreign policy goals. Croatia doesn't need anything. What we need is the stability of the Western Balkans.

So when it comes to the shadow fleet, we also discussed it during the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on Monday. Foreign Minister Andrii SYBIHA was also there. Of course, it is really concerning, as this is also how Russia funds its war against Ukraine. By some accounts, today, 70% of Russian seaborne oil moves via the shadow fleet. These ships are also old and dangerous. They are not insured and are poorly maintained. And so they pose a big environmental risk. Croatia recognised this problem in the early days and endorsed the United Kingdom's call to action on the shadow fleet when it was launched in July last year. Our experts are part of the international working group on the Russian shadow fleet, which was established at the end of August 2024. These groups also share information on the operation and so on.

In May this year, as the EU, we sanctioned almost 200 shadow fleet vessels. This was an important part of the 17th package of EU sanctions imposed on Russia over aggression in Ukraine. And of course, as the shadow fleet grows in size, we are ready to do more to prevent these ships from enabling Russia's war against Ukraine and to prevent its threat to the safety and security of seas and oceans.

And finally, so we will be pleased to take part in the Black Sea Security Forum in Odesa next year to also continue this important discussion. I was also the President of the new commission, and we had a very good co-operation with Black Sea Security Forum.

And thank you so much for your kind invitation.

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

Dear minister, thank you so much for your speech and answering the questions. Once again, congratulations to your country for celebrating the 30th anniversary next year. It is not, of course, years or decades that we celebrate, we celebrate achievements, and I'm glad to hear that your country is aligned with the Council of Europe's principles.

Dear colleagues, our next business is to consider the changes proposed in the membership of committees. These are set out in the document Commissions 202505, addendum 2. Are the proposed changes in the membership of the Assembly's committees agreed to? Agreed.

The assembly will hold its next public sitting this afternoon at 3p.m, the sitting is adjourned.

**La séance est levée à 13h10**