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Official report of debates

Ouverture de la séance n°30

Séance des questions : M. Alain BERSET, Secrétaire Général du Conseil de l'Europe

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The sitting is open.

I remind members that, in order to be registered for the sitting, you should insert your badge when you take your seat, and keep it inserted for at least 30 seconds.

You should also insert your badge in order to speak or vote. To request the floor, please press the “request” button.

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

Dear colleagues,

This morning the Agenda calls for the election of the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly.

The candidate's name and biographical notice are to be found in Document 16226. The candidate is: Dr Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU.

Though there is only one candidate, we are obliged to hold the vote by secret ballot so please vote when the vote is open in a few minutes.

The election will be held in the area behind the President's chair and will be conducted by secret ballot.

At 1 p.m. the poll will be closed. As usual, counting will then take place under the supervision of tellers.

In accordance with the rules, each political group has appointed a teller. The tellers are:

From the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group: Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA from North Macedonia;

From the Group of the European People's Party: Mr Sergiy VLASENKO from Ukraine;

From the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates: Dame Karen BRADLY from the United Kingdom;

From the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe: Baroness Sal BRINTON from the United Kingdom;

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.

From the Unified European Left Group: Mr Berdan ÖZTÜRK from Türkiye.

I will announce the results at the start of this afternoon's sitting at 3.30 p.m..

An absolute majority of votes is required.

I now declare the ballot open.

The next item on the Agenda is questions to Mr Alain BERSET, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

We will first hear questions from the speakers on behalf of the political groups and then hear a response from Mr Alain BERSET to those questions. I must remind you that there is a limit of 30 seconds. Of course, I can be a bit flexible. But I want to remind you that we should ask a single question and not make speeches.

I would like to ask our Secretary General, Mr Alain BERSET, to take his place at the rostrum. You have the floor.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you very much, Mr President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

At the very beginning of this question and answer session, I would first like to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Swiss delegation and to the family of Mr Alfred HEER, your colleague Freddy HEER, whose sudden death saddens us deeply. I do so also because for me he was a long-standing colleague, a colleague who left his mark on Swiss and European political life. As you know, his unwavering commitment to the Council of Europe, particularly as Head of Delegation, and his energy and determination made a valuable contribution to our joint work, and his absence will leave a void, both institutionally and on a human level.

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

Now I will give the floor, as I said, to the speakers from the political groups.

The first is Ms Lise CHRISTOFFERSEN from the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Ms Lise CHRISTOFFERSEN, you have the floor.

Ms Lise CHRISTOFFERSEN (Norway, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Mr Secretary General,

The level of suppression in Azerbaijan is unprecedented.

More than 300 political prisoners, among them journalists and human rights activists, 76 colleagues in this Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe are declared persona non grata. The authorities neither cooperate in monitoring procedures nor in election observations. They do not implement judgments from the European Court of Human Rights.

My question is are any efforts made by the Secretary General to bring this unacceptable behaviour to an end and to make Azerbaijan fulfil their obligations as a member of the Council of Europe?

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I remind all colleagues that the procedure goes as follows: when we have questions on behalf of the political groups, the Secretary General will answer immediately, and then I will take questions in groups of three.

So, dear Mr Alain BERSET, you have the floor to respond to the first question.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Dear President, thank you very much for this question.

We are all fully aware about the situation in Azerbaijan. We know that we have a lot of concerns in Azerbaijan, and [have] been in this situation [for] a long time.

We know this, despite the fact that we have [a] really diverse family, with a lot of different contexts and different histories and different situations, it is important always to work together to find the most highest level of convergence between our member states and for the values.

I see your concern, I share your concern. I think the best way, the best way to make some progress is not just to observe from far and to denounce; it is to engage, to work together, to try to develop projects, to highlight the points where we have some problems, to try to make steps, some steps, positive steps.

I know that it is difficult, but even if it is difficult – because it is difficult, it is much more important to engage. It is what the Council of Europe is doing.

As you may know, we have a collaboration, a co-operation with Azerbaijan at the intergovernmental level. We recently had a visit of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture. We have an action plan on Azerbaijan until 2026. We have an office in Baku working on this, on different topics, like against violence against women and girls, for anti-corruption, anti-money laundering and other topics. I mean, it's the best way to engage, knowing that [Azerbaijan] is one of the 46 member states of the organisation.

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

On behalf of the European People's Party, Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO.

Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Secretary General,

Thanks for everything that you do to support [the] compensation mechanism and [the] Register of Damage, but my question is about the frozen assets.

Could you please provide us [with] more information on what happens within the Council of Europe on this question? And what do you think about the idea of Chancellor Friedrich MERZ who recently said that the frozen assets can be used for defence spending. How can we make sure that these assets are used also for the compensation and for the reconstruction of Ukraine?

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Dear Mr Alain BERSET, you have the floor.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you very much for this question.

It allows me maybe to start giving some few recent elements about the Claims Commission and the compensation mechanism. I mean, we have these three pillars for accountability, the European Court on Human Rights, the Register of Damage, which shall very soon be implemented in the Claims Commission. We hope that it will be done by the end of this year, and then the Special Tribunal.

About the Claims Commission and the compensation, it is clear, and it was always clear, that the whole discussion must also include the discussion about the funding, how to fund all this work. And it is clear that, for many years now, the whole discussion about the so-called frozen assets is at the very centre of this discussion.

I noted in recent months that there are, first of all, among our member states, differences about the legal issues that this represents and how the assets or the benefits can be used. I mean, what can be done with the assets, with, well, how to say this, the interest, sorry. And to see what we can do with this. I mean, we need, first of all, to solve this. It is not primarily the role of the Council of Europe. Obviously, there are some legal issues in different countries, but it must be clear that we need funding to make sure that the Claims Commission and then restoration, reparation and reconstruction can be financed.

About the use of the frozen assets to finance defence systems and weapons, it's not my role to take a position on this. I just note, and I think it is also understandable why, I just note that, well, a lot of European countries are investing a lot of money now for defence system and weapons. I mean, it is probably absolutely a good thing and, to understand the actual situation, also for supporting Ukraine. But I think our role is to recall that, if we are investing a lot in this matter, it will never be solid and sustainable if the whole thing is not built on a solid ground of democratic security. That's why our role is also to call for this, for stability in the long term and

not to forget to finance and to support democratic security. That means the values, that means the importance of the rule of law, the importance of democracy, because it is exactly what made, in the past, in the last eight years, that our countries have always tried to be as stable as possible.

Despite all this, we know this, we have wars and war on the European continent. We have the aggression, well, to take this particular, the very central case, the aggression of Russia and Ukraine since 2014 and full-scale invasion since 2022. Despite this, we must invest to continue to work for stability and for the conditions that must allow peace to always prevail.

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

On behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Secretary General,

I trust that you support genuine peace rather than paper peace built on illusions.

You would agree that it is difficult to call it peace when Armenian prisoners remain in Baku jails, Azerbaijani forces occupy parts of Armenian sovereign territory and the Armenians of Karabakh are denied the right to return to their homeland.

How can the Council of Europe under your leadership contribute to resolve these issues, and to ending Azerbaijan's violations of fundamental human rights and international law?

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

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you very much for this question.

First of all, well, you know, we have seen a lot of instability, war in the South Caucasus. And it was not, well, good conditions also for the population. And it was really a difficult situation for all the population in the country, in Armenia. I just wanted to mention this.

In that sense, I must tell you that the whole discussion that I had recently with different actors in the region shows that this very important step made at the beginning of August in Washington with the draft peace agreement, it is a step for stability and for peace in the region. But clearly, as you mentioned, it is not black or white, one or zero.

Peace is always a process. It needs some time. It needs some improvement. It needs some collaboration. It needs working together and to try to restore also, where possible, a certain trust to have these conditions happening.

You also mentioned the people detained in Azerbaijan. I think it is clearly a discussion that we should continue to pursue in this context.

But once again – and without going into too many details now – once again, the only way, the only way to make some progress is never to cut ties. It is to be in contact and to have this development of a certain trust and level of collaboration. It is to be in contact, not just speaking about the fact that we are in contact, but it is to have enough regularity and clarity...

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Yes, Secretary General, sorry to interrupt.

Dear colleagues, I hear voices, and I believe I'm not at an age that I can hear voices from outer space. So the voices are coming from inside this hemicycle. Please let us be quiet and listen to the Secretary General. We are asking questions to him and he is answering.

Thank you.

Mr Alain BERSET.

Mr Alain Berset (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you very much, Mister President.

You know, sometimes I also hear voices, but more at night.

No, I was not hearing the voices. But thank you for the intervention, helping me to continue to answer the question, just to stop.

I mean, we need to have contact, not speaking about the fact that we are in contact, but on the substance. And it's exactly what I tried to do, being clearly in contact regularly with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol PASHINYAN. We had yesterday, by the way, a very good meeting and evening together.

And I also had the possibility to meet President Ilham ALIYEV last week in New York, exactly for this reason, you know, to speak about those elements. And this would create conditions. This could create conditions where we can address then other issues or the next issues that you mentioned in your question.

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

On behalf of ALDE, it is Ms Sabina ČUDIĆ.

Sabina, according to my computer, you haven't inserted your badge. You have to insert your badge first.

Ms Sabina ČUDIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, dear Secretary General,

We primarily welcome your efforts to ensure that the mechanisms of the Council of Europe, such as the European Court of Human Rights and Venice Commission, are available to all the citizens of our member states, including those states such as Azerbaijan, who are absolutely failing to meet our standards.

On behalf of the the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I might kindly suggest that you also consider forming a task force together with the rapporteurs in finding ways and the path for our colleagues back, but in a way that would ensure that it meets the human rights criteria and the paradigm that we all share in this chamber.

In addition, finally, I will ask, do you think that citizens of countries who are eager to meet the standards and who are desperately seeking to become members of this institution, such as Kosovo, equally deserve access to the Council of Europe's mechanisms and institutions, in the same way that we wish to see our colleagues from Azerbaijan and Georgia back?

Thank you.

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

Dear Secretary General, you have the floor.

Mr Alain Berset (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Well, I thank you for your... It was more a proposal than a question, if I may say this.

So to a constructive proposal to see what can we do to make sure that we are overcoming, I mean, just a discussion about the fact that we are or not working together, but how to go more in the substance and to find ways.

I take your proposal with great interest. We will have a look into this and to think which is the best way to progress.

But one more time, I think the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe plays a central role in the whole discussion.

We have also, with the Committee of Ministers, the two, well, constitutory and statutory bodies of the organisation working together to make sure that we have - because it's the only thing that matters in the end - that we have the maximal possible leverage for what we do.

That means for the values, for implementing, executing or making sure that there is a good execution of the decisions of the Court, for making sure that democracy is progressing and not backsliding, to make sure that there is good protection in all possible different situations and contexts for human rights.

And saying this, I know that it is saying a lot about the situation. And there is, at the moment, a huge gap between what we would achieve if we would live in a perfect world and what we are really achieving.

Because as I, well, several times have mentioned before, I mean, we are not more right now in a world where we are converging by the values for the best, for the better.

We are in a world where we have divergent forces in action that are quite strong at the moment. And it is playing a strong role – sometimes a very negative role on the values that we defend and that we support here together. That's the first point.

Your question has two questions, if I can say so.

You mentioned also the Western Balkans and question of accession of Kosovo. I mean, for the Western Balkans, I can just tell you in general, it was not the question.

But I take this opportunity to see that I'm closely, really, I'm following really closely the situation.

It is really important, particularly in certain cases, certain countries, to recall that the rule of law, that sovereignty, integral territorial integrity, stability of the region and the rule of law are central. It seems evident.

It seems obvious, but it is not in any cases. And I would try to recall this.

On the last question, the accession of Kosovo. It's clear that when we have member states, it is first of all for the advantage of the population, because those populations are covered by the the European Convention on Human Rights.

And to have this possibility opens the way when there is a violation or possible violation of human rights, to go to the Court and to have a decision. For the concrete case of Kosovo and accession – as you may know, it is a decision now that is pending before the Committee of Ministers.

And I am not able to give you much more information at this stage of the discussion.

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

On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES.

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

The Global Sumud Flotilla, made up of citizens from 45 countries, most of them Europeans, is heading for Gaza to break the illegal blockade imposed by Israel and bring humanitarian aid.

Responding to a moral and legal duty, since the States are flouting the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the flotilla found itself under fire from multiple drones.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for an end to these attacks and for an independent investigation. The Israeli government is promising interception and arrests, again totally illegal as they are taking place in international waters.

Another flotilla, the Thousand Madleens, has also set off. So, Mr Secretary General, do you support these flotillas, as Italy and Spain are now officially doing, and do you condemn Israel's genocide of the Palestinians?

Thank you very much.

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

Dear Secretary General, you have the floor.

Mr Alain Berset (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you for that question.

As you can imagine, I've just come back from New York, from the United Nations General Assembly, and you can imagine that this was obviously at the heart of almost all the discussions we had there. What I can say on this subject, as I did at our last session here, is that what we are seeing in Gaza is a profound human tragedy. It is something that is unacceptable, something that should not exist in terms of the respect we must have for human rights.

In saying this, we obviously recall that the Council of Europe's position on this issue is to defend human rights, to denounce human rights violations and the catastrophic situation in Gaza, and to call for an immediate ceasefire and immediate access for humanitarian aid for those affected. Of course, we must also consider the release of all the hostages.

And what we need today, and this is what is lacking today, is above all a credible political process that can move towards the only solution that will enable progress to be made towards stability in the region, which is the two-state solution. All the constructive elements that are then added to this to draw attention to the situation, to get things moving and to have an impact on the situation are excellent. This is why, of course, I think you mentioned the role and intervention of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who is obviously fulfilling his role and function by doing this.

We reiterate that there are no double standards, that human rights on European territory or human rights outside the territory of the Council of Europe are the same. They are universal, which is why I believe we have taken this very clear position.

We must also be very careful not to promise things we cannot deliver. And that's the point, of course, where we don't have access to the European Court of Human Rights for people in Gaza. They are not covered by the European Convention on Human Rights. This in no way detracts from the political position that must prevail, in the hope once again that we will have a ceasefire as soon as possible, the elements I mentioned earlier, but above all a credible political process for stability in the region, because this is the only way, in the end, to offer prospects to the people who, today, are in a situation that is, in fact, completely unacceptable, that we should not have to observe in the 21st century.

Thank you very much.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And this concludes the list of the speakers on behalf of political groups.

I will now open the list of colleagues who have asked for the floor in groups of three. And I will start with Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN.

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN (Türkiye, SOC): Thank you.

Mister Secretary General,

In Türkiye, dozens of mayors, politicians, bureaucrats and activists have been jailed.

In the lawsuits filed against the Republican People's Party (CHP), there are demands for the appointment of a trustee to the party. A trustee was appointed to the Istanbul administration of the Republican People's Party.

Although these lawsuits have become irrelevant due to the congresses held by the party, the judiciary continues to be used as a political tool. These are not just violations of rights, they raise questions about the legitimacy of the democratic system itself. What are your thoughts on this matter?

Thank you.

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

The next question is from Ms Hajnalka JUHÁSZ.

Ms Hajnalka JUHÁSZ (Hungary, ECPA): Mister Secretary General, one year after taking office, how do you assess the functioning of the organisation from within?

What have been the main challenges during your first year in office?

And in which area of the Council of Europe activities do you still advocate for greater change? Also, ahead of the planned next summit.

Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the third in this first group is Ms Saskia KLUIT.

Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC): Thank you, President.

We have seen this summer and these months that our citizens are suffer[ing] under the climate change crisis. We have fires in Southern Europe, crops dying in Eastern Europe due to rains. We have a big PFAS crisis that threatens the lives and health of our citizens.

Tomorrow we have a wonderful event on the right to a clean and healthy environment. And my question to you is, what is the Council of Europe, and what are you doing to make the next steps for the development of the right to a clean and healthy environment, that will protect our citizens and their way of life?

Thank you.

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

Dear Secretary General, you have the floor to respond.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you very much.

I will start with the first question about the recent developments in Türkiye. Thank you for raising the question.

Well, we are following the developments in Türkiye closely. The continued detention of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İMAMOĞLU is a matter of deep concern, also with other mayors who have been arrested. It's not to compare, but in this context, I welcome the release of Congress youth delegate Mr Enes HOCACOĞULLARI. He was in pre-trial detention following the attention given to this case, including by our Congress. And I would set in this context a troubling precedent if participants in Council of Europe activities can be prosecuted for remarks made in that context.

I mean, in all the contacts that we have with all member states, particularly also with Turkish authorities, we urge that they fully uphold their human rights obligations. I think it is essential that we insist on this, that rights and freedoms should be guaranteed on European soil. And they are also guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. It includes notably the right to a fair trial. It includes notably the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association. They are fundamental rights to have a functioning democracy. In this context, we also always recall the importance of executing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. I had several occasions to address this in recent months. I mean, one more time, it is really the role that we can have and I can have in my function, to make sure that we regularly have those discussions, particularly addressing the main points of concern. I also mention in this context exactly the execution that I mentioned before, and also the very well-renowned cases that we have open for execution at the Council of Europe.

For the second question, I want to try not to be too long for the second question. Thank you very much for this question about, I would say, the general assessment after one year. Well, you know, I try to do my best in this context. Well, we try.

I think we have, we, the Council of Europe, one of the most possibly important organisations that we need right now in Europe and in the world. Because what is disappearing right now is exactly this sense of connectivity, the sense of the community, the sense of what it means to form a society. And it's exactly based on what we do. I mean, making sure, for example, that through democratic processes, it will be possible for the population to decide in which direction they want to see the country developing, how they want to see systems organised, for education, for example, for access to health or for other things. It is exactly what is important right now, if you want to continue to make society and to be a society.

Exactly, this is also the same thing, with the rule of law. To have predictability, you need to know which rules apply. That's so important, not to have arbitrary decisions at a certain moment. The rule of law is so important for this.

And then for the good protection of human rights. And that's really the protection of human rights, the protection of individual human rights. It is, I would say, in that sense, a very liberal approach to what it means to have this protection. So it was my goal to strengthen this, to work on this.

But saying this, I see that we have an intensification of the war in Ukraine. Seeing this, I see that we had, well, a fragile peace and still not very stable in the South Caucasus. I still see that we have tensions in the Western Balkans. I see that we have a tragedy, I mentioned this before, happening in Gaza. I see that we have, in some elections, always a discussion about foreign interference, what it means in different directions.

I mean, as we speak, the challenges are growing. They are probably more difficult and more important than they were one year ago. I don't want to be too specific because then we need to make constant reforms of the organisation, to have an organisation really fit for this really rapidly changing world. We need to address new issues.

I was just mentioning right now, I mean, disinformation and foreign interferences. It is a huge threat to democratic processes. I can tell you, as I was participating for the Council of Europe at the European Political Community (EPC) in Tirana in May, I had the possibility to participate in a round table exactly on this, "democratic resilience". I mean, it is our core business, I would say: democratic resilience. And at the end of the discussion, everybody agreed, I mean, heads of state and heads of government, that we have a huge problem with fighting disinformation and with foreign interference. But nobody knew exactly what we should or what we could do now. Because it is not possible for each country, individually, independently, to tackle this issue. It is a global issue. And that's why we are thinking after this meeting at the EPC, after the contacts with the heads of state and heads of government, to think, okay, maybe we are able to deliver on this. We are able to make something to make sure that democratic processes are working well, to make sure that we have good instruments to fight against disinformation and foreign interference, and to understand what we mean by those words, just to take an example.

The last element, without it to be complete, the last element. I will never forget, I think like you, the visit of President Volodymyr ZELENSKYY to this hemicycle in June. That was truly a very impressive moment that we had the privilege to experience together at the very centre of the history of the continent, and also globally, because it was really a very important, very important moment.

I'll take now, maybe the last of the further questions about the environment. You are fully right. It is one of the crises that we are facing right now with the climate crisis. It is one of the important elements of this huge sequence of crises that is destabilising our countries and our populations. That is one very important element.

And what can we do in this context?

The first element we have is the Court, taking some decisions on climate cases. I know what I am saying because, as I was a candidate for the position, the European Court on Human Rights took a ruling against Switzerland exactly on one of those cases, making history not only for Switzerland, but I mean, also for other countries and putting some lines on how to address those issues at the legal and judiciary level. And I noted in the meantime that all the courts did the same, more or less in the same direction. I mean, there is movement at this level.

The second element I can mention here is the comprehensive strategy that we have at the Council of Europe and all the things we have, with the Action Plan related to the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment. That is one really important element. And I can recall in this context that it was one of the main results of Reykjavík, the summit of heads of state and heads of... It often goes forgotten. We always make reference, it is right, to the Register of Damage for Ukraine in Reykjavík. But there was also a really important element on democracy and a very important element on the environment. And we must always recall this and work on this basis with the support of the heads of state and government to make the implementation, I mean, day after day, of this element.

And the last point is the Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law. It is exactly one element, also where the Council of Europe is able to deliver.

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

The second group of three colleagues is starting with Ms Hripsime GRIGORYAN.

Ms Hripsime GRIGORYAN (Armenia, SOC): Thank you.

Secretary General,

We note with appreciation your active engagement in the European Political Community and particularly your efforts to highlight the significant geopolitical shifts affecting Europe and the wider international order.

You rightly also stress that the Council of Europe's role is essential in safeguarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law as pillars for peace and stability.

In this context, would you see further formalisation of the relationship between the Council of Europe and the European Political Community?

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr Conor MURPHY is next.

We cannot hear you. Have you entered your badge? Press the button. Wait for a few seconds.

Mr Conor MURPHY (Ireland, UEL): Secretary General,

You will be aware of the discussion in Britain around the British government considering withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights. You will also be aware that the Good Friday Agreement, which brought an end to conflict in Ireland, is underpinned by the European Convention on Human Rights.

What can the Council of Europe do to ensure that the ongoing protection of human rights, particularly for people in the north of Ireland, in the event that the British government withdraw, and also particularly in the likelihood in coming years that the people of Ireland, both north and south, will vote to end partition and reunite our country?

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

Ms Elvira KOVÁCS is next.

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

Mr Secretary General, when will the Council of Europe propose the modernisation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, as well as the modernisation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. We all know that today we are living in a digital world and a world of artificial intelligence, etc. So I believe that there are many more reasons to modernise these documents because unfortunately they are outdated.

Thank you.

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

Dear Secretary General, would you like to respond?

Mr Alain Berset (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you, Mr President.

I will start with the question about the EPC and the Council of Europe. And, as we all know, the EPC is a recent institution, if I can say it so, created in 2022, just after the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine. And it was, I think, the goal to have a very informal network, framework for heads of state and heads of governments to meet. The Council of Europe is regularly invited. And, as we know, the geographical scope of the EPC is exactly the same as the geographical scope of the Council of Europe.

The difference is that we have, on one side, a very informal gathering of heads of state, heads of government, and, I mean, it is informal and it should remain informal. And on the other side, we have an organisation with a very long-standing history anchored in all history of the continent since the post-World War II, and with a lot of elements that we developed in the meantime. The main element at the very beginning was the European Convention on Human Rights, and then the courts, and then different conventions addressing issues at the time where they appeared. Recently, for example, the AI Convention, the first treaty legally binding on artificial intelligence, protecting rule of law, democracy and human rights in this context, open to the world. It is developing a lot.

That means we have the same geographical scope, but different roles, I would say. And I can remember, and it was also my goal to see what we can do to have a convergence between the two organisations. We are working on this. I know that you have a rapporteur, I think, from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr Zsolt NÉMETH, who presented also a report on this. To be honest and transparent, really

transparent, it is much more difficult than I was thinking at the very beginning. Because there is, I mean, nobody is really enthusiastic about supporting the EPC, seeing that the Council of Europe could come and do something there. And I think the best avenue to have some more collaboration is to work on the substance.

And I can speak again about this element that I mentioned before about the possible convention fighting disinformation and foreign interference. The very start of this was discussed in the context of the EPC. But the EPC is not too critical, it's not able to deliver on this because it is not an organisation with all the elements, expertise and experience to develop something concrete, a tool to make it real. And it is there where we can deliver. We can also work on this kind of collaboration.

About the second element, thank you for the question about the European Convention on Human Rights and the discussion that exists, and I'm aware about this discussion in the UK about the possible withdrawal from the Convention, and that means from the Council of Europe, we must be clear, I mean, there is no possibility to participate in the Council of Europe and not accepting and not committing to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Two things on this, maybe politically first of all. We can remember that we had in recent times some discussions with member states about migration issues in the context of the Convention and the Court. We have this well-known letter of the nine. We have a development on this with more countries addressing the issue. And I can just recall what I said earlier this year. It must be possible in the context of the Council of Europe to address all issues at the political level. It is important that we have the possibility transparently to speak on everything. But to politicise the Court is not the right way to do this. Not only not the right way, but it is dangerous. Why? We are advocating, and I think our governments and member states are all advocating for the independence of the judiciary. We developed some projects in our action plan in countries to make sure that it is real and to improve this independence. It is not possible to do exactly the opposite at the Council of Europe. That means we should address the issue, but at the right place. And I will have probably the possibility at the next EPC at the end of this week to address this because it will be on the table.

The second element about the withdrawal, I mean the withdrawal from the ECHR would be, to be honest, really complicated. I don't have any idea how it would be possible to make this happen, I mean politically, legally. And I think the ECHR is part of the solutions for the Northern Irish peace process. It is part of the UK co-operation with the EU also. It is also an important part of the framework for how we work together, for the UK, and it would be a very, not only a bad signal, but it would be a factor of risk, of isolation for the country. Saying this, I think it would be much better to address the issues, to discuss everything at the right place and to see what we can do, what do we see as the problems, and not to take the Council of Europe and the Convention and the Court as a scapegoat for the whole discussion that can exist in different national discussions. That seems to me really important and we are really open to do this.

Last point about the UK, I had in New York a very good meeting exactly on those elements with Lord Chancellor David LAMMY. It was a really interesting discussion and it is an ongoing discussion. Here, like in all situations, we must continue to work together and to see how we can find an alignment in the interest of all actors.

About minorities, thank you for your question. It's a really important topic for the Council, for all of us. The protection of persons belonging to national minorities is essential for human rights. It is essential for democratic participation, to mention this, and for social cohesion, and ultimately for peace. Because what I described before are exactly the preconditions that are necessary to have stability and peace. The word peace, we always speak here in this House from democracy, rule of law and human rights. That's right. But why is it so important? It is so important because those elements are the grounds for bringing and maintaining peace. That's exactly the promise after World War II, as I mentioned before, as we had last year, the 75 years of this organisation.

What can we do now? This context, I mean, one very important element that I want to mention here is the New Democratic Pact. And I see three key ways to make sure that this issue is duly reflected: reaffirm our standards, that's an important element, if the pact explicitly refers to existing Council of Europe instruments, those instruments, I mean the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. And those are the pillars for our democratic model and must be upheld and fully implemented. Second element, rapidly, promote democratic participation. Third element, support our monitoring mechanism, with the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention playing a very important role in this issue.

I think that's the point I see. We should also include in the whole thinking about minorities the new technological challenges, artificial intelligence. It's a key word in this context. We must take this into account. That means we must really have a comprehensive approach on this. And I think we should be also able, and it is the case, to have an interpretation, a dynamic interpretation, taking into account the new developments speaking about minorities.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Dear Mr Alain BERSET, we have like three or four minutes. Would you like to give the floor to three more colleagues?

Okay. Thank you so much for being so kind.

I think that it is now Mr Damien COTTIER who will ask a question.

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

Mr Secretary General, as you said, you were in New York last week to represent our organisation as part of the United Nations High Level Week. You met a large number of international players, heads of state and government.

Basically, in this world where we seem to be going from crisis to crisis and where politicians, instead of solving crises, regularly create them, can we remain optimistic after your discussions? And perhaps, to add a topical element, following last night's announcement of this peace plan for Israel and Gaza, are you optimistic following this development?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): So, dear colleagues, I will not be giving the floor to other colleagues because I've just been informed that the Secretary General has an appointment at 11 a.m. with the Speaker of the Parliament of Kazakhstan. So please, dear Mr Alain BERSET, you may respond to Mr Damien COTTIER.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Thank you very much for your question. I'll try to answer in two minutes, so we can finish at 11 o'clock.

Thank you very much for your question. It was indeed extremely interesting in New York last week. I went there with 3 objectives.

My primary objective was to ensure that the Council of Europe and, in particular, our open conventions figure in a prominent position in all the discussions, particularly those regarding the Old Continent. This is the best way for us to gain visibility, credibility and support for Ukraine that goes beyond European borders, of course, and also to make progress with our most important conventions.

My second priority was bilateral meetings to address specific issues. I had a long list of those issues.

And the third priority was to take part in events with a more global function.

The other point I would underline is that that a few years ago, there was very little but very harsh criticism of multilateralism, and the rest of the world defended multilateralism without thinking about the content. Today, we have gone beyond this somewhat superficial stage, and in-depth discussions are beginning to develop on the possible adjustments needed to adapt and on the needs we have today for a multilateralism that corresponds to the challenges we face, to avoid everything crumbling and going wrong, if you will allow me that expression.

So I thought the debate has become somewhat more mature, if I can put it that way. I found it relatively interesting and I came away from New York a little less pessimistic than when I arrived. That's what I can tell you.

After that, is it naivety? Is it optimism? What are we dealing with here? I don't know exactly. But if I look at it over time, I've found it to be quite productive and with actors who are now focused on their work rather than just making statements. This is something that I feel and that I have found, all in all, to be quite positive.

Secondly, with regard to the peace plan for Gaza, as to what might happen... I think we'll have to wait and see. I simply think that this situation has led us to have to watch the unimaginable on a daily basis. And from there, we have a duty to rebuild something. That seems to me a gigantic task because the damage been

enormous. But once again, if this plan can lead to a ceasefire and greater protection for the civilian population, that in itself would make it worthwhile. Recent years have also taught us not to be naïve and to be very cautious.

If you're talking about New York, I'd also like to remind you that in the discussions we've had with the Assembly, there has been talk for some time of opening a Council of Europe office in New York. I would like to announce to you now that this is well underway, that things are moving forward, and that we hope to be able to open this office next year. This is important because in today's multilateral world, there are many areas in which the Council of Europe, as a regional multilateral organisation with a high level of commitment to principles and values on the part of its members, can provide solutions where other organisations are less able to do so today.

And one of the main points that I would underline in this context is the need for us to have accountability and justice in the context of conflicts, and in particular in the conflict in Ukraine.

The Office will help us to give greater visibility to our work and our values and it is essential that we underline the central role played by the Council of Europe in the international system.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): And that concludes the questions.

Yes, Lord Don TOUHIG.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC): As leader of the UK delegation, following Mr Conor MURPHY's question, can I make it clear His Majesty's Government is not considering withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights? It may be the opposition does, but the government in Britain is not considering it.

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

Though I believe it is a point of order to the House of Commons? Not here.

Yes, of course, dear Mr Alain BERSET.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): I thank you for this precision, because what I understood from the question, maybe I assumed wrong. What I understood was that it was regarding the proposal of the opposition. It's clear to me what you mentioned, but your intervention allows us to make it clear. I understood your question as addressing the position of the opposition in the UK.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): It was a lively discussion. Lovely and lively. And Lord Don TOUHIG set the tone at the end.

Thank you, dear colleagues. Dear Secretary General, thank you so much for being with us today and asking the questions to my colleagues.

Colleagues, I remind you that the ballot is in progress for the election of the Secretary General of our Assembly. The election is taking place in the area behind the President's Chair. The poll is open until 1pm, so I call those who have not yet voted to vote. They have two more hours.

Now, the next item of business this morning is a current affairs debate on democracy, rule of law and inclusive dialogue in Türkiye. The debate must finish by midday and speaking time is limited, as you know, since yesterday, to two minutes for all members except the first speaker chosen by the Bureau, who is allowed to speak for seven minutes. Mr Stefan SCHENNACH will take your position in front. Where is Mr Stefan SCHENNACH? He's coming.

Débat d'actualité : Démocratie, État de droit et dialogue inclusif en Türkiye

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

We shall now resume our sitting. The next item is our topical debate on democracy, the rule of law and inclusive dialogue in Türkiye.

I remind you that the speaking time for each speaker is set at two minutes, with the exception of the first speaker, designated by the Bureau, who has seven minutes.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, appointed by the Bureau, has the floor to open the debate.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, you have seven minutes to introduce the debate and three minutes at the end of the general discussion.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would ask you to take your seats quickly now, please. Please take your seats.

We will now hear from Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

You have the floor.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): Thank you very much, Mr President. I will take the liberty of speaking in my mother tongue this morning.

Together with Lord David BLENCATHRA, I am the rapporteur for the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) on Türkiye. In this capacity we have already been to Türkiye several times, visited several prisons and spoken to the government and to civil society.

Thank you for the honour of opening this discussion here, because the situation in Türkiye is worrying. Türkiye is increasingly losing the ground of the rule of law, the ground of democracy. It is extremely worrying when the largest opposition party in the country is being cracked down on by imprisoning elected mayors. Imprisoning, for example, the mayor of Istanbul, a metropolis of 16 million people, the mayors of Antalya, Ankara and Adana. These are all large cities. But not only the mayors were arrested, but also regional leaders and top civil servants.

And for what reason? Accusations of corruption or insulting the government. This is the way to try to silence an opposition. Because the Turkish judiciary is no longer about proving guilt, but about sending out cluster munitions in the hope that something will stick and so on. This is an extremely worrying situation.

And if they are from the city of Van, they are elected there, then they are certainly on their way to prison. Two mayors in prison, MPs from Van in prison and so on. This is a terrible situation that we have to be aware of.

What is happening politically at the moment is that people are being imprisoned. When they are imprisoned, you first look for evidence, then you look for testimonies and sometimes they are accused of things they didn't say. There is a person who was awarded the Václav Havel Prize, a member of the Constitutional Court. Someone made an anonymous witness statement and this person was given 10 years in prison, and the trial has now taken place. To this day, we do not know who actually made this fabricated testimony.

The free media are largely silenced. The separation of powers does not work, there is no system of checks and balances. For example, both elected, repeatedly elected co-leaders of the Kurdish DEM party are in prison. We have visited Mr et Mrs DEMIRTAŞ in the high security prison. And our European Human Rights Court has clearly said they they are political detainees. They are unjustly imprisoned, they are political prisoners, they belong free, just like Osman KAVALA.

Following a highly biased court ruling Mr KAVALA was sentenced to life imprisonment. The judgement of the European Court of Human Rights, his sentence was changed to life imprisonment by a very manipulated judiciary. The European Court has twice called for immediate release and the reaction was no, life imprisonment. And that is something where we have to say, this is not possible and we cannot accept it.

If we take the charismatic Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, for example. There is hardly any possibility of defence for him, because the defence lawyer was also taken into custody as a precautionary measure to prevent the rule of law from functioning. The defence has also been in custody for two months. But I mean, he is the elected mayor of a city of 17 million people. During the trial shots were fired and grenades were launched in an attempt to overturn a resounding electoral victory for the opposition.

The biggest chutzpah is that it was clear that if the opposition won the regional elections with 47 per cent of the vote, that would mean goodbye to the incumbent President ERDOĞAN at the next election. And that's when you start to manipulate the entire judiciary, to use it as an instrument of the government, to turn this judiciary into a kind of persecution apparatus. Imagine in your party that the head of government of your country doesn't think your opposition party is correct. Then the chairman is questioned, so to speak, and it is said that the chairman has been wrongly elected and the state is considering expropriating the process by having a court elect a chairman. That is an absurd situation. But that's exactly what the AKB is doing under ERDOĞAN, he is exploiting the judiciary.

And it can and must be said that the rule of law in Türkiye is nothing more than a distorted image. The judiciary is an instrument of intimidation. Evidence is manipulated and there is no presumption of innocence. Every legal system should actually be fighting for the presumption of innocence. This does not happen in Turkey.

Mr Chairman, I will use my last minute to say one more thing. Great respect for six young women in Sailor Moon braids. This is the Girl Group Manifesto, President Erdogan's new big bogeyman. Because they go on stage and say *Hak, Hukuk, Adalet* : law is justice. And you inspire the country with that, an essential motto for the country. And I, we can only hope that these young girls will not be imprisoned. Thank you very much.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

We will now move on to the general discussion. I would remind you that speaking time is limited to two minutes per speaker.

I now invite the spokespersons of the political groups to speak and I immediately give the floor to Mr Nicos TORNARITIS for the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Dear President, dear colleagues.

Türkiye is a founding member of this Council, bound by the European Convention of Human Rights.

Yet leaders like Mr Selahattin DEMİRTAŞ and Mr Osman KAVALA remain in prison despite court rulings.

Mayor Ekrem İMAMOĞLU faced political trials, while journalists, academics and civil society are silenced.

These are not isolated cases, but part of a systematic effort to erode pluralism and concrete power.

This is incompatible with the standards of the Council of Europe. Enough is enough.

If Türkiye continues to defy its obligations, this assembly must respond with stronger monitoring, political consequences and continuity in co-operation.

Our message is firm. Release Mr DEMİRTAŞ and Mr KAVALA, end the persecution of mayors and journalists and restore judicial independence.

These are not concessions. They are basic democratic standards.

The Council of Europe cannot remain silent. The Group of the European People's Party will not remain silent.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Nicos TORNARITIS.

Lord David BLENCATHRA for the Group of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Reformists.

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Mr Chairman,

May I begin by saying how much I, the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) and election observation missions will miss the sage advice of our esteemed colleague, Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

During our visit to Türkiye in June, Mr Stefan SCHENNACH showed his deep knowledge of and concern for the political prisoners we met: Osman KAVALA, Ekrem İMAMOĞLU and Figen YÜKSEKDAĞ ŞENOĞLU.

Colleagues,

They felt that this Parliamentary Assembly remained interested in their fate, because Mr Stefan SCHENNACH cared for them and kept fighting for them. Mr Stefan SCHENNACH is a true champion of democracy and human rights.

Well, since Mr Stefan SCHENNACH and I reported in June, the situation for freedom, democracy and the rule of law in Türkiye has worsened, as Mr Stefan SCHENNACH has outlined.

The government prosecutors are still pushing ahead with the trial of Ekrem İMAMOĞLU on specious corruption charges, and now claiming that he forged his university diploma, all a ploy to stop him from being a presidential candidate.

Another Republican People's Party (CHP) mayor, Hasan MUTLU, of Istanbul's Bayrampaşa district, was arrested on corruption charges just two weeks ago.

All told, 17 CHP mayors have now been removed and replaced by so-called government trustees who all happen to be Justice and Development Party (AKP) supporters.

But the most sinister of all is the action to destroy the internal party leadership of the CHP. The government got the Istanbul courts to remove the leaders of the CHP in that city, the main opposition party and the party of Ekrem İMAMOĞLU. They're doing a similar court case at Ankara. And we all know that the politically appointed judges will remove them there also.

And the greatest problem, colleagues, is that our own Western democracies have remained practically silent as President Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN has played the NATO card and made himself a middleman between Russia and Ukraine, getting the support of President Donald TRUMP, who calls him a strongman like him. The consensus view in the United States after they met at the White House last week is that President TRUMP does not care what President ERDOĞAN does internally in Türkiye, just the international scene.

Most countries in the Council of Europe have made little or no public criticism of President ERDOĞAN and the gross abuses of human rights in that great country.

I conclude by saying, colleagues, that this Parliamentary Assembly should call on all our member countries to publicly denounce the threat to democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Türkiye.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you Lord David BLENCATHRA.

I call Mrs Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO, of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr President.

The decision to self-dissolve the PKK was taken only a few months ago, and I think we need to give the authorities and the parties involved a little time to establish a constructive and lasting dialogue, in the interests of Türkiye. I hope that these discussions will lead, in particular, to the release of certain political spokespersons and activists.

There is another concern: Türkiye, traditionally renowned for its cultural richness, is currently going through a worrying period in terms of democracy and respect for human rights. Repression of opponents, censorship of the media, intimidation of journalists – these practices are now commonplace, placing the country among those where press freedom is under serious threat.

As I pointed out back in June when we discussed the dangers threatening Turkish democracy, the arrest of the Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, no doubt judged too popular, is clearly a sign of authoritarianism. The young Enes HACIOĞULLARI is now awaiting trial for remarks he made in this very Chamber. Thinkers, elected representatives, journalists and teachers are still at risk.

My fear is that a climate of self-censorship will develop, making any truly open and democratic debate impossible. In this context, the word "independence" is of vital importance in affirming the values that we all defend here. I remain convinced that open debate is essential to any society. After all, doesn't democracy require respect for the opposition and freedom for journalists to do their job?

Strengthening democratic institutions and improving the rule of law are more crucial than ever for the future of this beautiful country. This obviously requires the protection of fundamental rights, the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary.

Thank you very much.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mrs Béatrice FRESKOROLFO.

Mr George LOUCAIDES of GUE, you have the floor.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Mr Chairman, dear colleagues,

Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, Türkiye is experiencing a steady decline in democracy and the rule of law. While Türkiye was under post monitoring, our Assembly took the unprecedented decision to put the country under full monitoring, the first such case in our history. This reflected the collapse of judicial independence, the suppression of the media and civil society and the systematic misuse of anti-terror legislation.

The situation remains dire. Thousands of political prisoners, many of whom belong to the Democrat Party, remain behind bars. Mayors continue to be removed and persecuted for political reasons. Türkiye openly defies binding judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, including the orders to release Osman KAVALA, Can ATALAY, Selahattin DEMIRTAŞ and Figen YÜKSEKDAĞ.

Today, the judiciary is being weaponised against the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), in an attempt to weaken and possibly destroy it. This is a direct assault on pluralism and democracy. At the same time, fragile signs of peace exist. Following Abdullah ÖCALAN's call for the dissolution of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and his declared ceasefire, a Parliamentary Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy Commission has been created.

However, Abdullah ÖCALAN remains in near total isolation, in violation of the Nelson Mandela Rules and of the Court's case law. Therefore, no genuine peace process is possible. If he is to contribute to reconciliation, as millions of Kurds expect, his fundamental human rights must be respected.

Colleagues, Türkiye must implement all European Convention on Human Rights judgments and this Assembly's recommendations. If it continues to suppress democracy and defy its obligations, we on the left will demand the activation of the complementary joint procedure, as already indicated in previous resolutions, as the only adequate response to such consistent violations.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr George LOUCAIDES.

I call Mr Max LUCKS, of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Max LUCKS (Germany, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr President.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On 27 March, Enes HOCAOĞULLARI stood here in this Hall and, as his country's youth delegate to the Congress of Regions, denounced the erosion of democracy in Türkiye. He spent a month in prison for this and is now on trial.

We are witnessing an unprecedented erosion of democracy in a member state of the Council of Europe. Stefan SCHENNACH has mentioned the proceedings against the opposition party, the Republican People's Party, or CHP, where a verdict is expected on 24 October and where nothing other than the alignment of this party is to be feared. And the question is: how do we deal with this?

We are finding incredibly strong words here in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. We have the reports, we have the resolution. And what do the European leaders, the heads of state and government, the President of the Commission do? They don't make this the basis of their policies, but instead create a supposed stability. They are making migration agreements, and they are making a supposed security policy. And you have to imagine a security policy with a President ERDOĞAN who allows Hamas to keep bank

accounts in his country. They are prioritising this and making a crucial mistake. Because the process we are experiencing is not new. It started back in 2015, and it started with Kurdish mayors in the south-east of the country. It started with people like Selahattin DEMIRTAŞ and Figen YÜKSEL being arrested, and now Ekrem İMAMOĞLU. Anyone who believes that overlooking this will contribute to stability is very much mistaken.

It is a failure of Europe that our standards are not the priority in our foreign policy towards Türkiye. Let us finally ensure that the judgments of the Court, our reports and our resolution finally become the benchmark for European foreign policy towards Türkiye. We owe this to the many courageous democrats and also to the democrats in our Assembly. Thank you very much.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Max LUCKS.

We will now move on to our next speakers.

Mrs Aysu BANKOĞLU has the floor.

Ms Aysu BANKOĞLU (Türkiye, SOC): Thank you.

Dear Colleagues,

Today in Türkiye, democracy has been reduced to a shell of its true meaning. There are elections, but no genuine public will. There are courts, but no justice. There is a parliament, but little voice of the people. Because without the rule of law, elections become empty rituals, and democracy remains an illusion on paper.

We know this all too well. Elected mayors, Istanbul, Adana, Antalya, chosen by millions of votes, have been unlawfully removed and replaced by government trustees. Some are even imprisoned. The will of the people has been locked behind bars.

Our presidential candidate, Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, supported by 15.5 million citizens, now faces sham trials, political bans, and threats of imprisonment. His university diploma has been revoked, his lawyers detained, his legitimacy attacked. Meanwhile, 16 mayors from the Republican People's Party, the main opposition party, remain in prison. That means the voices of nearly seven million citizens have been silenced. Why? Because those in power are afraid, afraid of change and people's demand for freedom.

But democracy is not measured only at the ballot box. It requires free media, an independent judiciary, and equal citizenship for all. In Türkiye today, journalists are jailed for their reporting. Students face violence for peaceful protests. And the judiciary has been reduced from a guardian of rights to a political weapon. This is why our democracy is suffocating.

History teaches us a truth: no power is stronger than the people's desire for liberty. They will not silence Ekrem İMAMOĞLU. They will not silence elected mayors. Because this struggle does not belong to one man, it belongs to us all.

We are right. We are the majority. And as long as we do not remain silent, the future of this country cannot be stolen.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you for your time.

Mr Pierre LAMELY has the floor.

Mr Pierre LAMELY (Germany, ECPA): Dear Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are talking about Turkey and, in this context, about democracy and the rule of law. But if we want to be credible, we must not just point the finger at Ankara. In France, Marine LE PEN's eligibility to stand for election was cancelled by the courts. In Romania, CEAUSEŞCU's victory was cancelled, confirmed by the European Court of Human Rights. And in Germany, Joachim PAUL was excluded from a mayoral election. I don't think we can criticise Turkey here without also clearly naming these deficits in democracy and the rule of law in the middle of Europe.

We also have no reason to be complacent when it comes to NGOs. In Fulda, my home town, we can see how state agencies and left-wing extremist associations co-operate with each other as a front organisation for ruling parties. Funding flows into structures that call themselves Antifa, and everything that is not left-wing is combated in accordance with their mandate. How are citizens supposed to have trust in state institutions when supervisory authorities and activists are all in cahoots, only to end up manipulating citizens in the desired direction?

Things are no better in Germany when it comes to the election of judges. Just last week, the Christian Democratic Union of the Federal Republic of Germany, Social Democratic Party of Germany, Greens and Left Party in the German Bundestag elected a political activist to Germany's highest court. A woman who openly calls for an Alternative for Germany ban. How is this judge ever supposed to make an unbiased decision on such an issue when it is before her? The Alternative for Germany is the strongest party and that is probably precisely the reason why it should be banned. And the representatives of these banned parties are also sitting here in this House and they should ask themselves whether they really want to be proud of themselves when they travel abroad and then say that Germany has learnt from its history and is now banning the strongest opposition party.

Ladies and gentlemen, anyone in this Assembly who criticises Turkey and wants to explain to it how democracy and the rule of law work should start in their own country. Thank you very much.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr GÖKÇEN, Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN, sorry.

You have the floor.

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN (Türkiye, SOC): Thank you, Mr Chair.

Dear colleagues,

In this organisation that was founded to protect human rights and democracy, it is disappointing to see that in every session, Türkiye is remembered not by its progress but by violations. However, I believe and I am sure that my country will be remembered by how its people fought for democracy and how they rebuilt it.

I will not repeat what happened, how it still happens, and I know that you all know that it did not happen in a day. I see the exact same early steps in several countries in the world. I will not speak about the injustices that my party faces, my people face. But I want you all to think about the steps back from law and rules, and how every step back encourages the authority or the populist.

In every step, they seek new allies. And they try to divide the other side. Of course, they need to find an enemy. This enemy changes from time to time. Everyday problems of people do not change. But the authoritarian sentiment of revenge grows when they lose elections.

They don't care about facts. They make up a story and expect everyone to believe it. If you don't buy it, they lock you up. They think they can wipe out the truth. But Türkiye stands for a different story here. Against all those lies, millions of people are taking to the streets saying, "we left our fear at home".

When a journalist is jailed, ten journalists start speaking out. When a young person is arrested, a hundred young people take to the streets. When a politician is arrested, 15.5 million people go and vote in the primary.

When the Istanbul election was cancelled before, some pessimists said, "you cannot change power by voting in Türkiye". Then the people of Istanbul showed their will and they answered, by a million-vote margin.

You can always see Türkiye as a strategic but problematic country. But for those who want to see it differently, Türkiye is a fortress of democracy. Because being a democrat in Türkiye comes at a cost. And the millions ready to pay that cost cannot be wiped out. They cannot be silenced. They will not cease to exist.

They won't be wiped out, and their dedication will not go away, because democracies are not something gifted to our societies, it is there when we fight for it. It is there if we work for it.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Abdurrahman BABACAN has the floor.

Mr Abdurrahman BABACAN (Türkiye, NR): Thank you.

Dear Chair, Dear colleagues,

As I begin my speech, I must emphasise that many of the reservations in the draft in question are vague and abstract.

Dialogue is the path to progress. However, it is essential that such dialogue is rooted in fairness, objectivity, and a genuine desire to understand the full context of reality on the ground. We must focus on collaborative, solution-oriented discussions that move beyond political point-scoring and aim to address the issues at hand.

Allegations of politically-motivated actions against the judiciary, in this context, in Türkiye, fail to recognise the fundamental reality: all citizens, regardless of their political affiliations, are subject to the same legal framework.

Furthermore, Türkiye is deeply committed to fostering inclusive dialogue and addressing long-standing national challenges. A notable example of this commitment is the recently established Committee on National Solidarity, Brotherhood, and Democracy within our Grand National Assembly to solve the biggest and a half-century-old issue in Türkiye's history, together, regardless of political identity or political affiliation.

This initiative, which aims to bring together all political factions and civil society actors serves as a unique platform for co-operation, dialogue, and the promotion of national unity, showcasing Türkiye's proactive approach to reconciliation, pluralism and democracy.

In conclusion, I respectfully encourage this Assembly to approach Türkiye with both understanding and constructive engagement. The challenges we confront are immense, but Türkiye's democratic evolution is not only vital for our own future, it is essential for the future of the Council of Europe and its shared values.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you for your time.

Ms Derya TÜRK-NACHBAUR has the floor.

Ms Derya TÜRK-NACHBAUR (Germany, SOC): Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to counter the fake news from my far-right colleague from Germany. Precisely because we have learnt from history, our constitutional state stands on granite, it is unshakeable. And unlike him, I would like to talk about Türkiye.

When we talk about Türkiye, we are no longer talking about a constitutional state, but about a distorted image of it. Ekrem IMAMOĞLU, an elected mayor, a beacon of hope for millions of people and a social democrat, has been in custody for months. Not because he is guilty, but because he was clearly ahead of Mr ERDOĞAN in all the polls. And that is part of the truth. And that alone was enough to open eleven proceedings against him. A legal barrage that does not serve the truth, but solely to maintain power. The presumption of innocence is the heart of every democracy and must never be sacrificed.

But in Türkiye it has long since been abolished. Those who defend themselves risk new charges. Even Mr IMAMOĞLU's lawyer is now in custody.

And so Mr ERDOĞAN shows that no one is safe from the judicial system, which has really become a weapon against the opposition. The CHP, Türkiye's largest social democratic party, is particularly affected. Its mayors are imprisoned, pressurised or even forced to leave the party. Party conferences are banned and rights are trampled underfoot.

An attack on the opposition is always an attack on democracy itself.

And Europe looks away far too often. Those who remain silent now are complicit in the collapse of constitutional principles on our doorstep. We must not allow arbitrariness to take the place of law. Türkiye does not need more arbitrariness, but more democracy and the rule of law. And it needs more solidarity from Europe and the solidarity of all member states here in the Council of Europe.

We stand by the side of all imprisoned mayors, by the side of all democrats, by the side of all journalists who fight for a free press, by the side of young people who have a right to a future.

Her Şey Çok Güzel Olacak (Turkish: Everything will be fine.) Thank you very much.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you for your time.

Ms Christiana EROKROITOU has the floor.

Ms Christiana EROKROITOU (Cyprus, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

First, I would like to thank my colleague, Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, for his invaluable work, and we're very much looking forward to his report.

Dear colleagues,

Regrettably, but not surprisingly, we find ourselves deliberating democracy, rule of law and inclusive dialogue in Türkiye.

According to the "Freedom in the World 2025" report, Türkiye ranks among the top 10 countries with the sharpest decline in freedoms over the past decade.

Dear colleagues, let us not forget that Ekrem İMAMOĞLU is still in jail. Let's not forget that Selahedin DEMİRTAŞ is still in jail. Let us not forget that Osman KAVALA is still in jail. But let's not just limit ourselves to the names that we know. What about the hundreds, maybe thousands of academics, judges, civil servants? What about the media and freedom of speech?

What about the decision of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the violation of the rights of Aydin Sefa AKAY, who is still in prison despite his diplomatic immunity as a United Nations judge?

What about the United Nation's rapporteur position that "if the current trajectory continues, it could lead to the collapse of the rule of law in Türkiye", which is exactly in line with what my esteemed friend Mr Stefan SCHENNACH just pointed out in this hemicycle.

What about respect by Türkiye for international law? What about the continued occupation of the northern part of my country, of the Republic of Cyprus and the continued mass violation of human rights of the people of Cyprus since 1974?

Dear colleagues, democratic values are at the core of the Council of Europe. Without them we do not exist. Each and every single member state, big or small, powerful or not, must not only preach our values but must practice our values. And we should hold accountable any member state, including Türkiye, that only wants to preach but does not want to practice. If not, we will simply encroach our own organisation and we will be the greatest disservice to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Nina KASIMATI has the floor.

Ms Nina KASIMATI (Greece, UEL): Thank you.

We are here in this Council to address the issue of democracy, rule of law and inclusive dialogue in Türkiye, or the lack of it. On numerous occasions, myself, on behalf of the United European Left, and most of you, have all questioned the Turkish state regarding the long-standing violations of international law against its neighbouring countries like Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, Armenia, and of course, against the rule of law against its citizens.

On numerous occasions we asked Türkiye to implement the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights for the Kurd Mr Selahattin DEMİRTAŞ and Mr Osman KAVALA, and we were refused. But is this stance a matter of certain names or is it a structural issue in Türkiye? Or is it that this lack of democracy and inclusivity may be an inherent element of the Turkish Republic, even from its birth in the 20th century, against Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians who experienced genocide.

Some numbers for today: according to the Turkish General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Facilities, as of 1 September 2025, Turkish prisons accommodated 419,000 individuals, of whom 300,000 were convicted prisoners and 62,000 were held in pre-trial detention. These figures exceed the official capacity of 295,000 places, reflecting not only the rise in organised crime but also the political instrumentalisation of the penitentiary system by the Turkish state.

Also, the Global Organised Crime Index ranked Türkiye first in Europe in terms of the prevalence of state-affiliated criminal groups, a phenomenon further enforced by political corruption. The time has finished, but we all have to agree that the international community must take action in order for Türkiye to ascertain and become a member of the international community that will respect our shared values. Unless this happens, it cannot be a reliant partner. Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Christophe CHAILLOU has the floor.

Mr Christophe CHAILLOU (France, SOC): Chairman,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As many of our colleagues have pointed out, the human rights situation in Türkiye has deteriorated steadily over the last ten years.

Today, Türkiye is the main state to submit applications to the European Court of Human Rights, and the execution of the Court's judgments is an important issue, as the Turkish government has consistently refused to execute some of these judgments, which are highly symbolic in political terms. I am thinking, of course, of the emblematic cases of Mr Selahedin DEMIRTAŞ and Mr Osman KAVALA, who remain in detention even though the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers have called for their release.

We also deplored Türkiye's denunciation of the Istanbul Convention, which remains our main tool for ensuring the protection of women's rights.

The latest report from the European Commission, drawn up as part of the European Union's enlargement policy, stresses that the general human rights situation in Türkiye is particularly worrying. It notes the lack of progress made, particularly with regard to the independence of the judiciary and the fight against corruption. At this point, I would like to point out to those German MEPs who are comparing the situation in Türkiye with that in France that Marine Le Pen was convicted of fraud involving European budget funding, that she has appealed, that she is not in prison, and that she therefore enjoys the same respect for the fundamental principles of the rule of law as any French citizen.

Last March, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights called on the Turkish authorities to respect the right to freedom of assembly and expression in the context of the demonstrations taking place at the time. Of course, we are all thinking of the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem IMAMOĞLU, as well as the many elected representatives and local civil servants who have been suspended and imprisoned in total obstruction of fundamental respect for human rights.

This debate should be an opportunity to recall that Türkiye, this great country that has contributed so much to our institution, has commitments that it entered into when it became a member of the Council of Europe. Democracy, rights, respect for human rights and respect for the fundamental principles of local and regional self-government are not principles that can be chosen at will; they are higher values that we must all respect.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you for your attention.

Ms Meryem GÖKA has the floor.

Ms Meryem GÖKA (Türkiye, NR): "Mr President, dear colleagues, I will speak in English this time" [in German].

Firstly, Türkiye is a sovereign democratic state governed by the rule of law, and as we all agree, no one is above the law.

What we see are ongoing legal processes and not political operations. These proceedings, based on opposition members' testimonies and reports on corruption and bribery, are held by independent authorities. The opposition is in a serious turmoil, with reports of even delegate-buying in its congresses. It is important to note that several municipalities seeking cleaner politics have resigned and joined the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK). Why does the report overlook these facts?

When politicians in Europe face legal action, like for example, Marine LE PEN, do we hear urgent statements? Remember the headline, which is very much important: "A terrible day for Le Pen, a good day for French democracy". Is this not the clearest evidence of blatant hypocrisy? Is it not striking that even the European Commission emphasises corruption as a threat to democracy and the rule of law? Also, Türkiye has held more than a dozen elections since 2002, and the opposition leaders' candidacies demonstrate that there are no limits on democratic competition.

Now, dear colleagues, we should also recognise the historic turning point that Türkiye has reached. In July 2025, the PKK, a terrorist organisation that has claimed thousands of innocent lives since 1980, announced its disarmament and dissolution. Türkiye responded by establishing the National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy Committee in the Turkish parliament, uniting 51 deputies representing 98% of society in a transparent and inclusive process.

Our goal is clear: a terror-free Türkiye leading to a terrorism-free region. This is how democracy strengthens itself, by ensuring security, upholding the rule of law and fostering dialogue.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Piero FASSINO has the floor.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to say to my colleague Ms Meryem GÖKA, who has just spoken, that what is striking is that the mayors who are removed are the mayors of the opposition. There is no record of any mayor belonging to the majority government party being subjected to the same treatment as mayors belonging to the Republican People's Party or the Kurdish party.

Just as the journalists who are shot and imprisoned are those who criticise the government. There is no evidence of equal treatment of all media workers.

And so magistrates are removed because they are not considered sufficiently trustworthy by the government and the Ministry of Justice.

And, therefore, all this contradicts democratic rules.

I think we should be very concerned. Especially because Türkiye, which is a great country, which has a great history, is a member of this Council of Europe.

It endorsed, when it became a member of the Council of Europe, the democratic principles that underpin the founding documents and values of this Assembly. It undertook, when it became a member of the Council of Europe, to respect and apply the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, which is not the case.

So all this must alarm us.

I believe that our Turkish colleagues, especially those who belong to the majority and government parties, should come to terms with what Mr Stefan SCHENNACH has said here, not only today but in the long patient work with which Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, whom I thank, has followed Türkiye's affairs in recent years.

And let them give us answers of substance, let them not explain to us that Türkiye is a democratic country, indeed, that it is the most democratic country in the world. Because since we all belong to democratic countries, we know what the basic principles and rules are that cannot be violated. And today in Türkiye, instead, those principles and rules are violated every day.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK KANAT has the floor.

Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK KANAT (Türkiye, NR): Dear President,

Dear colleagues,

As a founding member of the Council of Europe, Türkiye remains firmly committed to our shared values: democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, principles enshrined in our constitution and upheld by the judiciary.

We welcome constructive criticism as it strengthens democratic institutions. Objective and balanced assessments help reforms; double standards and prejudices, including historic prejudices as we've just heard from several colleagues here today, only serve to undermine genuine engagement and progress.

Türkiye has a long tradition of safeguarding democratic competition and political stability. Each time we face challenges, we resolve them within the framework of democracy and the rule of law and we must continue to do so.

Judicial proceedings are conducted under constitutional guarantees of impartiality and due process. Allegations of politically motivated actions overlook the fact that all parties operate under equal rights including appeals to the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights. Türkiye also hosts a vibrant civic space with thousands of active NGOs and a diverse media environment.

Most importantly, the historic Terror Free Turkey process is about more than disarming the PKK; it is about reconciliation, democratization and building lasting social peace and regional stability after decades of terrorism damaging our social, political and economic life.

To this end, our Parliament has established the Committee on National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy, bringing together all political groups and civil society for dialogue to shape inclusive reforms. Our Assembly should adopt a constructive approach to support the difficult work of the Committee in order to build genuine national solidarity.

Finally, Türkiye continues reforms to strengthen judicial independence, improve transparency, and align with European standards. By working together in mutual respect and fair dialogue, recognizing Türkiye's challenges alongside its European vocation, we can strengthen democracy and strengthen our shared values.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES will be our last speaker.

Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES (France, UEL): Thank you Mr Bertrand BOUYX,

The peace process initiated between Türkiye and the Kurdish people has so far failed to make concrete progress towards a democratic and peaceful solution, or to guarantee the durability of the democratic experiment in Rojava.

Indeed, despite the PKK's agreement to lay down its arms, and although the bombing of the territories of the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria ceased a few months ago, numerous violations of international law by Türkiye have continued, in particular the cutting off and restriction of water supplies. For the peace process to make real progress, it is imperative that Türkiye respects its international obligations, starting with the "right to hope" for Abdullah ÖCALAN, in accordance with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights of 9 July 2013.

This ruling stresses that all detainees must be able to know the date on which their situation will be reassessed, a fundamental right linked to human dignity. As a member of the Council of Europe, Türkiye is obliged to comply with this ruling. Abdullah ÖCALAN is considered the natural and legitimate leader of the Kurdish people. The political model of democratic confederalism, which he theorised, forms the basis for the organisation of society in the autonomous regions of Rojava and allows the co-existence of various ethnic and religious communities.

This model is seen locally as the best guarantee of stability and peace. In this context, it is clear that any progress in the peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurdish people will require recognition of ÖCALAN's central role, and therefore the need to respect his fundamental rights. Detained for 26 years, he must benefit from the protection provided by the international conventions to which Türkiye has subscribed.

This respect for the law also concerns all political prisoners currently incarcerated in Turkish prisons. These steps that Türkiye must take are essential if a serious and sincere peace process is to succeed, in the interests of the Kurdish people but also for the benefit of Türkiye itself and the entire region.

Thank you very much.

Mr Murat Cahid CINGI (Türkiye, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mr President, Distinguished Colleagues,

I have to express my concern that Türkiye is even debated here today; while the the subject matter of this conversation is already under the competence of the Monitoring Committee. Türkiye is a founding member of this Assembly and a steadfast contributor to European security, stability, and democracy; and deserves to be treated as such.

I still would like to address the concerns that's been voiced by esteemed colleagues. Judicial processes in Türkiye are conducted within the framework of our Constitution and in full respect of our national and international legal obligations. Legal proceedings involving opposition figures are not politically motivated, but are based on credible evidence and due process. Our judiciary remains independent and is functioning under the principle of separation of powers, just as it does in all democratic states.

I would also like to touch upon the ongoing terror-free initiative in our country. The Turkish government has always maintained that a peaceful and democratic resolution is possible to the terrorism problem- but it must be achieved through lawful and inclusive means. We appreciate sincere steps toward de-escalation and remain open to reconciliation within the framework of the rule of law and national unity.

The legal and political aspects of the terror-free Türkiye initiative is being addressed by the newly formed Committee of National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy. We expect constructive results from this committee in the recent future, and hope for all stakeholders to support this historical opportunity.

We remain open to constructive cooperation, mutual respect, and genuine partnership as always, the very spirit of this Council.

Mr Mustafa CANBEY (Türkiye, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear President,

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to reaffirm Türkiye's unwavering commitment to democracy, the rule of law and political dialogue.

The rule of law is central to our democracy. It ensures that no one is above the law. This includes political figures and elected officials. There are ongoing judicial proceedings concerning mayors from various political parties.

Furthermore, I would like to mention the ongoing terror-free Türkiye process. The persistent threat of terrorism is one of the most pressing challenges Türkiye has faced. For decades, terrorism has undermined our democracy. It targeted our citizens, and threatened national unity.

This process is not merely a security campaign. It is rooted in justice, legality, and the protection of civil liberties. It aims to eliminate violence and the networks that support and justify extremism.

It also aims to ensure accountability in line with Constitution and international obligations. In order to ensure that this process will succeed, an ad hoc committee representing the all-political groups in the Turkish Parliament has been established by the Speaker of the Parliament. NGOs and foundations representing main segments of the society are directly engaged in this process.

Therefore, current political developments in Türkiye should be considered in the light of the above positive political initiatives for democracy and security.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

We must now interrupt the list of speakers.

Registered speakers who have been present during the debate but have not been able to speak may send their typed statement to the Table Office within 4 hours for publication in the official report. This text must not exceed 400 words and must be transmitted electronically.

Thank you very much.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, you have the floor for 3 minutes to respond as a member appointed by the Bureau.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): Thank you very much. I would like to thank everyone who has taken part in this debate and I can only emphasise this. Yes, Türkiye is a founding member of the Council of Europe. Türkiye was an initiator for the establishment of the Council of Europe Development Bank. Türkiye is an important state and that is why we are fighting for a return to the rule of law, for the return of human rights and democracy in the country.

Many commentators have written on this subject in opinion pieces in the media in Europe in recent weeks and the Council of Europe has remained silent. Well, we rapporteurs have not been silent. And with this debate today, the Council of Europe has not been silent either. And we will be visiting other mayors in the very near future and also visiting the Girl Group, which does an incredible amount in the country, where young people cheer them on. And I hope I never have to visit any of these young girls in prison.

It is important and right that we engage with a country like Türkiye at this level of intensity and it must be possible. We have already had various changes of government in Türkiye in the past. That is quite normal. Another change of government will come, because the current government and ruling party have abandoned the rule of law. And when I think back, I recently visited the Co-leader of the Kurdish Party in the women's prison with Lord David BLENCATHRA. A young mother is in prison and she doesn't know how long she will be there, whether it will be 35 years or 40 years, and she is not doing well. And that's why we should do everything we can to get this woman out of prison soon and back home. She has been elected twice by the citizens and the mandate was disregarded, just like Mr Selahattin DEMIRTAŞ, but just like the mayors of the Republican People's Party (CHP). And I can only hope that the CHP mains strong and never accepts forced leadership from outside, because we cannot accept that, the CHP must not accept that. Every party has the right to elect its leadership in an assembly and that is how it should be for the CHP. Good luck, CHP.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Pierre LAMELY.

Mr Pierre LAMELY (Germany, ECPA): Mr Chairman,

I would like to make a personal statement after my colleague Ms Derya TÜRK-NACHBAUR also insulted me personally in her speech. She called me an extremist. I would like to clearly reject that.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Just a minute.

Pursuant to Rule 35.6 of the Rules of Procedure, Mr Pierre LAMELY has asked to make a personal statement. I would remind you that no discussion may take place following a personal statement.

Mr Pierre LAMELY, you have the floor.

Mr Pierre LAMELY (Germany, ECPA): Thank you very much. Once again, Ms Derya TÜRK-NACHBAUR, you called me an extremist. I would like to clearly reject that. I am not an extremist. Nobody is an extremist just because they are not on the left. And nobody is an extremist just because they don't share your opinion. That, my dear colleague, is simply called democracy. Thank you very much.

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

Before you go, dear colleagues,

I want to thank our dearest Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, whom I consider a close friend of mine. Even though he doesn't know it, we are friends. I really appreciate his work. He has been with this Assembly for so long and I think that your last speech in this Assembly is on Friday.

So I will be here on Friday. I believe that Stefan is what I call for some of our colleagues, the role model of being a member of this Assembly. He has principles, principles aligned with the principles of the Council of Europe. We all have it, but some of us work more for the Council of Europe. And Stefan was devoted all these years to the Council of Europe, I believe more than he was to his own parliament.

He has been going - I don't want to use the word travelling because travelling may have an aspect of tourism - he has been going all around members of the Council of Europe. He has done an excellent job and he was appreciated, even by people who disagreed with him.

The first man I met here when I entered the room speaking was Mr Stefan SCHENNACH some years ago. I will always remember your interventions. I will always remember your devotion to the principles which I have just mentioned. And I believe, dear Stefan, as I have said to friends of mine, that we meet twice in life and I'm sure that those who have met you once will not avoid you the next time that they meet you. It is because of your behaviour. It is because of your democratic principles that you have said so well.

Thank you so much for what you have done for the Council of Europe and especially for this Assembly.

Thank you.

Discours : M. Nikol PASHINYAN, Premier Ministre de la République d'Arménie

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Prime Minister of Armenia,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Strasbourg and to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Armenia has been a committed and constructive member of our Organisation since 2001, and your presence, dear Prime Minister, here today comes at a decisive moment for your country and for the wider South Caucasus region.

The Council of Europe remains closely attentive to developments in the South Caucasus. Armenia's commitment to peace is of historic significance. A peace treaty with Azerbaijan would open a new chapter of stability and co-operation, bringing tangible benefits to citizens across the region.

The Council of Europe stands ready, dear Prime Minister, to accompany and support this peace process – including the ongoing debate on constitutional reforms – with its expertise and impartial platform for dialogue.

At the same time, we greatly value Armenia's constructive voice in this Assembly, helping to shape Europe's collective response to the challenges of our time.

Dear Prime Minister, for more than twenty years, Armenia has been part of the Council of Europe family, and it holds a special – I would even say a high – place in this Assembly, reflected in the stained-glass window above our heads, "Power of Unity" by the artist Arev Petrosyan.

Dear Prime Minister, we are looking forward to hearing your vision for Armenia's future, for peace in the South Caucasus, and for the contribution of your country to our shared European values.

It is with great pleasure that I will now invite you to the floor.

Mr Nikol PASHINYAN (Prime Minister of Armenia)*: Thank you very much.

Distinguished President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Distinguished Secretary General,

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express my gratitude for this opportunity to address the Parliamentary Assembly of of such a reputable organisation as the Council of Europe.

In the Republic of Armenia, the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) are accepted and perceived as guardians and defenders of democracy and human rights.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe resolutions are a constant companion in Armenia's difficult journey of democracy. In many cases, people in Armenia have waited anxiously and tensely for their adoption, considering that domestic hopes with regard to election fraud, bans on assemblies, the release of political prisoners, and justice have been exhausted. The European Court of Human Rights recently adopted a very important judgment in the case of the victims of 1 March 2008, finding a violation of their right to life by the state, and the ineffectiveness of the investigation into the circumstances of their deaths.

In recent years, the court has adopted landmark judgements regarding politicians sentenced to imprisonment as a result of 1 March 2008. On 1 March 2008, I was in the ranks of the opposition, subsequently I was forced to go into hiding, then I voluntarily turned myself in, after which I was arrested and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment. Throughout this time, I was anxiously awaiting news from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. The speeches and resolutions adopted or delivered in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe gave hope and strength to us, those fighting for democracy. I will never forget the day when in prison, I was visited by the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

Finally, in 2011, I was released from prison thanks to the persistence of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Human Rights, having spent in prison one year and 11 months instead of 7 years.

In May 2018, when the people's, non-violent, Velvet Revolution took place in Armenia, and as a result of the Revolution I became the Prime Minister of Armenia, the European Court of Human Rights had not yet adopted a decision in my case, and I continued to anxiously await the decision of the court, to which I had sent my application back in 2010.

In the position of Prime Minister, the European Court of Human Rights' decision took on greater importance for me, because had the European Court of Human Rights decided that the domestic judgement against me in Armenia in 2009 had been unfair, it would have provided such a basis for reviewing my case that no one would be able to say that it was because of my status as Prime Minister that such a decision was made, and justice and fairness would have been legitimate. And fortunately, that is how it turned out. The Court of Human Rights' decision made my subsequent acquittal in the Armenian court completely legitimate and unchallengeable. In the same way, many other former political prisoners in Armenia were also acquitted.

I say all this not only or not so much to express my gratitude, but to demonstrate that the Council of Europe and its structures are an organic continuation of Armenia's state institutions. I and many people do not consider the Council of Europe and its institutions to be a foreign organisation. The Council of Europe is our organisation, one of the most important institutions of our democracy, because we are its fully-fledged members. So are the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Venice Commission.

Our membership in the Council of Europe inspires us greater confidence in implementing democratic reforms, because we know that if we make a mistake there is an organisation close to us, our organisation, that will alert the mistake to us, help us find the right direction on the path of democracy, which is unfortunately becoming increasingly more difficult.

The Council of Europe is our home, where we find our address as a democratic state. Being a small country, we become part of a large, beautiful and bright family here, where the human being is the most important value, where the human being is the end, rather than the means.

This family is important to us.

The Council of Europe is a place where we can share the joy of our successes, a place where we can tell you about our failures, we can listen to the stories of others' successes in order to be inspired by them, and the stories of the failures of others in order not to repeat them.

Distinguished President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Distinguished Secretary General,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have brought with me to Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stories of both success and failure, although sometimes these stories are closely intertwined and it is often difficult to find the line where success ends and failure begins.

I am happy and proud to report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that since the 2018 People's, non-violent, Velvet Revolution, the authorities in Armenia have not attempted to rig any elections.

During this time, two parliamentary elections and local government elections have taken place in all the communities of Armenia, in some communities even twice.

The 2018 and 2021 national parliamentary elections were assessed by the international community as free, competitive and in line with democratic standards. Which essentially was unprecedented in our history. There were no protests related to the results of any local government elections; opposition parties won in a number of communities, which was basically impossible before the 2018 Revolution.

The notion of a "post-electoral process" has disappeared from Armenia's political life, while before the people's, non-violent, Velvet Revolution of 2018, it was the most frequently used term in Armenian political life.

People pinned their hopes for change on post-electoral processes because they knew that the elections would be rigged by the authorities, which would create a reason for post-election processes. That was the case in almost all elections held before 2018, but that is already history and, to speak frankly, quite an old history already.

But this does not mean that electoral democracy in our country does not have problems.

The practice of voter bribery continues to be used by some forces in Armenia.

The problem here is not only that it takes a lot of effort from law enforcement to uncover such cases, but also the lack of practical mechanisms to determine the extent of the influence of voter bribery on the election results. As a result, there are no practical mechanisms to exclude, from the political and electoral process, the forces that distributed voter bribes or, on the other hand, the implementation of such mechanisms can be interpreted as an attempt to make the elections controllable. Although the presence of those who received mandates through voter bribery in parliament or local government bodies is perceived as a vulnerability of democracy, when the tool of democracy, elections, is used against democracy by using money.

Added to this is disinformation, and in the case of Armenia, it is even more problematic because the majority of news resources are under the control of forces ousted from power in the 2018 Revolution and currently acting as opposition, as they spent their illegally accumulated wealth on spreading disinformation to save that wealth from the process of confiscating ill-gained assets. In many cases, they receive support from their like-minded foreign powers.

Taking practical measures against this disinformation campaign could be interpreted as an attempt to restrict freedom of speech, and the lack of action is seen as a weakness of democracy, a lack of protection, when the tools of democracy, such as the freedom of speech and the internet, are used against democracy through the use of money.

I could go on and on enumerating such situations, and these are problems, some of which exist not only in Armenia.

Hybrid attacks against democracy are becoming a key challenge for democratic countries.

We in Armenia position ourselves towards these situations primarily according to the principle of doing no harm to democracy, while understanding that many of our compatriots view this as weakness or inaction.

Hybrid attacks and the lack of effective countermeasures discredit democracy. But all the same, there are no country-specific solutions here, and the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe are the institutions where we should discuss this issue, consolidate our to-do list and understand how to further strengthen democracy.

In any event, our perception is that the Republic of Armenia should work with the global democratic community on these issues, in tandem with it, and we shall do so. Democracy is extremely precious and important to us. We cannot resemble those that use the tools of democracy to harm democracy.

I mean, much more dangerous is the possible practice of damaging democracy under the slogan of defending democracy.

But, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me confidently declare: in spite of all this, democracy in Armenia is in reliable hands. And in this case, we are not talking about the government, not the ruling majority, not civil society, but about the people, the citizens of the Republic of Armenia.

The said tools aimed at undermining democracy, all of these tools were used in Armenia, in perhaps the most vulnerable period for democracy in the immediate aftermath of the 44-day war of 2020, when a profound political crisis had emerged in Armenia.

Moreover, in a sense, the 44-day war was part of a hybrid war that targeted Armenia's statehood, Armenia's independence.

But you know, it was democracy that literally saved Armenia's statehood and independence. The war and the disinformation accompanying it were the tools that the anti-democratic forces used to demand that we simply hand the power over to them. We said that we cannot hand over to anyone the power we received from the people, we can only return it to the people.

In April 2021, I resigned: as a result, the country's parliament was dissolved, and we had early parliamentary elections on the backdrop of escalations on the border, occupation of Armenia's sovereign territories and information terrorism.

No one believed that our "Civil Contract" party would once again receive the people's vote of confidence. But the political force that led the people's, non-violent, Velvet Revolution not only once again received the majority of votes, but also formed a constitutional majority. This happened for one main reason: the people understood that it was this election that would guarantee the people's power in Armenia.

In other words, the people gave us a mandate to preserve their power and sovereignty, independence and statehood, and I can state unequivocally and unconditionally that today, indeed, the power in the Republic of Armenia belongs to the people, who are the guarantors of democracy in Armenia, and the Republic of Armenia is more independent today than ever, more of a state than ever, more sovereign than ever, more democratic than ever.

But something else also happened in the 2021 snap parliamentary elections. The people formed their own pre-election message and delegated it to the ruling majority, and the primary item in the people's electoral platform was peace.

The people entrusted us with bringing peace to Armenia. We affirmed that message of the people in the Armenian Government's 2021–2026 Activity Programme, as the greatest commitment undertaken before the people. And that's exactly what we read in the Government's programme.

I am happy to note that, today, peace has been established between Armenia and Azerbaijan. I cannot say that this is the achievement of only the Government of Armenia and the people of Armenia. It is equally the achievement of the Government of Azerbaijan and the people of Azerbaijan. If it were not so, there would be no peace. This is equally an achievement of the parliaments of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before 8 August 2025, Armenia and Azerbaijan had already carried out a tremendous amount of work. In 2024, for the first time, a longer than 12-kilometre segment of the interstate border between Armenia and Azerbaijan was demarcated, the regulations on the joint activities of the demarcation commissions of the two countries were signed and ratified, where the 21 December 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration is fixed as the basic principle of the demarcation of the borders of the two countries; in March 2025, Armenia and Azerbaijan announced the completion of negotiations on the draft agreement on the establishment of peace and interstate relations between the two countries, and announced their agreement on the draft.

But without the personal efforts and personal contribution of the President of the United States of America, Donald TRUMP, it would not have been possible to achieve the result that we achieved with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, on 8 August of this year.

In the US capital, Washington DC, at the White House, we adopted a Declaration, which affirmed the establishment of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

President Donald TRUMP also signed the Declaration as a witness. In the presence of President Donald TRUMP, the President of Azerbaijan, and myself, the two countries Foreign Ministers initialled the Agreement on Peace and Interstate Relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

This was a historic event that brought peace to our countries. But as I have already had the opportunity to say, peace is not a vacation, it is not rest, peace is daily work, peace, like a newborn, requires daily care.

Our newborn peace is 1 month and 22 days old today, and we must lovingly nurture it, love it and take care of it so that it grows, matures, becomes stronger, and helps our region of the South Caucasus flourish.

It is important, in this context, to clarify the fate of missing persons and address the problems of those deprived of their liberty as a result of the protracted conflict.

Distinguished President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Distinguished Secretary General,

Distinguished Parliamentarians, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the people's, non-violent, Velvet Revolution of 2018, I said that democracy for us is not a coincidence, rather a strategy, a political belief and an integral part of our value system.

I am happy to say, more than 7 years after the revolution, from this rostrum of the Parliamentary Assembly, that today Armenia hold a modest but firm place among the democratic countries of Europe.

But I consider this an achievement of the people of Armenia and the forces that waged a principled struggle for democracy, but equally an achievement of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Venice Commission, the European Court of Human Rights, and other structures of the Council of Europe.

I would like to thank all of you for your support to the consolidation of Armenian democracy since 2001, when Armenia became a member of the Council of Europe.

Since 2018, Armenia has witnessed enormous democratic achievements and substantive changes.

The most significant of these, which can provide a serious insight into the nature and scale of the changes, is perhaps the level of women's involvement in Armenia's public and state life. The number of female deputies in our country's parliament has never been as high as it is today. The number of female ministers in the government has never been as high as it is today. The Ministry of Interior, which is the largest law enforcement agency, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Foreign Intelligence Service are all led by women, which is unprecedented in our history.

When talking about the results of the revolution and democracy, some socio-economic indicators also matter. Armenia's economy has grown by about 43% since 2018. Fiscal tax revenues have more than doubled. In the Corruption Perceptions Index, compared to 2018, Armenia made progress by more than 40 ranks.

But now our joy from all this has become exhausted, because what I described serves to prove that more is possible and we should strive for more.

And for this, there is a tremendous amount of work to be done, to establish an independent judiciary, to implement a comprehensive and reliable anti-corruption system, to resist hybrid attacks targeting democracy, to entrench the rule of law and justice, to strengthen the protection of human rights, and to increase people's trust in the state.

The Republic of Armenia will confidently follow this path, and we are confident that we will enjoy the strong support of the Council of Europe and its structures in this journey.

Long live the Council of Europe, long live democracy, long live dialogue, long live peace.

Thank you and I will be delighted to answer all your questions.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Prime Minister, for your most interesting address.

Members of the Assembly have questions to put to you. We will first hear questions from the speakers on behalf of the political groups and then hear a response from Mr Nikol PASHINYAN to those questions. I remind colleagues that the questions must be limited to 30 seconds and no more. And I would ask you to ask questions and not make speeches.

So, on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens, Ms Petra BAYR. Petra, you have the floor.

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

We very much welcome of course the peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia, that hopefully will set an end to 37 years of conflict.

My first question is: how can we as the Council of Europe, and in particular as the Parliamentary Assembly, support the implementation of this peace treaty?

And my second question is, you will probably need a referendum because it also has an impact on the constitution. What does the timetable for the implementation of the peace treaty look like?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Nikol PASHINYAN (Prime Minister of Armenia)*: Thank you very much for that question.

You mentioned the topic of the Constitution. But I would like to inform you that our position on the Constitution has been expressed. We are discussing the Constitution as part of our domestic agenda. We are not discussing the question of amending the Constitution.

The peace agreement: in the context of the signing of the peace agreement, there is no need to amend the Constitution. Why not? A number of reasons. You may know that Azerbaijan insists that Armenia's constitution contains territorial claims on Azerbaijan, whereas, in September 2024, when Armenia's Constitutional Court reviewed the regulations on joint activities of the border demarcation commission of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which, by the way, was the first bilateral interstate document between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Constitutional Court reviewed this question and found that Armenia's constitution contains no territorial claim on any country.

How is this related to the regulation of the border demarcation commissions? As I told you in my speech, the joint regulation specifies that the Alma-Ata Declaration is the basic principle for the demarcation, and what the Alma-Ata Declaration provides. It was adopted by 11 former Soviet republics. It really contains two key provisions for the context of this discussion. First, that the Soviet Union ceases to exist under that declaration and secondly, the Soviet republics, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, would become sovereign states with their former Soviet republic's territories and recognise each other's territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and so on.

On 6 October 2022, we agreed, with the President of Azerbaijan, in Prague, to build our relationship on the basis of the Alma-Ata Declaration by recognising each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolable borders. Our Constitutional Court found that this agreement in no way contradicts the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. Moreover, you know that we have now initialled the peace agreement. The text of the peace agreement also refers to the Alma-Ata Declaration, in which the parties state that by accepting the fact that the former Soviet socialist republics have become independent states, and recognised as such by the international community, the parties recognise each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, inviolable borders, do not have territorial claims on each other, and undertake in the future not to raise such territorial claims. That is in the initialled peace agreement text.

The peace agreement contains another provision that none of the parties may invoke its domestic legislation as justifying failure to comply with or to carry out this peace agreement. So, on the one hand, the recognition of each other's territorial integrity. On the other, stating that the domestic legislation cannot be cited as an excuse for departing from these agreements. Moreover, in our current constitution, we have a provision that reads: "ratified international treaties are superior legally over domestic legislation". So when we sign the peace agreement under our law, we must send it to our Constitutional Court to review its compliance with our Constitution. If our Constitutional Court decides that the agreement contradicts the current Constitution, as I have already declared, we will initiate constitutional amendments. If our Constitutional Court decides that the agreement is in compliance with our current Constitution, then there are no obstacles to its ratification in our Country's Parliament. After which, under our Constitution, it will acquire the highest legal force. And therefore, in the context of the peace agreement, there are absolutely no issues related to the Constitution.

On the other hand, from February 2020 and earlier, we adopted the need to adopt a new Constitution in Armenia. Why such a need? As I stated in my speech, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is well aware of the stories of continuous repetitive rigging of election results in Armenia. But during that process, constitutions were amended and adopted, and there were constitutional referendums in the meantime. And Armenia's public perception is that the people never really voted for the Constitution. And here it's not just a political problem. In the position of Prime Minister, as a result of the people's revolution, in the Prime Minister's position, I quickly came to feel that people trust the revolution. They love the revolution, but often they do not love the state as much. So I ask the question, what is the reason? Why do our people have – forgive me for using this word – an allergy to the legal order established in Armenia?

My analysis showed that the reason is that the legal order established in Armenia is not organically linked to the people. Because people do not consider that the rules of living in Armenia, which are stated in the Constitution, which are enshrined in the Constitution or stem from it, people do not consider them to be a legal order established as a result of their decision. So this, so to speak, allergy could, in my opinion, only be overcome by adopting a new Constitution, where people would freely, democratically express their will and vote for the Constitution. By virtue of that fact, the required number of votes freely cast – 50% plus – would create that organic bond between the people and the state's legal order.

Forgive me for going into so much detail, but these intricacies are important because there is currently no obstacle whatsoever to the peace process. Quite the contrary. Even if we rely on the presumption that perhaps Azerbaijan has justified concerns, the shortest way to address these concerns is to sign the peace agreement and to go down the path of its ratification. As soon as that treaty is ratified, Armenia and Azerbaijan both will have a legally binding prohibition of reciprocal territorial claims. And under the Constitution, that agreement would acquire supreme legal force, greater legal force than the domestic legislation.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the European People's Party, the leader of the group, Mr Pablo HISPÁN.

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

Mr Prime Minister, I want to welcome you.

I want to congratulate you for your speech today. You have addressed us in an open and honest way.

We are living in troubled times. The political scenario looks like a rollercoaster with ups and downs; very fast.

We welcome the clear determination of the governments to follow, the Armenian government to follow the European path. The visit of Mrs Kaja KALLAS in June was a very good example of this commitment.

I was going to ask you about this path to Europe that you are following with leadership and determination, not looking to the past, but looking to the present and to the future of your country; closing the past and opening a better future.

But today is a day of hope for all of us. The plan for the Middle East that was launched yesterday is very important. Now it is Hamas who needs to make the next movement.

What do you think about it? Do we have the right to be optimistic about it?

Thank you again.

Congratulations from the Group of the European People's Party for the path of Armenia and for the work of the Armenian delegation here in the Council of Europe.

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

Dear Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Nikol PASHINYAN (Prime Minister of Armenia)*: You know that President Donald TRUMP proposed a plan for peace. The international community have welcomed this plan. So have we. We are welcoming it. We hope that as a result of that peace plan, eventually peace can be achieved for the Gaza strip.

Last year we, the Republic of Armenia, recognised the state of Palestine and were attentively watching the process and were hopeful that eventually peace would be established in Gaza as a result of the efforts of President Donald TRUMP and with the support of the international community.

Turning now to our policies, as I said already, as a member of the Council of Europe, we feel confident in the ranks of Europe's democracies because we see that we enjoy support. We are well received, and for that, we are grateful.

I also would like to emphasise that last year, Armenia adopted a law on the accession of Armenia to the European Union. The law has now entered into force.

Many people ask us when Armenia will become a member of the European Union, or how realistic is Armenia's accession in the EU. We say that without complying with the EU's standards, it is impossible to be a member state of the European Union.

Therefore, under all circumstances, our primary task is to bring the country into compliance with EU standards. The moment we objectively comply with the EU's standards, from that moment on, there are two options: either we get admitted into the EU, or we don't get admitted.

If we get admitted, great. If we don't get admitted, then we will have found something else which is very important. We will be a country fully compliant with the EU's standards, which would considerably fortify our democracy, our independence and fortify our prosperity.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Sir Edward LEIGH.

Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Prime Minister,

A major part of the peace treaty successfully negotiated between your two countries and President Donald TRUMP was the creation of the Zangezur Corridor.

This is a corridor linking Azerbaijan through southern Armenia to Türkiye.

And whilst there are obviously implications, good implications for increasing trade, there is some doubt whether the creation of this corridor is as much in the interests of Armenia as Azerbaijan.

So could you tell us the main differences, in your understanding of the Zangezur Corridor, between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

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

Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Nikol PASHINYAN (Prime Minister of Armenia)*: Thank you.

You know the documents adopted in Washington DC are not too long. The declaration adopted there is just a one-pager with five bullet points, five paragraphs. The initial text of the Peace Treaty is also not voluminous.

So I would ask all of our partners who are interested in the topic or more so, are going to speak publicly on this topic, it is absolutely not hard to read that one-plus page of document.

What would we find, by reading that document? We would find out that the narrative that you just used does not exist at all in this document.

I want to emphasise again, you used the term 'Zangezur Corridor'. Where did you get that term? Where did you read that term?

Such a term does not exist, never existed, I can assure you will never exist in any agreed upon documents between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Recently I was at the 80th General Assembly of the United Nations where I had to once again address this issue. I say peace requires nurturing. And a very important attribute of nurturing is the use of legitimate language; the agreed-upon legitimate language. I spoke at the UN and I noted - and I could say the same about today's speech - that in my speech, there isn't a word, an expression, the origin of which I could not tie to the documents adopted in Washington DC. So those who use the term 'Zangezur Corridor' are essentially - and by the way - I also made an appeal to my Azerbaijani counterpart asking to clarify what he means when he says 'Zangezur Corridor'. Where is that 'Zangezur Corridor'? One would need to point it on the map. If it turns out by saying 'Zangezur Corridor' they mean any part of Armenia's territory, then no one has the right to put names on Armenia's sovereign territory, names that are not accepted by the Republic of Armenia.

It would be a grave violation of the mutually agreed upon sovereignty. I really wonder where you got that term, I really do! Where did you read it? You speak about the Washington Agreement, but then you use language that isn't in any of the Washington papers, never was! Moreover, it harms the peace process because it directly breaches the agreement, and it lies outside the legitimate vocabulary used. We agreed in Washington DC that communications of the region would be opened in accordance with the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, jurisdiction of the states and the principle of reciprocity for Armenia-Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan for Armenia and Armenia for Azerbaijan would open these communications - domestic, both ways, mutual and for international communications. Besides, in the territory of Armenia there will be the TRIPP route, that's the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity. That paper was also signed by the President of Azerbaijan and therefore, it is my appeal and my expectation that we use only legitimate language. And I expect from our Azerbaijani counterpart to show on the map where they mean; which part they call 'Zangezur Corridor'. If it any way concerns Armenia's sovereign territory, then I am sorry to say, no-one can decide what names will be in the Republic of Armenia. Only the Republic of Armenia may decide that. Acting contrary to that would amount to a breach of Armenia's sovereignty, which on the highest level has been publicly agreed upon.

Words, names, vocabulary, language for the territory of Armenia would only be such as is defined by Armenia's government or parliament or the relevant authorities, or is agreed to, agreed with the government of Armenia.

So allow me to say I harshly condemn your use of illegitimate language in this reputable room, in this reputable organisation.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Mr Bertrand BOUYX.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to welcome you, Prime Minister.

I visited your country two years ago now, a few months after the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh. I was able to see both the distress and the dignity of the refugees, but also everything your country was doing to help them integrate into society.

So, apart from the peace process you mentioned, can you tell us whether the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh refugees has been raised, particularly in terms of compensation for their property?

And what is happening with the cultural heritage? Is it in danger of being destroyed?

Thank you very much.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Nikol PASHINYAN (Prime Minister of Armenia)*: Thank you for the question.

The agreement on establishing peace and interstate relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan – the one that has been initialled – already contains some agreements on certain matters, but it also provides...By the way, like any agreement or peace treaty, it is not all-encompassing and it is provided that appropriate mechanisms, platforms may be created to discuss other issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As to our fellow Armenians, refugees from Karabakh, I publicise our strategy on this matter, and our understanding is that, with our support and the support of the international community, our fellow Armenians, refugees from Karabakh, should be homed in the Republic of Armenia. We have started a programme of providing homes to them, with some difficulty; the programme is starting to work but I am sure it will become more effective. We envision the future of our fellow Armenians from Karabakh in the Republic of Armenia as citizens of the Republic of Armenia – why?

And I raised this topic on 18 August in my address to the public. The meaning of that address was... People ask how realistic is it for refugees to go back to Nagorno-Karabakh. I say directly: I do not consider it realistic. Moreover, I consider it honest to tell people about it honestly, because people should build their plan, their future, and really the topic of the return of refugees in this context, of all refugees, the topic of return is dangerous in my opinion for the peace process. Because conflicts, including in the Karabakh conflict, began from what seem to be simple humanitarian questions, and escalated into the protracted conflict we all know.

My understanding is that Armenia and Azerbaijan recognise each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, inviolability of the borders, on the basis of the Alma-Ata Declaration, and we need to concentrate on this formula, and on implementing this formula in the coming decades.

If I say very directly and in not such diplomatic language, Armenia and Azerbaijan should simply leave each other in peace and focus on economic co-operation and building dialogue piece by piece.

Our fellow Armenians from Karabakh should be homed in the Republic of Armenia, and live as citizens of the Republic of Armenia, and create and build their prosperity in the Republic of Armenia. That is our strategy.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the United European Left, the Co-Chair of the party, Mr George LOUCAIDES.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr Chair.

Dear Mr Prime Minister, my question was almost similar, exactly the same as my colleague's from Malta. We haven't co-ordinated ourselves. So if I may expand on that question, please tell us, what concrete ways could the international community, and especially the Council of Europe best support Armenia in this crucial endeavour in relation to refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh? And furthermore, as you mentioned in your speech, as I have the time, please elaborate more in relation to steps that you could take in order to have more progress on very important issues like judicial independence, fighting corruption, and protecting and reinforcing the rule of law.

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

Dear Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

And this will be the last answer because unfortunately we have to finish our morning session in three minutes.

Thank you, Prime Minister.

Mr Nikol PASHINYAN (Prime Minister of Armenia)*: Thank you very much.

You know in the field of democratic reforms, what has so far been done, we should simply continue with the Council of Europe and deepen our co-operation. It is a success story. New challenges are emerging, and we need to confront these challenges and deal with them to make democracy in Armenia more institutional.

By the way, one of the questions was what can the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe do to facilitate the peace process? Well, for instance, using legitimate language would be an integral part of that, because the language that has been used and the use of which I condemned is widely perceived in Armenia as a territorial claim on the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia.

I reiterate, I ask you all: the Washington Declaration is a simple one-page document. One page, five paragraphs. The peace agreement was published, not very long ago, and it is the legitimate and agreed upon vocabulary that we should rely upon and the use of which is the only thing which would enable us to nurture this newborn peace and to mature it.

As to our fellow Armenians, refugees from Karabakh, as I said already, we hope that the international community will provide financial support, greater financial support, to address their housing questions. But the Council of Europe can also help with different programmes for our fellow Armenians from Karabakh, including reskilling, training and education support. And I think that this is an important area so that in Armenia's evolving labour market, they find their place more quickly. Of course the government of Armenia is implementing such programmes, but...

By the way, in the near future, our government is going to organise a workshop or a conference with the participation of our fellow Armenians who became refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. During that conference we will try to hear first-hand from them, what are their impressions of the programmes implemented so far, and also, some medium-term and long-term initiatives that we would like to agree upon with them or get them involved in as much as possible in the elaboration of the substance of these programmes.

It is my final answer, distinguished President of the Parliamentary Assembly, distinguished Secretary General, excellencies, distinguished members of parliament. I want to once again thank you for this opportunity and convey my respect to the Council of Europe and all of its institutions and thank you for your support for Armenia's democracy all this time.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you dear Prime Minister for being with us today.

There were so many questions on the list, Prime Minister, a lot of interest, but unfortunately we don't have time. Maybe next time that you are here with us.

Dear colleagues, the ballot.

Yes.

Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, ECPA): This is a Parliamentary Assembly and the whole point of inviting distinguished foreign leaders is that people here have an opportunity to ask questions. The truth is that the replies that we have had today have been of quite inordinate length and as a result, nobody from the floor has had an opportunity to speak.

When foreign leaders are invited in future, will you impress on them please that they are here to answer our questions and just not to give long speeches.

Thank you very much.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Sir Edward LEIGH, thank you for your remarks.

I just want to remind you, maybe you are an older member than me in this Assembly, that we have never asked a Prime Minister or Head of State not to make the speech that they have planned. Of course, all our visitors know the time limit.

So I think, especially in this case, it is worth listening to the Armenian Prime Minister more. Don't underestimate the questions of my colleagues, I am one of you, though I cannot ask questions. It is because of what we have rightly mentioned earlier, regarding your question, the President of the United States had this initiative to solve a very big, important problem. And I think it is worth listening to the Prime Minister of Armenia more than usual, but I take note of what you have said and I will pass on this message to our next visitors. Thank you for mentioning it.

Dear Prime Minister, once again, thank you so much for being with us today, and for answering the questions of the members of the political groups.

Dear colleagues, I just want to remind you that the ballot for the election of the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly is now closed. The counting of votes will take place under the supervision of the tellers, Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA, Mr Sergiy VLASENKO, Dame Karen BRADLEY, Baroness Sal BRINTON and Mr Berdan ÖZTÜRK from Türkiye.

I invite them to go the count in the room set aside for this purpose. The election will be announced at 3.30 pm, at the start of this afternoon sitting. The Assembly will hold its next public - you can do it - this afternoon at 3.30 pm, with the agenda approved on Monday. The sitting is adjourned.

La séance est levée à 13h05