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Official report of debates

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Débat d'actualité : L'accord du Royaume-Uni sur les demandeurs d'asile et la réaction critique du gouvernement concernant la décision de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues, we will continue our work.

And the first item of business this afternoon is a current affairs debate on “United Kingdom agreement on asylum seekers and the critical government reaction regarding the European Court of Human Rights decision”.

The debate will last 1 hour, as it's written down in our rules, and speaking time is limited to 3 minutes for all members except the first speaker, chosen by the Bureau, who is allowed 7 minutes.

The debate will therefore end by 4:30 p.m. when we have the second current affairs debate of the day under the title “Consequences of the blockade on the Black Sea”.

If that is clear, now I call in the debate first Mr Frank SCHWABE, and, Frank, you have 7 minutes to introduce the debate.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC): Mister President,

Dear colleagues, first I would like to thank you that you appointed me unanimously as the first speaker in this debate. I thank you for this trust and for the support and to do this.

So this discussion is in general not about the question of migration or the rights of asylum seekers. Although we have to understand that there is a big challenge for sure, there is a big challenge, because on the one hand we ask for support and to respect the Geneva Convention. And on the other hand we have to face the reality that more and more countries do not really care about this Geneva Convention.

But whatever is the answer to the challenges, and we have to discuss it here in the next weeks, months, and years. Rwanda for sure cannot be a partner for any kind of migration or asylum agreement. And I would like to quote Amnesty International Report 2021 about Rwanda: violations of the rights to a fair trial, freedom of

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.

expression, and privacy continued alongside enforced disappearances, allegations of torture, and excessive use of force. This is a description about the real situation in Rwanda. How anybody can have the idea to, whatever, bring people to this country?

However and whatever you think about the question of migration and asylum, it is 100% necessary to respect the judgments of the Court of Human Rights. And I will say it again: it is 100% necessary to respect the judgments of the Court of Human Rights. The ECHR, again and again, is the core and the heart of this organisation. And it is a red line for all member countries. It was a red line for Russia. It's a red line for Türkiye, it is for Azerbaijan, and all other countries. And it is as well the red line for the government of the United Kingdom. They are obliged to implement the judgment of the ECHR courts as well, and not to pick which one they like and which one they don't like.

And as there was not just an attack, an oral attack on the court from a respective and responsible member of the UK government, but the presentation of a new law preventing the obligation of fulfilling the judgment of the ECHR as well, it is a matter of great concern for us.

Come on, colleagues, we are in the stage of preparing the Fourth Summit, a historical situation for this organisation, with the aim of strengthening — or I understand it may be wrong — with the aim of strengthening the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights.

How can one country start to weaken the Convention and the Court in such a way just in this week? And how the distinguished Government of the United Kingdom wants to argue in the case of Russia and Türkiye? In which case we do everything that the Turkish government respect the judgment of the court, to do everything to release Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş from prison in these days.

But it's not just a debate. And I think we should prevent to think of it. It's not just a debate here in Strasbourg in the Council of Europe, it's a debate in the United Kingdom as well.

And because of this, I would like to quote first Sacha Deshmukh, Amnesty International's UK Chief Executive, who said "the courts intervention in Rwanda deportation last week was an example of it enacting its fundamental role in ensuring basic human rights aren't violated. Stating nothing more than that the UK should pause removals to Rwanda pending the outcome of our own domestic judicial review process". And it's very troubling that the UK government is prepared to damage respect for the authority of the European Court of Human Rights because of a single decision that it doesn't like.

And Stephanie Boyce, who is the president of the Law Society of England and Wales, said, "The erosion of accountability trumped by the justice secretary signals a deepening of the government's disregard for the checks and balances that underpin the rule of law. The bill will create an acceptable class of human rights abuses in the United Kingdom by introducing a bar on claims deemed not to cause significant disadvantage". And she proceeded, "It is a large lurch backwards for British justice. Authorities may begin to consider some rights violations as acceptable because this could no longer be challenged under the Bill of Rights despite being against the law. Overall the bill would grant the state a greater unfettered power over the people, power which would then belong to all future governments, whatever their ideologies."

So, it's really, really, really, a big matter of concern. And I would like to ask you, really distinguished colleague Mr John HOWELL, who will speak later and who is the Chair of the delegation of the United Kingdom here: we had a discussion some days ago where you said that when Priti Patel, the UK Home Secretary, attacked the crowd it was just a private position. And I would like to quote her from the media in the UK.

She said, "Was it politically motivated? I'm in the view that it is absolutely. The opaque way this court has operated is absolutely scandalous". And she proceeded saying that she wants to "find ways to overturn this decision".

And my question really is to the distinguished colleagues from the United Kingdom. Will you support at the end this law in the United Kingdom which at the end undermines this organisation?

Dear colleagues, this Parliamentary Assembly has to defend the values of this organisation, the Convention, and the Court. And we have to ask the UK Government, along this way, if you go this way, you are a part of questioning and ultimately destroying this organisation and its values.

It's better to leave it alone.

Thank you very much.

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

Dear Colleagues,

Before I open the debate, we have, in total, 17 people who have asked for the floor. I can accommodate you all if everybody sticks to 3 minutes or less.

Please act in solidarity, do not wait until you hear the bell and if you hear the bell, stop your intervention because then it is up to another colleague who also wants to say something.

First in the debate, I call Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN from Ireland. She speaks on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Fiona, you have the floor.

Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President.

Earlier this year, Ireland commemorated 100 years since the establishment of our independent state. The course of our independence was not without difficulty because of the partition of our country, division between north and south, Catholics and Protestants, unionists and nationalists.

The Good Friday Agreement, negotiated by brave men and women in 1998, marked the end of three decades of bloody violence and was, and is, a blueprint for building a new future on our shared island because it has as its foundation a democratic and inclusive view of our shared island of Ireland.

Why is this important in this debate? The European Convention on Human Rights has a very special significance for Ireland and for the UK because it is an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement, an internationally negotiated agreement that has brought peace in our time.

As a country, we owe so many people for what they have done over the past decades to bring people together and build a better future and make possible the peace that we enjoy today.

Our task today must be to protect that peace, to build new relationships and repair old ones and ensure that we never go back to the darkest days of the past. We need to work to provide hope and opportunity to a new generation.

The fact that the UK government is talking openly about breaching international law is a matter of huge concern. It is deeply disappointing that yesterday the UK has put forward a bill to replace the Human Rights Act and will, if enacted, breach international law as well as severely damaging international relationships and trust.

Boris Johnson is certainly giving the impression that nothing is sacred in his view, not the Northern Irish Protocol or the Good Friday Agreement; not the European Convention on Human Rights, nor the European Court of Justice. One person, one prime minister, cannot be allowed to rip apart a relationship and respect that took almost a century to build.

The European Court of Human Rights has always been a guiding compass. Today, as war rages in Ukraine, key principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and above all, the effective functioning of the European Court of Human Rights, the conscience of Europe and execution of its judgments. A ruling ignored is a human right infringed and if we are selective in applying the rule of law, before long lawlessness will be the rule. It is never too late to do the right thing and we must appeal here for common sense, mutual respect and adherence to the values, norms and conventions of both the Council of Europe and the European Convention of Human Rights.

There will always be challenges in diplomacy and interactions with other countries but the way to resolve these outstanding challenges is through dialogue, partnership, discussion and engagement, rather than unilateral action.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Fiona O'LOUGHLIN.

Next in the debate, I call Mr George KATROUGALOS from Greece. He speaks on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

You have the floor, George.

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Chair.

We owe a lot to the United Kingdom. It is the country that has the longest parliamentary history in the world.

In Greece, when there is a vacuum in our written constitution, we refer to the British constitutional history as an indirect source of our constitutional law. The United Kingdom is the country in which their legal authors have saved the concept of the rule of law.

When we are facing such worrisome, I would say even preposterous cases, like the Rwanda case we are discussing, it is not coming from the usual suspect. This is even more worrisome, exactly because this is not an isolated case.

As Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN said before me, we have a series of events of unilateral decisions by the Government of the United Kingdom, not to depart from Europe to take distances from the continent, but to deviate from the standards of the common European legal civilisation based on the understanding, on the common understanding, of the rule of law and the protection of human rights and freedoms.

The decision to unilaterally deviate from the Northern Ireland Protocol is risking to destabilise the situation in the island and create a hard border.

Even more dangerous, is a decision to revise the Human Rights Act through a new bill of rights, so as to deviate from the European Convention of Human Rights.

These are dangerous decisions that could systematically undermine the legal protection of individuals in the United Kingdom and in Ireland. We should have a common stance facing these challenges.

When we have a threat to human rights and to the standards of the rule of law, we should not ask from where they are coming. If we are asking, we are expecting much more from the United Kingdom than from other countries in Europe.

I think we should adopt, not a double standard policy, but the same policy that we are applying towards Russia, that we should apply towards Türkiye. Not because the United Kingdom has affinities or similarities with these countries, but exactly because we must respect our common European legal tradition of human rights and protection of the standards of the rule of law.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister George KATROUGALOS.

Next in the debate, I call Mr Roberto RAMPI from Italy and he speaks on behalf of Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Roberto.

Mr Roberto RAMPI (Italy, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, President,

I think we should be quite clear and honest about this. Going beyond the mere details, what we are talking about today is an issue which could potentially have enormous and serious consequences for our organisation. The United Kingdom is one of the founding members of this organisation. I'll go further and say it is the founding member, the country which inspired this organisation.

It was Winston Churchill himself who put forward the idea of this organisation, an organisation which over the years has grown to gradually encompass the whole of Europe, reaching right out to the outer edges of Europe and even beyond.

This means that we now share the spirit of Europe, indeed, with other parts of the world. We have friends from Mexico and Canada who also regularly speak in this chamber. Today, at a time when for the first time we've lost a member, or just very recently, an important member, Russia, because of the terrible events that are happening in Ukraine, this founding member, this also inspiration to all of us — let's remember the concern that Brexit triggered off in all of us — the idea of the UK leaving the European Union wasn't just a technical decision; it struck us to our spiritual core, it was the UK taking a different road to the future.

And now we see another worrying offence. This country which was a model for us, a model in terms of human rights, the rule of law, parliamentary democracy... those were essential in founding democracies. Despite all of that, this country has decided to quibble with the decision taken by the European Court of Human Rights.

I can understand they could speak out against it, they could question it, but you can't just adopt legislation to get round rights, and this decision goes against everything we have built together.

I believe that, in the debate in this house, thanks to the reports and the discussions we have had, we have to be able to reach a fundamental decision which we can then convey to our friends, our colleagues, the current Government of the UK. Let's remember, as in the case with Russia, or indeed Türkiye, the problem is never with people: the problem is with governments in power. So we could then call on the government of the UK to think again, to step back, to rescind these measures. And I think it's important we send out a strong, united message to the United Kingdom, underlining our commitment to human rights and democratic values, as well as the rule of law.

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

Now we are going to listen to Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN from Armenia and he speaks on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Vladimir.

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister Chair.

Is the rule of law possible in the countries, when the rulings of the courts are challenged? Is human rights protection possible without the respect towards the rule of law? Does the rule of law may exist without democracy? These components of the legal and democratic engineering are indivisible and inseparable.

The judiciary plays a crucial role in keeping this trinity. The process of democratic backsliding is not an instant one. It is a very slow process and you cannot fix when democracy stops functioning, but it is obvious that the lack of respect for the rulings of the court is one of the clear signals of backsliding.

Today, we are discussing the issue which is interconnecting with one of our main institutions. The core of this organisation: the European Court of Human Rights.

I have mentioned here many times in this hemicycle that all ECHR rulings should be respected. Not only the final judgment but also the interim measures and maybe even more, because interim measures are, from time to time, even more important than final judgments. Because if interim measures are not implemented, final judgments would be useless.

Ladies and gentlemen, very often states are very reluctant to the implementation of the interim measures considering them less important than the final judgment.

Dear colleagues, we are living in a very alarming time when democratic backsliding, degradation of the rule of law and disrespect towards human rights lead us to be more proactive in defending the European Convention and democratic principles we are governed with.

States have a legitimate right to fight against illegal immigration but they, first of all, have international commitments to respect their obligations in the field of human rights, especially in the time that European values and principles are so vulnerable. We should be very, very sensitive on this issue and this discussion should be considered as one of the elements of early prevention of violation of the principles and values of our organisation.

Thank you very much.

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

Now the last speaker on behalf of political groups is Mr John HOWELL from the United Kingdom, and he speaks on behalf of the European Conservatives.

John, you have the floor.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Mister President.

And I'm extremely grateful to Mr Frank SCHWABE for this motion. Without his persistent pursuit of it, I doubt very much whether we would have seen a new Bill of Rights introduced into parliament in the UK this week, which will of course increase discussion. So, I thank him for that. I doubt, too, whether we would have seen clarification of the Government's position. So let me just read out from the document.

This is produced by the Government of the UK and is the final version of what the UK's position is.

I just read a few quotes.

The first one is: We remain a committed party to the ECHR, the rights under the Convention and indeed the Human Rights Act are retained under the Bill of Rights.

It goes on to say: The United Kingdom is committed to protecting and respecting human rights, to its membership of the Council of Europe and to its obligations under the Convention.

And thirdly, it says: The Government is committed to staying in the European Court of Human Rights.

And lastly, I just want to read this particular quote from the Government's own version of events, because it's important to what we are talking about.

It says: We recognise our obligation under the Convention to abide by judgments of the Court specifically against the United Kingdom.

And of course in the statement yesterday made by the justice secretary, he said too that we were intending to stay in the ECHR. And why not? I have always been a supporter of the ECHR. I mean, I have nothing to complain about. We have the lowest number of cases per capita in the Court.

There will be much debate on the new Bill of Rights, but it's important to bear in mind what members of the Court have said, that there is a difference between domestic law and international law. And this is about domestic law and there will no doubt be huge amounts of debate in the UK about that.

But I want to offer something to PACE today and that is I want to offer PACE the opportunity to comment on the domestic bill, the Bill of Rights, and they can do that by emailing me either collectively or through one of the committees.

And I would just issue a final warning for those who have got their information from the press. The press are not to be trusted to be honest in this, it is my background. They make a headline out of this rather than seeing the facts. Be wary! You may have a press that simply rolls over in your own country, but the way of the UK press is coming to you.

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

Now we continue the list of speakers.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): The next speaker is Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ from Switzerland.

Pierre, you have the floor.

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

In the field of migration, innovation never stops. At the time, we had the agreement between Turkey and the European Union. For all these years, we have had the pushback with the dramas in the Mediterranean or elsewhere. Now we have certain countries proposing to change their national law, allowing the realisation of pushback. Now they are proposing vacations in Rwanda - we have just spoken about this at length.

Dear Colleagues,

This is clearly a very bad signal that we are giving, at a time when the European Union is thinking about redefining its migration policy. We are not trying to get to the bottom of things and to really settle the question of a single law applied and respected in all our States so that migrants are treated correctly according to clear rules. We must remember these rules. There are no illegal migrants: every person can, if he or she feels the need, ask for help and protection in a country. This country must grant him help and protection and a procedure, a clear procedure with rules, with knowledge of his rights, with a translator and then there is a decision. If this decision is taken, the person may have to leave the country for a safe third country. This means that a new expertise is made to know if he/she will be sent back to a safe country.

The second thing that is a bit shocking in this story is that we are theoretically questioning decisions of the European Court. We already know the precedents with other countries. I remind you that the European Court of Human Rights – we are all convinced of this – is the foundation of our institution, the very essence of the Council of Europe. Our values are at stake, dear colleagues. The honor of our continent is at stake.

To come back to the history of migration, if now, on our continent, the continent that saw the birth of human rights, we do not treat migrants properly, what can we say about the way these migrants could be treated in other parts of the world?

It is really a fundamental struggle. We must respect our rules, our values. It is the expression of the dignity of a whole continent.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

Next in the debate, I call Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS from Greece.

Theodoros, you have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

Millions of migrants attempt to reach Europe hoping for a better future for themselves and their loved ones. This has triggered tremendous pressure on frontline countries and we all know it. For this reason, finding an adequate solution to migration pressure in Europe is essential.

We must be very careful though in bringing the right answers to problems we are facing. Solutions considered must on no account be to the detriment of human rights protection and the Council of Europe and European Union countries' observance of their international obligations.

Dear colleagues, it is not the first time that this issue is being discussed. I want to remind you that this Assembly discussed the possibility to delocalise processing of asylum applications already in 2007. In its Resolution 1569 of 2007 and on assessment of transit and processing centres as a response to mixed flows of migrants and asylum seekers, it noted that setting up of transit or processing centres raises a number of practical and legal issues and concerns including in terms of human rights and refugee rights.

Observing international human rights obligations is the best way to proceed. Negotiations have taken place and agreements were reached. It is essential that we all ensure, in our parliaments, to respect the 1951 Refugee Convention and European Convention on Human Rights.

We are all aware of the recent decisions of the European Court of Human Rights to halt the removal of a refugee from the United Kingdom to Rwanda. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons – I am honoured to be the Chairperson of this Committee – agreed on a clear statement last Tuesday regarding this topic. I hope that dialogue will continue on this crucial and controversial issue and a consensus will be eventually found.

Dear colleagues, the great comedian Groucho Marx once said "Those are my principles and if you don't like them ... well I have others". The Council of Europe must stick to its principles no matter which member tries to violate them. Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS.

Next in the debate I call Ms Serap YAŞAR, from Türkiye.

Ms Serap YAŞAR (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Miste President.

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased that the Assembly has immediately placed this crucial issue of asylum on its agenda.

In April, the British authorities announced that illegally arrived migrants would be relocated to Rwanda, claiming that relocation would facilitate safe and legal asylum channels and that Rwanda is able to accommodate tens of thousands of people.

We believe that this practice contradicts the right to asylum. There is a serious risk that the principle of *non-refoulement* will be violated by forcibly transferring asylum seekers to Rwanda. This practice would set a bad example for other countries.

Moreover, this policy would be based on the fact that Rwanda is a safe country for asylum seekers. However, we cannot accept this presumption. Yesterday, the Committee on Migration adopted a report on safe third countries. The report suggests that we need to monitor safe third-country decisions to protect the rights of asylum seekers, but we have no credible evidence that Rwanda is a safe country.

In this context, thanks to the Strasbourg Court's immediate interim measure, asylum seekers have been saved from a real risk of irreversible harm. I hope that the Court's interim measure will also save many others. We welcome the immediate implementation of the decision. I hope that this case will be an important step forward for asylum protection. I hope that the news about plans to adopt a law that would circumvent the Court's decisions does not reflect reality.

Finally, the Council of Europe must establish good practices for other countries in respecting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. We must stop all illegal actions against asylum seekers.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Serap YAŞAR.

Next in the debate I call Lord George FOULKES from the UK.

George?

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

For the very reasons that Mr George KATROUGALOS and Mr Roberto RAMPI raised about the respect that so many countries have had for the traditions of the United Kingdom, we in the United Kingdom, all of us, should welcome this debate today.

The Bill of Rights which was introduced yesterday in the United Kingdom Parliament is a misnomer. It is not a Bill of Rights. It reduces the rights of British citizens. The Justice minister in the House of Lords, Lord Bellamy, wrote to us all and he said that this bill will affirm UK Supreme Court Independence over Strasbourg rulings. Not the European Court of Human Rights, he does not call it that, he calls it "Strasbourg Court". The way he uses it is almost like an insult. But it will also, as Mr George KATROUGALOS said earlier, undermine the whole question and sabotage the Northern Ireland Protocol. It also undermines the Scotland Act, which incorporates the European Convention of Human Rights, and I do not think they have really realised that yet. And then Mr John HOWELL, for whom I have the greatest of personal affection, says that he invites you all to comment, but the UK government has actually refused requests from three committee chairs in the House of Commons for pre-legislative scrutiny. Pre-legislative scrutiny we normally have for all constitutional matters. They are trying to push it through with a majority of 80 in the Commons without proper scrutiny. Well, I can tell them they reckon without the House of Lords, which is packed full of lawyers who will pull this bill apart. A UK bill which weakens UK compliance with European Human Rights law will give the green light to any authoritarian government in any other member state to go ahead and forget about the principles of the European Court and the Convention on Human Rights.

Also with respect to Mr John HOWELL as well, the government has not even ruled out withdrawal from the Convention on Human Rights. The Prime Minister said all options are on the table and why are we getting this? Why are we getting this? There have only been two rulings! One, voting rights for prisoners, which we implemented and the one the other day on the interim judgment, on the flights to Rwanda, which we implemented. Both were implemented. So my feeling is, and the feeling of many of us, is that there is an ulterior motive for introducing this bill. An ulterior motive of this government that we have currently in the

United Kingdom. Mr Frank SCHWABE asked if we support his motion and his proposal. As far as the Labour members are concerned, I think I can speak for all of us, the answer is we reject this bill. We say to the bill, "No, no, no, three times no."

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

Now in the debate we are going to listen to Ms Ingjerd SCHOU from Norway.

Ingjerd, you have the floor.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD): Thank you President,

The right to seek asylum is enshrined in the United Nations Refugee Convention from 1951 and the 1967 protocol. It guarantees asylum seekers' protection from being returned to a country where they face serious threats to their lives or freedom.

What was not foreseen at the time of drafting was how modern communications would develop, and the ease with which we now travel between continents.

However, President, what was foreseen was the importance of ensuring individuals the right to safe shelter and the importance of fair processing of applications for asylum.

President, by exporting asylum seekers to another country, the UK is showing disregard for their responsibilities as a signatory to the Refugee Convention.

Even if Rwanda is only a plane ride away from the United Kingdom, Rwanda is on a different continent, and with far less resources when it comes to infrastructure and capacity. We know that the larger part of Rwanda's refugee population is still living in camps, with limited possibilities for a better future.

As the UN High Commissioner for refugees has asked, is it fair that a rich European nation exports its responsibilities to a poorer country?

Another question: How will British authorities be able to ensure that the asylum seekers are getting the protection they are entitled to under the convention?

President,

The difficult migrant and refugee situation in Europe is to a large extent the result of lack of solidarity and lack of willingness to share the burden.

Flying asylum seekers back to the continent many of them are fleeing from, without processing their applications, is a disappointing, short-term solution. I fail to see how this can be in line with obligations under international law

It is only when asylum seekers have had their applications processed fairly, that it is OK to deny and return those who do not qualify for asylum.

Exporting the asylum seekers to a different continent is not OK. Especially when the prime motivation seems to be pleasing the electorate. Strengthening the control of the coastline would be a better solution.

As a signatory of the Refugee Convention, The United Kingdom cannot only benefit from the convention. It must also take the responsibility to protect and implement it.

Thank you!

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

Now I ask Ms Thórhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR from Iceland to take the floor.

Ms Thórhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR (Iceland, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

Dear Colleagues,

The UK government may believe that they are taking a strong stance against, as a colleague mentioned that, the Strasbourg Court, but they are not. It is weak politics to attack the European Court of Human Rights for domestic political purposes. It's weak. It means you have nothing left to stand for.

The fact that you aim now to declare supremacy of domestic courts over the European Convention of Human Rights is weak.

I seem to recall many conservative UK colleagues standing here in this Hemicycle condemning Russia when it declared national law supreme over convention law. I seem to recall that, but now, now when it suits domestic purposes, all of a sudden that's okay.

This, dear colleagues, is weak. It's weak politics. I'm sorry to say it's not the only example of the states that we think should be the bearers of the message of this Organisation.

We saw Denmark doing the same thing when they had the presidency of the Committee of Ministers. They tried to use their presidency to weaken the independence of the court. My own government in Iceland attacked the credibility of the European Court of Human Rights when they disliked their judgment about the independence of judges in Iceland.

These are weak politics, dear colleagues. It should be rejected. It shouldn't be seen as a strong man or a strong kind of politics because it is just altering your opinions according to the wind.

You cannot, on the one hand, say that you aim to enforce the convention and then, on the other hand, try to enact laws that go against the fundamental principles of the convention, which is the primacy of the right of the European Court of Human Rights to interpret convention rights.

This is something that we can never alter. This is something that we all need to stand guard around, and there's nothing strong about trying to attack it. There's nothing protecting your own sovereignty. It's simple weak politics trying to abuse the moment at the time for domestic purposes. History will judge it as misjudged and weak.

I hope you stay away from this course, dear UK colleagues. You warned others against it before. You should look into the mirror now.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Thórhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR.

The next speaker in our debate is Mr Bernard FOURNIER, from France.

The floor is yours.

Mr Bernard FOURNIER (France, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President.

Mister President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The British government has signed an agreement with the government of Rwanda to allow the transfer of asylum seekers who have arrived illegally in the UK to Rwanda, where their asylum claims will now be processed. Funded by London to the tune of 141 million euros, it aims to deter illegal crossings of the English Channel.

When the agreement was announced, it drew strong criticism from human rights groups, opposition figures in both countries and even the United Nations.

Our Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has also denounced the agreement and explained that it calls into question the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Indeed, this convention establishes the principle of non-refoulement of asylum seekers.

The European Court of Human Rights also decided to suspend a decision of the British government concerning an Iraqi national who had applied for asylum upon arrival in the United Kingdom and was at risk of being returned to Rwanda on the evening of 14 June 2022. The U.K. complied with this decision and the plane he was on with several other refugees did not take off.

While this decision is provisional, pending the court's ruling on the admissibility and merits of the case, it has been strongly criticised by the British government.

Home Secretary Priti Patel called the decision "scandalous" and said the Court had worked "opaquely" on the case, even though its decision was based on Rule 39 of the Rules of Court, which provides that interim measures may be taken, exceptionally, where, in the absence of such measures, the applicant faces a real risk of irreparable harm.

Even more seriously, the British government introduced yesterday a bill to replace the Human Rights Act of 1998. This bill directly challenges the primacy of the decisions and judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in a number of cases. It fundamentally challenges the "living instrument" doctrine applied by the Court.

This project seems to me to run counter to the commitments made by the U.K. The British government says that the U.K. will remain a party to the Convention, but it is following a dangerous path, which I am sure will be exploited by some other states and instrumentalised by the Russian Federation.

I am counting on our British colleagues to provide us with information on this project, but it seems to me that it is our duty to remind the United Kingdom of its treaty obligations.

What credibility would we have in the face of other member States that question the decisions of the Court if we accept that one of the oldest democracies in Europe should break away from it?

Thank you very much.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, very much indeed, dear Mister Bernard FOURNIER.

Now I call in the debate Mr Jeremy CORBYN, from the United Kingdom.

Mr Jeremy CORBYN (United Kingdom, SOC): I'm delighted to take part in this debate. It's a timely one and a very important one.

This Council of Europe, above all, exists as a protector of human rights across Europe. We are the protectors of the European Convention on Human Rights. We elect judges to the European Court of Human Rights.

We are fundamentally about human rights, so I'm beyond disappointed that my government has done two completely wrong things in my view.

Yesterday, they announced the introduction of a British bill of rights into the British Parliament, and that bill of rights is going to, apparently, make Britain independent of what many of our ministers and conservative members of parliament choose to describe as a foreign court, in respect of the European Court of Human Rights. They describe it as the Strasbourg court, deliberately undermining what is an essential part of British justice.

The 1998 Human Rights Act in Britain incorporated the Convention on Human Rights, support for the Court of Human Rights, and of all of its case law into British law.

The British government doesn't like it because it has had one interim judgment against it of late, and one in the past. The decision that was made to intervene in respect of a deportation to Rwanda is one that has annoyed and excited the British government.

I want to just put this in the context of the politics of what's going on here.

There are desperate people in this world looking for a place of safety. Some of those get into flimsy dinghies and try and cross the English Channel. They risk everything in order to try to survive. The British Government's solution to their misery and their fear, is to remove them to Rwanda where their cases will be processed and they will, most of them, end up remaining in Rwanda. It's the outsourcing of the right of anyone to seek asylum. A legal right that is there within the European Convention and the 1951 Geneva Convention.

I think we should just think for a moment what it is like to be so desperate that you have to try to resort to those measures in order just to survive. This body should speak up for them, the victims of war, of human rights abuse, of aggression, of poverty, and of environmental disaster, and do something different.

I hope that the interim decision made by the European Court of Human Rights is something that pertains. But as other speakers have pointed out, if the British Government is allowed to get away with this, by saying with a split tongue if you like, that on one hand it supports the European Convention on Human Rights and

incorporates that into its law, yet at the same time saying it's not going to be bound by a foreign court, they're undermining the existing British law which gives our citizens, and the citizens of every other country in Europe, the right to have their case heard at the European Court of Human Rights.

We've got to stand by the advances made in human rights by brave people of past generations in order to protect the human rights of the most vulnerable people in this world today.

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

Now I call in the debate Mr Paul GAVAN from Ireland.

Paul, you have the floor.

Mr Paul GAVAN (Ireland, UEL): Thank you, Mister President.

How do we find the words to describe this new proposed law on asylum seekers in Britain? British Home Secretary Priti Patel describes it as, and I quote, "first class policy".

I am going to do a first here, as an Irish Republican, and quote Prince Charles, who said it was "appalling". *The New Yorker* magazine described it as "harebrained and immoral". I would describe it as amongst the most cynical, shameful, not to mention racist, proposals ever produced by a member State of the Council of Europe. What the British government is proposing is the effective outsourcing of asylum seekers to a third country: the outsourcing of their legal rights, the outsourcing of human beings.

A seven-page analysis of the proposed British–Rwandan scheme by the UN concluded that it was, and I quote, "incompatible with the letter and spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention". Indeed, I want to pay tribute to Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS, who let the initiative to table a draft declaration on behalf of members of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons highlighting that incompatibility and roundly condemning the shameful proposal.

It is interesting to note the comments of the Law Society of England and Wales, which has stated, and again I quote, "this bill will create an acceptable class of human rights abuses in the United Kingdom".

If it were not for the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights for an urgent interim measure, this exporting of asylum Seekers would have already begun. The reactions of the British government to the Court's decision have been appalling but also deeply worrying. The Tories now plan to introduce this new so-called "British Bill of Rights", which will actually significantly weaken the standing of the European Court of Human Rights in Britain. It introduces a promise to clarify the law for judges so they place British laws above European Court of Human Rights rulings. It also plans to screen out some human rights claims against the government or other public bodies. People would be required to prove at the earliest possible stage that they have suffered a significant disadvantage.

Finally, Mister President, as an Irish Republican, I must highlight the impact of this proposed new law on my country. The fact that rights are set out in the European Convention and are written into the Good Friday Agreement means that this new law will undermine that international legal agreement as well. The European Court of Human Rights has been an important mechanism to which citizens can turn when they suffered grave human rights violations. In the context of conflict in Ireland, this resulted in landmark judgments such as the McKerr group of cases, which saw the Court rule that the victims had their article to right-to-life breached. The importance of the European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence in upholding the rights of individuals in the north and holding the British government to account cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, not for the first time, Mister President, we have know-nothing Tory politicians creating chaos in Ireland.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Paul GAVAN

Now we are going to listen to Mr Julian PAHLKE, from Germany.

Julian?

Mr Julian PAHLKE (Germany, SOC): First of all, the United Kingdom already has a long history in disrespect of human rights, and there are people on flimsy rubber boats being stopped in the Channel and being brought back. And this is what I call a border farce. Deporting people is appalling and unethical. Outsourcing refugees is outsourcing responsibility.

And I'm standing here, as a young member of the German Parliament, and I say that because human rights are a consequence of the horrors in Germany's darkest times. The world learned a lesson after World War II. And the lesson was that every single individual must be granted a set of fundamental rights.

Ignoring the European Court of Human Rights is ignoring the lessons learned and the mutual respect for each other.

And, Mister HOWELL, if you ask for feedback on your bill, I can give you feedback. If you want to continue to respect the European Court of Human Rights, then also respect the judgment.

This is what is at stake.

Boris Johnson led the UK out of the European Union and he's now leading the UK out of European values.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Julian PAHLKE.

The next speaker is Mr Simon MOUTQUIN, from Belgium.

Mr Simon MOUTQUIN, you have the floor.

Mr Simon MOUTQUIN (Belgium, SOC): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

I'm going to ask you first if the next speaker will have time to speak as well, since he is more concerned than I am and I'd like him to speak. Okay, very well, thank you very much.

Dear President, dear colleagues,

Many, many members of the House have already spoken about this: the agreement between the UK and Rwanda is illegal and immoral. The return of asylum seekers to Rwanda violates all rules of international law. Amnesty International has pointed out that Rwanda's dismal human rights record is well known; the UNHCR has condemned this practice as contrary to human rights and the Geneva Convention.

So, of course, we must denounce this immoral agreement, we must denounce the United Kingdom's failure to respect the Court's decisions, but let's take the time to look elsewhere. Let's take the time to look at what is being installed on our continent and which could be called the "museum of horrors".

In Denmark, the migration policy restricts the rights of migrants year after year: confiscation of property, obligation to work in order to receive social benefits, return of migrants imprisoned in Kosovo, a project of an island specially designed for migrants soon.

In Italy, with the support of the European Union, agreements are made with Libyan coastguards to send them back to the hell of Libya, the hell where most women are raped every week.

In Spain, undocumented migrants have their hands burned because of the products they use to grow our vegetables, paid at three euros an hour.

In Croatia, Greece and elsewhere, the reports of pushbacks are similar and repeated.

In my country, Belgium, a majority of Afghans are currently being denied the right to asylum while the country itself is hit by a terrible famine and the country is once again in the hands of the Taliban. Still in Belgium, and I think a lot about them today, hundreds of undocumented migrants have started a hunger strike in vain, hoping to wake up the political world to their fate and their invisibility.

So, of course, we must denounce this agreement between the United Kingdom and Rwanda and the non-respect of the Court's decisions, but let's talk about immorality. Immorality is not only the agreement between the United Kingdom and Rwanda. Immorality is this migration policy whose only paradigm is security, restriction, externalisation, expulsion, repression, fear, barriers and pushbacks. Immorality is the reality that many of us travel with a passport around the world or in Europe while some have to risk their lives to hope for a better life.

Dear colleagues, finally, I call on you and I call on us to find morality in our migration policy. Let's change the paradigm, let's welcome, let's organise solidarity, let's protect, let's listen to the stories of these people, let's develop safe and legal ways of migration: in the end, let's just dare to create another kind of migration.

I thank you for your support.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Simon MOUTQUIN. The last speaker in this current affairs debate will be Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS, from the United Kingdom. Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS, you have the floor.

Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Chair.

I need not detain the members who have been gracious enough to give me time beyond time for very long.

I'd like to begin by a word of tribute to Mr John HOWELL for being there, and as our leader of the British delegation. A word of tribute because he's actually there, the only member of the Conservative governing party who's turned up.

Those of us who have spoken from the United Kingdom are all from the Labour opposing side of the British Parliament, and it's a sad comment. I would like to suggest to Mr John HOWELL that the next time we debate this subject he brings them in single file and sits them there to listen to all that's been said today. And if they had the guts to do so, to stand up and put a contrary case.

It's an echo chamber for all of us to be saying what has to be said and is obvious to be said and from a different variety of points of view. But we must have the governing party here. That's what the delegation to Strasbourg is all about. We must enforce a hearing by them of the case that's being made and has been made with passion, and conviction, and reason, and intellectual probity.

So that would be my very first plea.

I have to say too, that having fought battles recently for the nationality and borders bill that is now on the statute book, and enlisted the support of all the legal brains, the best brains in Britain in the House of Lords as it stood against the government proposals, only to lose the ultimate debate because of the majority in the House of Commons, we now align ourselves once again around this cause to fight the same battles all over again but with different material to work with and a different focus to concentrate on.

Just before we came here for this debate, I was present with Lord George FOULKES at a meeting that explained the needs of journalists in situations of war, and the necessity to give journalists at the front all the support we can because they are giving us the truth of what's happening in situations of war.

My friends, this is a situation of war, and we must report it faithfully and not hide behind selective quotations from government documents. I read in a newspaper article this morning: "Plans to make universal rights subordinate to ministerial opinion and political whim." That's not the press traducing what's happening at the moment; it's telling us the truth from the front line.

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

I now close this debate. It is the current affairs debate, which does not produce a document – a resolution. However, there has been an invitation made by our colleague, Mr John HOWELL, that if you have additional comments, do forward them to him.

The Bureau will decide whether and which follow-up will be given to this debate.

I now interrupt for a minute to change the Chair and then we will have our second current affairs debate of the day.

Débat d'actualité : Conséquences du blocus de la mer Noire

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Good morning to all of you.

The next item on the Agenda is our second current affairs debate on the "Consequences of the Black Sea blockade".

This debate will be opened by the speaker designated by the Bureau, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

The time limit for each speaker is 3 minutes, except for the first speaker appointed by the Bureau, who has 7 minutes.

I call Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, the first speaker designated by the Bureau.

You have the floor, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

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

Thank you, dear colleagues.

I think that is extremely important debate.

You all know that all this session is mostly about this awful war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine. And it has many dimensions on the land, but not only. Also one of the dimensions of this war is Russian attempt to occupy the Black Sea. Yes, to occupy, because they already occupied the Sea of Azov and stopped any activities there. Only their own is on the place. And now they're trying to do it in the Black Sea, attacking the North and Western part of the Black Sea and Ukrainian sea port.

They are taking not only Ukraine, but also have at least three cases of Russian Navy attacks on their civilian ships. First is Millennial Spirit tanker with a chemical cargo and the flag of Moldova, which is a member state of our organisation. Second is Namura Queen, under the flag of Panama. It was attacked by a missile and it was hit by a missile. And third is Turkish ship Yasa Jupiter, which was shelled and damaged by Russian Navy.

As the result, the sea trade of Ukraine through Black Sea is completely stopped. Before the war, 75% of Ukrainian foreign trade was made through sea ports, which is more than 150 million tonnes. Just imagine. Seaports also handled more than 90% of Ukrainian agricultural export, and, yes, agricultural export is the main issue today, because that is influencing food security in the whole world.

I will just give you just several numbers. The Ukraine and Russia together generated before the invasion 30% of world exports of wheat and barley, 18% of corn export and 80% of sunflower oil. That's why today we have a rise of prices in the supermarket's throughout the whole Europe where the rise of prices on sunflower oil that is absent, we have the prices of the beer, because of barley, of the bread because of wheat. And it's here in Europe where people still can afford it. But it's difficult for people. But let's go ahead and think what is happening in other countries.

The supply of wheat from Ukraine made 28% of Indonesia needs, 21% of Bangladesh needs. Together, Ukraine and Russia made 80% of wheat supply of Egypt, 80% percent, a country with more than 100 million population. What is ahead of us? Hunger riots. Starving. Millions of people dying from the hunger and millions of refugees, new wave of refugees.

And where will they go? It's clear. First of all to the country's member states of the Council of Europe. And that is a huge challenge to the world security in general.

High food prices have already increased the number of starving people in the world from 440 million to 1.6 billion people. That's according to Secretary General of the United Nations António Guterres.

So, this awful war against Ukraine is not only killing thousands and tens of thousands of Ukrainians, but it is also and will also kill millions of people throughout the whole planet with the hunger.

In 1932-1933, Stalin and Soviet Russia organised a genocide of Ukrainian people, Holodomor, where from 3 to 5 million of Ukrainians died starving. And now Putin, as a good student of Stalin, is making the same Holodomor genocide food attack but on the whole world. Like a real terrorist he took as a hostage millions, hundreds of millions of people in the world. From the calories in Ukrainian crops more than 400 million people are dependent on the planet.

It means that they are now hostages of Putin and his absolutely awful activity in the Black Sea.

And in the meantime Ukraine is trying to do our best to send our crops by other ways: by railway, by autoroute. But I can tell you that unfortunately it's impossible for us to replace the sea ports. We are trying our best, but still we're making up to 20-25% of our monthly export before. Because we can't place in short term sea ports and the sea.

So, what should be done?

I think that is the most important.

First of all, you are all parliamentarians. Please, address your governments to act and to react. We need to find solution. It can be convoys protecting the ships with grain coming from Ukrainian port. Together with providing Ukraine by the weaponry which will stop Russian Navy activity in the Northern-Western part of the Black Sea. That is the first option.

Second option. Every day, millions of barrels of Russian oil is crossing Bosphorus. Why are we not using this leverage? And I address Türkiye and other member states of NATO and our Council of Europe?

If we can say to Russia: either Ukrainian grain and your oil is passing through Bosphorus or nothing is passing.

If you are disrupting the humanitarian situation in the whole planet, we will react. And we should say this.

And their decision should be found very quickly, because new harvest collection already started in Ukraine. And in one month the situation would be even much worse. Ukrainian farmers don't have storages where to store the grain, don't have finances to finance the campaign, that's something we should do now.

And I address to you: next week will be NATO Summit in Madrid and your governments can react and I'm sure should react for humanitarian reasons first of all.

And last but not least, our organisation, I believe that Council of Europe should react too.

I think that we should not disappear for several months now till October.

I propose to the President and to the Bureau... tomorrow will be Bureau, to make a special session of PACE end of July. Not here in Strasbourg. The best option is in Odessa, my native city, which is the biggest city on the Black Sea.

If security does not allow: Romania, Bulgaria, Türkiye. Let's do it. If not session, some special event, some fact-finding visits. We need to do it now, in order to prevent starving of millions. This is our responsibility.

Thank you very much.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

I now call Mr George KATROUGALOS, from Greece, on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

The previous speaker has demonstrated very well how Ukraine is not just the bread basket for Europe but for the rest of the world as well. She has also demonstrated that the biggest risk is now for vulnerable countries, especially those in Africa. There are cases like the one she has mentioned of Egypt that has a dependence of more than 80 per cent. There are other countries in the sub-Saharan area, especially in east Africa – Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia – which depend on both Russia and Ukraine for 90 per cent of their wheat. We are speaking about the poorest regions of the planet.

Add to that a systemic failure we had already to face the consequences of the pandemic in this countries and also regional wars like that in Ethiopia and the Tigray, which has already started a famine. We have immediate reasons for taking action. The previous speaker has mentioned military means that could be used. I have, myself, read proposals like that of the retired Admiral James Stavridis, a former NATO Commander, about how a flotilla could escort merchant ships or about how more anticipates missiles could have a deterrent effect on the Russian fleet. The problem with this kind of military action is that they cannot guarantee the freedom of a ship going out from the ports of Ukraine, which must be a number one priority.

I believe that it is one of the best examples for which diplomacy stands out to be the best tool to provide a solution. On Monday, the EU ministers are discussing how we could have an agreement under the United Nations auspices in order to reach a solution by which safety corridors could be implemented the Black Sea in order to export Ukrainian grain. I think this would be a precursor, a precedent for a diplomatic solution in the war, which would fully respect the Ukrainian legitimate interest but also, based on international law, will give a way out to the war and the crisis.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister George KATROUGALOS.

I now call Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ, from Switzerland, on behalf of the Socialist, Democratic and Green Group.
You have the floor, Sir.

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

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Russia's war against Ukraine is having a series of collateral effects. We have seen the tragedy of the Ukrainian people, the systematic destruction, the unspeakable violations of human rights. We have seen the energy crisis, with the soaring price of gas and oil, inflation, and the energy poverty that is taking hold in some countries. Now there is the wheat crisis.

It is using this story as a weapon of destabilisation by Vladimir Putin to put pressure on the West by demanding an end to the sanctions against his country. Ukraine is one of the world's breadbaskets, as we just mentioned. The grain silos are full to the brim in Ukraine, with no possibility to export.

The Russian blockade of the Black Sea, the presence of a large number of mines to protect Ukrainian territory, access to Odessa, all of these are things that prevent us from imagining, in the short and medium term, the use of the Black Sea to export goods produced by Ukraine. We can imagine military measures but it is an enormous risk of escalation and, as Mr George KATROUGALOS said before, it is clear that, in no way, the ships would be protected. We could imagine making an agreement with the Russians, removing the Ukrainian mines, but we know that we cannot trust the Russians who are experts in the art of lying.

The humanitarian consequences are enormous in this field, especially in Africa. The famine announced for tens, hundreds of millions of people, will do considerable damage. It is a question of quantity and price, because money is needed to buy this wheat, which will become increasingly expensive.

In concrete terms, for a long time to come, the sea route via the Black Sea will be unusable, and this is where a solution must be found. We must find an immediate solution to try to export as much Ukrainian wheat as possible, but I think that just as we, the Western countries, must accelerate our energy transition in order not to depend on Russian gas and oil in the future, we must also find a permanent solution for the export of Ukrainian wheat.

Here, I heard an idea, expressed in particular by Mr. Macron: it was the development of a very efficient, very fast railroad through Romania. It is a complicated solution because there are problems of track gauge. It is an expensive solution. It is a solution that does not have an immediate effect. I do not know if there is another alternative because we must assume things for the medium, perhaps the long, term, and it seems to me the only possibility that geography offers us.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

I now give the floor to Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, from Poland, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

You have the floor, Sir.

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

My name always causes some problems: POCIEJ.

Thank you very much to Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO for this introduction. It is right and it is absolutely necessary.

No one should be surprised that we are dealing with this tragedy, the war in Ukraine, from different perspectives and with dense attention again and again and again. We have to do it because it is damaging and very dangerous. This war is not only a tragedy for Ukraine; it is not only an imminent threat for the Baltic

countries, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia. All of Europe is concerned. But now we discover that not only Europe is concerned with the blockade of Ukrainian ports, with the blockade of the Black Sea, the war waged by the Russian Federation undermines the stability of the Mediterranean region, especially the countries of the south-east of the region. This blockade creates an extremely dangerous situation and can cause famine and reactions that can degenerate into something like the Arab Spring, but in a bad way.

Already in Morocco, the government, in order to calm the situation, has to pay millions of dollars per month to maintain social peace and subsidise grain prices. In the other countries of the region, the situation is even more serious and, every week, is getting dangerously worse.

Allow me to make a very personal observation. I am very happy that in this House, in our Assembly, all of a sudden all Europeans have started to understand that these are not problems of Eastern Europe with Russia, but problems concerning the whole of Europe. And this is unheard of.

With Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, today, we were guests on the French radio, in the best time, and we talked about Ukraine. I cannot imagine the same situation a few months ago, a few years ago. I am sure that this change of consciousness is the most important thing that has happened in the last four months.

Thank you very much.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Aleksander POCIEJ.

I now call Mr Dmytro Natalukha from Ukraine, on behalf of the European Conservatives and Democratic Alliance.

You have the floor, Sir.

Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA (Ukraine, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, dear ladies and gentlemen, Madam Chair, and of course my great colleague Mister Oleksii GONCHARENKO for bringing this forward.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before February the 24th, some 800 million people were starving in the world. Now, regions such as MENA, where the food basket has risen in some places by 100% or 200% are threatened by crisis unprecedented in decades. Countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Qatar, Somalia, are critically dependent on Ukraine's ability to supply its agricultural products.

Russia's actions, however, are hitting the most vulnerable countries where even small price increases endanger millions of people.

But developing countries are not the only ones suffering from Russia's aggression.

EU consumer prices have risen more than 8% since the beginning of the war. Most importantly, producer prices rose in the EU by 37%. The increase in prices applies exactly to those goods that are the most basic and accessible to all citizens.

Now, imagine that you're a typical German who a year ago paid €1 for a sandwich with a sausage. Today you have to pay €2 because the bun was made from Ukrainian grain, and the butter was delivered from Ukraine or made from Ukrainian milk.

Moreover, the favourite beer of Germans will also become more expensive because local brewers often use Ukrainian barley that is being blocked in the port of Odessa. Italians will pay much more for their customer's spaghetti as prices for pasta in Italy have doubled in some places due to the lack of Ukrainian wheat. Exactly the same trend exists in Britain where its fish and chips have gone up by 20% in the UK because they're being fried in Ukrainian sunflower oil.

Finally, you'll go to France and you'll eat the Brie cheese which has gone up 28% in price. The same for the Ukrainian milk and their corn, that has been fed to the French cows.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, the rising price of confectionery, dairy products, and vegetables, is a planned operation to undermine stability in Europe directly targeting vulnerable population with middle and bottom incomes, even in the most developed countries. What to say if perfumes and clothes are getting even more expensive because of lack of supplies of Ukrainian raw materials.

Russia has consistently disrupted supply chains around the world risking starvation in developing countries and driving up inflation Europe unseen in decades. Its main goal is to disintegrate, destabilise and undermine security around the world.

This is not just blackmail, this is terror by which Russia threatens the whole world. Russia are the Horsemen of the Apocalypse that bring war, famine and death. It is the duty of the entire world community to give a strong response to Russia's barbaric behaviour.

One option is to provide a safe corridor for the export of Ukrainian goods. This is, establishing under the auspices of the UN, a humanitarian safe haven over the port of Odessa, the most correct and optimal option for solving the problem of the food crisis caused by Russian aggression. This initiative should be urgently put to vote in the UN General Assembly as it directly concerns every country.

We must make every effort to unblock the ports of the Black Sea and allow the whole world, which is now held hostage by Russia, to breathe freely.

Finally, the last proposition is to hold a joint PACE and NATO Parliamentary Assembly session to address this very specific issue.

Thank you very much.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Dmytro Natalukha.

I now call Mr Damien COTTIER from Switzerland, on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

You have the floor, Sir.

Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

We are right, in this House, to debate this important issue because we are facing one of the greatest risks of international crisis that stems from two other crises, finally: The Ukrainian crisis, the Russian aggression of Ukraine, and, on the other hand, also climate change. The situation in which we find ourselves, on the one hand, is related to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the blockades that result from it, but also to the bad harvests on the side of China, and an incredible heat wave on the side of India and other such local events related to climate change, which make the situation very dangerous in terms of access to global food resources.

In this case, Ukraine and Russia together represent about 30% of the world's wheat and barley production, 15% of corn production and 75% of sunflower production. As we have said, prices have risen massively in the last few weeks and this has caused, as our colleague Mr Oleksii Goncharenko mentioned, a food risk for between 500 million and 1.5 billion people. These are the UN figures.

We are therefore facing an extremely important and serious situation. This risk is particularly strong in North Africa and the Middle East.

History shows that wars are often linked to famines. This is true, but it is not inevitable. And to avoid this fatality, we must rely on the wisdom of men and women, on the will of governments and politicians, and therefore on diplomacy. Several avenues have been mentioned today and I would like to mention a few of them.

It is important to work diplomatically to unblock the Black Sea, to try to create channels that allow access to Odessa. This implies discussions with the Ukrainian government on this subject, since there are protective mines; with the Russian government to facilitate passage, probably international efforts to escort these ships; and also discussions with the Turkish government, which has blocked access for the belligerents to these straits.

It also means that the UN and the Romanian government must make every effort to provide access to the Danube crossing. It implies that the different national governments do not block exports or imports, because there is this tendency to protectionism in this kind of crisis which is not good. It may also involve some governments limiting the production of fuel based on plant products, and some governments have already moved in that direction. And it may also involve, of course, other ways for Ukraine to export its grain; Romania has been mentioned, perhaps also on the Baltic side.

We need a strong political will to resolve this crisis because we must not add a huge famine crisis at the international level to the various crises that our planet is already experiencing, and each and every one of us would do well to intervene in this sense, not only in this Assembly, but also with the governments of our various countries.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Damien COTTIER.

Mr Bernard FOURNIER, from France, has the floor.

Mr Bernard FOURNIER (France, EPP/CD): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

The aggression of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has a global impact. In addition to the destruction of cities, the atrocities and the displacement of the population, there is the risk of a world famine.

Russian troops are occupying arable land, destroying agricultural infrastructure and imposing a blockade on Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea. As a result, no goods are entering or leaving Ukraine's largest port, Odessa.

President Zelensky estimated that currently between 20 and 25 million tons of grain are blocked and that this figure could rise to 75 million tons by this fall, given the new harvest that will begin at the end of the month. However, in 2019, 54 million tons of grain and oilseeds had been exported from Ukraine, especially to Africa.

Food and fertiliser prices have skyrocketed since the beginning of the war. As a result, world markets are likely to be affected with, on the one hand, a rise in prices that will feed an already high inflation in the world and, on the other hand, shortages that could seriously affect populations on all continents.

The risk of famine is very real, especially since Ukrainian wheat exports go to low-income countries.

I am thinking of Lebanon, which is currently experiencing a serious economic and financial crisis, and which depends on Ukraine for nearly 80% of its wheat imports. Similarly, 60% of Somalia's wheat imports come from Ukraine. According to the UN, tens of millions of people are on the verge of becoming, or are already, in a situation of food insecurity.

Russia is now trying to convince the affected countries that it is the European sanctions against Russia and Belarus that are causing the rise in food and fertiliser prices and should therefore be abandoned.

This is simply not true and we must fight it. The only one responsible for the inflation is Russia, which is blackmailing us with hunger. It is Russia's war that is endangering global food security by blocking millions of tons of Ukrainian grain and bombing Ukraine's agricultural land and infrastructure.

It is necessary to obtain the establishment of secure corridors allowing the resumption of traffic in the Black Sea. For this, all diplomatic efforts will be welcome.

Technical assistance should also be provided to Ukraine to enable the demining of the waters near the port of Odessa. France has already pledged to support any diplomatic initiative that would allow the resumption of the flow of goods and to provide technical assistance for mine clearance.

Dear colleagues, the situation is particularly worrying: we must mobilise our governments on this issue to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

I thank you for your attention.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Bernard FOURNIER.

I give the floor to Ms Lesia VASYLENKO, from Ukraine.

Ms Lesia VASYLENKO (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

I will start with a quote: "The famine will start now and they will lift the sanctions and be friends with us because they will realise that it's impossible not to be friends with us."

These are the words of Margarita Simonyan, the chief editor of Russia's main state-controlled propaganda channel, during the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum just earlier this week.

Everything you need to know about Russia and its plans regarding the global food crisis is in that quote. The sad thing is that that quote is partly true. The famine is about to begin.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that from 8 to 13 million additional people will face undernourishment in 2022-23 if Ukraine is unable to export its grain.

Ukraine today feeds over 400 million people globally. Most of them live in North Africa and the Middle East. Some countries, like Egypt, buy up to 80% of their total grain supplies from Ukraine. Every year we export 58 million tons of agricultural commodities, and we ship 90% of it through the seaports of Azov and the Black Sea.

Right now we have 25 million tons of grain which are stuck in silos across Ukraine. In a few months there will be even more, as the harvest will start to be collected.

Despite the fact that 13% of our agricultural land is covered in landmines, despite the shortage of fuel and fertiliser and the bomb storage facilities, we have managed to plant and expect to harvest 80% of all arable land in Ukraine.

Instead of being exported, however, this grain sits blocked by Russian warships. And worse, Russia continues to target the silos with its missiles and artillery. The destruction of agricultural facilities, however, is not a mere coincidence or accident or collateral damage. Russia carefully plans all of its operations. Hunger today is used by Russia as a weapon of war. Russia uses it to massively destabilise the global economy and the political world order.

The return of famine in Africa will cause security threats in the region and a new scale of migration to Europe and the West.

Knowing all of this, we have a duty and an interest to act as an international community.

First of all, we must together approach the whole situation with full awareness of the manipulations, and withstand the blackmail coming from the Kremlin.

Second, we must keep talking to the Global South: Africa, the Middle East, Asia, to make them see Russia for the empire of evil it really is.

Third, we must realise that Russia is sabotaging all negotiations on the food corridors.

Here I will echo my colleagues Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO and Mr Dmytro NATALUKHA saying that each of us must urge our respective governments to push for a collective UN resolution on the setting up of a food humanitarian safe haven on Odessa, and the deployment of special grain-keeping missions in other Black Sea ports. Alternatively, we make sure that Ukraine gets enough weapons and in due time, to make sure that it protects the global grain that is necessary to provide for global stability.

Thank you.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Lesia VASYLENKO.

I now give the floor to Mr Ahmet YILDIZ, from Türkiye.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear colleagues,

From the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, we have been discussing the consequences. These consequences are far beyond Ukraine, even Europe, and include food security which we are talking about here. Ongoing wars cast a tragic light on the need to promote food security both within Europe and around the world.

In addition to the deteriorating situation in Ukraine, the war will have serious consequences on the global food supply chain as we witness. This situation poses a major problem for countries which are dependent on imports from Russia and Ukraine. Continuing the blockade of the Black Sea will have more impacts on millions already caught in a growing hunger crisis around the world and it will continue in the ongoing months.

A safe corridor must be established for grains without time-consuming demining efforts. This imminent crisis can only be overcome by joint actions as well as regional and international co-operation. To this end, Türkiye is actively taking part in the relevant multilateral initiatives at the UN, G20 and other international organisations in continuous consultation with all parties, especially Ukraine.

In this regard, we support the UN's plan and sincerely co-operate with all sides to establish these corridors. Also, as expressed by our foreign minister, we declared we are ready to host a meeting in Istanbul to hammer out the details of the plan if the sides come to an agreement. Recently, President Erdoğan talked to the UN Secretary-General on ensuring the export of Ukrainian grains over the Black Sea, which would be effective in terms of averting a global food crisis as well as reviving the peace negotiations and ending the war through diplomacy.

Moreover, increasing energy prices are pushing higher the cost of fertilisers. This is part of food security. In return it increases the cost of agricultural products and complicates the access to food for many across the globe. To mitigate the negative effects of the food security of the conflict, well-planned and well-targeted economic and technical interventions should be made.

As a Black Sea riparian state with the longest coastline, Türkiye will continue to make all efforts in order to contribute to ending the blockade for ships transporting grains and related products.

Dear colleagues, in conclusion, what I can assure you is that Türkiye being a major buyer of Ukrainian grains and other agricultural products, and having the major responsibilities on the security of the Black Sea, and having developed a strategic defence industry relationship with Ukraine during peacetime, is trying its best to play its unique role in close co-ordination with Ukraine.

Thank you.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Ahmet YILDIZ.

I now give the floor to Ms Larysa BILOZIR, from Ukraine.

You have the floor.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you.

Dear Chair,

Dear Colleagues,

In report about the role of Council of Europe insecurity this Tuesday, it was stressed that migrants, energy, and food have been weaponised by Russia. As the barbaric war was launched, the terrorist country Russia is creating all kind of crises: energy crisis, ecocide. Now it's using food crisis as a weapon.

After the failure of blitzkrieg, Russia moved to plan B: destroying all of Ukrainians' infrastructure and economy, logistic chains, mining fields. Keeping in mind that Ukraine as an agricultural country is key to global food security. By blocking seaports that provided 90% of Ukrainian export, Russia has planned to use large scale famine as an offensive weapon against the world.

Even if all measures of the action plan of the EU-Ukraine solidarity lanes adopted by a Euro commission to facilitate Ukrainian agriculture are undermined without blocking Ukrainian ports this time will not help them substantially. At best we will export not 1 million tonnes of grain but 2 million tonnes when I need three times more. Even now it's not profitable to export wheat to Europe or outside because the cost of logistics is times more than the cost of wheat inside Ukraine.

At the same time, the number of IDPs reached 8 million Ukrainians.

Therefore, today we need 15 000 tonnes of food per day. For you to understand what has been brought to Ukraine from UN and EU humanitarian organisations: canned poultry, corn and buckwheat porridges, pastas. When these value-added products could be easily produced here in Ukraine and bought by humanitarian organisations to be time less inside rather than us now having to export agricultural raw products, like cereals, and we import value-added products.

We ask you to help to rebuild the agricultural economy, to co-finance projects in relatively safe areas such as Central and the West of Ukraine on processing agricultural products.

I personally also do not expect the port to be unblocked until the end of the war.

The way out today can be to provide an international humanitarian convoy by NATO ships, but what is more realistic: support of your countries to kick out Russia from Ukraine.

To improve the food security situation, we need anti-ship missiles, harpoons, and an air defence system, as Russia is bombing our port every day, grain elevators, in Odessa, in Mykolaiv.

Even today they bombed one of the terminals, agricultural terminals in Mykolaiv.

So far there are some pre-agreements between Russia and Türkiye on the export of Ukrainian grain without our consent. We urge our Turkish friends: nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine. We cannot believe any arrangements with Russia. We are required to demine the sea around Odessa, and what are the guarantees? Demine the sea and tomorrow Russians will be in Odessa.

Therefore, I see only one way out: pressure on Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine and then all war-related problems will be solved on their own.

Thank you.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

The floor is given to Mr Larry BROCK, from Canada.

You have the floor.

Mr Larry BROCK (Canada): Thank you Madam President, dear colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to what may be the greatest challenge facing the world today.

The blockade of the Black Sea has stripped Russia's war in Ukraine of any pretence.

It is not just an unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, but against the whole world.

The UN estimates that 1.6 billion people globally are exposed to the unprecedented cost-of-living crisis unleashed by Russia on food, fuel and finance.

Russia's blockade in the Black Sea, meant to punish Ukraine, is punishing vulnerable people everywhere, including in war-torn countries such as Yemen and Syria.

50 million people in 45 countries are currently experiencing emergency levels of hunger; a situation that risks getting worse the longer Russia's blockade is maintained.

At a time when help is needed more than ever, Russia's blockade also makes providing help more difficult.

The World Food Programme estimates that it is paying 44% more for food aid today than in 2019.

Canada has been unequivocal in its condemnation of Russia's global aggression on the hungry.

Last month we joined our G7 colleagues in committing to concrete action to address the consequences of Russia's blockade.

This includes supporting the agricultural sector in Ukraine to harvest, store and transport products to world markets.

The G7 has also committed to increasing food aid to those facing famine, including through the World Food Programme.

As a major agricultural resource exporter, Canada and Canadians are doing what we can to help address global shortages.

For example, Nutrien, the world's largest fertiliser company based in Saskatoon, recently announced that it will increase potash output by 40% in 2025, in response to global shortages caused by the war in Ukraine.

The focus right now is rightly on meeting the immediate needs of the hungry and bringing an end to the blockade, but we must also consider the lessons we must learn from Russia's aggression.

We in Canada, like you in Europe, have learned that we can no longer afford to be agnostic regarding the source of essential resources.

Supply chains must become resilient and less dependent on authoritarian regimes.

In this context, it is all the more important to recognise the fifth anniversary of the comprehensive economic trade agreement between Canada and the EU.

Such agreements promote exactly the type of economic relations that Canada and Europe must pursue, trade between responsible sustainable producers and like-minded countries.

Thank you colleagues.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Larry BROCK.

The list of speakers is exhausted.

I remind you that at the end of the current affairs debate, the Assembly is not called to vote.

This debate will have allowed an interesting exchange of views between the members of the Assembly. Thank you all.

The next item of business this morning is the debate on the report on the Review of the Partnership for Democracy concerning the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic presented by Mr Jacques MAIRE on behalf of the Political Affairs Committee (Doc. 15526), and the opinion presented by Mr Serhii KALCHENKO on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (Doc. 15553).

I remind you that we must conclude our business at 6:10 p.m., including the vote. We will therefore have to interrupt the list of speakers at about 5:40 p.m. in order to allow time for the reply from the committee and for the votes.

I remind you that the rapporteur has 7 minutes to present his report and 5 minutes to reply to the speakers at the end of the general debate.

Mister Rapporteur, Jacques MAIRE, you have the floor.

Débat : Examen du partenariat pour la démocratie concernant le Parlement de la République kirghize

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE, Rapporteur): Dear President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

We do not often speak about Kyrgyzstan in this Assembly. We will probably do so more frequently in the coming weeks and months.

Kyrgyzstan, a former Soviet republic neighbouring China, is the only country in the region with a democratic culture. It is also our first and only partner for democracy in Central Asia.

The granting of Partner for Democracy status was not a given in 2014, but a gamble made by our Assembly with this democratic society. The bet is based on this willingness to co-operate. It is a bet that is not given; it is a commitment to convergence on the part of the stakeholders.

The intention of the Kyrgyz Parliament, the "Jogorku Kenesh", in 2014 was clear. It had claimed to share the values upheld by the Council of Europe, and made a series of specific political commitments set out in paragraph 4 of Resolution 1984 (2014). It also resolved to fight, as a matter of priority, against the lack of impartiality and independence of the judiciary, the widespread practices of corruption and torture, the impunity of law enforcement officials who are perpetrators, the acts of intimidation of civil society, or the unresolved consequences of inter-ethnic tensions.

Beyond these statements, what happened?

According to the resolution that conferred this status on Kyrgyzstan, the Assembly should have evaluated this partnership two years later. However, none of the three rapporteurs to whom the committee had appointed this mission before me was able, for various reasons, to complete its work.

In November 2020, major political unrest broke out in the country. The late Dame Cheryl GILLAN recalled the need to evaluate this partnership. Eight years after the status was achieved, was the gamble made in 2014 successful? Lost? Winning? Promising?

I was appointed rapporteur in 2021 to propose an answer to this question. With the agreement of the commission, I visited Bishkek from 22 to 24 March, met with representatives of the government, parliament, civil society, international organisations. Then I drew up an assessment in a report to the commission, an assessment of our eight years of partnership. I would also like to thank Mr Serhii KALCHENKO, the rapporteur for opinion, in which you indicate that you agree with the proposed draft resolution and share its main points.

There are positive elements in this assessment. First of all, of course, Kyrgyzstan's determination to remain on the path of democracy despite pressure from its authoritarian neighbours - Kazakhstan, Russia and China in particular come to mind. The authorities have given their word to the population on a more regular basis, in particular, through referendums; the promotion of the participation of women and minorities in political life - even if the recent reform, through the uninominal ballot, has undermined this aspect; and elections considered by international observers to be "acceptable" in spite of vote-buying practices. Then there are also certain misgivings.

I will not repeat in my report the chronicle of the political crisis that has shaken this country: since the election victory of Mr Jeenbekov and then the confrontation between the latter and Mr Atambayev, the political crisis, the parliamentary elections of October 2020 and the major democratic setback that followed.

In fact, I would particularly mention the frantic pace of the elections and reforms carried out by the authorities, with a succession of constitutional and institutional, political and legal reforms, and referendums, and which are linked at the same time to a disengagement of the population that has been reflected in an increasingly low turnout in the elections.

That said, the Kyrgyz interlocutors rightly added that the system needed to be reformed, because the parliament, which was a place of tension and corruption, had made the country almost ungovernable.

However, the political and institutional situation remains controversial. The Constitution has become a presidential system, which is not a problem in itself, but unfortunately the balance of power has not really been maintained, despite the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

As far as PACE is concerned, I can only note the low level of involvement of our Kyrgyz colleagues. Of course 17 hours of travel time, of course the pandemic, but, despite everything, contacts have not been frequent.

I would indeed like to come back to our concerns about the recent human rights violations. These include gender issues, the practice of torture, inhumane treatment, particularly in police custody or detention, and difficulties with the rights of expression and fundamental freedoms of assembly.

The Kyrgyz Parliament could indeed reaffirm more strongly than today its commitment to fundamental freedoms by repealing the questionable provisions of certain recently amended laws, such as the one on "foreign agents" or the one on "protection of false and inaccurate information".

Indeed, I believe that at the time of this return of experience, of this assessment, we wish to remind the Kyrgyz authorities of their commitments. We ask them to be particularly vigilant with regard to the pressures exerted on the media and NGOs. These pressures are repeatedly undermining the vitality of Kyrgyz society.

This being said, we also noted that the Kyrgyz authorities were extremely open to dialogue and the international human rights organisations present on the spot tell us that the dialogues have an impact and that they change the position of these authorities.

Finally, I would like to point out the particular international context in which Kyrgyzstan finds itself very dependent on Russia. Nevertheless, it wanted to use its autonomy and independence to support Ukraine's sovereignty in its positions, even though the pressure was strong.

My conclusion is simple: the results are not there, but the intentions remain positive. We must now, after eight years, move from intentions to concrete progress. The most important thing is the legal convergence between Kyrgyzstan and the Council of Europe on subjects that speak to our public opinions: the protection of citizens' rights, violence against women, etc.

Since the granting of the partnership, Kyrgyzstan has not adhered to any convention or partial agreement of the Council of Europe although it had committed itself to do so. There are positive intentions there too.

My conclusion is simple. I propose that we have two years in front of us to give the Kyrgyz, who have this will, this intention, the chance to concretise their commitment. If, after two years, they start to participate in our space of debate and law, it will be very positive, and we will be able to go forward. If it is not the case, obviously, we will be able to re-evaluate the partnership by drawing the consequences of the results that have been obtained.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr Serhii KALCHENKO, you have the floor to present the opinion of the Committee.

You are on the line and you have 3 minutes.

Mr Serhii KALCHENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Rapporteur for opinion): Dear President, dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to congratulate Mr Jacques MAIRE, the rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. I thank him for his report that thoroughly addresses the political, legal and institutional developments in Kyrgyzstan since 2014 when partner for democracy status was granted by the Assembly to the Parliament to the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights fully supports the proposed draft resolution. It also fully agrees with the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy that the Parliamentary Assembly's partnership with the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan has produced mixed results.

As a general matter, granting the partner for democracy status to the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan should entail closer co-operation with the Council of Europe and this co-operation has not been very strong in the past few years. In particular, the Kyrgyz Republic has not acceded to any Council of Europe conventions or partial agreements and the constitutional reform launched in 2020 has produced controversial results and puts at risk the country's institutional balance, as stressed in particular in the Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR of March 2021.

Moreover, the human rights situation in the Kyrgyzstan has not improved much since 2014, when the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights examined it in its opinion on the report of the Committee on Political Affairs on the Kyrgyz Parliament's request for partner for democracy status. Although the report by Mr Jacques MAIRE rightly points out the increased number of threats and acts of intimidation towards human rights defenders and civil society, some other human rights issues should be pointed out too. They concern in particular law enforcement agents' impunity for acts of torture or ill-treatment, poor detention conditions, lack of independence of the judiciary, issues with the right to a fair trial, enforced disappearances, problems with access to a lawyer while in detention and violations of the right to freedom of assembly.

New concerns may also appear in relation to the controversial provisions of some recently amended or adopted laws, like the Code of Administrative Procedure, which now contains provisions on the prosecution of "extremist" individuals or organisations, the law on "foreign agents" and the law on "protection against false and inaccurate information".

Thus, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan should make more efforts to pursue its co-operation with the Council of Europe and should make it more concrete in order to further develop democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It should regularly – preferably on an annual basis – inform the Assembly about the state of progress in implementing Council of Europe principles.

In case there is still no improved co-operation, the Assembly should consider suspending or even withdrawing partner for democracy status.

Hence, the Committee on Legal Affairs has proposed some amendments to further strengthen the draft resolution regarding human rights aspects and to stress the need for the Kyrgyz Parliament to be more proactive in fulfilling its obligations stemming from the "partner of democracy" status.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, dear Mister Serhii KALCHENKO, for presenting the opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

In the general debate, I now call Mr Ahmet Ünal ÇEVİKÖZ, from Türkiye, on behalf of the Socialist, Democratic and Green Group.

Mr Ahmet Ünal ÇEVİKÖZ (Türkiye, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues, dear friends, preparing this report must have been quite difficult. One certainly needs resilience to reflect appropriately on what the Kyrgyz Republic aims at, what it is going through and why it is important to keep this country engaged with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Thanks to our rapporteur, we have a very accurate and informative report in front of us.

First, I would like to share a personal experience with you which I presume will help to understand why the Kyrgyz people need to be anchored with our organisation.

I first visited Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1993. It was after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. I was surprised to see the statue of Lenin in a small square behind the building which is known to be the history museum today. I was surprised because many – if not almost all – statues of Lenin were destroyed in the former Soviet Republics, but it was still standing there in Bishkek. I asked why this was so. I was told that Kyrgyz people discussed the matter seriously and decided that the Soviet past was a part of their history, that they would not rewrite history, and that they would show respect to their past no matter what the present is and what their future would be. This decision has never been contested in the last 30 years and I think this is a very democratic stance.

Eight years ago, when the Kyrgyz Republic made its official request to become a partner for democracy of the Council of Europe, they did not fail to declare that they shared values upheld by our member states. It is true, however, in the last eight years, the Kyrgyz Republic has not acceded to any Council of Europe conventions. It is true that the authorities of Kyrgyzstan have not taken account of the recommendations made by the Venice Commission. But it is also notable and remarkable to remember that Kyrgyzstan is the first, and as far as I know, until now, the only central Asian country to apply for partner for democracy status with our Assembly.

It is the willingness and the intention that counts, and we have to take this into consideration.

It is important to remember that this country has also abolished the death penalty.

It is particularly important to note that Kyrgyzstan is determined to defend the sovereignty of Ukraine and not to associate itself with the Russian aggression. In fact, Kyrgyzstan advocates peaceful settlement of disputes between these two countries. Kyrgyzstan has gone through serious turmoil in the last couple of years. We do see the weaknesses and failings of their democratic institutions, but we also see that they strive to go along the path to democracy in spite of all those internal and external interventions.

It is, therefore, necessary to keep them engaged, not to discourage and eliminate them to our values but to encourage them to continue their efforts to comply with the requirements of partnership with our Assembly. And this report gives us the opportunity to offer this important chance to the Kyrgyz people.

Let us support it.

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

Now I give the floor to Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN, from Armenia. He speaks on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

He is always standing already, ready to take the floor - you have the floor!

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you so much, Kyrgyzstan is a really special place with very good people, very hospitable.

The Kyrgyz Republic is one of the countries of the former Soviet Union, and especially in Central Asia, which tries to be the most transparent, the most open that it can be.

I am saying this because the challenges and threats which Kyrgyzstan has had during these last 30 years of independence were not the same, as for example, the threats for other countries.

Kyrgyzstan's history and level of engagement in the processes which actually have taken in the territory of the former Soviet Union was really very interesting and important.

For sure, I have seen even before joining this Assembly the great will of Kyrgyz people to share European values.

The fact that we actually implemented several reforms, in particular the abolition of the death penalty and so on, is witnessing that we are trying to come closer to European values.

Being far geographically, we're trying to be closer to the European values.

But I would like just to say that for sure this is a very complicated road.

We should provide the necessary conditions for bringing the Kyrgyz Republic and the Kyrgyz Parliament, Jogorku Kengesh, closer to our values.

But simultaneously, I should address my Kyrgyz friends, Kyrgyz colleagues, and say that nothing is given as granted.

If we are "promised" and I know what promise means in Kyrgyzstan - if you promise to undertake reforms, you should do this, otherwise this would be a very complicated role.

I do believe - I'm almost sure - that the Kyrgyz authorities are really interested in further co-operation.

We somehow should, together in a joint effort, do all that is possible to root European values into Kyrgyzstan, and our Kyrgyz colleagues should do all that is possible to be more active in this Assembly.

I do believe that their active participation in the work of our Assembly would be a serious asset - not only for us, not only for the Kyrgyz Republic, but for the whole European-wide region.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, dear Misterr Vladimir VARDANYAN.

Next in the debate I call Mr Bob van PAREREN, from the Netherlands. He speaks on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

Bob, you have the floor.

Mr Bob van PAREREN (Netherlands, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

The report and the opinion of the Committee are clear. To get democracy is hard work, to keep it needs continuous energy. It is clear and well-written that there is still a lot to do, a lot has to be improved to live up to the requirements of a democratic society.

The Committee has great hope in the newly elected parliament.

We support their conclusions in this. We encourage Kyrgyzstan to take the lead to change.

We understand that for them a lot of steps have to be made.

The Committee is in favour of your expected initiatives, we learn.

Kyrgyzstan, take this chance. For the benefit of your people, share the great family of the Council of Europe and most welcome when you are ready.

Thank you, Chairman.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Bob van PAREREN.

Next in the debate, I call Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV, from Azerbaijan, and he represents the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President, dear colleagues,

First of all, on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to start by thanking the Rapporteur Mr Jacques MAIRE for this very important report.

The Council of Europe has long ago overstepped the limit of being a purely European organisation.

For several years, a number of non-European countries have been directly participating in the meetings of the Assembly and actively co-operating with the Council of Europe.

From this point of view, just as close co-operation with us is beneficial for the Kyrgyz Republic, which received the status of a partner for democracy with the Parliamentary Assembly eight years ago, it is equally important for us to have systematic relations with this country, one of the newly independent states in Central Asia, apparently outside our geography.

Because we are talking about establishing a network of values such as human rights, democracy, the rule of law in a wider area of contact.

We have been closely following the changes that have happened in the Kyrgyz Republic in recent years and the complex developments that have taken place, and we have witnessed the political concerns also that have occurred since the 2020 elections.

Of course, all this could not but have a negative impact on the normal development of relations.

Notwithstanding, Kyrgyzstan has made commitments in the eight years since it received the status of a democratic partner of the Council of Europe. It has not yet acceded to any convention.

Nevertheless, we must evaluate this not as a divergence of our paths, but as a consequence of the current historical circumstances.

Today, the country must do a lot to ensure the adequate formation of democratic institutions, and this situation should not generate any hesitation in the Council of Europe.

On the contrary, it is the Council of Europe that can give more attention and support to the Kyrgyz Republic in this direction, and its efforts in this direction should not be spared.

To do this, it is necessary to continue co-operation and partnership more consistently.

In fact, Kyrgyzstan itself has a strong desire to benefit more from the Council of Europe.

To realise the intentions, it is necessary to create more favourable conditions for Kyrgyzstan, to involve it more closely in the work of the Council of Europe, in the activities of the committees, through intensive contacts.

Dear colleagues,

"Jooorku Kenesh" - this is the name of the Kyrgyz parliament. "Kenesh" is one of the oldest Turkic words, signifying "council, meeting". Kyrgyzstan is the sole Turkic state whose parliament is expressed only in ancient national words.

That is, the propensity for discussion, advice, exchange of opinion - is one of the most stable qualities of these people since ancient times.

We would like to believe and hope that the rapporteurs on Kyrgyzstan, unlike their predecessors, will make their reports have more successful outcomes, and will contribute to the progress of Kyrgyzstan-Council of Europe relations and democratic partnership in the desired direction.

Thank you

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

Now, the last speaker on behalf of the political groups is Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, from Iceland, and he represents the position of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON (Iceland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Mister President,

To begin with, I want to thank the rapporteur for a sharp review of the development and progress of the partnership for democracy between the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic and our Assembly. The report reflects on many challenges the partnership was meant to navigate through in order to strengthen especially the foundations of democratic rights and security.

Before being granted the status of partner for democracy, the Kyrgyz Republic declared that it shared the values upheld by the Council of Europe. However, as it appears eight years later, sadly the partnership appears to have produced mixed results.

We have to take notice of alarming reports from Kyrgyz civil society about violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Especially those that relate to gender issues, the practice of torture, and the respect for important fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression.

Further, it is also worrisome to learn about the legislative steps taken recently to allow for the prosecution of organisations or individuals considered extremist. As noted by observers, this legislation poses a threat to civil society, actors and political opposition groups.

I would like to note that similar laws have been used in Council of Europe member States to hinder the work of the opposition and emphasise that it is the duty of the Council of Europe to take swift action to counter such developments wherever they occur.

According to the report, the recent changes made to the electoral legislation in Kyrgyzstan deprived a large proportion of the population of the right to stand for elections to the Parliament. This especially affected women, young people and those that have not completed higher education.

I would like to echo the rapporteur's calls to strengthen the efforts of the Kyrgyz government to promote women's participation in politics and public affairs, combat all forms of gender-based discrimination, ensure effective equality between women and men and combat violence against women.

Despite the Kyrgyz Republic currently falling short of upholding some important pillars of the partnership, there have been positive developments in fundamental areas such as the abolition of the death penalty, and signs of further improvements.

In conclusion, it is important for the partnership to proceed in a productive manner, and I hope that Kyrgyzstan authorities, sign and ratify Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements open to non-member states, especially those relating to human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

Thank you.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Bjarni JÓNSSON.

Now we continue with the rest of the list of speakers and first I give the floor to Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, from Italy.

Marina, you have the floor.

Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI (Italy, SOC): Thank you very much. I do apologise.

President, dear colleagues,

I think the report perfectly reflects the fact that this is all about a story with two parts. On the one hand, there hasn't been any real compliance with Council of Europe standards nor those of the Venice Commission. On the other hand, there is an express willingness to continue with this co-operation process on the part of both institutions as well as the civil society. Those are something we were able to see for ourselves when we went there to observe the elections. We saw there is a very lively civil society there.

Ultimately, when it comes to Kyrgyzstan's position on recent dramatic international events, and also in the light of its geographical location, clearly the situation overall is highly encouraging. Now, since we are experiencing such a difficult situation, then of course we need to strengthen dialogue, and I think that we need to be patient and, of course, we have different levels and standards between member states.

That is why dialogue is needed, particularly when the road to democracy is at risk of backsliding or even complete abandonment.

So I obviously agree with the rapporteur's proposal that we continue with this partnership, and that we support and encourage all stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan, who in different ways are working unflinchingly to try to endeavour to implement democracy and the rule of law, as well as to bolster civil and societal institutions.

And therefore, I think that the Council of Europe should continue to play an important role at a time at which we are all coming to realise that we need to continually strengthen and defend democracy.

Thank you.

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

Next in the debate, I call Mr Attila TILKI, from Turkey.

Attila, you have the floor.

Mr Attila TILKI (Hungary, EC/DA): From Hungary.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): I said something completely wrong so you didn't hear that, Mr Attila TILKI!

Of course I said Mr Attila TILKI, from Hungary.

Mr Attila TILKI (Hungary, EC/DA): Thank you, my name is Turkish.

Dear colleagues, despite the significant geographic distance between our region, Hungary considers the countries of Central Asia as important partners. We are striving for intensive and multifaceted relationships with the countries of the Central Asia region, particularly in areas of economic and trade co-operation.

The development of Hungary's eastern relations is a priority of our foreign policy. Central Asia is one of the target regions of this policy. This is based on the principle that the stability of Central Asia is of utmost importance not only for the region itself but for Europe as well.

Hungary is committed to international development support for the Kyrgyz Republic, especially in areas where our country has competitive knowledge, significant experience and high-quality technologies. Hungary welcomes and supports the Kyrgyz Republic's efforts to build relations with European countries. Therefore, we are pleased that the country is developing its co-operation with the Council of Europe. We hope that the partnership between the Council of Europe and the Kyrgyz Parliament will be effective and successful.

Hungary is ready to deepen further its political-economic relationship with Kyrgyzstan. For this reason, we have taken our bilateral state relations to a new level by signing the Hungary–Kyrgyz strategic partnership declaration. We welcome the opening of the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in Budapest on the 4 October last year, creating new opportunities for co-operation.

From October last year the Hungarian Embassy in Bishkek has begun issuing visas which have the promotion of relations and mobility. And of course, we have to speak about that, our diplomatic relationship between Hungary and Kyrgyzstan is 30 years old this year.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you, dear Mister Attila TILKI.

And once again, for the record, Attila is from the beautiful country of Hungary.

From the beautiful country of entry of Türkiye is Ms Arzu ERDEM, and she now gets the floor.

Ms Arzu ERDEM (Türkiye, NR): Thank you very much.

Dear President, dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur for the preparation of this important report.

It should have been underlined that Kyrgyzstan, as the most democratic country in Central Asia, despite having some shortcoming, is an important partner for us, the Council of Europe and other Western-based international organisations.

By establishing close co-operation with these international organisations, Kyrgyzstan has achieved significant progress, and shown willingness and commitment to strengthen democracy in the past.

However, the last couple of years were challenging for Kyrgyzstan; political turmoil after violent demonstrations started in October 2020, led to serious instability in the country and disrupted the normal functioning of democratic institutions and processes.

Nevertheless, this instability has been overcome to some degree in the short term.

Although many problems addressed by the Council of Europe as well as other international organisations in the past are unresolved, and Kyrgyzstan still has a long way to go towards democracy and the rule of law; if we look at the long term, we should see that it has achieved significant progress.

I think that it is more important to discuss, as the Council of Europe, how we approach the country, which has a partner for democracy status in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Therefore, we should continue our support to Kyrgyzstan and follow closely the steps that would be undertaken by this country to fulfil its commitments.

We need to bear in mind that Kyrgyzstan has important democratic experience and a vibrant civil society.

In addition, co-operation of Kyrgyzstan with the Council of Europe, especially through the Venice Commission, has produced positive results in the past.

So, I believe that we should maintain our sincere co-operation and aid to this country.

In order to increase our impact, I believe that it is important to work closely with other international partners, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE, to strengthen our efforts to support democratic developments not just in Kyrgyzstan but also other countries in the region.

Finally, I send my greetings from Türkiye to the friendly and brotherly country, Kyrgyzstan.

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

And now last, but not least speaker on my list is Mr Bakyt TENTISHEV, from Kyrgyzstan.

You have the floor, sir.

Mr Bakyt TENTISHEV (Kyrgyzstan): Thank you Mister Chair, dear colleagues and participants of the session,

On behalf of the Jogorku Kengesh of the Kyrgyz Republic I would like to express our gratitude to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the invitation to participate and be present in the summer session.

As you know, in 2014, the Jogorku Kengesh of the Kyrgyz Republic was granted the status of "partner for democracy".

We highly value and cherish this status.

The experience and knowledge gained over these years have significantly increased the potential of the institution of parliamentarism in the country, and strengthened us in advocating for common values, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Let me emphasise that problems such as corruption fail to respect human rights and freedom, as well as the stagnation of democratic processes are common challenges for all the Council of Europe member States.

It is possible to cope with them only by joining the efforts. In the fight against corruption, the work continues to fully study the possible accession of the Kyrgyz Republic to the group of states against corruption.

The freedom of the media in Kyrgyzstan is a matter of special pride of the country. There are no obstacles to their free expression and function, and there is no state censorship.

In 2021, according to the freedom of speech rating of the international organisation Reporters Without Borders, Kyrgyzstan ranked 79th out of 115 countries, and improved its rating by 90 points compared to 2018.

We also continue to work towards accession to the Council of Europe's open conventions.

We are currently party to the Lisbon Convention of 11 April 1997, on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region.

The Kyrgyz Republic has also submitted an application for accession to the Council of Europe Convention of the Transfer of Convicted Persons, of 21 March 1983.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe considered the application of the Kyrgyz side, made a positive decision, and invited the Kyrgyz Republic to join this Convention.

We are also consulting with the Council of Europe with a view to acceding to the 1957 Council of Europe conventions on Extradition and on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters of 1959.

The Kyrgyz Republic successful co-operates with the Council of Europe in the framework of the Rule of Law Programme in Central Asia.

We believe that through this programme, we will be able to improve the life for citizens and bring the basic indicators of human rights and the rule of law up to European and international standards.

Taking all this into account, the Kyrgyz Republic is primarily based on democratic principles.

We consider it mutual interesting for our future co-operation within the framework of the status of partner for democracy of the Council of Europe, for the subsequent development of democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, as well as protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Kyrgyzstan.

Once again, thank you all for the warm welcome, for the time provided, and for your attention.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, dear Mister Bakyt TENTISHEV, for your contribution.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mister Bakyt TENTISHEV, for your contribution.

The list of speakers is concluded.

I call for the reply of the Committee.

Mr Jacques MAIRE, you have 5 minutes to reply to the speakers.

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE, Rapporteur): Making my voice last 5 minutes is going to be difficult!

First of all, thank you for this excellent debate to the different group speakers. I think that there is a benevolence, an availability, an attention paid by everyone, which is indeed a positive sign and a message of hope that you, M. Bakyt TENTISHEV, will be able to take back to Bishkek.

It is true, as M. Ahmet Ünal ÇEVİKÖZ said, that I have seen this statue of Lenin that has not, indeed, been taken down. It is one of the few countries, it is true, that there is a form of tolerance to the diversity of opinions; it is a country that is diverse, including in its aspirations and in its population; and this ability to live together, not in a calm way but a little Gallic, I would say, a little French with a lot of debates and confrontations, is something that links us from Paris to Bishkek.

It is true that from this point of view, it is difficult for us to judge not the intention but the credibility of the commitments. This is a somewhat solemn moment, but when we look at both the government and the Parliament, there are both pro-European and very committed actors of progress, and then there are also actors who are rather in a negative game, in a game of blocking and in a place of brake. These actors of progress, these actors of rapprochement say to us: "Help us win the battle". And this battle is not certain. The outcome is not there.

I have a feeling about this: my feeling is that we have a very particular challenge. We have a poor country, with a poor Parliament, with limited operational means to come here to Strasbourg and, of course, a partnership is 50% of the way done by everyone. I think that if we do not make a little more of this way than others, to ensure that Kyrgyzstan can exploit this relationship, we will have difficulties.

Among the topics that may need to be addressed, there are two that I will address. Would it be possible for international funding actors to invest in Kyrgyzstan and invest in the cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the Council of Europe? It seemed possible to me in Bishkek. Organisations are interested in helping Kyrgyzstan to work with us, but we have to take care of it.

Second element, there is indeed a follow-up to do. I think that if we do not have a mechanism in the next two years to ensure continuity of the relationship, it is likely that the same causes of distance, difficulty, lack of means, will produce somewhat the same effects they do today. I therefore call on the Committee, Mr George

KATROUGALOS, and also on you, Mr President, Mr Tiny KOX, to imagine how we can ensure that, within the Assembly, someone is particularly mobilised to lead this dialogue over the next two years and to maintain this relationship so that there are positive developments.

With regard to this, we heard some very interesting things from Mr Bakyt TENTISHEV: I would like to reinterpret them. Obviously, there is a will, results from the point of view that Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI pointed out, on the efficiency of the electoral process, even if there is possible contestation. Results from the point of view of democracy and civil society, and the fact that this Constitution is interpreted, in reality, in a rather liberal way. So these are still points that need to be noted, and then I heard a form of openness but which, from my point of view, is not quite sufficient. That is to say, when we listen to the conventions to which Mr Bakyt TENTISHEV said that Kyrgyzstan was ready to open up and that it was ready to consider, the recognition of diplomas, the transfer of prisoners, the convention on extraditions: it is perfect, it is interesting. But these are administrative and operational tools that aim to facilitate cooperation between states. They are not yet, today, instruments that protect human rights or Kyrgyz citizens.

And from this point of view, just one example, but at a time when we are all fighting collectively to ensure that domestic violence is an element of visibility, the fact that a Central Asian country, for example, a Muslim country, is in the process of ratifying the Istanbul Convention, would be an extremely important political message. And, in these cases, it would be important for Kyrgyzstan, and it would be important for the Council of Europe.

In conclusion, I would like to say thank you for the welcome we received from our colleagues in Bishkek. Thank you obviously to my partner who allowed me, dear Pavel, to be guided in these mazes of Bishkek which are not very simple. And then thank you all because this is my last intervention, and I am happy to do it on this subject.

Thank you.

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

I will say some words at the real end of this discussion. But we still have work to do, but indeed we took notice of the fact that this might be your last debate.

So we will come back to that issue later.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Does Mr George KATROUGALOS wish to reply on behalf of the Committee?

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Thank you, Mister Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank Mr Jacques MAIRE for his impressive work, and a thorough report. He has managed to deliver where his predecessors did not make it. I would like also to thank Mr Serhii KALCHENKO for his contribution to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

I am especially glad that we had also the chance to hear the views from Kyrgyzstan by a member of the parliament there. And I think that Mr Jacques MAIRE has made the situation clear. There is political will, there are aspirations on behalf of the Kyrgyz government in order to progress democratically to be part of this common European legal space for freedoms and rights. But despite these aspirations, the results are mixed. I think the best indication for that is that the country has not yet acceded to a number of conventions of the Council of Europe and although it is very positive that, as we already heard the rapporteur remark, there is an intention to join some of them, they have more or less administrative character. They are not of the core, let's say conventions, that really have a function of protection.

I think that we should not just ignore other positive issues. It seems that the visit of our rapporteur there in March has given an additional motivation to the country to make additional efforts. I think that there is a clear indication of more interest on behalf of the authorities to materialise their aspirations, and I believe that the new parliament elected in 2021 is going to be more efficient towards this road.

The Committee has unanimously accepted the report and also the proposal by the rapporteur that we should continue the partnership, while at the same time maintaining a rigorous dialogue with a new review to be contacted in two years. And, of course, in our meeting earlier we took a position in favour of most amendments proposed by the colleague from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

Therefore, dear colleagues, I strongly encourage you to support this report. And finally, since it could be the last presence in the hemicycle of my friend and colleague, Mr Jacques MAIRE, I would like on behalf of all of you to thank him for the important contribution and I am sure that we are going to find each other sooner or later on the same path of defence of basic human values, freedoms, which are the foundation of the Council of Europe. [in French:] Thank you, dear Jacques.

Vote : Examen du partenariat pour la démocratie concernant le Parlement de la République kirghize

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

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy has presented a draft resolution [Doc. 15526] to which 9 amendments and one sub-amendment have been tabled.

Amendments will be taken in the order in which they appear in the Compendium.

I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds.

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved by the Committee, should be declared as agreed by the Assembly.

I also understand that Amendment 6 was unanimously agreed by the Committee but it must be taken individually with the tabled sub-amendment.

Is that so, Mister George KATROUGALOS?

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): It is so, Mister Chair.

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

Does anybody object? I do not see objections.

Therefore I declare that amendments 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 to the draft resolution have been agreed.

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

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 3, 4 and 9 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority be declared as rejected.

Is that so, Mister George KATROUGALOS?

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): This is exact, Mister President.

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

Does anybody object?

I do not see - so as there is no objection:

I declare Amendments 3, 4, and 9 to the draft resolution rejected.

Mr George KATROUGALOS (Greece, UEL, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Mister Chair, there is somebody.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Madam Mariia MEZENTSEVA, do you object?

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Well, I think Mr Serhii KALCHENKO, who was preparing the opinion for the resolution, was online so he should have done it. But I assume he is not online right now.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Sorry, he is online.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Oh yes, dear President, if it is possible he will do it instead of me.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): I will give the floor to the Rapporteur.

The question is did you - one second, we do not hear you.

Now we hear you.

The question is:

Do you object to the fact that the Amendments 3, 4 and 9 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority be declared as rejected, or do you agree with the decision of the Committee?

Mr Serhii KALCHENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Rapporteur for opinion): Well, I'm ready to agree upon the issue of Amendments 3 and 9, but I would like the Assembly to consider and probably to adopt Amendment 4.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): Okay, for Amendment 4 there is an objection.

I remind the Assembly that the objection must be supported by at least 10 members. Will those who support this objection indicate their support by standing – 10 or more.

I see a lot of important people but all together they do not make up 10, including the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. So sorry we now declare that the Amendments have been rejected.

There was some bookkeeping to do over here. Please excuse me.

I now call Mr Serhii KALCHENKO to support Amendment 6 on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

Mister Serhii KALCHENKO, you have 30 seconds.

Mr Serhii KALCHENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Rapporteur for opinion): This Amendment aims at specifying that the co-operation with the Venice Commission in particular should focus not only on laws, but also on constitutional provisions.

That also adds a reference to the Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission OSCE deal on the draft constitution that was further adopted, entered into legal force, and became a new version of the constitution.

I would say that during the meeting of the Committee, Mr Jacques MAIRE suggested a sub-amendment; I agree to his sub-amendment.

Thank you.

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

I call Mr Jacques MAIRE on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy to support the sub-amendment. You have 30 seconds.

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE, Rapporteur): Yes, it is simply to insist on strengthening co-operation with the Venice Commission, but not so much in relation to the Constitution.

So the sub-amendment is to delete the words "the Constitution" - and therefore to bring the legislation of the countries closer to international standards and to implement the previous recommendations, in particular on electoral matters and those contained in the joint opinion on the draft Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.

So we take the amendment and simply delete the words "the Constitution". The question is very simple, the Constitution was adopted recently, it does not make sense to put pressure to change a Constitution that has just been adopted in the next two years when there are so many demands on many other laws.

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

I understand that the mover of the Amendment accepted the sub-amendment, so I now shall put the sub-amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

The sub-amendment is agreed to.

We will now consider the main Amendment, as amended.

Does anybody wish to speak against the Amendment as amended?

That is not the case.

What is the opinion of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy on the Amendment as amended?

Mister Serhii KALCHENKO?

Mr Serhii KALCHENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Rapporteur for opinion): Yes, I support the sub-amendments.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the amendment as amended, to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

The amendment is carried.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Doc. 15526 as amended.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

The resolution is adopted unanimously.

Thank you very much, congratulations to the rapporteur.

This is the end of the debate, but is also the end of an era, as the era of Mr Jacques MAIRE has now finished, although he is still available in our Assembly, this was his last report in our Assembly, the last of many of the reports that he developed on behalf of our Assembly and the Committees in which he participated.

Jacques, you were, you decided not to run in the last elections, and that was your decision, you did not ask for an opinion of any committee, you decided it for yourself, if you would have asked the opinion of the President, he would have said: run, Jacques, run, and I'll turn away from the assembly, but stay here.

You have shown, and this I really mean, you have shown to be an excellent colleague in this Assembly. You are often characterised as a diplomat, and nothing wrong with a good diplomat is what I always say.

You have to be in an Assembly that calls itself "meeting place", an agora for parliamentary diplomacy. You have to be at least once in a while a diplomat.

As a President, now, and as a colleague in the Presidential Committee for years, I can say that your diplomatic solutions helped our Assembly a lot to take the right decisions and not to enter into fruitless debates, which are also always available and can always have been taken up. You were there on crucial moments when we had to take decisions in this Assembly, you were there, representing your group, the group that you lead, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, in an excellent way.

And I see that Mr Iulian BULAI is sitting behind, yes, in an excellent way. So, Iulian, it will not be easy to step in the shoes of Jacques.

You were playing an important role as a member of the Assembly, as a rapporteur, as the Chairperson of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and as a very much experienced member of the Presidential Committee.

Some call it the politburo of the organisation, I would prefer to call it with its name: the Presidential Committee, that you played an enormous important role.

And you appeared to be a good friend, as well. And I thank you for all of that: being a good friend, being a good colleague in the Presidential Committee, being an excellent rapporteur, being an excellent leader of the ALDE group, and being a great colleague in this Assembly.

So I would like to ask everybody not to take the floor by using your microphone, but using your hands and give Jacques a big applause.

Thank you, thank you very much.

Mr Serhii KALCHENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA): For the record, I would like to mention that, due to a technical error beyond my control, I could not vote during the vote on the draft resolution on the Review of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz. My intention was to vote in favour of Amendment 6 to the draft Resolution and in favour of the draft Resolution.

Débat : Le contrôle de la communication en ligne: une menace pour le pluralisme des médias, la liberté d'information et la dignité humaine

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): We now come to the debate on the report titled "The control of online communication: a threat to media pluralism, freedom of information and human dignity", Document 15537 presented by Mr Frédéric REISS on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

In order to finish by 8:00 p.m., I will interrupt a list of speakers at about 7:45 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote on the draft resolution.

I call Mr Frédéric REISS, rapporteur, to take the floor. You have 7 minutes.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you, Madam President.

I have Jacques Maire's badge here, if someone can tell him. A short announcement to begin with.

Dear Colleagues,

At the end of a long stretch of work, we arrive this evening at the presentation of a draft resolution on a very topical subject. Is there a need for control of online communication? If so, can this control become a threat to media pluralism, freedom of information and human dignity?

I have jumped on the bandwagon since the first rapporteur was Mr Sos AVETISYAN from Armenia. I would like to thank him for his initial work.

The draft resolution takes into account the remarks made by the experts we met during a meeting in Paris. Likewise, I took into account the positions of the European Commission and the comments and analyses of the representatives of the intergovernmental Council of Europe.

I would like to thank my colleagues who contributed to the meeting in Rome of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and the Media, and I would like to greet the chairman who is next to me. The text that was unanimously adopted in Rome was, for the final drafting, subject to amendments concerning Wikileaks and its founder Julian Assange. This is an aspect that we did not mention in the report. It is true that the initial objective of Wikileaks was to provide pluralistic and transparent information. We know that taking better account of whistle-blowers is a current concern of our respective governments. We will have the opportunity to discuss this after the general discussion.

Turning to the substance of this report, it is obvious today that the flow of information online has increased exponentially and that everyone knows the importance of online communication today. Everyone wants to "get the word out" or "get known," and those involved in politics know this.

The use of artificial intelligence and automated filters for content moderation is probably not a panacea. Artificial intelligence has become a major part of our daily lives, but we must be careful. As some members of the culture committee have pointed out, we must not forget the indispensable presence of human decision makers.

We all want open and transparent communication policies, and we can only be concerned about the concentration of online information flows in a small handful of Internet intermediaries. Their impact on human rights, democracy and the rule of law is indeed a concern.

For a long time, the term "Internet intermediary" was a bit of a catch-all concept, but today, the Council of Europe has defined precisely these service providers who facilitate interactions between individuals and legal entities.

Today, we can see that private Internet companies have an inordinate power in the economic and technological field and can thus influence almost all aspects of people's private and social lives.

When questioned, these oligopolies say they guarantee the diversity of information sources as well as the pluralism of ideas and opinions online by using the artificial intelligence I mentioned earlier. The limits of this must be underlined.

There is the emergence of a non-democratic political power. Indeed, when electoral communication, for example, moves to the digital sphere, whoever manages to control it can become, especially during election campaigns, a formidable political force. In France, the elements of electoral propaganda documentation have always existed – they were paper leaflets, often – but propaganda on the Net is obviously much more violent and can sometimes convey misleading and manipulative information and thus weigh on the result of an election.

At the time this report was prepared, we did not know that the Russian Federation would invade Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It is certain that in times of war, misinformation, or the failure to inform the population, can be the cause of culpable behavior that endangers human lives, and sometimes even – and this is a certainty – causes deaths, including among the civilian population. I wanted to make this clear in the margin of this report.

We all want a variety of quality information and a plurality of sources available online.

Algorithmic systems are obviously very useful with the phenomenal amount of information circulating. But beware of their misuse or even dishonest use to shape information, knowledge, opinions or even emotions. Allow me to insist on paragraph 7 of the draft resolution which states:

"With the emergence of Internet intermediaries, harmful content is spreading at a very high speed on the web. Internet intermediaries should be particularly mindful of their duty of care when producing or managing content available on their platforms or when acting as curators or publishers, while avoiding the removal of third-party content, except for clearly illegal content."

Finally, to conclude, I would like to mention the trend of regulating social media platforms, with sometimes endangering freedom of expression. There can indeed be perverse effects; this is the purpose of paragraph 10 of the resolution. If legislators choose to impose overly-strict regulations on all Internet intermediaries, including the new small businesses that are setting up, this could consolidate the position of the large players that are already on the market. This is obviously not the goal. However, in order to avoid extremely dominant situations, new players would be welcome.

Therefore, a gradual approach is recommended to adapt different types of regulations to different types of platforms. This is what I propose in this draft resolution.

I thank you.

Ms Ingrid SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Frédéric REISS.

We continue the debate of the speakers on behalf of the political groups.

First I call Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK from Group of the European People's Party, online, but I'm not sure - no?

Then we continue.

The next one is Ms Nigar ARPADARAI from Azerbaijan and European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

The floor is yours.

Ms Nigar ARPADARAI (Azerbaijan, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much.

Dear Colleagues,

Today, control over online communication literally means power. Never in the history of humankind was there such an efficient way to influence people's behaviour often without their knowledge. It is by all means a scary prospect. Even scarier is the fact that there is no real accountability mechanism for either social media captains, governments or security services when they introduce online control or manipulation mechanisms.

There are currently few obvious trends on the internet. The first one is economic. Large corporations, owners of social media and producers of gadgets and apps create software and hardware tools for dual usage. On the one hand, the microphone in your phone helps you to talk to friends. On the other, it writes down your behaviour patterns and turns them into your profile, which belongs not to you, but to corporations. Through this profile, the corporations know your preferences and motives, and they do not only offer things to buy but they would rather nudge you into buying them. They use your weaknesses in order to obtain profit. Well, this is how advertising has worked throughout history. This is not new. But today, there is no real regulation on this. Regulators are far behind markets. They do not even understand what happens online. Infringement to the rights of people, manipulation, and corporate greed are online realities.

Another trend in business is that these realities lead to monopolisation. Large social media owners with access to mass personal data acquire an unreasonable advantage over small businesses that have no access to it. Large corporations become larger, small businesses suffer from aggressive interruption by large companies. We are not talking decades, this is happening now.

Another and even more troublesome trend is the comfortable silence of large countries' security services about what they actually do online. The current architecture of the internet gives them unchecked and unlimited influence. It is the influence over both persons across the globe, regardless of their location or nationality, and it is the influence over the small countries and nations which do not have the privilege of

having special relations with social media owners. Any statement that social media is pure business and entertainment is utter nonsense. They are weapons. Total lack of accountability of what the large countries do on the internet is a dangerous situation and it will lead to explosive consequences sooner or later. They will eventually undermine smaller nations in their sovereignty, they will interfere in domestic politics. Even for a noble cause, we here in the Council of Europe – the oldest and the most well-known human rights organisation in the world – must reform ourselves in order to adapt to this massive challenge. We are not really fit for this discussion yet and we need to review the mission and plans of the organisation. Unfortunately, free internet became the internet where the rich and powerful abuse the small and poor. This inadvertently leads to the violation of human rights, a core mission for this organisation.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

We continue to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI, from Türkiye.

The floor is yours.

Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI (Türkiye, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you Chair,

I would like to thank the rapporteur for this detailed and comprehensive work.

It's quite a difficult job to write a report which stands for freedom of speech, and at the same time discusses controlling the misuse of this, with regard to misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and to draw the correct line in between.

An independent and pluralistic media environment is of utmost important to our democracies.

The press, radio and TV agencies had their different models and clearly defined their own information sources.

But in the digital age, traditional media expanded with online media and social media.

That improved freedom of speech and personal participation in a good way, but at the same time misuse of that freedom increased as never before.

So what should we do?

Should we give up our freedom of choice and hand in ourselves to artificial intelligence, or to the mercy of control freak governments?

The intermediary companies gained enormous power and created trade barriers as never before.

Their priorities and benefits do not match with the platform's users; there are after foreseeable users whom they can manipulate according to their preferences.

Due to own AI programs they claim to know us better than ourselves.

They share information they think fit for each of us.

In time, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; given regularly selected information by AI step-by-step a user becomes the person that AI want them to be.

Slightly, artificial intelligence turns us into artificial people. That's not acceptable.

We need a more transparent control mechanism, and preferably by third-party fact-checking networks which should ensure us our right to choose our own information flood.

Another issue is control-freak governments; they should never become a virtual Big Brother.

As the number of illiberal democracies increase, the number of governments using regulations as a stick also rise.

Laws should avoid broad concepts that are open to interpretation, such as harmful content.

Laws should not be implemented within a biased interpretation.

We cannot be on the side of the ban; we cannot give up our free media or freedom of speech.

And we cannot correct a mistake with another one.

We know the cost of this very well.

What we need is instead of less transparent and controlled information by somebody, more information, more transparency and more inclusivity by everybody.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much, Mister Zeki Hakan SIDALI.

On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, Mr Alexandros TRIANTAFYLLIDIS from Greece.

The floor is yours.

Mr Alexandros TRIANTAFYLLIDIS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group)*: Ladies and Gentlemen,

I too would like to make a contribution to this debate. I would like to actually place myself in the position of citizens, to put myself in their shoes. I think that the control of networks 100 per cent is something that is done by media groups. Media groups control it all together. There is no freedom of information. Communication online is being controlled – you may ask how. How does this happen? Well, first of all, you have populist channels, they prepare public opinion in countries by using disinformation.

Secondly, you have so-called information sites and, if you like, armies of mercenaries, and by that, I mean trolls, trolls who anonymously use these networks and flood the networks with masses of false information and fake news.

Finally, you have got governments. Governments which really are at the service of change of behaviour online on the part of our citizens. A small minority can be influential and can actually change the outcome of an election in any given country. The chief editor, whether they are pro-government in a particular country, that chief editor could really – in media terms – annihilate any opponents by propagating fake news, false information, also quoting sentences out of context and thereby completely disregard them.

If we want more discernment, then we need to have citizens who are genuine clients. Citizens send out messages using social media or networks. That of course can have a psychological impact and in certain circumstances what is at stake here is simply eliminating the opposition, your so-called enemies, for instance, fake surveys, fake polls, which would lead the reader to believe that the government is much more powerful than it is. This is propaganda. Look at Donald Trump; that's propaganda. Look at the extreme right messages – propaganda – or indeed Brexit and Cambridge Analytica, the scandal that occurred in that connection.

This is all about manipulation. Manipulation leads people to think that all politicians at the end of the day are the same. People are actually currently suffering from poverty from inflation and from unemployment. They are suffering from all of these problems and are ripe for falling into the hands of the extreme right or indeed ripe for abstention, they simply disconnect. How many of our countries are experiencing this kind of problem, I ask you? The fact that we have anonymous use online helps spread fake news. Murders, crimes, media crimes, real crimes, acts of terrorism, blackmailing, the murder of Giorgos Karaivaz, a Greek journalist. Unfortunately, one year later, that particular case has still not been elucidated. We still have no answer to what happened. What are we suggesting here? Societal control? Accountability, certainly. Politicians should be accountable for their actions, and we are calling for greater transparency for all.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I continue to the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus.

The floor is yours, Sir.

Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU (Cyprus, SOC)*: Thank you very much.

Well, I think that "anybody who thinks freely, thinks well." That was something that was said by one of the first visionaries of Europe. This is the gist of human value. It is the core of human value. Freedom of thought forms part of human freedoms, human rights. That is what gives meaning, a sense, to our existence, to our life as human beings.

So we are talking about a society that should be free. That is our vision. And we can gain that freedom through knowledge. But knowledge is not something that you are born with as a human being. Knowledge is something that you acquire through observation, through information and in terms of observation and information what we need for that is knowledge. We need both aspects.

It is no coincidence that totalitarian regimes are keen to fight against knowledge because knowledge is their first enemy. We have seen this in the past. We have seen information being excluded. We have seen the manipulation of knowledge also today. And it all serves the same purpose.

Human beings, born free, are transformed into slaves. That is the purpose. Online communication and access to that knowledge, access to that information, of course, is a need today, it is a requirement today. Today, we have the technology that we need in order to access that knowledge, that information. But there is also a democratic principle in all of this. We need to make sure that freedom of expression and freedom of speech is guaranteed in these circumstances and today we have platforms – we have big, major platforms. And these platforms have a lot of power on the market, and a lot of leverage. They control access to the market and also control content and they are very competitive, of course. And because of their competitive edge, their advantage, they can actually make a lot of gains, for instance, acquiring user data. And user data is power. They become omnipotent if you like and they can shape public opinion as a result of all this. They can have a bearing on the outcome of elections. They can even silence certain facts – not speak about them.

So faced with this omnipotence, we need to fight back. Now we can use artificial intelligence but we need to at the same time make sure that we are guaranteeing human rights.

So what we need is a framework – a legal framework, an institutional framework – and indeed, in the report, we have that reference. We refer to the fact that legislators, parliamentarians, shall make sure that there is a balance between freedom of speech, on the one hand, and protection of private life and personal data on the other. So there is a reference. There is a reference also here to WikiLeaks, and that is really important because we are talking about political subjects.

And if I may, I would like to take this opportunity to perhaps recall something that was said at the time of the French Revolution: ignorance and contempt for human rights are the sole cause of government corruption, as they said. Therefore, we must fight ignorance and we must also fight all the ills of this world by combatting ignorance and we must do that by freedom of information and knowledge.

Thank you.

Ms Ingerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, sir.

I underline that I urge you to take care of the limit of 3 minutes, or else you take the speaking time from other colleagues. The limit of the 3 minutes is the limit of the speaking time.

We continue the debate.

I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI from the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group and Italy.

The floor is yours.

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): Thank you very much indeed, Madam President.

Distinguished colleagues, this assembly just one year ago adopted a report from our colleague Mr Roberto RAMPI, with an overwhelming majority, recognising the right to knowledge.

That knowledge is bound up with freedom of the press, both online and offline, a democratic right that all of us, as members of this Assembly, have close to our hearts.

This is an issue on which all our futures hinge. Democratic institutions depend on it, and all of this was essentially summarised, in the report I've just mentioned, as well as in the Chilcot Committee, back in 2016, a committee which was set up at the behest of the UK Government and looked at the military attack on Iraq in 2003.

The Chilcot Committee took 6 years, three different commissioners, 180 witnesses, and waded its way through hundreds of thousands of documents, and in the final report it said that the intervention in Iraq had been bloody and destabilising. And it would have been possible to consider other, more peaceful options before unleashing war. It would have been possible to contain Saddam Hussein. In 2003, there was no imminent threat from the Iraqi dictator.

According to that report, the circumstances in which the Blair government found that there was a legal basis for military intervention were unsatisfactory. This, colleagues, means that we are faced with a paradox. We've got Julian Assange, who is facing life imprisonment for having brought to our attention tragic events. On the other hand, we have destroyed and destabilised countries, according to the Chilcot Committee, as well as the functioning and prestige of parliamentary democracy.

I would like to remind you of the written declaration of 31 January 2020. It was signed by 37 colleagues from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the Assange case. In it we call on the institutions of the Council of Europe, as well as member states to keep a very watchful eye on the situation and to stand up for the rights of Julian Assange and afford him protection under the European Convention on Human Rights.

I would just like to end by warning of Eisenhower's words on the military-industrial complex; it's important that we look to the future.

The President said, "We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Gianni MARILOTTI.

We continue to Mr Kamal JAFAROV from Azerbaijan and the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr Kamal JAFAROV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA): Thank you very much, Madam President.

How free are we in a social media when our preferences for like, share and comment are highly influenced by the predefined opinion of the majority, or strategically defined misinformation?

If we make an analogy to the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant, freedom in social media is not a true freedom, simply because it involves satisfying desires we haven't chosen in the first place.

When we like something, dislike something on social media, we are not really acting freely - we are acting as a slaves of others' expectations. For example, there are situations where we don't like something, we don't share something, because we think we will get bullied by some people we even don't know.

This situation is worse in the case of children. They get bullied online, they do crazy stuff for views, and they repeat some trends on TikTok.

Whenever our behaviour is socially conditioned, it's not truly free.

If there is no democracy without a real possibility of making conscious rational choices, then are we really making free in our choices in social media?

This was the first part of the problem.

The second part of the problem is that this kind of information, full concentration, is in the hands of the few private organisations, which gives them huge economic and technological power, as well as the possibility to influence almost every aspect of the people's private and social lives.

This raised a very important question on the capacity and willingness of these few corporate organisations for ensuring diversity of the information sources, and pluralism of the ideas and opinions online.

Other risk factors in this context are the lack of transparency of new forms of online advertising, which can too easily escape the restrictions applicable to advertising on traditional media, such as those intended to protect children: public morals and social values.

Even the traditional gatekeepers like journalists look forward to the news which will have the most clicks, rather than the value of the news.

Then the use of artificial intelligence and how to make it filtered for content moderation is neither reliable nor effective.

It's important to acknowledge and properly articulate the role and the necessary presence of the human decision makers, as well as the participation of the users in the establishment assessment of the moderation policies.

I think that this report is in the right direction with some proposals.

We need to adopt as parliamentarians adequate institutional and legislative mechanism in order to navigate the path toward safe environment in social media.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Kamal JAFAROV.

Then I call, on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN, from Ireland.

No, I do not see her in the plenary.

I then call Mr Koloman BRENNER, from Hungary.

Neither he.

Then we continue to Spain.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, from the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

The floor is yours.

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

Today we have multiple, very diverse information. It's a privilege to have this ease of access in our modern societies to information.

We have a pluralism of ideas, and opinions on the internet, and this is a great asset. It's a wealth of online information that we're talking about in today's societies.

However there is also a risk: a lot of toxic information on the internet.

This is dangerous for children, for young people, for vulnerable people, who probably aren't able to check the information against other available, more reliable information.

So, there are infomercials, there's manipulation, etc. There is no checking, no checking of sources, there is just a belief in what the internet says.

That's not good for democracy, it's not good for our societies, not good for our development, for our growth.

In addition to that of course, it's flanked by the growth of populism.

This will have an enormous impact. We don't have sufficient filters on our social media, no filters against fake news, no filters against harmful information or content.

What about children? What about adolescents? Why is it they have such ease of access to pornography or to dishonest information, or indeed hate speech. All of this can contribute to more violent action in society.

Also, unacceptable sexual behaviours. This is very much against the kind of education that we'd like to promote in Europe as a whole.

This is a debate that will give rise to certain questions, to certain doubts. What should we give privilege to? Is it freedom of expression, or is it the protection of our children, our youth, our vulnerable populations.

These are interesting questions.

I genuinely believe that there should be a limit somewhere.

I think we should make sure that all internet service providers should comply with minimum standards: but we mustn't be naive; these companies are companies; they could perfectly well manipulate content.

This is after all, something that forms part of their business model.

They need to be, of course, allowed to continue to operate, but we need to act against harmful and illegal content.

Unfortunately, in our European countries we have different types of legislation.

For example, in Spain, we now have legislation to protect young people and children against all types of violence; we have co-operation in order to classify content, we provide support to parents as well, we have parental control for media, all of this is promoted by the government.

We also want to make sure the intermediary industry is assisted in its efforts.

We want protection and genuine support to make sure that we don't allow harmful content for young children and adolescents to go out there.

Everyone should know the limits, and everyone should abide by these limits. That is our approach.

I know it is difficult to strike the right balance, but the right balance is always the key to success in politics. It's the key to consensus, and that's what we hope to achieve through this report.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

I now call Mr Sorin-Titus MUNCACIU from Romania and the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr Sorin-Titus MUNCACIU (Romania, EC/DA): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm about to give you a certain feeling about what's happening when the manipulation and these decisions do not belong to the real people, the people who should make those decisions.

On 10 January 2020, a media cartel took a decision upon themselves to push and to get the pro-vaccination narrative, because they thought this was the only way to get through the pandemic situation.

Now what was the repercussion for this thinking? It was the fact that the other narratives, which means the regular medicine of the 21st century, we turn back to them.

This problem of having a cartel of media deciding which way to go in a pandemic situation is very dangerous.

What happened was not only did this cartel take over all the information in the western hemisphere, but on top of that, social media was influenced. Of course, this new means like artificial intelligence took over, and it happened that the medication and the protocols were ignored. The practice of medicine, the informal concern, was ignored.

Therefore this pro-vaccination narrative was all over and was to the detriment of the other means of treatment.

Moreover, it interfered with consent because the adverse reactions were suppressed also.

This is a practical example about when a media cartel decides one narrative, and that narrative is pushed to the public. The other ones are going to suffer, and sometimes the truth with it.

Thank you, Madam.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much, Mister Sorin-Titus MUNCACIU.

Then I continue to Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and Ms Liliana TANGUY, France: I do not see her in the plenary.

I continue and give the floor to Mr Kamil AYDIN, Türkiye. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr Kamil AYDIN (Türkiye, NR): Thank you Madam Chair, dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteur for his report. As we are all aware, freedom of expression is one of the essential foundations of a "democratic society".

The online communication we are discussing today has revealed new opportunities to express ideas and to connect people with each other.

These opportunities provide us with new ways to enjoy freedom of expression.

Social media and the internet also have the potential to promote human rights and help young people get acquainted with our core values more closely.

While social media offers unprecedented opportunities for the realisation of human rights, it has also opened new possibilities for the surveillance of people, on the basis of what they read or discuss, with whom they discuss it, whom they interact, what videos they watch or what they upload.

This surveillance does not necessarily have to be carried out only by the government.

The internet intermediaries also have the necessary equipment to track people's internet activities.

The internet and social media, which are controlled by internet intermediaries, have great power over individuals.

Internet intermediaries have the power not only to induce people about their decisions of what to wear, drink or buy, it also has the power to manipulate the elections, spread disinformation and prevent people from enjoying their freedom of expression.

However, intermediaries should respect the human rights of their users and affected parties in all their actions.

Consequently, I would like to remind you that the member states have a positive obligation to protect human rights and to create a safe and enabling environment for everyone to participate in public debates, and to express opinions and ideas without fear.

Thus, member states should take all reasonable and appropriate regulations to ensure people enjoy their rights also in the digital area.

However, member states should also refrain from violating the right to freedom of expression and other human rights in the digital environment while preparing these regulations.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that our committee member Mr Frédéric REISS is, as far as I heard from him, he is going to be the rapporteur for the last report. I would like to wish him a very happy and healthy life.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much, Mister Kamil AYDIN.

I continue to Albania, and Ms Etilda GJONAJ. She's not in the plenary.

I continue to Ms Anna ROBERTS from Canada and Observation.

Ms Anna ROBERTS (Canada): Madam President,

Fellow Parliamentarians and Esteemed Colleagues,

First, I'd like to thank the Committee and its Rapporteur for bringing this important issue to the Assembly today.

We live in a seemingly ever more digital world, as increasingly aspects of our lives require some form of digital interaction, old distinctions between communication that happens "online" versus "in real life" have become antiquated.

As the Committee's report rightly points out, for the most part, the intermediaries for these digital interactions are a small group of large multinational corporations or, as Canada's Competition Commission calls them, "global digital giants".

With the rise of these global digital giants, we have growing concerns about the economic, political and social power that they wield.

Whatever you may think of the specific case, when a digital platform has the power to limit the speech of the President of the United States – arguably the most powerful person in the world – the influence of these platforms cannot be denied.

Competition, or anti-trust laws have been put forward as one tool to address these concerns.

Where global digital giants abuse their dominant position in digital markets, or engage in mergers and acquisitions that hinder competition, competition regulators seem well-placed to act under existing frameworks.

Canada's Competition Commissioner, for one, has stated that "safeguarding competition in an era of global digital giants is paramount", and competition regulators must prevent digital giants from becoming "anti-competitive gatekeepers, deciding who gets to compete, and potentially forcing new and innovative firms out of the market".

But are competition laws, which were designed for an industrial, bricks and mortar economy, capable of addressing the issues facing digital markets?

For example, can competition law respond to issues raised by the use of artificial intelligence or advanced algorithms?

How should competition law operate in markets where competition is based on the collection of data instead of price?

Debates on the need for reform often boil down to the problems that competition regulators are expected to address.

In Canada, at least, competition law has traditionally focused on economic issues, promoting economic efficiency through competitive markets.

The law was never intended to deal with issues related to free speech, privacy or the environment.

The question therefore becomes whether competition law should evolve to address the varied issues raised by the concentration of power in digital markets. Or, do a range of issues require a range of responses?

Answering these questions will be critical to determining the best approach to dealing with concerns related to the rise of global digital giants.

Discussions and the sharing of best practices through forums such as the Parliamentary Assembly offer an invaluable opportunity to consider different perspectives and approaches to this common challenge.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Anna ROBERTS.

We continue to Finland and Ms Inka HOPUSU, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Bob van PAREREN (Netherlands, EC/DA): Madam Chair,

Is it possible for me to take over my colleague's speech, by Mr John HOWELL, or is that not possible in the procedure?

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): You can come at the end then, I think, you can continue and if you want to take the floor later, I will give it to you but Ms Inka HOPUSU.

Mr Bob van PAREREN (Netherlands, EC/DA): I can wait...

I don't know what the method is.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): It's not the normal way to do this, so we continue on the list, but I remember you sir, yeah.

But Ms Inka HOPUSU, is she not here?

Ms Inka HOPUSU (Finland, SOC): Yes, I'm here.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): You are there.

Yes, please!

Ms Inka HOPSU (Finland, SOC): Madam President,

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you to the Rapporteur for raising this not so easy matter: the need for social media regulations.

Online communication has become an essential part of our everyday lives. Its influence on people's opinions, actions and behaviour is huge.

That's why we must follow, regulate and improve the pluralism of who is controlling the information, who is making the actual choices on what kind of information people see, who owns the information collected on us and what it is used for.

It is partly problematic that online platforms are giant entities trying to make a profit. Yet, as experience has shown, their activities have a huge impact on human rights, especially on the right to privacy and freedom of speech.

Hate speech and freedom of speech are not always clear. Unfortunately, many want to blur them.

Hate speech is often directed towards politicians and authorities.

In Finland, the Prosecutor General has been determined in prosecuting cases of hate speech, defamation, persecution and ethnic agitation. As a result, she has been targeted by trolls on social media. The same trolls attacked her online when she reported the Finnish National Prosecution Authority's intention to participate in the investigation of war crimes in Ukraine.

Many of those spreading hate online reject criticism by saying that "soon we can't say anything anymore".

However, we must see the connection between hate speech and human rights violations.

Often in history, hate speech has begun the path to violence. Inciting hatred lays the ground for graver actions. The consequences of dehumanisation have been seen in Rwanda, Yugoslavia and now in Ukraine.

Social media has enabled the anonymous and faster than previous spread of such messages. We legislators must stay on top of it. Our regulation and oversight must follow suit so that we can quickly stop such criminal and harmful content and action. The responsibility lies both with the platforms and their users.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Inka HOPSU.

We continue to the Slovak Republic and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe with Mr Miroslav ŽIAK.

The floor is yours.

Mr Miroslav ŽIAK (Slovak Republic, ALDE): Thank you, Madam.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The biggest export article of Russia is propaganda and fake news. They spent such an amount of money and we are facing a dangerous threat.

So many people who believe in this fake news live in Slovakia. Just imagine, almost 50 per cent of teachers believe in fake news, as was found by a survey.

Therefore, I welcome and support the report with the resolution, but I still think we will have to do much more.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much, Mister Miroslav ŽIAK.

I call Ms Zeynep YILDIZ from Türkiye.

Ms Zeynep YILDIZ (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank Mr Frédéric REISS for his excellent report, which identifies currents and new questions and problems in a rapidly digitalising world, and offers concrete solution for these questions and problems.

While the means of communication facilitates and strengthens with this digitalisation era, the mass media platforms have also transformed.

The digital platforms actually became the new mass communication medium nearly for all.

As the traces left by individuals, as personal data turns into an economic value, the need of having legislative measures becomes more crucial.

Along with its economic dimension, the new era of digitalisation has brought us the necessity of having a legal framework that protects basic human rights also on the digital platforms.

Unlike other economic based social transformations that the world has undergone throughout history, it's very clear that legal measures regarding digitalisation should be taken on a global scale, as the current globalisation of this new data-based economical structure embraced people on the global level more than ever.

Throughout history, economists have been strengthened by people's consuming products.

Today it has evolved into an economic order in which people's preferences are productised through algorithms.

In this respect, I would like to express that I find it very valuable that the concept of human dignity is placed at the heart of this report.

Dear Colleagues,

We have to know that to put strong emphasis on the need of political pluralism on the digital platforms it is not only important just for having antitrust legislation in the market, but for protecting individuals' right of expression as well.

To put emphasis on the protection of personal data is not only important for preventing people from feeling alone in a public sphere, but also for protecting people's privacy and dignity

To fight against this information and digital harassment is not only for maintaining the public order on digital platforms, but also to protect people's freedom of obtainment of information and freedom of communication.

Hopefully, the report covers these points as a whole and provides solutions for these current problems.

By bearing in mind these points, member States and the Assembly should ensure that all people in Europe and all around the world enjoy their freedom of expression and protect their dignity and privacy in the digital environment.

In order to do so, as these platforms have service globally, there must be social media and internet regulations not only on the continental level, but also on the global level, which protect people's fundamental rights.

This Assembly may take initiative in this regard.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Zeynep YILDIZ.

Then I call Mr Even ERIKSEN of the Socialist Group and from Norway.

The floor is yours, Mister Even ERIKSEN.

Mr Even ERIKSEN (Norway, SOC): Madam President,

First, I would like to thank the rapporteur for a job well done.

The control of online communication is a very relevant topic in our modern society. Every day, many Europeans live their lives on their devices for hours. It is crucial that social media balance users' freedom of speech and their need for protection against fake news and hate speech. This is one of the many issues at hand in this debate and the one I would like to address.

When you read something on Facebook – how can you know it is true? How can you know that the information has not been paid for by someone who wants to influence you with something? Maybe it is not information after all, but disinformation or conspiracy theories.

Madam President, the amount of disinformation available online is at a growing rate. For instance, during the war in Ukraine, we have been subject to a lot of Russian disinformation. Fake videos, false reports and propaganda. This is very serious. We also have evidence of multiple examples of third-party entities trying to influence elections through social media. That is a serious threat to our democracy.

The internet is a scary place to be, Madam President, but it is also the place to connect and reconnect with friends and family and to express views and feelings on community matters. Social media has revolutionised how we communicate with each other and how we gain information. This development forces us to adapt our legislation in order to face the threats and opportunities that arise.

The platforms have the responsibility to ensure the protection of users' rights, privacy and dignity. There is a fine balance between the lack of control and the restriction of the freedom of speech. As the Norwegian Minister of Culture and Gender Equality said in our Parliament earlier this year, uncontrolled distribution of illegal content is obviously damaging to public discourse. We do not want a situation where the platforms, on their own initiative, moderate and remove so much legal content that it goes beyond the freedom of speech. I agree with her.

Madam President,

I call on the Council of Europe and the member States to ensure this legislation takes this fine balance into account.

Thank you!

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Even ERIKSEN.

I give the floor to Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA from the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance and Azerbaijan.

The floor is yours.

Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA (Azerbaijan, EC/DA): Thank you Madam Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much to the rapporteur, first of all, for his important report which raises important questions for us.

The development of telecommunication technologies and digital media have greatly changed our life, especially in recent years during the pandemic, people have begun to spend most of their time online, socialising, communicating with each other, spending free time.

All over the world people are already accustomed to work and getting education distantly.

From one side, the addiction of children as well as their parents on mobile devices, social networks, internet media, is growing; from another, the rapid development of telecommunication and media technologies has changed the very nature of the media.

They have become an integral part of our life, reflecting everything that happens.

Today we can watch in real time not only sports, concerts, performances. All events taking place in any corner of the world can be broadcast live on social networks without specifying the backgrounds, the reasons, context and condition of the event, thus manipulating the people's mind, creating desired opinions and views in society.

The race for high audience ratings is also reflected in current affairs news reports.

The news that the media presents to the audience is often quite bizarre, scandalous.

Media and social networks, as well as being a tool of propaganda and different values, notions, facts and developments, forming sometimes false opinion of people, are used not only as a tool for delivering and receiving information, but also they turn information into one of the most valuable types of capital and the resource of the great income.

Those who possess this capital along with the associated infrastructure have enormous economic power that can be used in different purposes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We all agree that the lack of information causes a lack of participation of people within society.

Today, we're facing a great challenge and responsibility.

It is not in the power of humans to resist the spread of media communication and digitalisation of information, but I'm sure that we can regulate social media and communication, prioritising democracy and protecting human rights and dignity.

Thank you.

Ms Ingrid SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much, Madam Sevinj FATALIYEVA.

Then I call Ms Nicole TRISSE from France and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

She is not in the Plenary.

Then we continue to Mr Martin BELUSKÝ from the Slovak Republic.

Mr Martin BELUSKÝ (Slovak Republic, NR): Thank you, Madam Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

This report deals with the control of online communication with the intent to make state members use anti-trust legislation and to ensure that media automated content moderation is not allowed by the legislation.

But I would like to draw your attention to another very important topic regarding media control. As it is written in the draft resolution, whoever controls online communication during, for example, election campaigns, may become a formidable political force. Voters may be seriously encumbered in their decision by misleading, manipulative or false information. While increased democratic oversight is necessary, regulation enacted in practice often entails over-broad power and the discretion of government authorities over information flows which endanger freedom of expression. If they allow governments to freely control the media, they can and some will abuse the right to intervene in people's right to get information.

As witnessed in Slovakia, our government adopted the law where one government office has the right to block a whole website simply by saying it was promoting severe disinformation but without any definition with a right to correct direction, we can say without fear that the government found a tool how to silence uncomfortable opinions without public control.

As the report says, internet intermediaries should be particularly mindful of their duty of care where they produce or manage the content available on their platforms or where they play a curatorial or editorial role while avoiding taking down third-party content, except for clearly illegal content. But the same should be used for governments. They should not use tools to take down any website content, except, of course, for illegal content.

However, disinformation is not illegal and should not be a pretext for taking down a whole website.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Ingrid SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Martin BELUSKÝ.

I give the floor to Mr Jeremy CORBYN, from the United Kingdom and the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Jeremy CORBYN (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to be able to speak in this.

I thank the rapporteur for the debate which has ensured we can have a serious discussion about the power of social media.

Social media and platforms are a massive ability around the world for people to communicate with each other, but they're also powerful. They're also controlled by very powerful people.

The illusion that we often have of the freedom to communicate on social media platforms is one that is actually – as many speakers have indicated – under the control of somebody else.

I think to the bravery of the farmers in India, when they were mounting huge protests against the marketisation of their farms in India, all their internet access, all their platforms were closed down at the whim of the government of India in co-operation with those that own and run those media platforms: an illusion that was there that somehow or other they were free to communicate with each other.

This happens time and time again around the world when people want their voice to be heard, and it's uncomfortable for the government concerned. The owners of these platforms co-operate with that government and close them down and silence those voices.

The algorithms that operate on how we individually use social media give us the illusion of choice, the illusion of searching for information in a free and open way. In reality those algorithms drive us immediately to one source of information or another, one point of view or another.

This has a massive effect on elections all over the world, where elections are manipulated by algorithms and by the social media giants that control them.

Again, people thinking they have the freedom of choice, in reality, are being directed in a certain way. It is political control that is exercised through very high technology.

The report draws attention to the platforms that are under threat, but doesn't say too much about the danger to journalists.

I just think we should pause for one second and think of the murder of Ms Shireen Abu Akleh, for example, for speaking out on behalf of Palestinian people on Al-Jazeera. There are many other journalists under threat.

There is an amendment down which I strongly recommend we support by Mr Gianni MARILOTTI and others, concerning Wikileaks and the situation in which Julian Assange finds himself at the present time.

Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, told a lot of very uncomfortable truths around the world. Uncomfortable truths about American power, about the CIA, about Guantanamo Bay, about Iraq, about Afghanistan, and about many other issues around the world.

In some ways he'd be called a hero. Instead he's in a maximum-security prison in Britain and about to be deported to the United States to get a sentence of over 170 years.

This is an outrage beyond belief that somebody who spoke up for the truth, for peace, for justice, and for safety is threatened with three life imprisonments.

Surely, if we're talking about media freedoms, we also talk about respecting and defending journalists who've used that freedom to inform all of us.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Jeremy CORBYN.

Then I give the floor to Ms Tarja FILATOV, from Finland, and the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

The floor is yours.

Ms Tarja FILATOV (Finland, SOC): Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Online communication has become a part of our daily lives. We are talking about an infrastructure that has evolved into a necessity, for better and for worse.

Our daily lives have moved to the digital environment much faster than the values, structures and modes of operation that uphold our democratic societies. We spend our time online, we interact with others, we search for information, we work and entertain ourselves.

The internet remembers what we have already forgotten. The algorithms connect the dots and draw up accurate profiles of us, offering commercials, materials and services in accordance with our profiles, or they don't offer. However, the internet must not become a parallel reality, where people are not affected by the laws of real life. Right and wrong are the same both in real life and online.

We need a pluralistic, free internet. Yet, one's freedoms must not violate other people's rights. Everyone's online action, people have become a resource of the data economy. Many rightly ask, who owns my information and what is it used for?

Digitalisation and the data economy enable welfare and a rapid growth in productivity. At the same time, we must recognise the unfairness of a data-based economy, as power is concentrated in a few data giants. Concentration distorts competition. The lack of rules for the data economy can hurt people, businesses and societies.

Popular social media platforms and digital trade centres are part of society's critical infrastructure.

Platforms and their algorithms have too much power in deciding what information is offered to whom. Such power can be abused to manipulate people. While market manipulation is prohibited, one might ask, why is such manipulation of people allowed online?

Fake news, hate speech, sexual harassment and other drawbacks of the internet are difficult to control.

But it does not justify giving up on tackling these harmful problems.

In a worst-case scenario, non-regulation might erode democracy.

We must increase our understanding of the digital world.

Information literacy must be improved. It is a new form of basic reading and writing skills.

This is important for everybody, and this is important for our democracy.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Tarja FILATOV.

Then I call Mr Armen GEVORGYAN from Armenia and the European Conservatives Group.

The floor is yours.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, EC/DA): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Social networks and modern communication technologies have become the main tools for ideological influence over the past decade.

In a sense, we now live in an era where a new type of individual is being born: someone who has ceased belonging to his own state, his community or even to himself, but rather depending on social networks and the messages they broadcast.

This over-dependence on social networks has been leading to the disintegration of other fundamental democratic values and institutions. Top among them are free and fair elections. It creates a certain erosion of freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Experts have shown that via social networks, certain groups can potentially manipulate the political preferences of about 25 per cent of the electorate. Algorithms have already seized control of the emotions and wishes of millions of people worldwide. While entire states turn into digital colonies of their external administrators.

In our times, when social networks have degraded truth and facts to only secondary importance compared to feelings when some politicians successfully practice posts through politics, we must acknowledge that democratic and republican form of governance is in deep crisis. The above-mentioned processes now form a new format of communication between governments and the governed. Here, the democratic form of governance is not necessarily the unquestionable choice for ensuring sustainable developments of modern states. The government can no longer disregard the moods expressed in likes and dislikes on social networks. Some of them, at the same time, use social networks in order to sway public moods, stir division in society and artificially dominate public discourse, especially in times of nationwide campaigns.

Madam Chair,

The Council of Europe and this Assembly, in particular, must identify a reasonable balance and good merit of measuring the democratic credentials of European States. Namely, we shall work to develop a code of conduct for democratic states where governments, in particular, must be urged to ensure the right of the public to communicate freely online without interference. This includes not only adopting legal provisions to undermine organised networks disseminating fake news and hate speech, but also proactively investing in improving major literacy among the public. Of course, it must be the role of this organisation to find a reasonable balance and prevent this from becoming a punishment tool at the hands of the government against media and online activism, and indeed, promote a free and pluralistic flow of information online, which is respectful of human rights.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Armen GEVORGYAN.

I give you the floor, Mister Éctor Jaime RAMÍREZ BARBA, Mexico.

Mr Éctor Jaime RAMÍREZ BARBA (Mexico)*: Thank you, President.

I'd like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Frédéric REISS, first of all, for so astutely indicating the attacks of freedom of expression and pluralism in the digital environment.

We agree fully with the resolution before the Hemicycle, asserting that communication on digital platforms should be open, transparent, and plural, and should be based on free access to information of public interest as well as on the responsibility of those who generate and disseminate content.

We reiterate our concern that digital communication is being controlled and distorted by a group of corporations or state institutions.

This poses a high risk for freedoms; it impacts security, privacy and the exercise of citizens' rights.

We commend the call for stricter legislation protecting the rights of users, preventing consolidation of major private corporations that distort digital information, protects plurality of online sources, and the objectiveness of information and the internet as a platform for disseminating ideas in the context of freedom of expression.

Furthermore, we call for public institutions to respect the rights of the population in terms of access to digital media.

On 10 March 2022, European parliamentarians spoke out against the violations of the human rights of Mexican journalists in my country.

The strategy used by the Mexican government and the ruling political party is to use digital platforms to disseminate hate messages and fake news, to denigrate, discredit and threaten journalists, press and the opposition.

An investigation by the National Democratic Institute and Stanford Internet Observatory has said that Twitter accounts were attacking journalists and the media criticising the new president.

The Global Freedom House report on Mexico for 2020 asserts that there is manipulation of content in advance, as well as coordinated attacks on journalists and violence, threats and attacks, as well as harassing journalists who oppose President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government.

Therefore states should guarantee citizens the rights to communicate freely on digital platforms in a framework of respect for plurality and human rights.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Éctor Jaime RAMÍREZ BARBA.

Then I call Mr Pedro CEGONHO, from Portugal, and the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Pedro CEGONHO (Portugal, SOC): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

This report covers a sensitive issue. The concentration of the internet business in the hands of a few private corporations gives them huge economic and technological power. As well as the possibility to influence almost every aspect of people's life and social life.

Afterwards, the use of artificial intelligence and automatic filters for content moderation is neither reliable nor effective. It is very important that the Assembly could bring the member states' legislation to observe the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems and the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries at the concentration of economic and technological power in their hands with the correct competition regulations and tools.

We underline the report's aim to avoid pushing new actors outside the market or enabling them to enter the market. However, those measures must guarantee that any legislation imposing duties or restrictions on the internet with an impact on users' freedom of expression be exclusively aimed at dealing with illegal content to avoid broader notion as harmful content.

It is urgent to ensure that mere automated content moderation is not allowed by national legislation. In connection, we must encourage internet intermediaries, via legal and policy measures, to allow users to choose means of direct and efficient communication which do not solely rely on automatic tools.

We salute the rapporteur when he firmly urges us to guarantee that legally mandated content moderation provides the necessary presence of human decision-makers and incorporate the sufficient safeguards so that freedom of expression is not hampered.

Therefore, we must counteract hate speech online by issuing warning messages to persons who spread hate speech online by inviting users to review messages before sending them. Encourage internet intermediaries to add such guidelines to the codes of conduct dealing with hate speech, as our colleagues have written in this report.

We must be very concerned with the electoral codes. Let's consider adapting election legislation and policies to the new digital environment by reviewing provisions on electoral communication. In this aspect, reinforce accountability of the internet in terms of transparency and access to data.

Therefore, we agree with the approval of this important report and its resolutions.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Ingerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Pedro CEGONHO.

Even if there are a few left on the list, including Mr Bob van PAREREN, I have to close the list of speakers now.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers, as I said. The speeches from members on the speaker's list who have been present during the debate, but have not been able to speak may be given to the Table Office for publication in the official report.

I remind colleagues that typewritten texts must be submitted electronically, if possible, no later than 4 hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

I call Mr Frédéric REISS, rapporteur, to reply to the debate.

You have 5 minutes, sir.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you, Madam President.

After this high-level debate, sometimes with philosophical approaches, I would like to thank all the speakers who have understood the difficulty of the subjects, so much so that their remarks have been relevant and sometimes passionate. The number of participants at the end of the day proves the importance of the subject.

It is obvious that today, there is a fact: that those who have a maximum of information on the populations of this world hold the power. That is very worrying.

Many have pointed out that control mechanisms and manipulations are present today and that the most important thing is to guarantee pluralism on the Net. There was a lot of talk about artificial intelligence. This is a definite help, but be careful not to go too far. We must indeed avoid monopolies, the monopolies of the Internet giants, because we all need more and better information. It is also obvious that today we must allow access to knowledge. I also have a thought for all the murdered journalists, some of you have referred to it.

Albert Camus said,

"Freedom offers only a chance to be better, servitude is only the certainty of becoming worse."

It is therefore particularly important to take this into account in the education and protection of our young people. I fully agree with those who have highlighted the ethical principles that must be present on a regular basis.

The challenge before us is, indeed, immense, and there is a clear need for an ethical framework in addition to the legal one. Without ethical standards, technological developments could be used against all human morality, both from a legal and ethical point of view. Social media platforms must assume their responsibilities to ensure a free and pluralistic flow of information online that respects human rights.

Indeed, today is my last report, as after four mandates, I have decided to leave my place to younger people. I would like to thank Mr Kamil AYDIN for his kind words. I would also like to thank the Secretariat of the Commission, Roberto FASINO and Eugen CIBOTARU, who have been a great help. I had the honour of chairing for a few months this beautiful Commission, which is today chaired by Lord Alexander DUNDEE.

It has been an honour for me to work in this Hemicycle during all these years to defend human rights and to convey the values of the Council of Europe.

Thank you very much.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Frédéric REISS.

Does the Chairperson of the Committee wish to speak, Lord Alexander DUNDEE?

You have 3 minutes.

Lord Alexander DUNDEE (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear Colleagues,

Politics is dependent on communication. Today this is mainly, as we know, online. Moreover democracy is dependent on free access to quality, reliable, unbiased information. Therefore, as has been frequently said today, we have to control the threat from a number of internet participants who seek to unwind the flow of information online.

As the report by Mr Frédéric REISS correctly highlights, the key issue here is not the huge economic and technological power of some big operators, but simply the position they find themselves in to influence almost every aspect of people's private and social lives.

A diversity of information sources, ideas and opinions must be preserved online. Equally, economic, technological and information power has to be held to account so that it becomes a democratic intervention rather than the one-sided political power.

A range of Parliamentary Assembly reports have already indicated how people's decisions can be altered by misleading, manipulative and false information, and that algorithmic systems can be abused or used dishonestly to shape the formation of individual and collective opinions and actions.

Clearly, we need to guard against this.

Today's resolution offers balanced proposals.

These build on a key idea. Internet intermediaries need to allow a full and free flow of information online consistent with human rights, legal and ethical perspectives.

To make this happen, our national legislation and practices have to be in line with the recommendations used by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

In this field our countries should also set up rules to advance transparency, justice, non-maleficence, responsibility, privacy, rights and freedoms of user.

Then on electoral communications, our internet operators must be held to account to enhance transparent access to data, quality journalism as well as a critical evaluation of electrical communication and media literacy.

I thank you very much for supporting the resolution.

I hope it will be carried unanimously here, then become adopted in our national parliaments so that these necessary safeguards can come to apply in all our Council of Europe States.

Thank you.

Ms Konul NURULLAYEVA (Azerbaijan, EC/DA): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Thank you, Mr. President!

First of all, I want to thank Mr. Frederick Reiss for preparing a very significant and detailed report on this issue of global concern.

Initially, I want to mention that although emerging technologies, especially Artificial intelligence (AI) have the potential to be beneficial in some aspects, they also possess the potential to become a serious danger to human rights, such as free expression and media freedom.

Looking at the issue from the perspective of my home country, I would like to mention that, Azerbaijan also places a very high value on this set of high technologies but usage of them do not restrict pluralism and freedom of information. Because the newly adopted Media Law in my country meets modern requirements and creates conditions for developing the country's pluralistic information environment. This law also creates a basis for ensuring the security of the information space in our country, stimulating the development of local media, and improving the information environment. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Azerbaijan is the leader in South Caucasus region in the use of artificial intelligence. In addition, Azerbaijani government has recently started working on the establishment of a National Plan for Artificial Intelligence to accelerate AI research and application for the economic prosperity.

Dear colleagues, firstly, I firmly believe that transparency is a basic requirement for any public scrutiny and individuals should be aware of how decisions that affect their life are made and also which data is used for what purposes. To achieve these goals, independent research on AI's societal impacts should be supported. Additionally, governments should be transparent about their own AI implementation and disclosure of AI usage purposes must be made mandatory. Secondly, private companies must be responsible for the implementation of AI technology as well. Those who benefit from AI should be held accountable for any negative consequences of its application and establishment of strict government regulations is essential factor for achieving such accountability.

To conclude, I would like to say that Artificial intelligence is the future, not just a technology. Therefore, we have to understand and prevent its negative impacts on human rights violations to create a better future.

Thank you for your attention!

Vote : Le contrôle de la communication en ligne: une menace pour le pluralisme des médias, la liberté d'information et la dignité humaine

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Lord Alexander DUNDEE.

The debate is closed.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft resolution, Document 15537 to which three amendments and three sub-amendments have been tabled.

Amendments 2, 3 and 1 and their sub-amendments must be dealt with individually. Amendments will be taken in the order in which they appear in the Compendium.

I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds.

We start with Amendment 2 with sub-amendment, and I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI to support Amendment 2. You have 30 seconds.

He is not here.

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): Thank you, Madam President.

This amendment, as I said in my contribution to the debate, seeks to underscore the paradox. We have seen a lot of distortions, manipulations, that have been endorsed by a government committee of enquiry, yet anyone who makes information available before the committee actually faces results like life in prison.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I call Mr Frédéric REISS on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media to support the sub- amendment.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Yes, thank you, Madam President.

On the substance of this amendment, we agree. I said in the general discussion that the initial objective of WikiLeaks was towards pluralistic and transparent information, and that the general principles were freedom of expression and its dissemination by the media.

It's just the place that bothers us. Therefore, I propose, in the sub-amendment, instead of putting after paragraph 1, to put this amendment after paragraph 3 since, in paragraph 3, at least, we are talking about the lack of transparency and the new forms of online advertising.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against this sub-amendment?

None?

Mr Erkin GADIRLI (Azerbaijan, EC/DA): Thank you, Madam Chair,

I would like to speak against it because of this reference to WikiLeaks.

We all read it, of course, it's very interesting but let us not forget that this was a leak, it was illegally obtained information, and it is not a correct form of reference.

The content of illegally obtained information should not be referred to.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

What is the opinion of the mover of the main amendment?

I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI.

What is the opinion?

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): I agree with the sub-amendment. I accept it.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The mover of the main amendment is supported.

As the mover of the sub-amendment and the Committee is clearly in favour? Yes?

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

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed:

The sub-amendment is agreed to.

I will now consider the main amendment.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment as amended? No, none?

What is the opinion of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media on the amendment?

In favour? The Committee is in favour.

I shall now put Amendment 2 to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 2.

We wait for the result.

It is agreed to.

Then Amendment 3 with sub-amendment.

I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI to support Amendment 3.

You have 30 seconds, sir.

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): I will use these 30 seconds to thank the rapporteur who did an excellent job.

Thank you.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I call Mr Frédéric REISS on behalf of the Committee to support the sub-amendment.

You also have 30 seconds.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Yes, Madam President, because it is for the sake of clarity, to some extent, of the wording of these sub-amendments.

In reality, we would like Amendment 3 and Amendment 1 to be one amendment. That is why the beginning of the amendment is written differently. In fact, both amendments are placed after paragraph 14 and therefore begin with "the right to free and pluralistic information is strengthened by [...]" and the last part of Amendment 1 would disappear. In fact, the two amendments are linked, hence this sub-amendment.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The sub-amendment?

No, none against.

What is the opinion of the mover of the main amendment?

I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI.

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): I am in favour.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put to the sub-amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed. I call for the result to be displayed.

The sub-amendment is agreed to.

We will now consider the main amendment. Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

No.

What is the opinion of the Committee on the amendment as amended?

In favour.

I shall now put Amendment 3 to the vote and the vote is open.

The vote is closed. I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 3 is agreed to.

Then we continue to Amendment 1 with sub-amendment.

I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI to support Amendment 1.

You have 30 seconds, sir.

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): I think we've talked about this issue at sufficient length, and so perhaps I can just renew my thanks to the rapporteur.

I move that we adopt this amendment.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. As always good with the time!

I call Mr Frédéric REISS on behalf of the Committee to support the sub-amendment.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

In fact, this amendment makes it so that, what remains is "In processing information, Internet intermediaries are required to act in accordance with the principles set out in Resolution 2382 (2021): media freedom, public trust and the citizens' right to know." Everything else disappears since it is in Amendment 3, which we just adopted.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the sub-amendment?

No.

What is the opinion of the mover of the main amendment?

I call Mr Gianni MARILOTTI.

Mr Gianni MARILOTTI (Italy, SOC): Favourable.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): In favour.

As the mover of the sub-amendment the Committee is clearly in favour.

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

The vote is now open.

The vote is now closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The sub-amendment is agreed to.

We shall now consider the main amendment.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment? No.

What is the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

The Committee is in favour.

I shall now put Amendment No. 1 to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment No. 1 is agreed to.

Thank you.

We will now proceed to a vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 15537.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft resolution in Document 15537 is adopted.

This is Mr Frédéric REISS' last report. On behalf of colleagues, I would like to thank you for your work as rapporteur, for several important reports, and also for how you have co-operated in the plenary. We all wish you all the best in the future. We will miss you here, Mister Frédéric REISS.

(Applause)

A good applause is always good to take back home!

The Assembly will hold its next public sitting tomorrow morning at 10:00 a.m., with the agenda which was approved on Monday morning.

The sitting is adjourned.

Have a good evening, all of you.