



**Provisional edition**

Tuesday 10 October 2023, afternoon

## Official report of debates

### Opening of the sitting num 21

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly):** The meeting was called to order.

Proposed changes to the composition of the Commissions have been published in Commissions (2023) 07 and Addendum 2.

Are there any objections to these changes? I see none.

*They are therefore adopted.*

The next item is questions to Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

A significant number of colleagues have already expressed the wish to ask a question. I would remind you that questions must not exceed 30 seconds, and that you must ask a question and not make a speech.

I now give the floor to Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, from Austria, of the Socialist, Democratic and Green Group.

Mister SCHENNACH.

### Question time: Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

**Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear Madam Secretary General,

I am sure that in the Council of Ministers, you had a lot of debate regarding the pictures that we saw from Lampedusa.

How do you think we can guarantee that the Convention of Human Rights and the convention regarding refugees will be fulfilled in the area of the Council of Europe member states? Because a lot of people are worried about those pictures and that they do not really follow our conventions. Please can you tell us your position and what the standing of the discussion inside the Council of Ministers is?

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In this report:

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

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

Madam Secretary General.

**Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ (Secretary General of the Council of Europe):** Thank you very much.

Indeed, what we have as the latest news from Lampedusa is very worrying. I would like to remind you that, unfortunately, Lampedusa is not the only place, and Italy is not the only country facing such huge numbers of migrants and refugees who are seeking security.

There are two answers to give to your question. On what is currently going on: this summer, unfortunately, pictures showing the unfortunate fate of people who in the thousands found refuge on Lampedusa. The Commissioner for Human Rights was there and was actually talking to refugees and migrants but also to local communities and civil society who are helping these people to see what the situation is.

When it comes to the other actions of the Committee of Ministers, I would like to recall that at the Reykjavík Summit, our leaders also discussed the issue of migration, because it is a growing concern in a number of our countries. One of the areas, which is probably not targeted directly from your question but is also very important, is how to go about this, because of what is very often behind such huge numbers of people. There are smugglers, who profit on that unfortunate business. People lose lives, so many at sea but elsewhere as well.

How to get about this scourge that is more and more present at the borders of Europe but also elsewhere in the world? The answer from Reykjavík was that we may consider targeting this issue, which is not the only one that we need to target but certainly a very important one, how the current situation of international co-operation, and how the current situation with dealing with smuggling is dealt. This week on Friday there will be a group from the Secretariat who actually are preparing a review of how the situation at this moment looks in international co-operation and dealing with the smuggling of people. The meeting will be with ambassadors of the member states. We will take stock of where we are and whether really, what I was suggesting and also was somewhere implied in the decisions, we might think of another convention or legal instrument that will deal with that. Because I think deterring these people from profiting from the misery of some people trying to reach Europe or other places needs to be stopped. These people who are profiting from that have to be taken to justice.

Let us see what we can do more on that. The situation is not from yesterday. The situation will not wither away. I think we need to tackle it from different points of view. I also saw that one of the dedicated committees of the Parliamentary Assembly has discussed this issue. We need real action from different actors. I have a special representative on refugees and migrants, who is currently going, for instance, just today to Armenia, because there we also have people who are seeking shelter, who fled from their homes, unfortunately, and are now in Armenia. What a special representative can do is go to the places, find what the needs are and then help. The Committee of Ministers, of course, is issuing different recommendations on the matter. I will just recall one, which is quite an important one, which is the recommendation on refugee, asylum-seeking women and girls, where there is a special recommendation to our member states giving guidance on how to deal with people, especially when they are vulnerable. Very often women and girls are those vulnerable people in these situations. There are also other recommendations on age assessment and many others that are important for migration. In general, and you are right, when people are found on the territory of the member states of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights' respective provisions have to be applied, and this goes for all of our member states. Sometimes it is very difficult and, therefore, for countries that are on the frontline and face one moment, like now in Lampedusa. There are so many thousands of people there. More solidarity will be very important on that. We are, on the level of the Council of Europe, dealing from different points of view with this issue.

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

The next question comes from Ms Ingjerd SCHOU from Norway and she speaks on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Ingjerd, the floor is yours.

**Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mister President and Madam Secretary General.

In June our Assembly discussed the budget and priorities of the Council of Europe for the next four years.

Our message to the Committee of Ministers was clear: to follow up on the ambitious goals of the Reykjavík Declaration. We were in agreement that we should go over and above zero real growth.

How is the work on the budget proceeding? Are the member states delivering on their ambitious goals?

Thank you.

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

Madam Secretary General.

**Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ (Secretary General of the Council of Europe):** Thank you very much for this question, because the Reykjavík summit was a success. The Reykjavík declaration was very rich in giving orientation to this organisation about what is a priority for the member states to be done in next years ahead. And the agenda set is very ambitious, and you are absolutely right.

And I'm very grateful to the Parliamentary Assembly that you took the resolution, almost immediately after the Reykjavík Summit, to support what is my reading and the reading of the declaration. Such an ambitious plan, increasing in a number of areas the actions of the Council of Europe or asking the Council of Europe to increase the strengthening work of the Court, of the execution of judgments, of when this commission or the commissioner work on matters of the environment, work on the principles of democracy, giving as a novelty for the first time as part of our budget, also partly supporting the third pillar of our work, which is standard setting, monitoring, and assisting member states.

So far we always heavily or almost completely relied on the voluntary contributions from the member states or European Union. We believe that it is an equal pillar to the other two ones. So therefore we need to have some support, some budget dedicated to associations, and in particular for some of our action plans like the one on Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Bosnia Herzegovina and some others. And that some money has to be secured through regular ordinary budget.

So, with this in mind, I proposed the draft proposal for the budget and programming budget - programme for four years and budget for the next two years. And indeed I propose that we go above Zero Real Growth.

I know that at this stage it's very difficult all across our area for our member states dealing with inflation and other issues, but I think what is at stake here is democratic security, backsliding or halting backsliding of democracy, and harnessing the new challenges, not least environmental challenges and human rights and artificial intelligence.

So, for that, for all those reasons I proposed the budget that is above the Zero Real Growth. The delegations and the member states have started discussing it and what I can say is that in the next two months I hope that we will arrive to the budget that was hoped for and wished for by the leaders when they proposed the very comprehensive agenda for the next programme and work of the Council of Europe.

And in that respect I would really highly appreciate your support back through your national Parliament, to the governments to support that approach, because I think the situation is very difficult in Europe when it comes to democratic security. We need to revert the trend of backsliding of democracy and for all of that we need a budget that is appropriate to the challenge.

Thank you.

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

The next question comes from Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON from Iceland and Bjarni speaks on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

The floor is yours, Bjarni.

**Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON (Iceland, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Secretary General, in the Reykjavík Declaration, the heads of states encouraged the establishment of a new intergovernmental committee on the environment and human rights: the Reykjavík Committee.

How is the Committee of Ministers following up on this statement? What steps have already been taken? How is the progress? And what is the timeline for this process?

Further, can you promise this Assembly that you will do everything that lies within your competencies to defend the fundamental human rights of the Armenian people exiled from Nagorno-Karabakh?

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

Madam Secretary General.

**Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ (Secretary General of the Council of Europe):** Thank you very much.

I think it is right that all your questions are somehow linked with our Reykjavík Summit. And the last question coming from you representing Iceland, as a leader of the Icelandic delegation, it is not by chance that you ask this question and that you ask about the environment. Indeed, at Reykjavík, our leaders were very clear that there should be progress and a strong commitment to harness the Council of Europe efforts on human rights and the environment.

I know that throughout our spectrum of institutions of the Council of Europe – not only the Court but also others – have dealt with this issue and I think we are, just now the Court is having some very interesting hearings on some of the issues linked with the environment and human rights. And that, actually, is also what the leaders were discussing: do we need a new protocol to the European Convention? Do we need another separate convention? What is the way to approach the issue? But one thing our leaders were certain of was that human rights and environment and climate change are intertwined and that we need to step up our work.

So, on your issue on your question on the Committee: at this moment, we the Committee of Ministers' intergovernmental sector is working on two lines. One is, indeed, the Steering Committee on Human Rights, which is the link with issues pertaining to the feasibility of a future instrument to be decided upon. So the work, the negotiations, are actually starting and the Committee is due to have to come back with an answer on feasibility by June next year. So by June next year, we will know what the feasibility says and what would be the most appropriate for the Council of Europe to have as a new instrument dealing with this issue.

At the same time, there is an action taken with the convention on protection of the environment through criminal law and, on this, negotiations will start next week. So they will be – I hope – by some time, although the issues are very complex and the scale of the challenge is very, very big, that we will have in the next year or two, decisions on both: on this new convention on the environment through criminal law, and also the one on what we do to better protect human rights with regard to climate change.

In what concerns your second question, when you ask me to do whatever is in my capacity to protect Armenians who have fled, unfortunately, from the place they have lived for hundreds of years. Already, by now, my special representative is on the way to Armenia with, of course, consent from the Armenian authorities. She will map the needs of those people because there are over 100 000. Almost all unfortunately left from Karabakh and we will certainly, when coming back, we will devise a plan on how to assist so immediately the people who are there. But, of course, there is a bigger question to see when and how these people should return home because I think no one wants to be a refugee, no one wants to leave the place where they were born or their ancestors were born. So, I think throughout the Council of Europe, we should pay attention to that and do whatever we can to allow these people to go back.

And, of course, on the side of Azerbaijan, I hope soon to be able to send a mission from the Secretariat that will talk to Azerbaijani authorities and see what is their assessment of the situation in Azerbaijan. But also with this I call on Azerbaijan as I did to our Joint Committee to really apply the European Convention on Human Rights fully because everyone around the Council of Europe space is entitled to enjoy all freedoms and rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. So I think if we work on all those fronts, then Armenians will be – hopefully very soon – safe to go back to their homes.

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly):** The next speaker is Mr Thibaut FRANÇOIS, from France, on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

Mister FRANÇOIS, you have the floor.

**Mr Thibaut FRANÇOIS (France, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Madam General Secretary,

Ladies and gentlemen,

For several days now, the Israeli people have been facing terrorist attacks by Hamas on their territory.

It is incomprehensible that the condemnation of Islamist terrorism is not unanimously supported by certain French political parties, represented both here and on the other side of the Chamber.

The European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance and the Rassemblement National will continue to defend all French people, whatever their origins, whatever their religion, against the deadly ideology of Islamist terrorism. It is essential that all forms of apology for terrorism be prosecuted in our respective countries.

Madam Secretary General,

I would like to know how the Council of Europe intends to contribute to the protection of Israelis, but above all to the condemnation of parties and associations that are complacent towards Hamas.

Thank you very much.

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

Madam General Secretary?

**Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ (Secretary General of the Council of Europe):** Thank you very much, Mister Thibaut FRANÇOIS.

You will have read that I reacted on the morning of 7 October, when the horrific attacks by Hamas occurred.

The brutality and indiscriminate nature of the Hamas violence has led to the deaths of several hundred civilians and injured thousands, with several hundred people taken hostage.

All this is unacceptable, as I made clear in my statement on 7 October.

Yesterday, as you also know, all over France, including in Strasbourg and in front of the Council of Europe, there was a kind of gathering of Jews, but also of other people who wanted to show their solidarity and demonstrate that they, and of course the Council of Europe, do not accept any terrorist act or attack on civilians, because nothing justifies terrorism. My special representative for anti-Semitism took part and clearly expressed the Council of Europe's solidarity, as well as my own, with the Israeli people.

You also know that Israel is not a member state of the Council of Europe, so from the Council of Europe we can only make very strong statements, which we have done. To do more is impossible, as it is not really in our mandate, and it is not in my mandate as Secretary General.

You are absolutely right. We must show our solidarity with the Israeli people and truly condemn the Hamas attacks, which have caused so much suffering.

As I work for an organisation that promotes peace in Europe and beyond, I can only call for dialogue to find a solution to this very difficult issue, which has been around for a long time.

We need to invest everything possible in dialogue and find a way, firstly, to put an end to the suffering, and secondly, to find a solution that will enable us to avoid such things happening again.

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

Last question on behalf of the political groups comes from Mr Paul GAVAN from Ireland and Paul speaks on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Paul, the floor is yours.

**Mr Paul GAVAN (Ireland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Mister President, Secretary General.

I believe the greatest human rights tragedy of the 21st century is the mass drownings of human beings in the Mediterranean and Greek seas: already over 2 000 lives lost this year, over 27 000 lives lost in the last decade.

With respect, talk of deterring smugglers is really missing the point that each day we are losing human beings in those seas.

Will you support a clear call for state-led rescue missions in relation to these people desperately fleeing war and famine?

What steps will you take in relation to deterring the ever-increasing use of *refoulements* amongst member states?

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

Madam Secretary General?

**Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ (Secretary General of the Council of Europe):** Well, push backs are clearly forbidden under the European Convention on Human Rights, so I can only call on our member states when dealing with migration and with refugees or asylum seekers to apply international standards, including the European Convention that forbids the push backs.

So, what in the past we were doing was either through the action of the commissioner or through, in certain cases, also our action from the special representative for migrants and refugees. We would go there, speak to the authorities, and then of course go back to the respective governments and ask them to execute.

But you know very well that there are other bodies dealing with the issues, such as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. They also from time to time go and see especially those who find themselves in detention at the borders.

So, all these different bodies of the Council of Europe are sending a clear message: push backs are forbidden and therefore shouldn't be happening.

And with that, my special representative for refugees and migrants is working very closely with the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, and they provided in the past and are working now on guidance for the member states on how to deal with people in these vulnerable situations and respect basic fundamental rights and freedoms.

Also, my special representative is in close contact and on the board of Frontex, so really working very closely and giving all possible assistance to give trainings or information on what and how needs to be done at the borders when the respectable authorities are assessing refugees and migrants when they are on the territory of Council of Europe member states.

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

We started eight minutes late, so that leaves that we still have six minutes for four questions and a very short reaction.

I call now Mr Armen GEVORGYAN from Armenia, Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV from Azerbaijan, Ms Franziska HOOP from Liechtenstein, and Ms Larysa BILOZIR from Ukraine so that we also have a bit of a general balance.

The first question comes from Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

You have 30 seconds.

**Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, EC/DA):** Thank you, Madam Secretary General,

Just yesterday, during the same session we awarded the Václav Havel prize to the Turkish political prisoner Osman Kavala, recognising human rights violations in Türkiye and at the same time, we elected a new Vice President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from Türkiye, essentially encouraging its current policy.

This is just an observation, but you should know that as a part of its genocidal policy Azerbaijan recently captured the Armenian political and state leaders of Karabakh as the Turks did 108 years ago. Taking into account the worse situation in Azerbaijan [he was interrupted by Mr Tiny KOX].

So what are you going to do with this situation, specifically with the prisoners in Baku? Or will we do no awarding in the future with this prisoner?

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly):** Sorry, I have to be strict.

30 seconds for everybody.

The next question comes from Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV from Azerbaijan.

30 seconds, Rafael.

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

Dear Secretary General,

Armenia and Azerbaijan are currently working on a peace treaty. I am sure that sooner or later, this agreement will be concluded, however, we also need to prepare both societies for a peaceful future.

In this regard, how does the Council of Europe intend to expand confidence-building measures between the two countries with the involvement of civil society, in particular the younger generation?

And a supplementary question, do you pay attention to the difference in mood between mine and our Armenian colleague's question?

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

Next question comes from Ms Franziska HOOP from Lichtenstein. 30 seconds.

Switch on your microphone, please.

**Ms Franziska HOOP (Liechtenstein, ALDE):** Thank you, Mister President.

Madam Secretary General,

The European Court of Human Rights plays a central role in protecting the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe. However, some states seem unwilling to enforce the judgements of The Court.

How do you use your role to ensure the implementation of these judgments, and to what extent do you think that bilateral meetings with representatives of the respective states can actually, bring about that rather-late enforcement?

Thank you.

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Madam Franziska HOOP.

Last speaker on my list will be Ms Larysa BILOZIR from Ukraine.

30 seconds, Larysa.

**Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE):** Madam Secretary General,

It is well known that on the second year of full-fledged Russian invasion into Ukraine and war, citizens of the Russian Federation irrespective of other countries are still working in the Secretariat and other bodies of the Council of Europe. The question is how many Russian citizens are still working with the Council of Europe and your leadership since the expulsion of Russian in March 2022, thus undermining the security and the reputation of this oldest European international organisation.

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

For questions, 4 minutes left to Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ.

I have to be strict on your last comment.

**Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ (Secretary General of the Council of Europe):** Thank you.

Let me go in the reverse order, so I start with the colleagues who work in the in the Secretariat. We are a rule-of-law organisation and I'm applying the current regulation. The regulations were decided by the Committee of Ministers, so, as long as they are in force I will do so.

But you also know that the moment when we expelled Russia from this organisation, I prepared a very comprehensive document on the consequences of Russia's expulsion, and one dealt with this issue.

Since then, the large majority of colleagues, almost all, who have only Russian nationality have left. By the end of this year they will all be gone, those who had fixed term contracts. For others, I am applying the rules and I will continue to do so, because we cannot ask other countries to apply the rule of law and then be an organisation that itself is not applying it. But considering that there are some issues that needs to be dealt with, I also applied a risk assessment of some higher-level and medium-level posts and, according to where possible, I also applied the policy that we have in our people strategy, which is mobility of the staff which includes everyone, not only colleagues who have also Russian nationality.

And those who are remaining are mainly all those who have double nationalities, who have another nationality, and they fulfil what is required to be a civil servant, public servant of the Council of Europe.

For execution of judgments, it is first and foremost political and by the Convention that it is that respondent state is responsible for execution of judgments. It is the Committee of Ministers, again by the virtue of Article 46 of the European Convention, who is there to supervise this execution, and, indeed, for years, there were many reforms that were trying to make the system more workable, more transparent, more easy. I think we arrived to the point where we can say that really the execution is done in a proper way. However, there are quite a few countries that have some cases that date 10, 15, even 20 years.

So, the execution is clearly defined in terms of the convention that deals with that. But you're right that we are all actually also responsible for that and the Secretary General as well. So I use all my high level meetings with all my respective counterparts to raise this issue, because I think it's very important, because the execution of judgments is one of those areas where the leaders in Reykjavík decided that we need to put more effort, therefore more money, into it. The execution of judgments is crucial for the convention system to be sustainable and credible, and therefore we should invest all we can so that our member states who have difficulties for different reasons to execute the judgments should do so.

But while saying that, one thing is for sure: the execution is the obligation of the respondent state and it cannot be negotiated. So, once the court judgment is final, it has to be executed, and the execution department and the Committee of Ministers can help in that, and they are doing so, but actually the real work is on the respondent.

CBMs of course, and thank you for mentioning it, CBMs are very important for any credible confidence building among Armenia and Azerbaijan and in many other places, so I've already done with my colleagues two CBMs in 2022: one in Venice and another in Tbilisi for a young journalist and for civil society of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

And I trust that in the future we should do more of that. But, of course, for that to be the case there need to be agreement on all sides. We are ready to apply this as soon as possible, we already have I think some prepared ideas about what to do.

And finally for what was asked by the colleague from Armenia, so how to deal with the issues that are now at stake for Armenians: I announced and I hope that a visit will take place soon, that we are in talks with Azerbaijan, that a high level visit from the Secretariat will go to Azerbaijan and discuss all appropriate issues so that may include also the issue that you asked for.

Thank you.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must now conclude our questions to the General Secretary, whom I would like to thank very much.

**Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL, President of the Assembly):** We are now going, thank you very much, Madam Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ, for dealing with the next debate. We will wait for a minute so that we can change the Presidency.

As we still wait for our Vice-Chair to take over, I open the next item on the agenda, which is the debate on the report titled "The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe". You can find it in Document 15826, presented by Mr Samad SEYIDOV on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

In order to finish by 6:45 p.m. we will have to interrupt the list of speakers at about 6:30 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call Mr Samad SEYIDOV, rapporteur.

You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes at the end of the debate to reply. The floor is yours.

## **Debate: The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe**

**Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA, Rapporteur):** Thank you very much Mister President.

Dear friends, dear colleagues,

It is a really great privilege and honour to present this report and to see our friends and colleagues who came for this, I think, very important and fruitful discussion which we have been waiting for. Because "The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe" is really being discussed in a timely way in this hemicycle.

I am really honoured that during the discussion we agreed that this report could be presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and be unanimously approved by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

Now I address you to seek your support for adopting the draft resolution before you, and a further contribution of the Parliamentary Assembly in protecting and enhancing democracy and human rights across Europe.

Dear colleagues,

We are at a time in history where, more than ever, we need to stand by the principles of the Council of Europe.

This commitment to the common values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a precondition for peace. We are talking about peace a lot.

Ideologies that seek to undermine these values, that seek to reject democracy, undermine human rights and ignore the rule of law are in direct opposition to these values.

Far-right extremism is not a new phenomenon. Unfortunately we can see this far-right extremism on a global stage, and in Europe of course. We can see characteristics of far-right ideology, far-right extremism – I want to stress this word. This is xenophobia; this is anti-Semitism; this is Islamophobia; this is other kinds of violence, which poses a significant threat to our society.

The latest developments in Europe and all over the world show us how difficult the situation just now with this extremism is. We can see some attempts to undermine our values: with fighting against Jews; with burning the holy Koran; with doing some things unacceptable in a civilised world.

Far-right extremism is, as we can see, one of the fastest growing threats in many European countries.

Of course when we started to discuss this question, my friends and colleagues from the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy expressed their views. They even presented their own opinions which I fully respect, and they said Mr Samad SEYIDOV you are talking about far-right extremism, but what about far-left extremism? Because extremism is extremism and you should take these realities into account.

With my full respect to my colleagues, and we have discussed this question more than three times at the level of the Committee, together with experts who were invited to the Committee, with representatives of the Venice Commission, we understand the moods and ideas presented by colleagues.

But I have decided to stay with the initial initiative, the initial motion, and present you with a report about far-right extremism today.

In our discussions we presented different ideas, and that's why I did my best in order to present you the main avenues: how can we fight extremism? What can we do in order to prevent this disease?

From my point of view, we should enhance and strengthen existing legislation: this is very important.

Secondly, and this is really very important, especially for representatives of the young generation in Europe, and all over the world: we pay so little attention to representatives of the young generation, and that's why promoting education and media literacy is vitally important for fighting extremism.

Thirdly, we should combat online radicalisation, disinformation, and propaganda. Unfortunately these characteristics of extreme far-right ideology became a disease, not only in Europe, but all over the world, and especially propaganda: we can see that.

We should encourage respectful and inclusive political discourse. We should respect each other. We should withdraw hate speech from agendas, and we should educate representatives of the young generation to follow this path, this way.

We should do our best as representatives of the parliaments, representatives of the political part of our society. We should do everything in order to enhance the protection of elected officials from politically-motivated crimes and illegal behaviours.

I am convinced that any strategy to defeat extremism must confront, head on, the extreme ideology underpinning it.

We must confront, tackle and expose conspiracy theories.

And we must continually make the argument for our values with confidence.

Our responses should not only be reactive, but proactive. Investing in education and awareness campaigns.

We should promote inclusivity, tolerance and respect for diversity. Especially from this point of view, I should remind you that these values were presented at the Reykjavík Summit, and this is exactly the way we should go. Of course we have done a lot from this point of view, but I think we should do much more in future.

I think that during the discussions, we will follow this path.

Again I want to express my gratitude to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, which unanimously adopted this draft resolution.

Thank you all very much.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister Samad SEYIDOV.

Now we will go to the list of speakers on behalf of political groups.

I give the floor to Mr Bertrand BOUYX on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

You have the floor.

**Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Rapporteur,

Ladies and gentlemen,

"Far-right ideology: a challenge for democracy and human rights" is a vast debate that concerns us all. When we hear "extreme right-wing ideology", we tend to focus on the word "extreme right", and rightly so.

The report gives an initial definition: firstly, a belief in some form of natural inequality or hierarchy between peoples; secondly, manifestations of racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia; and thirdly, a belief in authoritarianism, a cult of the leader as the sole embodiment of so-called traditional values, a belief that rejects any notion of democracy.

Obviously, we in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe share none of these values, and we fight against them. That goes without saying, so I'd like to come back to the word "ideology".

Indeed, everywhere the far right presents itself as the best defender of the nation, its identity, and its interests. But everywhere, every time there is a question of defending the nation, it betrays, capitulates and chooses the side of its enemies.

Why this paradox, you may ask? Because it's so fascinated by the cult of the strong man, the leader, the guardian of tradition, that it believes the nation and the people are no match for ideology. This leader, who is systematically weighed against democracy and its complex deliberative procedures, is worshipped regardless of nationality.

Examples abound. Without going back to the Second World War, just look at Vladimir Putin's biggest supporters today. Which parties enjoy the largesse or simply the sympathy of Russian power? I'm sure you have them in every one of your countries.

The elections in Slovakia gave us the latest example. It's the far-right parties. In fact that's how you can recognise this type of party. And why? Because these self-proclaimed defenders of the homeland actually favour what best corresponds to their fantasy, the strongman, even if that strongman is an enemy of their homeland.

I therefore invite our countries not to focus on these parties, which err every time history gives them the opportunity to do so, but more effectively to remove the soil on which they thrive like gangrene on a diseased leg. There's nothing specific about the struggle. It's called good governance, inclusiveness, democracy, economic and social progress, and tackling the real issues facing our societies, far from the wishful thinking of the proponents of these ideologies.

I wouldn't want to end my speech without returning to the fate of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. The report rightly points out, and I quote, that, "Extreme right-wing ideologies encompass and promote xenophobic, racist and nativist visions, including other forms of intolerance or claiming religious or other beliefs." Some 120 000 Armenians had to leave their homeland because they were of the wrong ethnicity, once again in Europe.

With these remarks in mind, I shall be voting in favour of the resolution before us.

Thank you for your support.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Bertrand BOUYX.

Dear colleagues, I would like to inform you that in order to finish by 6:45 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 6:30 p.m. to allow time for the reply and vote on the draft resolution.

Now I call Mr #Bob De BRABANDERE.

You have the floor.

**Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear colleagues,

Let me get straight to the point. Who needed this report? There is no public debate about this topic and the facts show that the real dangers in our society are not coming from right-wing parties. Accepting this report will only demonstrate, once more, that this Assembly has completely lost all touch with reality in Europe and the real concerns of our citizens.

This report is just a weak excuse for an attack on all parties that do not blindly agree with the left-liberal establishment. Some amongst us here want to install a thought police, be able to brainwash young people and curtail free speech. The ultimate goal: eliminating political opponents and perpetuate their own power. It is no coincidence that an amendment was also tabled in the Committee to impose a *cordon sanitaire* as it exists in my country Belgium. A *cordon sanitaire* has only one effect, ladies and gentlemen, and that is to undermine democracy. To eliminate the will and voice of the majority of voters, the true enemies of democracy cannot help but reveal themselves here. And why? Just look at the election results in Germany last weekend. And there you have your reply; people are fed up with the left-wing narrative. People understand they have been deceived for all these years and they want real positive change. When the left ran out of arguments, the only thing left to cling onto power was to forbid its opponents from speaking by vilifying them. And we all know history here. We all know what the next step will be if this also fails.

Let me scare you a bit with something that some of you are not used to – hard objective facts. Europol counted 28 terrorist attacks last year across the European Union, that were carried out, failed or could be foiled. Thirteen out of 16 of the completed attacks – 13 out of 16 – were attributed to leftist and anarchist terrorism, two cases of Jihadist terrorism and only one – one – of right-wing terrorism. Those are the facts. That is reality. A fact-based report with a different title should have been put here before us. It should be named "The challenge of far-left ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe". But let us face it, it is not a far-right, we are only right so far.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister Bob De BRABANDERE.

Now I give the floor to Mr Alexis TSIPRAS to speak on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

You have the floor.

**Mr Alexis TSIPRAS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group)\*:** For the last 15 years, since the financial crisis of 2008, we have been living in a troubled world with parallel and successive crises. In this unstable environment, more than 70 years after the defeat of fascism, hatred, racism and nationalism have again found the ground to spread across the European continent. Our focus is on racism and hate speech, and we see attempts to promote both extremes. Who made extreme racist discourse mainstream? Who tried to revise history and invent the theory of two extremes? Which media systems have promoted extreme right-wing rhetoric, even neo-Nazis? What policies have led to the social exclusion of millions of European citizens, leaving them open to right-wing discourse? And we have also seen the focus of the far right on migrants and refugees.

In Greece, we experienced a significant drop in our GDP and a large number of refugees passing through the country. But we managed to come out of this crisis by fighting the far right by confronting its ideas and policies. We tried to protect our most vulnerable citizens. Instead of letting people die at sea, we protected human life, gave refuge to thousands of refugees - adults and children - and granted them Greek citizenship. We stood up to violence against the LGBTI community by recognising the right to gender choice and introducing civil partnerships for same-sex couples. We confronted nationalism head-on, resolving the Macedonian question and giving the Western Balkans a European perspective.

These choices may have come at a political cost, but in 2019, neo-Nazis did not enter parliament. Unfortunately, today we have three far-right parties in the Greek parliament. To limit their influence, we need the courage to confront their ideas, racism and nationalism. We need social policies that reduce inequalities and promote greater social justice and security. We need to raise awareness and show less hypocrisy. While we educate against hate speech, we must all be active in countering these phenomena. We won't solve these problems, whether in Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh, Palestine or within European societies, unless we all take action.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister Alexis TSIPRAS.  
Now I call Mr Paulo PISCO to take the floor on behalf of the Socialist Group.

**Mr Paulo PISCO (Portugal, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Thank you, Chair,

Dear colleagues,

The influence of extreme-right parties and movements has grown together with the influence and sophistication of internet and social networks. It is through those channels that citizens are flooded with disinformation, fake news, manipulation, and radicalisation.

That's why this report is so important and must be followed. It highlights the dangers of the extreme-right movements to our democracies, to the stability of our nations, to the strength and cohesion of the European Union and the humanistic values we defend in the Council of Europe.

Our societies are more polarised than ever, because digital platforms amplify the anger, revolt, and anxiety that are fed by the extreme-right movements and parties, in a circular flow of destructive energies, arming seriously the capacity for political dialogue and co-operation, paving through the way to reach power in a perverse and dishonest manner.

As in totalitarian regimes, the extremists transform adversaries into enemies to better drag people to their propaganda. And the enemies are the democratic institutions, the European Union, the left political movements, migrants, Gypsies, and other minorities. They claim for an impossible nationalism and pure identity in a world full of colonisers and colonised people and composed since ever by migrant flows. They urge to racism and xenophobia and legitimate racists and xenophobes and hate speech.

They are a threat to the European Union project, build to reject the clash of nationalisms and identities, promoting instead the dialogue and co-operation. They block decisions in the European Union with dramatic consequences at the level of migrations, preventing to save lives in the Mediterranean. They are killing the meaning of humanism and solidarity.

Extremist movements are or were often financed by Russia, responsible for the unacceptable violation of the United Nations Charter and for all kinds of war crimes in Ukraine. Although they are trying hard to seem respectful and acceptable, we must not forget that their inspiration came from fascist and authoritarian ideologies.

In my country, Portugal, the extreme-right say they want to found a new republic, they reject the authority of the chairman of the parliament, their militants make sieges to political parties, their parliamentarians undertake provocative actions in demonstration organised by left wing parties, and, as the Constitutional Court stated, their internal statutes are anti-democratic.

Here, in the Council of Europe, and in our member states, we must raise our voice to defend tolerance, inclusive and pluralistic societies, if needed with sanitary measures. Fighting extreme-right ideology is a moral duty for all democrats, if we want to prevent the degradation of our democracies.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you Mr Paulo PISCO.

Now I give the floor to Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

You have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

The Group of the European People's Party welcomes this timely report on the rise of far-right extremism, a critical issue that threatens the core values of our countries are built upon.

The recent surge in far-right extremism both in Europe and globally poses a clear and present danger to our commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and threatens the inclusive and diverse societies we aim to uphold.

Over the past two decades, the world has encountered a series of crises, ranging from global financial issues to significant challenges in migration, culminating in the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. These events have had profound impacts on our continent as a whole, resulting in social frustration, fear and anger. They have created the perfect fertile ground for far-right extremism to take root.

We must meet this challenge with the co-ordinated whole of society approach. Given the transnational nature of the strict co-operation among member states, it is imperative.

At the same time we underline that national action plans must involve civil society, the media, educational institutions, and of course political parties.

We make a point of highlighting that education is one of the most powerful tools against extremism.

We must integrate comprehensive education about human rights, diversity, and democracy into school curricula, and enhance media literacy and critical thinking to empower citizens to resist extremist propaganda, disinformation, and the new AI-powered tools, such as deepfakes.

Furthermore, we echo the rapporteur's call for political parties to be at the forefront of this fight.

It is our duty to use our platforms to counter these messages and to provide our people with a strong democratic alternative, especially in the context of the following months, when many of our member states will hold elections that will shape probably the future of our continent as a whole.

It is crucial for our member states to review and enhance legislation regarding extremism, hate speech and disinformation to promote education, media literacy and critical thinking, combat online radicalisation, counter disinformation, support civil society and of course encourage respectful political discourse.

Let us work together to preserve our democratic values, and my colleagues, stand united and reaffirm our commitment to the principles that define us as the Council of Europe.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE.

And now in the debate I call the next speaker Ms Isabel ALVES MOREIRA.

Please, you have the floor.

**Ms Isabel ALVES MOREIRA (Portugal, SOC):** Thank you, Chair.

The firm fight against the violation of human rights today once again in history involves the fight against the extreme rights.

The extreme right waves the flag of security, when in fact it only wants the security of a few, as it has always done throughout history. So we, the democrats, have to recover the security speech, knowing how to explain that fascism is the land of security for some, an insecurity for almost all. As we saw in the invasion of the capital, as we saw in the eyes of the bodies of victims of hate and discrimination, as seen in the targets of a manufactured coward social polarisation that weakens before the strong and is so strong against women, racialised people, LGBT people, immigrants, and migrants.

We respond to hate and the continued activity of destroying democracy with more and more democracy and better democracy.

We must be a free, safe and democratic Europe for everyone, co-operating so that the disadvantaged are not the slave labor of extremists.

Education for respect for human rights is essential and that is why all extremists launch campaigns against education for citizenship calling it an ideology, as if democratic constitutions had not chosen equality over inequality. Citizenship is not an option, it is not optional.

We have a special duty to defend human rights and democratic principles and to reject all forms of racism and intolerance, hate speech, incitement to racial speech.

This duty involves recognising that our societies have systemic problems of racism instead of denying them by imagining our countries as exceptions to a centuries-old history that has left deep marks.

It is because these structural problems exist that fascism tries its way, so we begin by recognising them and then deconstructing, repressing, combating, and creating real public policies that eliminate the causes of discrimination against people who have the right to freedom, equality, and security.

This is the Council of Europe. We have made a choice.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I would like to give the floor to Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN.

Please, you have the floor.

**Ms Arusyak JULHAKYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear colleagues,

Today we address the pressing concern that threatens the very foundation of democracy and human rights.

Far-right ideology, often characterised by nationalism, xenophobia, and authoritarianism has been on the rise in many parts of the world.

This not only threatens the principles of equality and justice, but also undermines the very essence of democracy and human rights that have been hard-fought and cherished for generations.

In recent years we have witnessed the alarming rise of hate crimes, discrimination and violence associated with far-right ideology. These acts directly threaten the human rights of individuals who are targeted based on their ethnicity, religion or beliefs. From this point of view it is very important that we as an organisation discuss the issue, trying to find possible solutions.

Being frank, dear colleagues, I'm a little bit confused seeing that the rapporteur on a topic related to xenophobia and authoritarianism represents a country which is famous for its xenophobia and authoritarianism, a country which just very recently ethnically cleansed a whole population of Armenians living in their ancestral homeland and an ethnic cleansing which was the final chord after nearly 10 months of blockade and starvation of those people.

The report brings examples of different countries, but nothing is said about Azerbaijan itself.

For example, it could refer to the latest report on Azerbaijan of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), in which is mentioned the following. I quote,

"The Committee is deeply concerned about incitement to racial hatred and the propagation of racist stereotypes against persons of Armenian national or ethnic origin, including on the internet and social media, as well as by public figures and governmental officials, and the lack of detailed information on investigations, prosecutions, convictions and sanctions of such acts. The Committee is also concerned about reports that school textbooks promote prejudice and incite racial hatred, particularly against ethnic Armenians, the marginalisation of ethnic minorities in history, education in Azerbaijan."

However, colleagues, going back to the topic of far-right ideology, let me say that as responsible politicians and advocates for justice, we must stand together against extremism, hate and intolerance. We must defend the democratic principles that have allowed us to progress as societies. We must work tirelessly to ensure that human rights are preserved for all, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Only by doing so can we build a future that is truly inclusive, just and democratic for all.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And now I would like to give the floor to Ms Oleksandra USTINOVA. Please, the floor is yours.

**Ms Oleksandra USTINOVA (Ukraine, ALDE):** Dear colleagues,

We are talking about today about the challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights. However, I think we should not be talking about the challenge but about the threat. The threat to the world that we already are facing today. It has been disturbing for us as Ukrainians when the far, far-right ideology – I would say the extreme far-right, a terrorist ideology – was rising in Russia called the Russian world. We as Ukrainians especially for the last 10 years, and that is when the war broke, were telling the European nations that this is a threat not only to human rights, not only to democracy but a threat to their lives.

I think today it is obvious that this far-right ideology called the Russian world, is threatening the world with weapons, it is funding not only the far-right extremist movements in Europe but also other parts of the world. We already saw the Russian weapons in Hamas when they invaded Israel. We can already see the Russian weapons in other parts of the world that the terrorists are using. And we should be honest with ourselves that we cannot fight extremism-terrorism if we do not stop Russia together, as European countries and the world.

If the Western world cannot stand up against one single terrorist organisation – and this is what Russia is today – we will fail not only in democracy but we will fail as the world, because they will come to any other country that is present here today next.

Ukrainians have been claimed to be Nazis, to be extreme rights, and we had to prove to the world that we were not, while there was this evil emerging in Russia right next to us. And now when we keep hearing the words negotiations and diplomatic solutions, I would like you to tell me how we are supposed to be dynastified as the country for Russians to stop. Because they treat Ukrainians as Nazis that have to be eliminated just because we speak Ukrainian, just because we do not share their values. That the world should be the Russian world. And I wish there was an amendment left that, unfortunately was not supported, about the countries funding the far-right movement, because then it would be clear who is funding this in Europe, who is funding it in other parts of the world and who is funding terrorists around the world who are invading democratic countries.

Thank you so much.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Madam USTINOVA.

And now I give the floor to Mr John HOWELL.

Please, you have the floor.

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

The sort of Europe that I wanted for my children was one without the ideology of the Cold War.

How we got trapped into seeing the world as right-wing or left wing is the subject of much discussion and of numerous PhDs.

I feel the Europe that I know has got into a world of extremists on all sides, in all countries, almost – in almost all countries, extremist groups are gaining strength.

Europe is no less clean than anywhere else. On the one side, within living memory, Greece was run by the colonels. Spain and Portugal only lost their fascist governments in 1975. And on the other side, many countries of Eastern Europe – including countries that I love, such as Slovakia – have had communist governments of an extreme nature.

I'm afraid that I'm an old-fashioned liberal centrist who believes in human rights, who believes in the rule of law, and who believes in the power of democracy.

I believe that most people here share those views and that view of society.

We must look at the real causes.

We must look for xenophobia.

We must look for racism.

We must look for intolerance.

Because those of us who are on the other side of those key elements of it are doing things that are tremendously helpful, for migrants for example, and also in education, I am chairing an event to look at why education cannot become a human right across all countries.

If we look at Hamas, we see that it has an ideology, but it is not a left-right ideology. It described itself as having an anti-Zionist ideology.

I think that that is illustrative of the sort of extremism that we see about Europe at the moment. It produces a complicated pattern. Old ideologies try to attach themselves to new ideologies but are increasingly irrelevant and confused.

It's not ideologically based, but it's based on trying to obtain world power.

The UK puts open societies at the centre of what we do. Counterterrorism and tackling extremism is the framework with which we use to deal with crime.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mister HOWELL.

And I would like to give the floor to Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

The floor is yours.

**Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC)\*:** I would like to thank Mr Samad SEYIDOV for this interesting and realistic report of the European political situation. Little by little, the social and political climate has been getting worse in various fields, where the clear and decisive roadmap: the extreme right, has been gaining ground in the fight against democratic, social values and what I would say are fundamental rights. There are no halfway houses here.

In the context of questioning human rights, there has to be a resolute defence of our values, consolidating the building of European identity based on the defence of democracy and values. There have always been intransigent and intolerant people throughout our history and in our democracies but it is true that the spread of the extreme right through social networks and the dissemination of fake news and aggressive campaigns reaching our young people, who are, in most cases, defenceless in the face of pernicious and anti-democratic propaganda, are situations that impair our foundations and dangerously spread unacceptable intransigence. I mean intolerance of the LGBTI community and women, as we are seeing how our rights and freedoms – which have cost us so much to achieve – are now being seriously jeopardised. And, I mean migrants, who are suffering on a daily basis from hate campaigns and disinformation with xenophobic attitudes and minors who have been deprived in various regions of an effective right to education because some curricula content is now jeopardised by the far right.

The right to be able to enjoy and guarantee a clean and healthy planet for future generations in the face of surrealistic climate change denialism is another problem. These are just some of the obsessions of the far right, which affect our daily lives; among millions of European citizens who believe in democracy and freedom, and we do not want to see our rights undermined.

In Spain, this summer, we have seen a change in various local and autonomous governments and it is a reality – a widespread reality – now that the far right is present in many governments and presidencies of autonomous parliaments because the Partido Popular opened the door to them and thus began the dilution of rights.

We are perplexed as to how the rights of women are now being attacked. We are now seeing debated in autonomous parliaments the imposition of a parental pin, censoring sexual and emotional education, which is incomprehensible given the growing access of young people to pornography. Pressure being put on help for migrants and endless limitations are being put on the work being done to tackle climate change.

These are not theories: it is the unfortunate reality experienced by our continent. You cannot whitewash the ultra-right, as the right wing is trying to do in some countries. The effects are damaging for our society and we must all do everything possible to avoid it. I appeal for our democratic values to bring about unity amongst all of us to avoid coalitions which allow the far right to go on spreading their extreme ideology, limiting and restricting human rights. It is, therefore, our obligation to carry forward our responsibility in this body, but first and foremost, in our own countries.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Nuno CARVALHO please.

You have the floor.

**Mr Nuno CARVALHO (Portugal, EPP/CD):** Thank you Madam President,

Well, of course the far-right in Europe feeds itself from the stresses that our society produces, the stresses that come from different challenges. All of us can understand that, quite recently, when we had to struggle to fight against Covid-19, this was an opportunity for a lot of the movements that are far-right and extreme to infiltrate themselves and say that they were anti-vaccine and anti-a lot of the measures that had to be taken and everyone had to suffer in order to, of course, undertake and at the end win this fight against this terrible virus.

But the truth is that this is an example of all type of stresses that our societies may face in the future, like climate change, of course, like inflation.

And so, the first point that I would like to stress is that we need to tackle these issues and we need to tackle them in a the most moderate a way as possible.

Because the first thing that we can see is that a lot of times, they occupy a void: they occupy a void of protests; they occupy a void of not taking care of some issues and recognising them as true problems.

I should also say something, that I can see a lot of times that we as politicians - and allow me to say that we, including myself of course, as politicians need to do our best to respect our principles with our voters, respect our mandate that we have assumed with our voters.

Because if we do not carry out our mission with our, principles, with our mission, with our ideology, the mistrust that we can create in society with the true democrats, with the ones that want to maintain and sustain a true democratic system, well, that belief in these politicians may crumble.

People may lose trust in us, so it is very important to maintain our principles always in our priority, and never, never try to fail with our voters that have entrusted us with that mission. So that is of course something that we need to be very, very, very clear about in these very difficult times.

Otherwise, of course, the counter communication that has been created by the far right, and of course by all other types of extreme movements that we have been assisting, will thrive and will win against the moderate politicians like I, myself, think I am, and most of our colleagues here represented.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I would like to call Ms Meryem GÖKA to take the floor.

**Ms Meryem GÖKA (Türkiye, NR):** Dear President and dear colleagues,

Far-right extremism has had a long and especially violent presence in our continent. But unfortunately, especially in recent times, we are witnessing the rise of far-right extremism, with a surge of anti-democratic attacks and assaults on political opponents, ethnic, and religious groups, and in particular against Islam and Muslims, as well as anti-immigrant violence.

Recently, an unfortunate example is France's ban on its Olympic athletes wearing headscarves, which has also been slammed by the UN and is completely contrary to the spirit and purpose of the Olympics and our core values.

As you may well be aware, there have been grave incidents in Europe, where Muslims have been subjected to hate speech, attacks, and insults to their sacred values, such as attacks on mosques and, as we have seen recently in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, increasingly spreading Qur'an burning incidents.

We all must unite in condemning and rejecting such discriminatory practices.

Let's call it by its name. These are examples of anti-Muslim racism, xenophobia, and far-right extremism. I would like to underline that the United Nations recognised these acts as acts of religious hatred and violation of international law.

They also constitute one of the biggest threats to social peace and the core values of the Council of Europe. This is not freedom of expression.

As the report points out, despite the actions and steps taken by the Assembly, the problem still persists and must continue to be tackled.

Therefore, I also would like to touch on a few points concerning the role of us politicians, which I believe is more important than ever at a time of simultaneous democratic backsliding and the rise of far-right extremism.

First of all, I think we should work to remove the existing legislation that enables far-right extremism and its manifestations before developing new policies and legislation to combat it.

More importantly, I believe that as prominent political figures in our societies and as people who are sometimes among the victims of this problem, we should be at the forefront of fighting it with a common stance that embraces all our differences.

I also believe that ideologies, beliefs, and narratives are at the root of this problem and therefore must be tackled first and foremost. The discourse of politicians, which greatly influences the public opinion, should respect our core values.

Finally, I would like to thank the rapporteur Mr Samad SEYIDOV for his excellent work and this timely report.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And now I give the floor to Mr Jeremy CORBYN.

Please, you have the floor.

**Mr Jeremy CORBYN (United Kingdom, SOC):** Thank you, Madam President.

And I welcome this report and I absolutely welcome the debate that we're having here today, because it comes within the background of media all over Europe and many are right-wing politicians in national parliaments all over Europe being very critical of the principles behind the European Convention on Human Rights. And indeed in the case of my own country a significant number of conservative MPs actively calling for withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights. And we have a government that is actually challenging it in its own legislation. And so it is important to stand up for the principles of human rights in universality across this Continent.

The role of the far right in blaming minorities for problems is not a new one. The Nazis did it in the 1920s and 1930s, when it suited them to blame Jewish people for the economic problems that German people were facing. And it happens in every country at the present time. The same language is used against refugees and migrants, who are accused of causing the problems of underfunding of schools, of health centres, and all the other vital services that we need. They are the convenient scapegoat of today.

And so that racism, that anti-Semitism, that Islamophobia, that anti-Black racism that is played out by right-wing politicians ends up on the streets with brutal treatment of migrant people, assaults on people just going about their normal business, and sadly attacks on synagogues, mosques and other places of worship.

It's very important that we stand up against this far right ideology, stand up against the culture that is behind it, and ensure that our children, our schools, are brought up understanding both the brutal history of much of this continent, but also the brutal history of colonialism in many parts of the world. It is a principle of how education is carried out.

Hate speech has consequences, hate speech against individuals is frightening for young people, ends up with the growth of racism and a far-right ideology, and ends up dehumanising people.

As my friend Mr Paul GAVAN pointed out, thousands of people have died in the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea over the past few years trying to reach a place of safety. They're not our enemies, they're not our rivals, they're not trying to invade or take over, they are human beings trying to survive in a very difficult world. Tomorrow they will be our neighbours, tomorrow they'll be our doctors, tomorrow they'll be our teachers.

This report stands up against far-right ideology.

I think it's very important that this Assembly makes clear its position, that the growth of far-right ideology damages everything that we believe in in a free and democratic society. Therefore, that declaration against the far-right ideology is more important than ever now to stand up against this horrifying trend all across Europe.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And the next speaker is Ms Maria-Gabriela HORGA.

You have the floor.

**Ms Maria-Gabriela HORGA (Romania, EPP/CD):** Thank you.

Dear colleagues, yesterday 9 October was a national day of the Holocaust victims in Romania.

We have a duty to take all measures to ensure that such crimes against humanity do not happen again.

Awareness of the dangers we have not yet escaped is important.

Politicians and political parties should give greater importance to the threats of far-right movements, both for the public defence of human rights and democratic principles and by unequivocally rejecting all forms of racism and intolerance, hate speech, incitement to homophobic behaviour and harassment.

To combat these challenges to fundamental values, I support the report presented by Mr Samad SEYIDOV which envisages international co-operation by reviewing and, if necessary, improving existing legislation.

This can be done by implementing a series of measures to effectively counter hate speech, incitement to violence and discrimination emanating from far-right political groups.

Romania also pays attention to the knowledge of history. Through it we can avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. History of the Jews, the Holocaust, is now a subject of study in schools in Romania.

"A nation that does not know its past is condemned to repeat it" said the well-known Romanian historian and politician Nicolae Iorga.

We, as elected representatives as well as the democratic political forces we represent, must fight and combat violent right-wing extremism that forms networks and even extremist political parties that share views based on xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance, as well as various conspiracy theories, and act online and offline in our European countries.

Unfortunately, I have seen that representatives of such a political party in my country are trying to imitate the way the legionnaires put pressures on the university environment.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And now I would like to call Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR, you have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues, I want to thank the Rapporteur for the great job he did encouraging us to be vigilant and reasonably assess the upcoming threat for European values.

And today the rhetoric of European far-right ideologies is based on three key ideas: the chauvinistic and lasting domination of nation, xenophobia against immigrants, and political populism.

The extreme right offers its supporters very simple solutions: expelling foreigners, anti-European, anti-NATO policies. They reject non-EU immigration and even the EU itself. For them, everyone who is not their own is a stranger.

This rhetoric is very similar to that of the Russian Federation which, in my opinion, puts a great effort in supporting far-right movements in Europe.

During the election campaign, far-right parties criticised sanctions against Russia, criticised military aid to Ukraine, opposed LGBT rights, etc.

It is worth noting that recently in Slovakia a party with openly pro-Russian narratives won the election. The former Slovak Prime Minister has placed a billboard where he called Ukrainian fascists and calls on NATO to stop giving the Kyiv regime weapons, blaming Ukraine and the West for the start of the war. Therefore, what we have as the result is that the Slovakian government decided not to send more aid to Ukraine.

According to the recent surveys, far-right parties are gaining popularity in Europe. Support for the pro-Russian ADF rose to 16 and 15 and has in Bavaria recently in local elections. And in the European parliament elections will be held in summer 2024, and the right parties have a great chance to win.

Currently, the division inside Europe is playing to the advantage of Russia.

Such actions are part of a plan of the Russian totalitarian regime to weaken the European Union. A prominent example, Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front party, also known for her openly pro-Russian views and relations. The story of Russian bank loans and funding her election campaign is worth mentioning here. Le Pen has been and remains the mouthpiece of Russia and Russian narrative in Europe. She openly supported the annexation of Crimea and, by a strange coincidence in 2014 received funding from a bank close to Crimea. Though it is still under investigation, Russia is still trying to interfere in international affairs of states in order to undermine democracy and to continue the information war in Europe which is aimed at establishing a pro-Russian regime.

Dear colleagues, it is worth taking immediate measures to regain confidence in the democratic power institutions and to counter Russian aggression. As we have understood, the war is being waged not only in the Ukrainian trenches, but also in the heads of Europeans. We should unite against this threat to democracy and European stability before it is too late.

Thank you for your attention.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Now, I give the floor to Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, EC/DA):** Dear colleagues,

This report is presented by a member of the ruling party of a country that just accomplished a complete ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh against the indigenous Armenian population. It is quite strange when a representative of Azerbaijan is presenting a report on the issue of human rights and democratic governance. Far-right ideologies most of the time consist of nationalist, xenophobic, militaristic and authoritarian sentiments. All these have been present in Azerbaijan for decades. There is not ethnic cleansing since Nagorno-Karabakh shall not be viewed as an only Armenian concern. Creating such precedence will give incentives for war aggression to many other dictatorships sitting on large reserves of natural gas and oil, and will promote far-right ideology approaches.

Today, Azerbaijan illegally and immorally holds in captivity a big number of Armenians. Among them are persons who had in the past 25 years been elected in democratic elections and as legitimate representatives of their people had been leading them for freedom and self-determination.

In contrast, Azerbaijan has had the same ruling family for exactly 30 years now and counting. Is this a form of far-right ideology or a new type of democracy that has been nurtured under the Council of Europe's umbrella?

Colleagues, the leadership of this Assembly received the report I co-authored in April 2022 titled "Weaponising religion and potential consequences for European democratic security". The report was prepared to provide the Assembly with supporting evidence and an overview of the established state practice by the governments of Azerbaijan and Türkiye of certain policies aimed at racially and religiously inspired human rights violations against Armenians as well as attempts of mobilising Muslim societies against Armenia, Armenians and against European countries in general. It decisively showed that the governments of those countries had conspired to abuse the European liberal laws and values and through makeshift loopholes ventured to create controversies inside Europe and against Europe.

The main goal, in my view, has been and continues to be the creation of new forms of solidarity in Europe as a bargaining chip in the relations with European states. These efforts to proactively use Turkish diasporal structures in Europe for the purposes of establishing new forms of solidarity means nothing else by attempts of weaponising religion in multicultural European societies, which shall be a matter of concern for European security.

Let me conclude by saying that in order to stop the spreading of far-right radicalism, the Council of Europe has to do crucial homework to self cleanup and suspend the membership of authoritarian states.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

And now I call Mr Andrea ORLANDO to take the floor.

**Mr Andrea ORLANDO (Italy, SOC):** I want to thank Mr Samad SEYIDOV for his report and proposals.

By supporting to this resolution I fulfill a duty that comes from the constitution of my country which defines the Italian Republic as anti-fascist. The report tells us that it is necessary to encourage political leaders to have an inclusive public discourse and to avoid divisive rhetoric, condemning hate speech.

We know what hate speech is, it's fairly easy to identify it: anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, hatred of migrants. But what is non-inclusive speech? Here the distinction is more difficult, but no less important, because non-inclusive discourse, divisive rhetoric, is often the heritage of politicians who are ostensibly not extremists and who hide behind appeals to common sense, traditions, and national values.

But if one side alone claims to interpret the will of the whole people, if one side alone claims to interpret the whole nation and the will of the nation, indeed to be the nation, automatically those who oppose it become an enemy of the people and an enemy of the nation.

So if the nation is attacked by enemies, there is justification for resorting to means that were hitherto not permitted. The history of the twentieth century reminds us of this. If the enemies are external, war is justified and right-wing extremists feel legitimised, whether they are called fascists, Nazis, Francoists, nostalgic for Videla or Pinochet, they feel legitimised to strike those enemies of the nation by any means.

Inclusive discourse is thus marked by the ability to recognise the truth that is also there in the position of others, to give a limit to one's own narrative. And non-inclusive discourse is difficult to identify. Because the line between national pride and nationalism, the line between partisan pride and the claim to monopolise the concept of the homeland, is very thin and runs through public discourse and advises each person to watch for the fascist within him or her. The sense of limits, the ability to cultivate doubt, the balance of powers, secularism, recognition of the other, the rule of law, and formal and substantive equality, are the elements that have nurtured democratic thinking. If the extreme right is advancing today, it is because democratic thought has been weakened, and I think – couldn't this report do it – that among us we should also discuss how we recast democratic thought to prevent hate speech, divisive rhetoric from taking over.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And the next speaker is Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO.

**Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD):** Dear colleagues, while we condemn the far-right ideology movements, we are actually lacking one important thing in this conversation: it is understanding the roots these far-right ideologies are coming from. And unfortunately, whether we like it or not, there are two reasons. One of the reasons is when someone wants to weaponise people with a violent regime to use them for their own reasons. But, the second reason is when people feel that they are not heard, they are too fragile, insecure, and then suddenly someone with power comes to them or offers to join that radical movement and to get a purpose, to fight back.

I'm saying this because, unfortunately, there is no proper research available, no proper statistics on why people are joining these movements. And while it poses an incredibly big threat to democracies in all of our countries, it actually is the reason why we have to sit together and think what is wrong? It is in all the systems that we have; that unfortunately these far-right ideologies are increasing.

Technically, there are a number of things that I want to raise your attention to.

How these movements are financed – are there investigations being done on that? Is there enough education in universities, in schools, in different countries, regarding the threats of that radicalism? Is there any incentive for those people who are currently acting as radicals to get out from that movement?

If we look at these people who are there, many of them are very uneducated. Then such terrible, violent regimes or organisations – as for instance The Wagner Group – they may come to different, maybe not in all European countries, but in those who are vulnerable, and offer them to join that radical movement. And they will join for money and for the purpose.

We should be using the time to educate these people and to prevent this aggression and radicalism. But at the stage when it's only just starting.

And at the stage where we are now, we actually have to investigate these roots, to raise the public campaigns, to implement the mechanisms that will investigate the financial sources of these radical movements. And only then we will be able to stop it. But only statements will not help. But the report is great and very, very timely.

Thank you.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And now I give the floor to Ms Derya TÜRK-NACHBAUR.

Please, you have the floor.

**Ms Derya TÜRK-NACHBAUR (Germany, SOC):** Dear Madam President.

Dear Colleagues

Right-wing extremist ideologies are not just a creeping danger, they are a direct threat to our democracy. In Germany, we are conducting these debates about radical right-wing movements, predominantly at national level. However, exclusion, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia and racism are not only widespread in Germany, but throughout Europe. It is necessary to internationalise these debates that we all have in our national parliaments. And that is what we are doing today with this debate on the insightful report by Mr Samad SEYIDOV and I thank him for that.

The spread of anti-democratic ideologies in the middle of our society is assuming alarming proportions. It is high time to take an active stand against right-wing extremism. Ideologies have become socially acceptable, and that is truly alarming. They are invading our homes, our screens and our parliaments. I can report from Germany that many things that were not sayable a few years ago have become sayable even in the heart of our democracy, even in the German Bundestag. Looking at the darkest chapter of our history, it is a disgraceful fact.

The new right-wing extremists are now "respectable" – they now wear suits instead of biker boots - but their ideas are just as dangerous. They preach a freedom that means the oppression of others. They deny people like me and millions of others in Germany and throughout Europe the right to exist. This is not a marginal phenomenon.

Last weekend's elections in Bavaria and Hesse in Germany showed that right-wing extremism is not a regional but a countrywide ideology. It is a matter of strengthening our defensible democracy. Education is the key. The top priority for the self-preservation of democracy is political education. We must explain democracy, bring it to life and also develop the discourse. We must counter extremist narratives and promote participatory dialogue if democracy is to withstand the current pressures. And we must use all the resources of our constitutional state to combat disinformation and violence. Democracy is not defenseless, no; it is very defensible. And this report aptly underscores that and calls on us to stand up for our European values.

We Social Democrats have paid a very high price in history for our commitment to freedom and the rule of law. That's why we see the fight against right-wing extremism and the fight for democracy as our primary duty, and I call upon you all to take up this fight.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

And now I would like to give the floor to Ms Laura CASTEL.

Please, you have the floor.

**Ms Laura CASTEL (Spain, UEL):** Thank you, Chair.

Indeed, as the resolution states, the most effective way of preventing far-right extremism is to strengthen adherence to the principles of democracy, human rights, rule of law, pluralism, tolerance, and respect for diversity, because they are the fundamental and core values of the Council of Europe.

I would like to raise the attention of the cases of infiltration by far-right extremists in military forces, and its radicalisation as shown by the use of symbols and mottos of extremist, racist and Nazi or fascist nature.

I can speak about the case of the Spanish army and just a few examples.

The first one is a letter of 73 commanders of the army sent to the Spanish king by which they assume the speech and terminology of the far-right political party narrative. What is alarming is that the field marshal of the armed forces in Spain, the king himself, remained silent about this identification, as well as the minister of defence.

A second example is outrageous: in a WhatsApp chat where there were radical messages from retired air force members, one of them stated that execute 26 million of motherfucker Spaniards should be a full short solution. So, defending the extermination of half of Spain's population, and wishing to repeat the 1936 coup d'état.

What is disturbing is that in this chat there were active commanders of the armed forces, such as the chief of staff, and no retaliations, no sanctions, no penalty, no accountability, nothing happened: because the tolerance of extremist positions in the armed forces is structural in Spain.

A third example: images of parachute soldiers singing neo-Nazi songs about Spanish soldiers who helped the Nazi forces during World War II and doing the Nazi salute in military facilities. Again, no retaliation, no sanctions, no penalty, no accountability, nothing.

And another example: a neo-Nazi group of army offices in Murcia called "Lo Nuestro" has openly made an apology of fascism showing that extreme far-right is normalised and tolerated.

Moreover, have been denounced fascist discourses by army teachers in the academy, defending beating immigrants, minors, bombing immigrants' boats, and doing apology of Franco's regime.

So, there is a resolution of the Assembly that specifies that counteracting neo-Nazism should be accompanied by the clear political message at the highest level that neo-Nazism and exteremism, and hate crimes, and hate speech cannot be tolerated in a democratic society.

So, what I request, because this resolution we are discussing today asks to ensure effective mechanisms against extremists in the police. But I request that the Assembly colleagues include military forces as well.

Thank you very much. And I thank you the rapporteur.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you. I call next Mr Nicos TORNARITIS from Cyprus, Group of the European People's Party. The floor is yours.

**Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Dear colleagues,

In Europe, the surge of far-right movements and parties has contributed to the erosion of our democracies.

Targeting minority groups based on ethnic or religious background leads to discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes, greatly compromising basic human rights. The rise of populism, nationalism and polarisation threatens social cohesion and weakens democratic societies.

The eruption of new conflicts and war in the wider region, such as the horrific and barbarian attack on Israel by Hamas, Azerbaijan's military aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's invasion in Ukraine have raised fear and insecurity, fuelling the rise of extremism and radicalisation.

Furthermore, growing instability among European societies, rising inflation, high energy prices and especially the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis have caused additional deterioration of the socio-economic conditions in Europe, further stimulating the rapid rise of extreme ideology.

The perception that migrants and refugees are a threat to our societies has fuelled the rise of xenophobia, discrimination and racism. Support for anti-immigrant policies is causing democratic backsliding and is undermining human rights and the rule of law.

On the contrary, a common response based on solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibilities can relieve frontline countries, like Cyprus, Greece and Italy, and have a positive impact on creating the conditions necessary for more resilient, open, democratic and tolerant societies, which will be able to resist and counter extreme ideologies.

Member states should strengthen legislation pertaining to violence and discrimination, adopt measures to actively promote inclusive and multicultural societies and protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups.

Dear colleagues,

If we do not act now, tomorrow may be too late!

Thank you very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Dear colleagues, please take care of the time.

I call next Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV from Azerbaijan from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. The floor is yours.

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

Dear colleagues,

It is commendable that such a report, which is always topical but the importance of which is felt even more strongly today, is being debated in the Assembly. In fact, notwithstanding the rapporteur is presenting this significant issue in the form of a separate report for the first time. In his various speeches during his many years of activity in the Parliamentary Assembly points reflected in the report in a complex form were repeatedly voiced in the form of separate theses.

What I mean by this is that it is not just a research paper written within the allotted time frame. The author has been familiar with this problem for many years and has made observations on various aspects of it. Of course, this is not accidental. Because the homeland of the rapporteur is Azerbaijan. In this country, according to the tradition that has developed throughout history, there has never been a place for xenophobia or any intolerance towards other religions, languages and peoples. This habit which has grown into a stable element of national thought, continues today and in turn has always become an important auxiliary tool on the path to achieving democratic values in multi-religious and multi-ethnic Azerbaijan.

On the one hand, this report is dedicated to reinvigorating efforts to protect democratic values, human rights and the rule of law from harmful pressures and threats of certain extremist ideologies. Nevertheless, in fact, it should also be assessed as another important initiative of the Council of Europe for its self-defense. After all, the major goal and main tasks of our organisation consist of fighting in the same direction. At the same time, all this is not only a problem for our organisation or Europe. Far-right extremism is among the most undesirable obstacles for the world as a whole as well as for the harmonious development of democratic institutions in the countries.

The rapporteur, Mr Samad SEYIDOV, is an Azerbaijani, and one of the greatest enlightened poets of his people, Abdulla Shaig, has a hemistich included in United Nations reports which echo this report and can be considered as the motto of both us and other leading world organisations.

We are all particles of the Sun,

We are all raised in the same nest.

This is an indisputable truth for all peoples and countries, for all human beings, for all times. The presented report addresses this timeless truth telling us how to overcome the tendencies that can harm our world towards becoming a decent place to live. Certainly, we share the rapporteur's view from start to finish.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Mr Andreas Sjalg UNNELAND from Norway, Group of the Unified European Left.

**Mr Andreas Sjalg UNNELAND (Norway, UEL):** Thank you, President.

Us gathering in this Assembly is the result of a continent that learns from its mistakes. The painful memory of the Second World War looms over Europe's history, a war of extermination in which Jews, Roma, queers, and other minorities were targeted for annihilation. Nazism, fascism and the extreme right is the most destructive force known to mankind. We have come a long way from the horrors of the Second World War.

Our continent, once shattered by hatred, vowed to embrace democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a guiding principle. That is what we are trying to do in this room: to fight with words, not weapons. To tear down walls, not raise them. To build a society based on the rule of law and to ensure the respect of human rights. But today, we face the same threat: far-right ideology. It is a divisive force that seeks to tear us apart. Using hate as a weapon, we have seen failed coup attempts in Germany and Brazil, and far-right terrorism is a growing concern.

In Norway, we have seen how hatred of Islam has led to shooting at Muslims in a Mosque. We have seen how conspiracies about Islam and immigration led to a terrorist shooting and killing of political youth from the Labour Party. We know it starts with words, words that dehumanise, and we in this Assembly have a responsibility to never forget what hatred and xenophobia can lead to. We cannot let this poison spread. We must unite as Europeans to reject hatred and exclusion. Democracy and human rights are not just words, they are the foundation of our societies ensuring everyone's dignity and freedom. But we also have to talk about the increasing inequality in Europe, because increasing inequality tears apart societies and carries wood to the flame and the fires that extreme rights want to burn. We have to talk about how this inequality shatters our society, because the far right is standing there ready to use the powerless in the meeting with inequality to mobilise with hate and put people against people.

Let us learn from our history. Remember the sacrifices made and protect our hard-won victories. We need open dialogue, education against extremism and policies promoting inclusivity, and to fight and reach above the inequality that we are now seeing.

We must stand strong, reject hatred and preserve our democratic values. That is why this report is so important, because it obliges us not to forget; it obliges us to act and the threat from the extreme rights calls for action.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Mr Asim MOLLAZADA from Azerbaijan, European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Asim MOLLAZADA (Azerbaijan, EC/DA):** Thank you very much Madam Chair,

The concern in Europe for extreme right ideology is absolutely natural.

Europe suffered from that during the fascism of the 20th century. It was a big tragedy for the Europeans. We understand it, but we should also take into account that the evil empire, the Soviet Union, also created tragedies for the people who were under the control of this evil empire: Holodomor, the red terror, collectivisation - we are all well informed about the real face of left-extremism. When the evil empire collapsed, a lot of KGB files were opened. And in these files there was technology which the Soviet Union used against NATO countries. It means funding and donating to left and right extremism, with the goal of create chaos in NATO countries.

And it is continuing.

When the Soviet Union started to collapse, they created just occupied countries which were going to the united civilised world.

Azerbaijan became the first victim. A major ally of Russia and Iran, Armenia, attacked Azerbaijan, occupied 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan, brutally expelled hundreds of thousands from Armenia, from occupied territory, killing children and women.

The same happened - the same 20% occupation of Georgia. The occupation of Moldova, a small country which could not resist this army, and 20% of Moldova came under occupation.

Now every day, we are painfully watching how children in Ukraine are dying. 20% of Ukraine is under occupation - that's the punishment, because Ukraine would like to be a civilised country and again was punished, it was the same evil.

I heard about the Karabakh people, but who sends them Armenia? The goal is to use them again for punishment of Armenia who would like to run away from a former boss and now they expel all Armenians to Armenia, Armenians from Azerbaijan to Armenia with the goal of creating chaos in Armenia, and again give power to the Karabakh club - a brutal club. Most of the leaders of this Karabakh club are military criminals, killing children, women, but there is not an understanding of the processes on the extreme left.

There is a programme - they're selling portraits of Che Guevara, you know a former Soviet country which also created some radical leftist movement, not only in Europe. Fidel Castro - come on guys, it's the twenty-first century.

We should think that all left and right extremism is a great danger for all nations.

Let's talk about the serious development, a serious education system which will prevent an absence of knowledge, of how dangerous the extreme left and extreme right are.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Mr Stéphane BERGERON from Canada, observer. The floor is yours.

**Mr Stéphane BERGERON (Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I've already had occasion in this House to talk about the phenomenon of democracies, i.e. authoritarian regimes that give themselves a democratic veneer.

These "democracies" often tend to support ideas dear to the extreme right, which exploits people's legitimate concerns about phenomena such as migratory movements and under the pretext of guaranteeing people's safety, fighting terrorism - in short, maintaining law and order - these "democracies" also tend to restrict or even limit human rights.

If we are to believe that the far-right seems to be on the rise, not only in Europe, but in many other parts of the world, then the future of "democracies" looks bright.

Since we've been in this movie before in the 20th century, it goes without saying that all this gives us cause for concern; but above all, it seems to reveal that the right, the center and the left are no longer able to fully meet people's expectations, which gives the extremes a run for their money.

Quebec and Canada still seem to be escaping, at least for the time being, this global movement that has also gained a foothold on the American continent, particularly among our neighbors to the south. But for how long?

We are watching with some trepidation as this movement gains momentum around the world, and wondering when it will run out of steam, or whether it will once again lead to a potentially fatal cataclysm – particularly in Quebec, for which the direct and privileged relationship with France is fundamental, indispensable, even existential. The prospect of a Rassemblement National victory is extremely worrying. The same is certainly true in French Canada and Acadia.

Don't get me wrong: I don't want to seem like I'm interfering in France's internal affairs. The fact is, however, that Marine Le Pen, who is already not known for being particularly Europeanist, is not known for being a great transatlanticist either.

Beyond her political ideas, which are already worrying in themselves, independently of the effective marketing of her person, her party and her program, it is this possible disengagement from the former motherland that she represents that is potentially most worrying for Quebec.

I even believe that the whole of the French-speaking world should be concerned, given that France is already no longer assuming its leadership role in the global French-speaking world with the enthusiasm of yesteryear, despite the fact that French will be the fastest-growing language on the planet over the next 50 years.

In short, as parliamentarians, we must remain vigilant to prevent extremists and even foreign regimes from using the gains of democracy to undermine its foundations.

In a study published in 2019, the Samara Center for Democracy notes that the rise of extremes, and I quote, "comes at a time of rising economic anxiety, technological disruption raising fears about the future of the labor market, and authoritarian regimes attempting to instill populism and division, in order to undermine liberal democracies."

Debates such as today's are part of the process of raising awareness, and allow us to start thinking about how to guard against operations aimed at destabilising our societies.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Mr László TOROCZKAI from Hungary.

**Mr László TOROCZKAI (Hungary, NR):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Despite the fact the Council of Europe is not supposed to be some kind of dictatorial political institution, this is another extremely biased political report. You here usually select one ideology, or I should say one community, and attack it constantly. That European community which wants to preserve European traditions, you are attacking those who oppose mass immigration, because they do not want a uniform Europe, but instead a colourful Europe, those who want a safe Europe.

You talk about humanism and human rights, but in reality you want to build the darkest dictatorship the world has ever seen. Where people who think differently are hunted down, where all people are monitored, where political censorship rules everything. I give you my own example, so that you cannot say that I am talking nonsense.

In 2019, my Facebook page was deleted, and since then it has become forbidden to mention my name on Facebook, while I am now the president of one of Hungary's strongest opposition parliamentary parties. This was arranged at Meta by political parties in Hungary, my rivals. Meta interferes in elections in many countries around the world. I have sued Meta. I won the case with a final judgment and the court ordered Meta to restore my Instagram page. However, up to this day, Meta has not done so.

You and the companies and politicians who represent your ideology, this extremist left-liberal-globalism, are now not even respecting the law. Facebook, or Meta, as the largest social media, does not even always comply with EU rules. They openly violate the law, freedom of speech, democracy, and openly discriminate against those who think differently, they suppress Christian or national ideas, and even censor scientists, if that is in the interest of the global corporations.

Shame on you! With reports like this, you are not protecting human rights, you are creating the darkest dictatorship!

Finally, I would like to respond to my Ukrainian colleague, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, who addressed his speech to me last time. I would like to talk about how the rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine are being seriously violated. Even the Hungarian flag and the Hungarian anthem have been banned at the Hungarian Secondary School in Mukachevo, in Munkács in the Hungarian language. Ukraine should respect the rights of minorities first. You, Mister GONCHARENKO, on the other hand, should clarify your role in the bloody events in Odessa in 2014 in which 48 civilians died. Then you can lecture me and Hungary on human rights!

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** I call next Mr Axel SCHÄFER from Germany, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Axel SCHÄFER (Germany, SOC):** Madam President

Ladies and gentlemen

For me as a German, this report is of course of particular importance. After all, in 1933, the extreme-right Nazis, with majority support in Parliament from all democratic parties, were handed power and brought about unspeakable suffering to their own country, to Europe and to the entire world.

For me personally, this has an additional meaning. One of my predecessors as a member of parliament, a Social Democrat in Bochum, was killed by the Nazis in the Esterwegen concentration camp in his fight against right-wing extremism. And the great commitment shared – by the vast majority of my country, and the vast majority in Europe – in this assembly is that after 1945 we said that anti-fascism means pro-European. And we are today in the situation where we have to defend the achievements of this common Europe. We have to defend them against an emerging right-wing extremist ideology, which is not only an error that leads on a wrong path and ends in insanity, but on the other hand, every day also tries to destroy the European achievements and our institution.

Therefore, it is our task - also with this report - to stand up everywhere, every day and in every country, where it is about xenophobia, where it is about discrimination of minorities, where it is about racism and nationalism, to say; we are Europe together. And against nationalism, the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, rightly said that the most important national interest of every country in Europe is European unity. That means, ladies and gentlemen, also for us, here in Strasbourg. In his last speech as President of the French Republic, François Mitterand said that nationalism is a war and extreme right-wing politics not just an error but also always a criminal path.

And that is why it is our common task as democrats to block this path, to lead the fight together. This is the place. Here is the perspective for 9 June 2024, for the direct election of the European Parliament. And for this, this report is an important basis.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call Mr Aleksandar NIKOLOSKI from North Macedonia and the Group of the European People's Party.

**Mr Aleksandar NIKOLOSKI (North Macedonia, EPP/CD):** Thank you.

In the report is written correctly that to counter these challenges to the fundamental values that the Council of Europe aims to uphold, it calls to strengthen and to adhere to these values. This includes fortifying legislation to counter far-right extremism, enhancing education and media literacy, and combating online radicalism.

The draft resolution underlines that politicians and political parties should be at the forefront of responses to far-right extremism, both in the public defense of human rights and democratic principles and in the unequivocal rejection of all forms of racism and intolerance. It is something that we must do here.

The far-right ideology can be found in many member states of the Council of Europe. I want to underline the example of Bulgaria, where the President of the country Rumen Radev and Vice President Jotova implement far-right extremist politics. Radev and Jotova use the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union in order to impose a veto on Macedonia asking Macedonians to change their history, language and culture in order to

start accession talks. At the same time, they do not give any human rights to Macedonians who live in Bulgaria and deprive them of self-identification, use of their native language and right to education and assembly.

In the last months, they went a step further asking Macedonians in Albania to change their identity from Macedonian to Bulgarian. In Albania, there have never been Bulgarians, and Macedonians have lived there for centuries. But Bulgaria is blackmailing Albania with its progress towards the European Union asking them to impose a new identity on their citizens. You will agree this is not within European values. This is far-right extremism and ideology that is happening in the 21st century. And that is why we should fight.

They use all means to find this kind of identity that they cannot find. They offer Bulgarian passports, which are as well as EU passports, to citizens only to declare them different to what they are. They abuse their membership in the European Union to change national identity. That is why I ask the European Union to review its policy to Bulgaria and not to allow them to abuse the right of citizenship and passports for political purposes and change of national identity.

So Bulgaria continues this example of national assimilation. They blackmail Macedonia and veto Macedonia, stopping Macedonia from talks with the European Union only. Also, they do not respect the human rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria and do not implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and they blackmail Albania trying to find identity which is not happening.

They will not succeed! But this is the best example of extreme far-right ideology, and that is why I support this report that should give guidelines on combating far-right extremism and far-right ideology.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Mr Petri HONKONEN from Finland.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Petri HONKONEN (Finland, ALDE):** Thank you, Madam President.

Only two hours ago we got shocking news from Finland and Estonia. It seems that someone has destroyed the gas pipeline which connects Finland and Baltic country Estonia, and it's not difficult to guess who is behind this terrorism.

The gas pipeline is very important for us, because thanks to that we can live without Russian blood gas. But now it's not any more possible to connect Finland and the Baltic countries.

It's clear that in this kind of situation when European countries, our continent, is becoming more and more insecure, it's clear that we have to fight more strongly against extremism and more strongly for our democratic values and human rights.

Madam President, I want to thank the rapporteur for this good reports and I want to highlight especially the essential role of social media and tech companies as a platform and enabler for far-right ideologies.

This report very well recognises extreme radicalisation which happens in social media platforms, but not the bigger phenomenon of how these far-right ideologies grow their support between regular citizens via social media. This is very worrying.

I want to underline that social media is itself a seedbed for controversial discourses and this kind of hate speech phenomena in modern society. How social media platforms work and how those companies, like Meta and X Corp., are making business and money via their algorithms that are putting people against each other, not connecting people, but putting people's opinions against each other, is something that in this Assembly we are obviously not enough aware of. And they have to do better than they do now.

I call our Assembly to observe the role of these companies more seriously than what is said and what is done now.

I also welcome EU-level regulations in this respect to combat against extremism and controversial discussions and dialogues in social media, and call our Assembly to be a driver and moral backbone of these complex legal and principle discussions.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Mr Max LUCKS from Germany, Socialist Group.

**Mr Max LUCKS (Germany, SOC):** Thank you, Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The report deals with the greatest danger to our democracy in Europe - the danger of right-wing extremism. Right-wing extremism is a danger because it has consequences that are very concrete and that are very threatening, and I am also very grateful to the Rapporteur for taking up the case of Walter Lübcke - the district president of Kassel, a German region - who was murdered by a neo-Nazi in 2019 because he stood up for refugees. This shows us what the consequences of hate are.

It is the absolute truth that we find right-wing extremism in Europe, in all countries and that it is a threat to our democracy. But there is another truth that we should perhaps deal with a little more. Our states are insufficiently able to protect their citizens from right-wing extremism. We must call on you to do so. For instance, given the fact that there have been really shocking events with the National Socialist Underground, a Nazi movement, in Germany.

However, right-wing extremism is not a new phenomenon, and we sometimes give the impression, even in today's debate, that we have only been dealing with right-wing extremism in Europe for five or ten years. That is completely wrong. Right-wing extremism has had its roots in Europe for a very long time and in a very brutal way. The most incomprehensible example of this is the Shoah, which my country perpetrated against the Jews; and that is why, by the way, we as Europeans should not be left cold by the fact that last Saturday so many Jews were murdered in one day by the Hamas attack last Saturday.

But the genocide perpetrated against the Armenians in 1915 also shows the dreadfulness of right-wing extremism. And ladies and gentlemen, instead of demanding a culture of remembrance about this genocide, we as the Council of Europe, as Europeans, have not even been able to prevent the expulsion of 100 000 Armenians by military force, by a brutal dictator, Ilham Aliyev. This is a disgrace for Europe. Fighting right-wing extremism also means opposing ethnic cleansing on our continent.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** [Light applause]

Thank you.

I call next Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN from Armenia, Group of the European People's Party.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD):** Thank you.

From time to time I would like to just rise and keep silent here, say nothing, because very often I have the feeling that everybody speaks, but nobody listens.

It's very complicated not to agree with the rapporteur about the report, about his speech. Yes, for sure: far-right ideology should be condemned. For sure we should fight against intolerance, racism, xenophobia, anti-Islamic movements, and so on.

But unfortunately hypocrisy rises to the level there; it's easy to speak about a phenomenon without looking at yourself.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV, you say everything about all the developments, but you say nothing about Armenians, about anti-Armenian rhetoric existing in some countries of the Council of Europe. You didn't say this. I understand you.

You also didn't agree to include in your report cases of state-sponsored cases of far-right ideologies.

You don't want to speak about this, and I understand you perfectly well.

You know, honourable colleagues, nobody today calls himself or herself a fascist or a Nazi.

Now we understand perfectly well that new racial theories are based rather on another phenomenon: on the phenomenon of racial hatred, which is very well covered with different, beautiful names.

Far-right ideology. When we were discussing the report on far-right ideology, we became the witnesses of several speeches which are the brilliant manifestation of far-right ideologies.

That's why I'm saying that it's much better to keep silent.

I cannot vote in favour of this report for the above mentioned reasons, but I would like to ask Mr Samad SEYIDOV: in a couple of years, if your children, grandchildren would come to you and ask what's happened with the Armenians living in Nagorno Karabakh, what would be your answer, Mr Samad SEYIDOV?

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** I call next Ms Ada MARRA from Switzerland, The Party of European Socialists.

**Ms Ada MARRA (Switzerland, SOC):** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

First of all, I'd like to welcome the fact that this report focuses on the extreme right.

At a time when society is seeking to systematically and symmetrically oppose arguments according to the theory of the two extremes or, in other words, "you want to denounce the extreme right, so I'll denounce the extreme left", there is a great risk of drowning out the subject or missing the point.

In this case, the Commission weighed up the pros and cons and didn't want to miss the disturbing phenomenon of what's happening in our cities and countries, so it decided to focus on the extreme right.

We thought the nightmare of the beginning of the last century was over, but here it is again.

The far right is not just a group of movements - it's also a group of parties. Sometimes they express themselves on the margins of society, sometimes they have arrived in our parliaments and governments, in the north, south, east and west of Europe: everywhere.

The definition of extreme right has been clarified in this report, and is in any case - and always will be - the subject of debate. But one thing unites these different extreme right-wingers: the denial of equality, the denial of horizontal power-sharing, the denial of protection for minorities. These are all values that our Organization stands for.

At a time in history when communication is as important as substance, it is clear that the propagation of messages peddling hatred or "fake news" is too formidable an opportunity to reach out to people. It would be interesting to study how some of these movements use the cloak of freedom of expression to violate other fundamental rights.

The main challenge for our societies will be to be courageous enough to denounce the extreme right wherever it is found, even if it is within the institutions of the State. This report does so by not being afraid to denounce the extremism sometimes displayed by members of the legitimate forces of the state, such as the police.

Because if we don't name the problem, if we don't identify the potential breeding grounds for these ideologies, which have sometimes, and too often, led to tragedies, then it will be difficult to fight against them.

Social media education measures are one of the instruments proposed in the resolution, but it's true that this resolution can lose its force if other fields of action are not mentioned in the prevention and resolution of problems. This is why, in my opinion, the amendments proposed by Mr Simon MOUTQUIN and his colleagues have their place in this resolution. We need to reintroduce, in concrete terms, what would be inclusive and participatory measures for the population in society, so that society does not turn away from democracy. They must be named and promoted.

There is a time for analysis and a time for solutions: this resolution would be more complete and would have its place among these solutions.

Dear colleagues, we need to find a solution to de-radicalise minds. It's a matter of urgency.

Thank you for your attention.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Ms Elena-Simona SPĂTARU.

Yes. The floor is yours.

**Ms Elena-Simona SPĂTARU (Romania, ALDE):** Thank you Madam President,

Combating intolerance and promoting equality are fundamental values and key objectives inherent in any society in which democracy, human rights and the rule of law are irreversibly established in the fabric of society.

The Council of Europe has taken numerous initiatives over time to establish standards in the field of preventing and combating all manifestations that incite hatred and intolerance toward other members of society.

This makes the work of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the umbrella body of the Strasbourg-based organization, which has issued a number of general policy recommendations for the attention of the Council of Europe's 46 member states, noteworthy in this context.

The rapid rise of populism, extremist rhetoric and hate speech against politicians are undermining the foundations of democracy, and this trend can only be countered by promoting more inclusive societies in which the interests of every citizen are taken into account. Otherwise, any socially marginalized citizen can become a safe prey for extremist political forces.

The actions of manipulation, especially for electoral purposes, of the issue of illegal immigration in Europe by such extremist political forces in Austria have unfortunately jeopardized even Romania's accession to the Schengen area later this year. In spite of the fact that the technical requirements have already been met for 11 years and in spite of the enormous efforts made by the authorities in Bucharest since the beginning of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine at the external border of the European Union, the far-right party in Vienna, an ally of the aggressor state, Russia, has achieved the bizarre position of strength to decide the fate of another state at its will and without any logical explanation of the veto decision that was made.

Finally, I would have a rhetorical question: is our dream of having a Europe where democracy is at home still relevant?

The answer depends on all of us.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I see that Lord David BLENCATHRA is not present.

Then I call next Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK from Türkiye.

The floor is yours.

**Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK (Türkiye, NR):** Dear Chairman, dear colleagues,

I would like to start by saying that I strongly support the resolution.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for his excellent work on this important subject, considering the fact that far-right extremism has gained very disturbing momentum in Europe in recent years.

I would like to emphasise that political leaders and public figures have a responsibility to denounce far-right extremism unequivocally at all times.

Hate speech and extremist ideologies should not find refuge in our political discourse but unfortunately, we witness politicians all around Europe using xenophobic, anti-immigrant and Islamophobic discourse, especially during election periods.

This is a grave threat to social cohesion and unity, and leads to a dramatic increase in hate crimes. I hope that we all, as politicians, work to contribute to the implementation of this report's recommendations by our respective governments and society.

Most importantly, I believe the real danger, which could have been elaborated more in the report, is the alarming rise in the influence of far-right groups on the discourse of mainstream political parties and ultimately on policy making all around Europe.

Policies and legislations that target minority groups that marginalise entire communities, purely based on their race, religion, or origin, are not just being proposed, but in many European countries, they are being implemented at the national, regional and local levels.

Look at the restrictive migration policies adopted all around Europe. Look at the handshake law in Denmark, the minaret prohibition in Switzerland, the burkini and abaya ban in France, and the list goes on.

When these countries allow far-right ideologies to infiltrate their legislative processes, they do not just enact laws: they inadvertently normalise hate, legitimise and spread far right ideologies and encourage and embolden far-right groups. And by doing so, they do not just harm the marginalised communities, but they weaken the values and very fabric of Europe.

The resolution refers to enhancing existing legal frameworks in the member states in order to effectively counter far-right extremism - which of course is crucial - but as a first step, the existing discriminatory, anti-immigrant, xenophobic and Islamophobic practices, policies and legislation should be identified, eliminated and repealed in all European countries.

I believe it is vital that the Committee works on another report on this subject and makes the necessary recommendations to the member states in this context in order to continue contributing to countering far-right extremism effectively.

Thank you.

[Light applause]

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Ms Blerina GJYLAMETI from Albania, Socialist Group.

The floor is yours.

**Ms Blerina GJYLAMETI (Albania, SOC):** Honourable Chair, dear colleagues,

The topic that we are discussing today is as timely, as necessary as ever while our continent is facing one of the most unprecedented wars of aggression by the Russian Federation of Ukraine, or also lately the Hamas attack in Israel.

It is true that we live in a volatile environment where the far-right ideology has become business as usual in different countries, and is driving certain parts of our societies towards isolation, while we witness politicians grasping such opportunities for political gains.

Therefore it is of utmost important that we join forces and use all the means at our hands to address such challenges for the sake of our common future.

Far-right ideologies characterised by radical conservatism, ultra nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and homophobia.

It goes without saying that such ideology rejects the value of tolerance, human rights and the rule of law.

On the other hand it poses a serious challenge to democracy in our continent, where far-right parties have gained electoral success and political power in recent years.

We have witnessed over the years and particularly in recent times the nationalist movement driven by such ideology use an aggressive approach to gain more support by undermining, for instance, legitimacy and functioning of democratic institutions and processes.

Questioning the validity and fairness of elections, spreading misinformation, attacking the independence and credibility of the media and the judiciary, and seeking the erosion of the checks and balance that limit executive power.

Such an approach has become today of great concern because it has fuelled social polarisation and intolerance, by exploiting public fears and grievances over issues such immigration, terrorism, globalisation and cultural differences.

They have demonised minority groups such as Muslims, Jews, Roma, migrants and refugees.

They have promoted a narrow and exclusive vision of national identity and belonging that excludes diversity and pluralism.

They also threaten the human rights and dignity of marginalised group which face discrimination, violence, harassment and hate crimes.

I hope we can agree that the above-mentioned phenomena and threats can bring us no good and these are facts; that regardless that one can argue, the other reason may imply having the situation that we have today.

But, dear colleagues, I strongly believe that this organisation is the right and the only one which can substantially contribute to promoting social inclusion and integration by addressing stronger the inequalities, discrimination and marginalisation, by providing opportunities for dialogue and co-operation among different groups celebrating diversity and pluralism, and supporting victims of hate crimes.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I call next Ms Nataša SUKIČ from Slovenia. The floor is yours.

**Ms Nataša SUKIČ (Slovenia, UEL):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for a very structured report addressing this pressing problem that is undoubtedly more and more affecting modern democratic societies. I agree with the conclusion that the far-right extremism is the signal which shouldn't be underestimated and it requires a strong and decisive response. Yes, we, the politicians, should be at the forefront of this "battle" though, to be frank, politicians are way too often also a part of this problem.

Unfortunately, even my country, Slovenia, is not immune to this issue, as there are multiple groups and organisations within Slovenia which are or have been engaged in far-right political activity and right-wing extremism. Their political activity has traditionally opposed and targeted socially progressive policies, and minorities (in particular the LGBTIQ community, and ethnic minorities like the Roma and immigrants).

As I mentioned in my introduction, politicians are also often intertwined with far-right groups. For instance, at least two members of Blood & Honour (including a leader of the Slovene B & H) were identified as members of the Slovene Democratic Party SDS youth wing. B & H members have also included Slovene army soldiers and members have also been known to have attended SDS events on multiple occasions, and to have met with high ranking SDS politicians. The journalist who uncovered the links (Anuška Delić) was charged with leaking confidential information. She alleged the charges were "politically-motivated".

Unfortunately, far-right violence, driven by xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, has increased sharply in recent years. Therefore, governments must ensure that there are counterweights to extremist discourse by publicly challenging the narratives of far-right extremism, and ensuring that the measures are in place that strengthen the respect of human rights, diversity, and human dignity.

The proposed resolution offers many concrete responses to tackle the issue of far-right extremism. It should therefore, in my opinion, be supported.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

We are not sure if Ms Etilda GJONAJ from Albania is in the hemicycle.

If that is not the case, then I call Ms Sally-Ann HART from the United Kingdom.

The floor is yours.

**Ms Sally-Ann HART (United Kingdom, EC/DA):** Thank you, Madam Chair,

Open societies and the protection of human rights around the world are vital. It is not just left-wing liberalism and the lack of action on illegal immigration that have fueled a return to the right in Europe, but also the fact that the left has lost its way in a fog of despotic entitlement and tends to focus on niche, rather extreme issues

like trans ideology or make certain people in society victims to suit the left's narrative of oppression and discrimination. Far-left ideology, Madam Chair, is as challenging to democracy and human rights as far-right ideology because all extreme ideologies are a threat to democracy, free speech and human rights.

Promoting progressive values and inclusivity is essential, however, there has been real angst amongst many that this approach has neglected the concerns of those who feel left behind or alienated and it is crucial to find a balance between fostering diversity and addressing the grievances of those who may have turned to the far right out of fear and frustration.

Democracy and human rights have long been foundational principles in the United Kingdom and later in Europe. The UK's democracy began with the Magna Carta which established the rule of law and the idea that all citizens, including those in power, should be fairly and equally ruled by the law. It began the tradition of respecting the law, limiting government power, providing access to justice and the protection of human rights. However, yet again, extremes are gaining power in Europe as we see the resurgence of far-right ideologies that pose a significant threat to these very ideals.

We are seeing far-right parties move from the political margins into the political mainstream. However, I do not buy the political or media narrative that all European conservatives with a small C are far right just because some are opposed to further European integration or to hold a torch to family values and law and order or want to control their borders in order to prevent the spread of far-right ideology.

Europe has witnessed the realities of fascism in the last 90 years or so, right up to the present day with Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. European countries must get a grip on illegal migration. Governments have not effectively managed this challenge which has allowed far-right groups to exploit the issue for political gain. It is essential to differentiate between discussions on migration and illegal migration, emphasising the importance of comprehensive and humane policies that address the root causes of migration while maintaining the rule of law. This draft Resolution is an affront to free speech, democracy and human rights and policymakers and governments must address the root causes of the far right, and it is crucial for people to be reminded of the dangers of far-right ideology and take action against it. But this is not the right way.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** The last speaker in this debate will be Mr George LOUCAIDES from Cyprus, Group of the Unified European Left.

The floor is yours.

**Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL):** Thank you, Madam President.

Dear Colleagues,

The great threat of the far right is looming in Europe and beyond, gaining in strength and threatening the values and principles which were built on the ashes and the human victims of fascism and the far right eight decades ago.

The growing popular support of the far right in almost all parts of the European continent cannot but deeply alarm us and prompt us to wage a constant and consistent battle against the ideology of hate, which is the worst thing the human mind has devised.

We must never forget what European and global history have taught us.

The far right and fascism do not constitute another voice in democracy, but a voice against democracy.

In confronting the ideology of hate we must put forth humanism and solidarity.

Against racism, fascism, violence, and discrimination we must protect and strengthen the core values of this organisation, namely democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

That is why our answer must be to isolate and sideline in political and social terms the thrust of fascist ideology in all spheres of public discourse, especially in all media.

This is an essential prerequisite to protect our societies from hate speech and the vulnerable groups it targets.

When on the contrary, we normalise the far right by collaborating with them in any way or by utilising the same rhetoric, as is currently happening unfortunately, we are actually preparing the ground for it to grow. Moreover, in the same way, existing institutional racism provides fertile ground and must be immediately and effectively addressed, as the report correctly highlights.

Similarly, we must counter all the root causes that the far right/fascist ideology is taking advantage of in order to spread its poison of hate into our societies. That is growing inequalities in the world, in Europe and within member states, but also poverty, despair and marginalisation, and the deprivation of dignified access to basic human rights like health, education, and housing.

Furthermore, we urgently need a common European strategy dealing holistically and effectively with the issues at stake, again on the basis of solidarity and humanity, and the protection of human rights. In the above framework, we should promote tolerance through our institutions and effectively implement inclusive policies for all vulnerable groups, including of course migrants and refugees. We must also revoke the Dublin Regulation. We need solid integration policies but also additional measures aiming to promote the sustainability of developing southern countries instead of policies aimed at the depletion of their resources and wealth.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Ms Katalin CSÖBÖR (Hungary, EC/DA):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

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

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dear colleagues, rapporteur,

Thank you for the hard work and for the very comprehensive, focused report.

I'll support the Resolution. Far-right extremist ideologies vocally (speaking-out or shouting), silently (by written words) or physically (by riots or terrorist attacks) are increasingly threatening our home where our shared democratic values rule.

It is a high time for a comprehensive actions to address this multi-faceted phenomenon.

The Bulgarian Parliament recently adopted important amendments to the Penal Code about hate speech crimes and I'm proud of it. But I know that Law is just one of our safeguards against the threat of the far-right extremism. Legislation would be just words if there is no efficient law enforcement.

Let me give you an example. Activists of a political party violently disrupt a movie show and prevent people from watching it just because they think it's too liberal and they don't like art that promotes tolerance and inclusion of the different. It happened twice for an internationally awarded movie. Marching people throw red paint over an EU institution building while protesting. What are these actions? Are they simply freedom of expression activities, radical ones but still acceptable for a democracy, or are they plainly threatening our democratic world? How should the police act in those situation? Should they stop and investigate them or treat them as freedom of expression deeds?

People who work in the law enforcement units are not immune to the far-right propaganda. Some of them just doesn't have the knowledge and the skill to recognise it, to tell the difference between the radical ideas part of any democratic political pluralism and the extremist ideologies that threaten democracy. Some of those who are in charge of safeguarding and protecting citizens are influenced by extremist ideologies. We need to provide proper training and tools to our law enforcement officers to act against this phenomenon.

Therefore I will also support amendment 2 to add to paragraph 15.1.5 the requirement to provide continuing training for police forces for raising their awareness of manifestations of far-right extremism as well as boosting their skills in terms of identifying, preventing and tackling such crimes.

I urge you my distinguished colleagues to unite our efforts and to booster the immune system of our society to defend our shared space of freedom, rule of law and respect of human rights.

Thank you.

**Mr Didier MARIE (France, SOC):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

**Mr Frédéric MATHIEU (France, UEL):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

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

**Mr José Luis PECH VÁRGUEZ (Mexico):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Your Honorable Members,

Today democratic governments are not solving the serious problems citizens face and that explains the emergence of extreme right or totalitarian left governments, both populist that offer simple answers to complex problems.

There is an urgent need for measured governments that govern rationally to give effectiveness to democracy and thereby recover social cohesion.

I point this out because most of today's governments, seeking to meet the demands of the financial markets, forget to serve the needs of their citizens. They are more concerned with paying interest on their debts on time and keeping their country risk indicator attractive, forgetting the human development of their population. By adjusting to neoliberal policies, governments reduce their size and abandon their fundamental responsibilities.

Therefore, there are many dissatisfied people in the world, who become the "breeding ground" for the emergence of right and left-side populisms, proposing simplistic solutions such as: "let's get immigrants out so that there are more jobs for nationals" or "social programs for all without increasing taxes".

The dissatisfaction of so many allows populists to win elections using the democratic system. However, when they come to power, they cannot fulfil their absurd promises and seek to stay in it, affecting human rights and attacking the foundations and institutions of the democratic systems that brought them to power. This is unfortunately the road being built today in Mexico.

But also, this is the case with the right of Bolsonaro in Brazil, or that of Trump in the US, as with the totalitarian left of Ortega in Nicaragua, and Maduro in Venezuela.

Unfortunately, populisms are increasingly attractive to the majority because they connect with people's fears or needs, polarize society, divide it into good and bad, affect human rights and hurt social cohesion that is the fundamental basis for the development of a nation.

Europe has been the cradle of the democracy we live in today. In their name and that of freedom, we must not allow today's populism to discredit our form of government.

On the other hand, it is urgent to give effectiveness to democratic governments so that they fulfil their main responsibility: to meet the needs of the citizens.

We need world governing bodies and spaces such as the European Parliament to speak out to curb the abuses of global economic actors over national governments, and to put forward proposals other than the Washington Consensus that truly lead to collective well-being.

In short, we must all ensure democratic governments recover their capacity to serve society and respect human rights of all. With this, we will be avoiding the main causes that give rise to populist governments.

**Ms Rosangela Amairany PEÑA ESCALANTE (Mexico):** *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

The far-right ideology in the international scene, including in Mexico, causes the limitation or prohibition of the exercise of certain fundamental freedoms, as well as an imbalance in the exercise of public power.

There is a certain concern in Mexico in the sense that the Spanish ultra right wing has joined the Mexican conservative parties and very specially, sheltered a former president, Felipe Calderon, one of the worst presidents we have had in modern history.

With its Madrid letter, the Spanish ultra-right wing party has made inroads in Latin America in a sort of anti-communist crusade in which it accuses left-wing governments of being totalitarian, drug traffickers and akin to the Cuban regime.

A rhetoric that has had an effect on the right-wing National Action Party, when it is the very right and ultra-right who are linked to the drug cartels. The former Secretary of Security under Felipe Calderón is on trial in New York for his ties to drug trafficking and organized crime groups. Spain tucked this spurious ex-president in its arms by granting him residency and work as a highly qualified professional for a group presided by the populist Aznar and is part of a collaboration network to attack and harm adversaries, even if it means using lies, hate and manipulation.

But as one of our revolutionary heroes would say "Deeds, not words". Contrary to what previous conservative and corrupt administrations perpetrated to the detriment of the great working masses of the country, in the current government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador we have built what we call the Fourth Transformation of the public life of the country, in order to guarantee:- Prosperity of society;

- Social welfare;
- Recovery of the rule of law;
- Full respect for human rights;
- Effective inclusion of minorities in national public life;
- Transparency and accountability;
- Economic and social development, without jeopardizing business dynamism;
- The enhancement of national history and culture;
- The preservation of the environment;
- The extinction of social inequalities;
- The improvement of public service;
- Immediate and responsible attention to the needs of vulnerable groups;
- The public scrutiny of popular representatives;
- The improvement of the national economic leadership;
- Security and peace; and
- The rescue and protection of public resources.

The Fourth Transformation, in five years, has changed the paradigm of exercising public power, eliminating the pillars of neoliberal and right-wing policies. Contrary to the model promoted by conservative groups, including the extreme right, with the Mexican humanism model we have promoted actions such as: The implementation of the Pension Program for the Welfare of Persons with Permanent Disabilities, which has granted direct economic support to 1 million 253 thousand 440 entitled persons. Of the people served, 160,497 reside in indigenous or Afro-Mexican municipalities and 77,074 in municipalities with a high or very high degree of marginalization. The construction and application of the Sembrando Vida program, which provides economic and in-kind support to people of legal age who live in rural localities in municipalities with high levels of social backwardness and who are owners or possessors of 2.5 hectares available to be worked in an agroforestry project. The program currently has 447,672 active beneficiaries in 23 states. Consolidation of the Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro program. This program offers young people between the ages of 18 and 29 who are neither studying nor working the necessary tools to develop and train them to practice a trade. Since its inception in January 2019 and until June 30, 2023, it has benefited 2.6 million young people who were trained in 452 thousand work centers throughout the country. Of the total number of apprentices, 1.5 million were women, or 57.8%. The design and implementation of the Program for the Welfare of the Elderly, which has granted economic pensions to 11.4 million people aged 65 and over, of whom 998,470 reside in indigenous or Afro-Mexican municipalities or localities. The training of Federal Public Administration personnel in human rights, with special attention to the agencies that perform tasks related to National Security and Public Safety. To date, more than 39,000 members of the National Guard have been trained; more than 126,000 members of the National Defense Secretariat; and more than 21,000 members of the Navy Secretariat. The use, optimization and modernization of the educational infrastructure with the School is Ours Program, has been focused on delivering a government subsidy in favor of school communities to be used in

the improvement and dignification of their educational spaces. In 2022 alone, the program benefited 44,299 school communities nationwide, of which 6,262 correspond to indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples and communities.

All this would be unthinkable under conservative and, fundamentally, extreme right-wing governments. Therefore, the population must be warned not to pay attention to the siren song promoted by these political groups, since their place should be in the dustbin of history.

**Mr David WELLS (Canada):** (*Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2*)

Colleagues,

In recent years, we have witnessed a disturbing increase of extremist actions.

Rapporteur Mr Samad SEYIDOV's report reminds us of some of the more tragic examples, such as the storming of the U.S. Capitol, the Brazilian Congress and of course, the Hamas attack on Israel.

My use of these examples – like my decision to drop the inflammatory “far-right” label at the outset of my remarks today – was intentional.

Extremist violence in all forms, and from any political or religious motivation, is a blight on our societies; whether it be far right extremists or far-left radicals and eco-terrorists.

For that reason, I was pleased to see Rapporteur Mr Samad SEYIDOV's report acknowledge that some members requested he expand the ‘scope of the report to cover all forms of extreme ideologies.’

For academics and our national security specialists, these categories may serve a purpose.

For parliamentarians, however, I see greater value in us focusing on the often-complex solutions.

Take, for example, this report calling on Council of Europe member states to: “combat online radicalisation through collaboration with social media platforms and tech companies to identify and remove online content that promotes far-right ideologies, while safeguarding freedom of expression and avoiding undue censorship.”

In Canada, attempting to do this has proven to be a challenge. Any unreasonable restrictions will have unintended consequences. The Liberal government of PM Justin Trudeau has instituted unreasonable financial costs on the largest online platforms – not news organizations – but Google and Facebook. These platforms have reacted by not allowing ANY news links on their platforms in Canada.

This clear overreach by the government – not right wing but clearly bordering on extremist in ideology – has resulted in less news getting to Canadians who used these platforms as their only news source. This has also caused smaller, on-line news organizations to cease operations as these platforms were their primary mode of distribution.

The Liberal government has also installed a convicted eco-activist as Minister of Environment and Climate Change. This serves the purpose of the Government officially promoting an extremist ideology on climate change – not right wing, but extremist nonetheless.

I hope – through this debate and our discussions this week – we can take home some concrete and innovative new ideas for how best to tackle the grave issue of extremism, be it right or left, governmental or non-state actors.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers. The speeches of 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 you, colleagues, that typewritten text must be submitted electronically no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

I call now Mr Samad SEYIDOV, rapporteur, to reply to the debate.

You have three minutes.

**Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA, Rapporteur):** Madam President, dear colleagues, dear friends,

Let me express my gratitude. I thank you all for this excellent debate; very important, very timely. I think this is a vivid example of how this problem is really dangerous, important and discussed in a timely way in this Assembly.

For approximately one year and a half, at the level of the Committee, we have discussed this question.

You know the major problem was being not so extreme when writing a report about extremism. That's really very difficult. That's why in the report I consciously - especially in the draft resolution - didn't mention names of countries, because we are all responsible for everything which is going on in our common family in Europe. We all together should do our best.

You know that to withdraw from our lives this extremism, this unacceptable-for-us-threats to our core values.

Sometimes it's difficult, not so easy.

And even during the discussion, some of my friends even put my candidature as a rapporteur under suspicion, because I am from Azerbaijan.

How can I reply to this, friends?

Being a Muslim, I can only bring to your attention a quote from the Gospel of Luke: "my Lord, my father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing".

But this is really very important, to take into account that this is not about the countries for the time being, because we have an opportunity during the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), during the cases of the countries, to discuss these questions.

This is about ideology. This is about the roots. This is about the problems which we all have.

That is why I ask you to support us. At the Committee level, we have already done that. At the Committee level, we unanimously support this report.

I hope this Assembly will also be able to show how important it is to unite in front of this threat, to be together when this evil is coming, because this is our family. This is our home. This is our Council of Europe.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

Does the Vice Chair of the Committee wish to speak?

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, you have 3 minutes.

**Mr Reinhold LOPATKA (Austria, EPP/CD, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy):** Dear Chair, dear colleagues,

Following this very rich debate with 43 speakers, I would like to thank all the colleagues for their contributions.

I want to underline that there is no place for violent ideologies in our societies. Here, we are an organisation to protect human rights – universal human rights for the protection of common values and against ideologies that seek to undermine this.

I want to thank Mr Samad SEYIDOV for his comprehensive report and our many discussions on this report, the different views of the Committee were well outlined.

This was reflected on 11 September 2023 in the anonymous adoption of the draft resolution by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. And it is important to note, as the report does, that we parliamentarians can be and should be at the forefront of responses to extremism both the public defence of human rights and democracy and the rejection of all forms of resistance, intolerance and hate speech.

So, colleagues, I want to encourage you to support this draft resolution.

Thank you very much.

## **Vote: The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe**

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

The debate is closed.

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy has presented the draft resolution (Doc. 15826), to which three amendments have been tabled.

We will now consider the three amendments individually.

The 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 call now Mr Simon MOUTQUIN to support Amendment 1. You have 30 seconds.

The floor is yours.

**Mr Simon MOUTQUIN (Belgium, SOC):** Thank you, dear colleagues.

Thank you, Rapporteur.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you, as I was unable to take the floor for lack of time.

Very briefly, the first amendment I'm proposing is in fact a fairly coherent amendment with regard to the report. It proposes to do what we do in French-speaking Belgium and which works, namely to apply a *cordon sanitaire*.

I think we need to send a strong signal against far-right parties and not ally ourselves politically with them. For this reason, I suggest a political *cordon sanitaire* against far-right parties.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

That's not the case.

The rapporteur, Mr Samad SEYIDOV.

**Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA, Rapporteur):** Dear President,

Thank you very much.

I am quite clearly understanding the intentions which are coming from the mover of the Amendment, but I think I have already said we should keep the balance.

This report is an invitation. This report is a very good base for future deeds which we are going to do and that is why, of course, a *cordon sanitaire*, that is too much and I, from this point of view, I am against.

Thank you.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

What is the opinion of the Committee?

**Mr Reinhold LOPATKA (Austria, EPP/CD, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy):** The Committee was against, following a tight vote.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

*Amendment 1 is agreed to.*

[Applause]

I call Mr Simon MOUTQUIN to support Amendment 2.

You have 30 seconds.

**Mr Simon MOUTQUIN (Belgium, SOC):** Thank you, Madam President.

The following amendment actually supplements a very good provision within the report, which talks about creating hate crime units within the police force.

What I'm proposing is to supplement this sentence with other provisions that will strengthen this fight, namely ongoing training for police forces to be able to identify hate crimes and racism-related issues.

I think it was very important to be able to specify this provision.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

That's not the case.

What is the opinion of the Committee?

**Mr Reinhold LOPATKA (Austria, EPP/CD, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy):** The Committee was in favour by a large majority.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

*Amendment 2 is agreed to.*

I call Mr Simon MOUTQUIN to support Amendment 3.

You have 30 seconds.

**Mr Simon MOUTQUIN (Belgium, SOC):** Thank you, Madam President.

The last amendment I'm proposing is in fact consistent with the explanatory statement in the report, since the report rightly points out all the reasons why citizens drop out of the democratic system and vote for the extreme right.

This Amendment in fact proposes solutions and puts forward the idea of reconnecting the citizen with politics, by perhaps also questioning the provisions in the decision-making process for citizens; and then also, of course, reducing economic inequalities.

I think we can all agree on the objective we have as politicians, whatever our party.

Thank you all very much.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** Thank you.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

That is not the case.

What is the opinion of the Committee?

**Mr Reinhold LOPATKA (Austria, EPP/CD, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy):** The Committee was in favour.

**Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly):** The Committee was in favour. I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

*The vote is open.*

*The vote is closed.*

I call for the results to be displayed.

*Amendment 3 is agreed to.*

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Doc. 15826 as amended. A simple majority is required.

*The vote is now open.*

*The vote is closed.*

I call for the result to be displayed.

*The draft resolution, as amended, in Doc. 15826 is adopted.*

## **Debate: The honouring of membership obligations to the Council of Europe by France (periodic review)**

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Could you take your seats, please, so that we can continue.

Thank you very much.

Let us begin this debate.

The next item on the agenda is the debate on the report that is entitled "The honouring of membership obligations to the Council of Europe by France". It is Document no. 15833, presented by Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO and Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN on behalf of the Monitoring Committee. In order to finish by 8:00 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 7:50 p.m. to allow time for the reply and vote on the draft resolution.

The co-rapporteurs will now present their report. They each have 5 minutes now, and 5 minutes to share at the end in order to reply to the debate.

**Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE, Co-Rapporteur):** Thank you very much, Chair,

Preparing a monitoring report on the host state of our organisation is certainly not an easy task.

As we speak here in Strasbourg, or indeed where we have our Committee meetings in Paris, it would be easy for any observer unaccustomed to our Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) to wonder why of all countries, should France be submitted to such a scrutiny.

France of course is an example in many respects: the democratic tradition and the attachment to human rights are not in doubt. But as stated by the Permanent Representative of France to the Council of Europe, no country is perfect. There are possible improvements in every domain.

Human rights are a journey and not a destination at which one stays contentedly rooted, continuing to consider that everything is okay.

It's fortunate that international organisations such as ours exist to steer and to spur-on our member states.

It's therefore with much humility and a strong sense of responsibility that myself and my colleague Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO present this report to the Assembly today. I want to thank her for her constant collaboration and support in relation to this.

It's important to say that we applied the same criteria and methodology used for every country under periodic review.

The objective of periodic reviews is to apply to well-established democracies the same criteria as to more recent ones.

This Committee has already on many opportunities confirmed the value of such a procedure for the country under scrutiny, as for all other states.

As is normal working-method within our Committee, we took into account the findings and conclusions of institutions and monitoring mechanisms relating to the conventions of the Council of Europe to which France is a party, notably the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Group of States against Corruption, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

We studied judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and their execution.

This Committee conducted two hearings in April 2022 with the Defender of Rights of the French Republic, and in December 2022 with the former chair of the parliamentary committee of inquiry into obstacles to the Independence of the judiciary.

We made two visits to Paris in September 2022 and January 2023, which allowed us to meet representatives of civil society and the media, governmental authorities, independent administrative authorities and members of parliament.

To ascertain the quality of the findings of this report, the Monitoring Committee sent two requests for opinions to the Venice Commission, which released an opinion on the status of the judiciary and an interim report on Article 49.3 of the French Constitution.

I want to thank also the French authorities and the members of the parliamentary delegation which shared their observations with us and we integrated as many of them as possible.

The last few months have seen intense developments in France, sometimes relating to topics that we had identified as relevant for our report.

We made special care not to focus on the more recent events, but to stick to our mandate, and just to say that the main issues that we discuss are long-standing ones, finding their origins before the current government came to power.

Constitutional reform is an open debate in France and as the 65th anniversary of the constitution was celebrated, some proposals for constitutional amendments have been put forward by President Emmanuel Macron.

We think that both opinions of the Venice opinion can be of use in the future institutional debates in France and abroad.

On Article 49.3, relating to the legislative procedure, our purpose is absolutely not to give an opinion on the recent use of this procedure by the government, as history shows that governments from all political sides had recourse to it when political circumstances required.

I'm going to hand over now to my colleague.

Thank you.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO?

**Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, Co-Rapporteur):** Dear colleagues,

Definitely, France has very interesting traditions – long-lasting traditions – of democracy, and we found ourselves in this situation when, at the time we were conducting this report, there were a lot of tensions and discussions in French society on a number of questions and one of them is the judiciary. Taking this into account, we submitted the request to the Venice Commission to hear the conclusions and opinions of the Venice Commission on a number of questions. One of them was mentioned by my colleague, Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN regarding the constitution article and the second one is about the system of the magistrates.

The Venice Commission issued an opinion on the position of the superior council of the magistrates and the statutes of the magistrates. And the Venice Commission has issued a number of recommendations that are quoted in this report and we invite the French lawmakers to find a way to adopt this much-needed reform. However, we also know that there has been quite a lot of progress being made. If we just look at the numbers: the justice budget in France has risen in the last three years by 26% and it is also planned to have an increase in the budget to solve the problems in the justice system, also plus 21% and, of course, we complement that.

Another very important problem that we focused on is the question of prison overcrowding. Unfortunately, this is one of the issues where France was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights because the structural prison overcrowding created a condition of tension contrary to Article 3. Just to give you a little bit of understanding of the numbers: according to the Ministry of Justice data, this summer, French prisons had more than 74 000 people compared to the capacity of the 60 000 places available for detainees. We know that there was a fact-finding mission of the National Assembly and now other efforts are being made by the French authorities to combat this and to introduce alternative sentences but also to build new places for detention. However, the question of emergency is still very important and we welcome if there are more and more steps being taken on this matter.

Time is too short to develop all the topics covered but a few more very important questions that we focused our report on are the fight against corruption, combating discrimination, the freedom of information and combating the violence against women and transparency of political financing.

We welcomed the advances of the regulations on the question of the political financing of the parties and donations. It is very interesting in France that there are certain limits on donations that can be made to political parties and political campaigns, and also certain restrictions are being done more or less recently on the limit of the loans, of where this money can be taken from to finance the political activities in France.

We do understand that probably the question of the protests in French society is a very important issue to discuss. Probably, it has lots of cultural components and we urge all the democratic institutions in France to provide more justice, and of course, also to have more transparency on the data regarding the statistics and different investigations on human rights.

Overall, very big thanks to the French authorities and the Secretariat for this – I would say – not an easy task but we were trying to be very constructive and not to be in the conversations on the political level but rather on the level of the human rights and we used all the conclusions that were provided by European international institutions.

Thank you.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Now, on behalf of the political groups, I call first Sir Edward LEIGH

**Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** Mister Chairman,

Certainly, in my opinion, there is no doubt that France is founded on fundamental principles such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

It is an honour to defend France [...].

**Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group):** There's no need for an Englishman to defend France, because France is a bastion and a beacon of human rights and always has been.

Of course, France's relationships with Europe, and in particular with the United Kingdom, have been complicated over the centuries. Most recently in the First and Second World Wars and since, France has been a bastion of freedom in alliance with her family of free nations.

We in the United Kingdom have immense respect for our closest neighbours, our partners, and our allies, the French. The close co-operation between our countries has continued.

The report into "The honouring of membership obligations to the Council of Europe by France" is not made out of any accusation of breach or malfeasance. It is merely a periodic review. In the week of horrific attacks on our cousins the Jewish people, it seemed somewhat self-indulgent to be debating so-called human rights abuses in one of the freest countries in the world where millions of people who don't live there would love to live there.

In the English language we have an expression that "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence". We, of course, are proud of our history, but there are things France has done superbly that we are envious of, and that's not just wine, climate, and cheese. It is many other things which we should admire in France.

Prison overcrowding and the conditions of detention are no doubt a point of concern.

In my own country, our prisons are so overcrowded they've now got to offshore prisoners.

As for the use of force during demonstrations, I could only wish that our police in Great Britain were effective at handling disruptive protesters as the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*. How extraordinary to attack France on this where France is the one country where protesters traditionally actually succeed in changing things.

We welcome the extra revisions in preventing and combating violence against women that the French government has introduced, and this report points it out.

Now the report mentions the constitutional powers of the president as being of interest recently. People often say that if the British have a problem with the idlers, and the Americans with guns, then the French have a problem with pensions. Article 49 was investigated by the Venice Commission. This so-called interference is precisely what the Constitution of the French Republic passed by 82.6% of the population designed to do. A clear separation of powers amongst the executive legislative and judicial is one perfect legitimate theory of constitutional governance. It's not the only one.

The presidential powers are very clearly delineated. There is nothing that the president has done recently which is wrong.

We should support France, pay it honour. *Vive la France, vive la République!*

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES now has the floor.

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

The land of human rights, that's how France likes to present itself.

This reassuring expression provides us with a kind of carpet under which we can conveniently hide all the dust in a kind of self-absolution.

The very sharp report before us allows us to lift this carpet, and invites us to be lucid. My group congratulates the rapporteurs, free from any suspicion of bias, on their excellent work.

Yes, in France, the freedom to demonstrate is repressed. Just today, a pacifist demonstration was banned in front of the building we're in, as were others across the country.

In recent years, thousands of demonstrators have been injured, many of them suffering serious after-effects from the use of weapons of war by the police. The rapporteurs report illegitimate violence by police officers, which goes unpunished, and for good reason. The police and gendarmerie inspection bodies, and the report quotes this well, are dependent on the Ministry of the Interior and overwhelmingly made up of police officers and gendarmes who are *de facto* judge and jury.

Yet, since 2017 in France, 33 people have been killed by a police officer or gendarme following a refusal to obey. In the last six years, that's twice as many victims as in the 15 years between 2002 and 2017. Is this the land of human rights?

The report also notes abusive behavior on the part of police officers and gendarmes, which disproportionately affects people perceived as having an immigrant background or belonging to minority groups. Yes, in France, young men perceived as Black or Arab are 20 times more likely, 20 times more likely, to be subject to an identity check than the average population. Is this the land of human rights?

We support the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, which calls on the French authorities to introduce without delay an effective system for tracing identity checks carried out by the police.

With regard to the rule of law, the Venice Commission points to significant and problematic interference by the executive in the powers of the legislature, through Article 49-3 of the Constitution. In this way, the government was able to force through a pension reform rejected by all the unions, by the vast majority of the population, and by the National Assembly. Is this the land of human rights?

On the other hand, amendments to the Constitution are recommended to free the judiciary from interference by the executive.

The picture gets even darker. The European Court of Human Rights has enjoined France to put an end to a situation of systemic prison overcrowding, an unworthy condition of detention contrary to Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Yes, in France, prisoners are subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment. Is this the land of human rights?

Concentration of the media in the hands of a few billionaires, a crying lack of resources allocated to the fight against corruption, and violence against women. Yes, the country of human rights is gangrened.

I say to you here at the Council of Europe, guardian of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, that this damning portrait of France is, unfortunately, a true reflection of reality.

May this essential report dispel denials, awaken consciences and encourage the defenders of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** [Applause]

Thank you.

Now I call Mr Axel SCHÄFER.

**Mr Axel SCHÄFER (Germany, SOC, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear colleagues,

Monitoring is quite difficult to translate into German and means supervision and has quite a negative connotation. In fact, what we are doing here is discussing how the obligations and commitments of the individual member states are being met. And that's why I'm taking the liberty of saying something a bit fundamental at this point, because the question of which countries are under which monitoring is always a matter of discussion in all the groups.

The crucial thing is that here we are discussing in concrete terms - in this case France, and soon Germany, of course - what our countries, our parliaments and governments have undertaken to represent in a common Europe, in the Council of Europe, in the Parliamentary Assembly, and to practice what we preach back home. And we all know; in every democratic country, even in the oldest democracy in Iceland and in Great Britain, there are still gaps in a number of places between the constitutional or the traditional claim and the reality. And those are what we are discussing here. And the good thing about this process that we see today is that all countries are equal.

It is not a case of saying that you have such a long tradition of human rights that we don't need to discuss you anyway, but it is good that points have also been raised in this report, for example with regard to justice and democracy on the one hand, and the question of more direct democracy on the other. And indeed, what we have already discussed here in general about Europe, or, where every country can learn from other countries. Here in Germany, we are doing that as well. We're late with democracy, so we've had some advantages, but we're also changing - as society changes, as people change - but we want to do it here together and for the better.

And I admit - as a self-confessed fan of France - of course, for me, one of the most moving moments in politics in my entire life was January 11, 2015. Maybe some of you, of you, also participated in that, when we took to the streets in Paris with 1.5 million people in solidarity with Charlie Hebdo - against murderous terrorism, for freedom, for peaceful coexistence in France, in Europe and everywhere.

And that's how it should stay, and that's why thank you for this report.

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

Now I call Mr Birgir THÓRARINSSON.

**Mr Birgir THÓRARINSSON (Iceland, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group):** On behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (the EPP) I thank the Monitoring Committee and the rapporteurs for this timely and detailed report on the honouring of obligations by France.

The report is comprehensive. The time does not permit me here to cover all the points that were raised by our group members. I will, therefore, limit my remarks to those of most concern to the Group of the European People's Party.

The Group of the European People's Party remains committed to the ongoing monitoring of all of our member states, old, new, and everything in between.

Mister President,

The monitoring tool is a vital tool. We believe that it is not intended to punish member states, but to highlight shortcomings, and to shine a light, in order to ensure the respect for the rights and duties of our institutions and our citizens.

Indeed Mister President, the draft resolution makes specific mention of "the excellent co-operation during the preparation of this report with the members of the French delegation, representing both the governing coalition and the opposition".

The report highlights, and the Assembly welcomes, ongoing improvement in the regulation of political financing; efforts made in fighting violence against women; protections of journalists and media freedom; and reforms in prisons, in line with judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

We were concerned with reference to ongoing legal issues, which might be better addressed using other tools of the Council of Europe.

The usefulness of mention of open, ongoing legal matters, which are receiving due diligence in the member state concerned, appear misplaced, and unprofessional in a report of the Assembly.

The members of the Group of the European People's Party were divided on this report and our members will vote for, or against the resolution, as they see fit.

The Group of the European People's Party remains committed to our ongoing monitoring work, to highlighting shortcomings where necessary, and praise improvements.

We thank the members of the Monitoring Committee for their continued efforts.

It must be clear Mister President, that in the preparation of our work, in assisting rapporteurs, and committees in carrying out their duties, the Secretariat, and its staff must maintain strict neutrality, and assist and guide, rather than express personally held opinions. Practised long-time drivers sometimes takes the wrong turn, and refresher courses can often be useful.

Our member states are making a good practice with new improvements, and I have every confidence that we will continue to do so.

I thank the Committee for this report.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

The final speaker from the political groups is Mr Caspar van den BERG.

**Mr Caspar van den BERG (Netherlands, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group):** Dear Chair,

Monitoring the human rights, the functioning of democracy and the rule of law are a vital part of our work here at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). To quote King Willem-Alexander in his speech in the hemicycle in June 2022: "the goal is never to point the finger at someone else, but the goal is to learn from looking critically and constructively at ourselves in the mirror." That is the way in which our efforts here have a positive added value to our societies and our citizens.

And this report helps to do exactly that. I want to thank the rapporteurs Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO and Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN and the staff that supported them for their impressive work and for a balanced report and recommendations.

For my political group, it is important to stress that monitoring reports should be about the functioning of states, not the naming and shaming of individual persons or officeholders. Singling out individuals in monitoring reports will weaken the instrument as it invites ad hominem debates that in the end do not serve the interests of the societies and citizens we work for.

Among other things, the report asks attention for the strained capacity of the French prison system. We understand that the French government has now launched a programme to increase the number of places for detainees, and is working hard to overcome the hurdles of both personnel scarcity and local objections to new facilities: everybody wants a well-functioning prison system, nobody wants a facility in their backyard.

Also, the report expresses concerns about the use of force on the part of the French police. This remains an important topic to be vigilant about and every case is in principle one too many. We are pleased to see that new statistics from the French inspectorate about the use of force by the police have come out last month which provide more transparency and insight in casualties, and how they are followed up. We regret that these data have come too late to be included in the report and recommendations, but are confident that they will help in following up on this matter on the part of the French government.

In addition, the report applauds the decisive actions by the French government to fight domestic violence, in particular violence against women. For the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), this underlines the commitment of the French government to actively promote human rights and the rule of law.

ALDE therefore is supportive of the report and the recommendations following from it. Thank you.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Now Mr Didier MARIE now has the floor.

**Mr Didier MARIE (France, SOC):** Thank you, Mister Chairman.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Monitoring Committee for choosing to assess my country and to congratulate the rapporteurs, Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO and Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN, for striking the right balance throughout the process.

As the Minister of Justice, Mr Dupond-Moretti said, a report of this nature, like the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, stings a little. No country is perfect, even France, which is committed to freedom, human rights, and democracy. Fortunately, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is there to remind us, to guide us, to spur us on.

The report underlines a number of points that run through the French political debate. The first concerns the balance of power.

Since its creation in 1958, we have been debating our Constitution, amended 28 times, which, at times, such as during cohabitations, has favoured parliamentarianism, and at others, such as today, hyper-presidentialism.

It is in this context that the rapporteurs question the use of one of these articles, the famous 49-3, which allows the government to ask for the confidence of the National Assembly when it is not sure of its majority. This is what happened recently with the pension reform, which was seen by many as forcing through, accompanied by the use of other articles of the Constitution or the Assembly's rules of procedure to restrict the opposition's right to speak.

If this article were to be reviewed, it could, in my view, only be done as part of a wider reform of our institutions, aimed at rebalancing our system in favour of Parliament.

My second point concerns the police. Controversies over the legitimate use of force have arisen in the wake of outbursts during demonstrations or refusals to comply, resulting in death or serious injury.

The doctrine of maintaining order must be questioned. I agree with the rapporteurs' observations and proposals on the need to review it and, in particular, on the banning of certain weapons, such as defensive bullet launchers.

Likewise, the authorities must be more transparent about the statistics relating to these events, and guarantee the independence of law enforcement supervisory bodies.

Secondly, on the question of the independence of the judiciary, I would like to remind you that President François Hollande had proposed a reform to guarantee the independence of the public prosecutor's office, a reform which failed for lack of a two-thirds majority in Congress.

The Government has decided to strengthen the human and financial resources of the Ministry of Justice, but it will be necessary to improve its operation by developing alternatives to the judicial system that fills our prisons, where conditions are all too often undignified. Prisoners come out of prison worse than they go in, and France has been condemned for this on several occasions. To facilitate rehabilitation, we need to think about alternative sentences.

Finally, as regards media concentration, I agree with the opinions expressed by the rapporteurs. The situation is becoming increasingly problematic, with large industrial groups buying up news media and transforming them into opinion media.

Thank you very much.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** [Applause]

Thank you sir [said in French].

And now Mr Reinhold LOPATKA.

**Mr Reinhold LOPATKA (Austria, EPP/CD):** Mister Chairperson,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking you very much for this comprehensive report. This report shows that France has a functioning state, that France is a country of human rights, and that France is, of course, a functioning democracy. A large part of the report also has my full support. But there are individual passages where, in my opinion, the report is based on the wrong basic tone. I would like to mention two examples here.

I believe that in France, compared to Austria, demonstrators are more prone to violence. That is what the pictures show. Of course, I am in favour of the right to demonstrate. Of course, I am in favour of all human rights being exercised as far as possible by each and every one of us. But I am absolutely against violence in any form becoming part of the political debate. Then, there are difficult situations for the police. In my opinion, this report is too critical of the police and the great police violence that is mentioned here. The police have a mandate to establish peace and order. That is not easy when you are faced with such a large number of violent demonstrators. I feel that the report lacks the necessary understanding for the work of the police.

A second example that I would like to mention is this article here 49.3. It is indeed the case that when you hear about this for the first time as a non-French person, you have to have this construct explained to you. The very limited possibility of application per session, only for the budget and other legislative projects, has already shown that the rights of Parliament can, indeed, be restricted here in a very limited way.

It is to be said, however, that the associated vote of no confidence always indirectly gives the possibility to prevent such a legislative project also in the parliament, if just thereby the government finds an end. In other words, what I would like to say is that France is a leader in many democratic policy issues. This report is basically positive, because it is very comprehensive. But it has individual points that do not allow me to vote in favour.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Mr Bertrand BOUYX.

**Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE):** Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By voluntarily joining the Council of Europe, our states have decided to submit to the scrutiny of their parliamentary peers from other states. Monitoring is an essential tool. For this to happen, the process must be transparent, based on clear data and devoid of political or diplomatic ulterior motives. I, obviously, hope that this has been the case in my country. I leave that to everyone's discretion.

I'd like to come back to three points in the report. Firstly, what the report calls "illegitimate police violence". France had to deal with a record number of demonstrations in connection with pension reform and then a series of riots following the death of a young man killed by a police officer during a traffic stop. In view of the considerable disorder, the fact that the police and gendarmerie were able to maintain order, while at the same time being capable of questioning themselves and changing their policing doctrine to make it more effective and less likely to generate casualties, and that the perpetrators of violence, including among police officers, were brought to justice, proceedings are underway, show, if proof were needed, that France is a state governed by the rule of law, despite some unfortunate wording in the report. As for statistics on violence, I invite the rapporteurs to ask for a meeting with the Inspectorates General, who will be happy to provide them with the annual activity report.

Next, prison overcrowding. This is an issue of the utmost importance. As far as penal policy is concerned, France seeks alternatives to incarceration wherever possible. We can, nevertheless, regret that the rapporteurs did not highlight the law of 8 April 2021, which created a judicial remedy for unworthy conditions of detention.

As for the budget, for the fourth year running, the Minister of Justice has announced a significant increase in the resources allocated to the public justice service in 2024, which will exceed the symbolic 10 billion euro mark. Therefore, we are making progress, without any binding measures that would disregard the constitutional principle of the independence of the judiciary. We are making progress.

Finally, the report and the resolution insist on Article 49-3 of the Constitution. You have asked the Venice Commission for an opinion on a 65-year-old constitutional provision. Let me explain the principle. It's not that complicated. France is a parliamentary republic, since the government emanates from the National Assembly. The corollary is that, once constituted, it can "determine and conduct the policy of the nation", in the words of Article 20 of the Constitution. In the event of deadlock, it can engage its responsibility. This does not constitute "significant interference by the executive in the powers and role of the legislative branch", as the Venice Commission's provisional report, and I stress "provisional report", alleges, since the opposition can

demonstrate that it is in a position to constitute an alternative majority by voting, as has been said, a motion of censure. This is the system of the alternative majority, admittedly presented in an original way, but which exists in other democratic countries. In this way, the legislative power has the last word.

With these clarifications in mind, Mister Chairman, dear colleagues, I shall be voting in favour of this report.

Thank you, Mister Chairman.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you sir.

And now Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

**Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, EC/DA):** Thank you.

Dear colleagues,

Over the past decades many member states, including my own, have looked up to France as a source of best practice of good governance, human rights protection and participatory technocratic process. But let me focus on one other issue, namely the human rights dimension in the foreign policy of France.

Since the late 1990s, France has been a co-chair in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Minsk Group, which for two decades has tried to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

French mediation has held a consistent position in favour of supporting the rights of the endangered Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh, including the right to self-determination.

I want to put special attention on the fact that the French position had remained unwavering, despite the shifts in global politics over the past two decades. That's oil and gas trumping considerations of human rights and liberal values.

Let me also emphasise that France, which recognised the Armenian genocide by law in 2001, bears a special responsibility in addressing the use of force by the Azerbaijani government in modern days as a clear expression of intent of a second genocide against the Armenian people. The Armenian people highly value this policy.

Colleagues,

Upholding human rights not just in rhetoric but also in practical policy level would have created a completely different picture in this Assembly and in Europe in general.

The real support of the ideals of human rights and dignity can only be manifested during crisis, such as now, when we see many states flipping to power politics.

The Armenian perspectives on the French role in the regional security in my view can be summarised in three main points.

First, despite all the known challenges in modern times, we expect France to contribute to the constructive dialogue among all international stakeholders in support of the understanding that the Nagorno Karabakh issue cannot be considered resolved, given the scale of the grave violation of international law and order by Azerbaijan.

Second, we encourage France to facilitate long-term and equitable piece in our region by due consideration of all historical and objective realities, without pushing Armenia to the brink of making either/or choices, as well as containing the renewed aggressive pursuit of the Türkiye Coalition, namely of Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

Lastly, we expect France to pursue Azerbaijan's accountability, including in this organisation, to make sure there is no sense of impunity for crimes against humanity and all Armenian prisoners in Baku are released.

Thank you.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

Now, Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN.

**Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN (Armenia, EPP/CD):** Thank you very much. Dear colleagues, [in French].

It is really very complicated to be one of the biggest democracies in Europe, because everybody looks at you and everybody thinks that it is a pattern for further actions.

For sure, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, democracy is not a static phenomenon. It is a developing one. It is developing every day and from this perspective, such kinds of reviews are very important. I would like to say that from the very beginning, the French democracy was a democracy not only within the country but also abroad. And we should take this into account.

I would like to congratulate the rapporteurs not for the report, but for their choosing of the country which we are monitoring. And you have found these problems in France not because there have been no such problems in other countries members of the Council of Europe, but because the French democracy reached the highest level of transparency and openness towards any kind of criticism. That is why you see the overcrowded prisons, that is why you heard a lot of stories about police violence and so on. Believe me, if you will face an authoritarian state, you will see no protests, no persecution, no prison. You will see an absolutely ideal picture. You see in France, not something unique. You see in France, something which exists everywhere, but the French democracy has reached the level that it is not afraid to show, it is not afraid to speak, not afraid to discuss. And this is one of the values of French democracy. For sure, nobody is perfect and we understand perfectly well that it is very complicated crisis after crisis, in this huge democracy to do everything in accordance with all of the procedures, which are required. But simultaneously, I would like just to say that France was, is and will always be a country that allows any person to be 100% French and 100% person of his identity or her identity. This is quite important.

You know, my dear friends, I would like to say, despite the criticism in this report, that I would like to wish all of the countries of the Council of Europe, including my own country, to reach the level of democracy which we have in the *République française* [French Republic].

Long live France, long live the Republic [in French].

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

Now Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ.

"The floor is yours" [spoken in French].

**Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ (France, EPP/CD):** Thank you, Mister Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I've always considered the periodic reviews of member states to be a source of improvement, and as such, necessary and welcome.

This report, on the other hand, makes me wonder about the wisdom of such an exercise.

You state in paragraph 12 of your report that you believe you have produced an objective report. Allow me to tell you that this is not the case, that it is quite the contrary. Your report is politically biased, based on a total misunderstanding of how French institutions work.

You claim that democracy and the rule of law are in danger in France.

You insist on one article of the Constitution, Article 49.3, on which you asked the Venice Commission for an opinion. In its interim, that is, not definitive opinion, the Venice Commission considers that this article allows "significant interference by the executive in the powers and role of the legislative branch", and adds that this "is apparently unique in comparative European experience and is problematic". I have the utmost respect for the work of the Venice Commission, but I have to admit that I'm very surprised by this statement. Article 49.3 has been around since 1958. Does the Venice Commission really think that the balance of power in France has been problematic for 65 years? I've been a member of parliament for 16 years, sometimes in the majority, sometimes in opposition. If that were the case, I would have realised it a long time ago.

No, France is not a democratic anomaly. Article 49.3 of the Constitution is not an obstacle to the democratic functioning of French institutions: it's an original tool introduced into the Constitution to enable institutions to function rationally. Each country is unique and can choose its own framework, as long as democratic principles are respected. This is as true for France as it is for any other country.

On the subject of policing, you regret that official statistics do not allow us to clearly identify the number of people injured or killed by the forces of law and order". Allow me to point out that the General Inspectorate of the French National Police publishes an annual activity report containing numerous statistics, and that in the latest report available from 2022, the number of people injured and killed in the course of a police mission is indeed listed.

We can only accept criticism when it is fair and based on proven facts, not when it is based on untruths.

In conclusion, I regret to say that this report is neither serious nor objective. The immoderate and unfounded criticisms it contains completely discredit it. How can the Monitoring Committee, and more broadly the Council of Europe, endorse such a political drift?

As far as I am concerned, I will of course vote for my country and against this report.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you, Madam.

And now Mr Kamal JAFAROV.

**Mr Kamal JAFAROV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA):** Thank you, Mister Chairman.

As a founding member of the Council of Europe, France has failed to meet its obligations in terms of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

First of all, according to this report, the use of weapons by French law enforcement officers has caused serious injury and death during mass demonstrations. The death of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk, of Algerian-Moroccan origin, shot dead by a police officer at a roadside checkpoint, is a horrific example of the systemic nature of excessive force and racism.

France also flagrantly violates human rights in its overseas territories, as a result of its neo-colonialist policy. It continues to exploit Africa by printing banknotes for 14 African countries, charging them minting fees and using child labor to extract raw materials, as is the case in Niger.

Dear colleagues, France is also responsible for the current migration crisis. Africans are abandoning their continent because of France. The solution is not to transfer Africans to Europe, but to free Africa from France.

France must respect the sovereignty of the Comoros over the island of Mayotte, as well as the rights of the people of Caledonia and other overseas collectivities.

Nearly one and a half million Algerians were killed during French genocidal domination. The skulls of Algerian freedom fighters are still preserved in the Paris museum as war trophies. This is cynical and disgusting. We call on French President Emmanuel Macron to return the remains of these heroes to Algeria, so that their country can honour their memory.

The recent withdrawal of French troops from Niger, Mali, and Burkina-Faso has demonstrated once again that France's astonishing policy in Africa is doomed to failure. France is trying to impose the same harmful practices in the South Caucasus regions by supporting Armenia with a new arms deal.

Dear colleagues, this approach does not serve peace but aims to trigger a new conflict. If a new conflict were to arise in the region, France would be responsible.

Thank you for your attention.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much, is Mr Petri HONKONEN here?

But Mister Andrej HUNKO, I recognise you.

**Mr Andrej HUNKO (Germany, UEL):** Thank you very much, Mister President,

I would like to start by congratulating the two Rapporteurs for this detailed report and perhaps also critical report on some points - but I think that is also the task of this periodic procedure, which we have introduced because - and I am a great believer in this - because when I started here, 12 or 13 years ago, there was this idea that there are the teachers and the students of democracy. There are those who come from the post-socialist states; who have to learn democracy first, so to speak. And we from the old democracies - from

France, from Germany, from Great Britain: we teach democracy. But it's a bit more complicated, as we have also discovered in recent years. It's just that we also have problems in the seemingly fixed democracies, and it's very good that this is also being dealt with in this periodic review procedure.

And I also understand this report in this sense. There are critical points with regard to police force. I remember the report by our Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of the Yellow Vests Protests, which was also critical. I am not in a position to judge it in detail, but I have great confidence in the work of the Rapporteurs and also in the secretariat of the Monitoring Committee that there is a balanced assessment of the situation.

I come from *Aix-la-Chapelle*, or Aachen as it is called in Germany. It's a city that historically has been partly French, partly German. In my youth, the values of the French Revolution - *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, the philosophers of the French Revolution - were the orientation for me in my political awareness. I am a big fan of France, but I think it is good and I congratulate the head of the French delegation that you can also accept critical things, because in the end, it strengthens the credibility of this Council of Europe. It strengthens the credibility of this Assembly if we don't just point at others, so to speak, but also allow critical reports among ourselves.

And in this sense, thank you again for the report and I will definitely vote in favour, and I think the Unified European Left will also vote, unanimously, in favour.

Thank you very much.

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

Is Ms Liliana TANGUY here?

No? Oh, yes, I am sorry, I could not see you.

**Ms Liliana TANGUY (France, ALDE):** Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, France is the subject of a periodic review by the Committee on its obligations to the Council of Europe. The French authorities have responded with complete transparency to the requests of the two Rapporteurs, Ms Yelysaveta YASKO and Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN - whom I would like to thank for their work - who have acknowledged, and I quote, that they have had "quality exchanges" with members of the government and "enjoyed excellent co-operation with the members of the French delegation to the Assembly".

As the only French member of the presidential majority and a member of the Monitoring Committee, I paid particular attention to the conclusions of this report and I have to say that I found some of the conclusions harsh, even very harsh. That's why, in committee, I proposed amendments to the draft resolution, to ensure that the reforms undertaken by the French government are better taken into account in many areas.

First of all, I am pleased to note that the co-Rapporteurs have recognised the French government's efforts to combat domestic violence, and in particular, violence against women. It's worth remembering that this is an important pillar of President Emmanuel Macron's action in favor of gender equality, which he has elevated to the status of a major national cause. The work certainly needs to continue, but we're on the right track.

With regard to the functioning of our institutions, the Venice Commission has been asked to comment on Article 49.3 of the French Constitution, because the Rapporteurs consider it to be an instrument of government control over parliamentary work. I do not share this interpretation. Article 49.3 respects parliamentary democracy. Why is that? It is because when Article 49.3 is activated for a bill, the Constitution provides for the possibility of tabling a motion of censure, and the government commits itself. If this motion of censure is adopted by the National Assembly, the bill is considered adopted and sent to the Senate for reading, which will vote on the text in any case. In this way, the expression of national representation is respected, and the use of Article 49.3 must be seen as a mechanism of rational means of parliamentary democracy, making it possible to overcome the obstruction of debates and adopt important texts, such as the budget.

As far as police violence is concerned, I would stress that the use of force is subject to strict necessity and proportionality. The riots that have taken place in France in recent years are the result of organised violent groups who disrupt public order and endanger people and property, requiring the intervention of the forces of

law and order to protect the population in the event of serious danger. You mentioned the death of a teenager in June 2023: let me remind you that an investigation is underway. The police officer has been indicted, so it would be wiser to wait for the results of the investigation before ruling on this issue.

Furthermore, I regret that the report and the draft resolution also nourish a caricatured view of the management of policing in France, and I emphasize what other colleagues have said: that statistics exist on this subject and that they are perfectly available.

*[The Chairman asks her to finish].*

I'll finish.

Ladies and gentlemen, France is open to constructive criticism, but let me say that French democracy is respectful of the rule of law and human rights, and that France is the country to which many of the world's persecuted and oppressed turn to seek asylum.

*[The Chairman interrupts to ask him to finish].*

Thank you.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** I am sorry, you are going to have to stop now.

Mr Thibaut FRANÇOIS? Is he here?

**Mr Thibaut FRANÇOIS (France, EC/DA):** Mister Chairman,

Rapporteurs,

Dear colleagues,

The Council of Europe is founded on fundamental principles such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It is essential that all members respect these values.

This motion for a resolution questions a number of the points raised in it, and is clearly directed against France, my country.

Article 49-3 of the French Constitution, mentioned in paragraph 6, raises questions about the principles of sovereignty of the French legislature. The use of the 49-3 to pass legislation can be seen as an act of force against the will of the French people, as was the case during the most recent review of pension reform in France. Yes, the repeated use of the 49-3 by Emmanuel Macron's government is unacceptable given that the French people wanted to have their say on a debate that is crucial to their future. However, this article is in our Constitution, which is nothing other than the sovereign emanation of the will of the French people.

This report cannot openly and credibly deny the democratic and sovereign nature of the French Constitution, which is the cornerstone of our democracy.

Yes, France is one of the most successful democracies in the Council of Europe, and this report would have us believe otherwise.

As for concerns about the level of police violence in France, referred to in paragraphs 9 and 13 of the Council of Europe resolution, where you express concern about, and I quote, "abusive behavior affecting certain communities perceived to be of immigrant origin or belonging to minority groups", let me remind you of one thing. The French police are facing major challenges, and they are subject to unjustified attacks of extreme violence, as we saw recently during the recent riots that set France ablaze. It is essential to distinguish peaceful demonstrations from disruptive elements, linked to the extreme left for example, who seek to sow chaos and attack our forces of order.

No, the French police are not violent. No, the French police do not act on the basis of race. Yes, if there is abuse, it must be punished. But that's the job of the French justice system and not of this House. Moreover, I have not heard the Council of Europe condemn the fact that certain political forces in France, driven by the desire to destabilise our society, continue and contribute to fuelling the climate of violence and hatred towards everything that represents France and its state. These are, moreover, the same people who have failed to condemn the Hamas terrorists in France. They spoke out just before.

It is for all these reasons, and this obvious lack of objectivity, that I shall vote against this motion for a resolution attacking France.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Katalin CSÖBÖR (Hungary, EC/DA):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

**Ms Anne STAMBACH-TERRENOIR (France, UEL):** *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much.

I'm afraid we must call an end to the list of speakers at this point. Having interrupted the list of speakers, the speeches of members on the speakers list who have been present during the debate but have not been able to speak may be given to the Table Office for publication in the Official Report. I remind colleagues that type-written texts must be submitted electronically, no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

Now I call on Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN and Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO.

You have 5 minutes between you.

**Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN (Ireland, ALDE, Co-Rapporteur):** That's fine.

Thank you very much, Chair.

And can I thank all of those who contributed to debate. And just to emphasise that at all times that we, myself and Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO, behaved in an absolutely professional way in terms of listening, engaging, and fact checking in terms of the information that is in the report.

I'll just respond to a few of the comments.

This report has been almost two years in the making.

So for Sir Edward LEIGH to try to bring this in context with the atrocities that happened this week I think is absolutely not appropriate. This is not a debate or should not be a debate about who is pro-France and who is against France this is about a great country but trying to make it better.

So, the issue of long-standing concern is the policing of street protests. We have to say, it has raised the antenna of the Commissioner of Human Rights, the French defender of rights, and several civil society organisations. A review of policing methods, I believe, is rightly called for in this report.

In relation to racial profiling, we tried in vain to get statistics on the number and location of identity checks. It is a longstanding issue, and policy is needed as recommended by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report.

Mister Birgir THÓRARINSSON, we highlighted positive aspects, but we also called out areas that needed improvements.

I absolutely refute any suggestions that you have made in terms of undue influence in relation to the writing of this report. This is my and Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO's report. You undermined the process by what you said, you undermined the rapporteurs at your suggestion and I will remind you that the Monitoring Committee unanimously agreed to this report, and I honestly think you should apologise for your remarks.

Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ, I just want to say that what you said I found very patronising, to be honest. You say that this report is politically biased: it is absolutely not so and your own ambassador here in Strasbourg, clearly, does not think so. You are entitled to your own opinions, but not your own facts and this report is factually correct. Great attention went to providing footnotes on where all of the information and facts came from.

You mentioned statistics, and I say to you, that statistics should be more detailed so as to allow for a better transparency concerning people wounded during demonstrations. We didn't have any and we certainly looked for them and those statistics do not exist.

**Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, Co-Rapporteur):** Dear colleagues,

I think we all have seen that, yes the monitoring process may not be very pleasant for some countries. If we do accept the importance of the values and the tools that we have in this organisation, we have to respect these tools.

Yes, it may not be pleasant to hear that there are some problems, but the goal of the report is not to praise any of the countries. The goal is actually to indicate now what is being positive and what are the problems that need to be improved.

I'm sure that all of you noticed that France is an incredibly democratic country. Here we just saw the evidence of pluralism of thought and the speech. I think it's absolutely great.

I'm also happy on a personal level that some of the conversations that we had when we were trying to find the information provoked certain processes that we would get more statistics available to the public. Yes, indeed, some of that came a little bit later than we would like it to have before, but in the end I think we see the evidence. We have the statistics. I just think that we all should celebrate the traditions of democracy but also acknowledge the problems that we need all together to work on, because there are too many threats in our European societies now.

I wish France all the best.

I really hope that the next countries for the monitoring will also ready be for this process.

**Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly):** Thank you very much indeed.

Now I call the chair of the Monitoring Committee.

You have 3 minutes.

**Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)):** I would like to thank our rapporteurs for their hard work.

This report on the fifth review report on democracy in the various countries is an exercise that our Council of Europe decided to encourage countries to fulfill all the democratic criteria and principles of the rule of law.

There is no doubt that France is a great democratic country. All over the world, when we think of democracy, we think of France. No one can interpret this report as a criticism of French democracy. However, even the most democratic countries and even the most consolidated systems can have problems. It's good to see this and to check how they can be corrected to improve the functioning of democracy.

I say this to a few French colleagues who have said that this report is a report against France. Nobody here wants to approve a report against France. On the contrary, it's a report which, while underlining all the essential and fundamental aspects of French democracy, also points out that there are problems that need to be addressed. It is the responsibility of the French authorities to accept or reject this proposal.

Everyone is free to do what they think. But I think we have to achieve this objective of our Assembly, which is to encourage all countries to implement, every day, in the best possible way, all the rules, all the principles, all the values of the rule of law. That's all there is to it.

I think it's good. I invite all our colleagues, and also the few critical French colleagues, to vote and approve this report which, in the Committee, was unanimously approved after several amendments presented by Ms Liliana TANGUY and other French representatives had been accepted.

Thank you for your attention.

**Vote: The honouring of membership obligations to the Council of Europe by France (periodic review)**

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

I declare the debate closed.

The Monitoring Committee has presented a draft resolution, Document 15833, to which no amendments have been tabled. We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 15833. A simple majority is required.

The vote is now open.

The vote is closed.

I ask for the result to be displayed.

*The draft resolution in Document 15833 is voted for. It was adopted.*

What we need to do now is move on. The Assembly will meet tomorrow at its next public meeting tomorrow afternoon at 2:30 p.m. with the Agenda, which was approved yesterday.

I declare the sitting adjourned.