



Provisional edition

Wednesday 29 January 2025, afternoon

Official report of debates

Opening of Sitting num 6

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

Dear colleagues, please, be seated.

I want to remind members that they should insert their badge before taking the floor. As you begin your speech, please, press the microphone button once only, wait for a couple of seconds, and then start.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is my great honour to welcome His Excellency Mr Luc FRIEDEN, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, to the 2025 opening session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Dear Prime Minister, your extensive experience in governance, including many years as a minister and your appointment as Prime Minister of Luxembourg in 2023, is a testament to your dedication to public service and leadership.

It is with great esteem that I welcome you to this hemicycle, which, as you told me earlier, is the first time that you are visiting. And we are welcoming you warmly and we are thankful to you that you are here today with us.

I assumed my first year of the presidency during the year marking the 75th anniversary of this institution and I have to say that I was struck by the insufficient visibility of the impact of the Council of Europe's work on the lives of millions of Europeans. Throughout my tenure, I have called on political leaders to highlight, by all possible means, the history and legacy of this organisation to the broader public.

It is for this reason that I am particularly pleased about the opening in Luxembourg of the exhibition "75 years of defending the Council of Europe's fundamental values through posters". This exhibition serves as an excellent bridge, connecting the Council's rich history with the present, and I find it symbolic that it opened its doors, Prime Minister, in your town of birth, excuse me if I will not pronounce it very well, Esch-sur-Alzette, a city deeply rooted in the values of resistance and human rights.

The theme of resistance against oppression and the responses of societies to authoritarianism is also central to this session, particularly as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The participation of Luxembourg in these commemorative events, both here and in Poland, underscores Luxembourg's enduring commitment to memory, justice, and the fight against all forms of intolerance.

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.

These occasions serve as powerful reminders of why our organisation exists. They highlight the enduring importance of the Council of Europe's founding principle: that peace and democratic security can only be achieved through justice, human rights, and international co-operation. It is imperative that every member state contributes to safeguarding the multilateral system established 75 years ago.

Dear Prime Minister, we deeply appreciate Luxembourg's leadership, especially at a time when unity and co-operation are more critical than ever. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with you and your government to advance our shared goals, both during Luxembourg's presidency of the Committee of Ministers and beyond.

Prime Minister, the floor is yours.

Address: Mr Luc FRIEDEN, Prime Minister of Luxembourg

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Mr President of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Mr Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Ladies and gentlemen

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Two days ago, I was in Auschwitz, a place and name forever etched in history as synonymous with the lack of humanity.

This place of commemoration prompts deep reflection on the darkest moments in our continent's history. It also calls for action to ensure that these horrors can never happen again.

Born in the wake of the barbarities of the Second World War, the Council of Europe was called upon to nurture, fortify and materialise the sense of a new European state of mind, based on the principles of individual freedom and the rule of law. From the outset, therefore, its moral ambition exceeded the material objectives of other post-war organisations such as NATO and the OECD. And it is this moral ambition that continues to guide this Council of Europe.

I am therefore delighted that Luxembourg's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers has given me the opportunity to exchange views with you today. First and foremost, I would like to reiterate my country's unfailing attachment to our Organisation, as demonstrated by the forthcoming visit to Strasbourg of His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, and that of our Minister of Foreign Affairs last Monday.

The Council of Europe was the first common democratic institution on our continent. The principles that guided its action from day one remain as valid today as they were in May 1949: the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law.

Luxembourg attaches the utmost importance to the promotion and protection of human rights, both internationally and in my own country. Like so many other countries, we are obviously aware of the challenges we face. This is why Luxembourg is fully committed to the Council of Europe, its Committee of Ministers, its Parliamentary Assembly, its Court and other bodies.

I am convinced of the need for an approach based on the rule of law and multilateral co-operation. It enables us to work together for peace, common development, respect for human rights and the resolution of international challenges. These concerns were also at the heart of Luxembourg's term of office on the United Nations Human Rights Council, which has just come to an end.

And I'll never stop saying it here and elsewhere: Europe is a necessity. But it's much more than that: Europe is above all an idea and an ambition. It is a community of values between states with diverse traditions and cultures, whose pan-European scope is its strength.

There can be no Europe without democracy, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. These are the very soul of our continent, an intangible force that we share across borders, and from which we cannot be dissociated.

These values gave rise to the European Convention on Human Rights. This text, whose 75th anniversary we are celebrating this year, is one of the fundamental pillars of our common democratic space. It is here, in Strasbourg, a city marked by centuries of war and violence, that the fractures of our continent are healed and repaired. It is here that a true European consciousness is being built.

And yet, today we are witnessing the rule of law being called into question and our democratic values being put to the test. In the face of these extraordinary challenges, the Council of Europe, together with the European Union, must continue to mobilise; to mobilise in defence of our values, which can never be taken for granted, and whose respect is unequivocally binding on the member states of both organisations.

For this reason, the Council of Europe and the European Union are two closely linked organisations that complement each other. Let us continue to work together to strengthen the cohesion and unity of Europeans within the framework of a harmonious and respectful partnership. If we are to face up to the challenges of our times, especially those of a geopolitical world undergoing profound change before our very eyes, it is precisely this European state of mind that we must keep alive.

For the first time in decades, a European democracy is fighting an existential battle. Beyond the countless victims, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine tramples on the foundations on which the Council of Europe and Europe as a whole were built. It is a war against our values, a war against international law and multilateralism.

This war of aggression is undoubtedly the greatest security challenge facing our continent today, but it also casts doubt on the international law we hold so dear. Our historic duty is to confront the dangers that threaten peace.

In recent years, this Organisation, the Council of Europe, has demonstrated its ability to act decisively in the face of threats to our shared European values, to revitalise and prepare our Organisation to meet the complex challenges of contemporary Europe.

The Council of Europe succeeded in doing justice to its pioneering spirit by reaching agreement at the Reykjavík Summit on the creation of a Register of Damage Caused by Russian Aggression against Ukraine. This register, which has been operational since April 2024, is an essential step towards materially documenting the damage suffered by Ukraine and its population. The legal and technical experience of the Council of Europe will remain invaluable for the establishment of a future compensation mechanism for victims, as well as a special international tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is in our common interest to promote synergies with other international organisations, in particular the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, in order to support Ukraine on all fronts. Support for Ukraine, both nationally and here within the Council of Europe, will therefore remain a central priority of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, because of the principles we uphold and which Ukraine defends for us all.

The corollary of the weakening of the multilateral system by the war that continues to rage in Ukraine is the erosion of respect for fundamental values in many countries. These challenges are a source of deep insecurity. They profoundly challenge both peace and democracy. Building a peace based on co-operation between nations is the equivalent of developing a democracy based on respect for the rights of every human being at national level.

I would therefore like to welcome the initiative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to reflect on an ambitious action plan for the revitalisation of democracy. Faced with the challenge of democratic decline, the Council of Europe is well placed to address these crucial issues for our continent and our societies.

Revitalising democracy is as much a process as an objective. It requires the full participation of civil society, citizens, young people and, of course, all state institutions. The Secretary General can count on Luxembourg's support in drawing up this action plan.

Despite the significant progress made on our continent since the late 80s, I note with concern that these same values and ideals are sometimes called into question within Europe itself. The growing difficulties in executing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the attacks on human rights defenders and other civil society players, and the violence against journalists are clear signs of this, which must prompt us to react.

The deterioration of the rule of law primarily affects vulnerable people and minorities. Protecting minority groups must be an integral part of our common pan-European action. For without this solidarity, which must be implemented in our member states, our entire European architecture of democratic values is called into question.

Since its inception, the Council of Europe has demonstrated its crucial role in the process of European integration and the creation of a common legal area. It has supported the construction of the rule of law, in particular through the European Court of Human Rights, but also through the Venice Commission. Luxembourg particularly appreciated the expertise of the latter – the Venice Commission – in the context of the revision of our Constitution, which came into force last year.

Through its decisions, the Court plays a crucial role in guaranteeing the protection of human rights across the European continent. The Court is not always a comfortable institution, but it is the cornerstone of all European Convention on Human Rights systems. Without it, the convention system that was born in the early days of the Council of Europe, and which still supports the organisation today, could not function.

Over the decades, the Court's judgments have had a profound impact on the understanding of human and fundamental rights in Europe and beyond. My country, Luxembourg, its judicial system and its society have also evolved thanks to Strasbourg case law.

Beyond the Court's work, we also wish to move forward on our path towards a common legal area. To illustrate our ongoing work towards a common legal area, I welcome the draft Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Legal Profession, which was submitted to your Assembly for opinion last December. We hope to open the convention for signature at the foreign affairs ministerial meeting in Luxembourg in mid-May.

The aim of this future convention is to strengthen the rule of law and, by the same token, the protection of lawyers, whose role is fundamental to the administration of justice and the safeguarding of fundamental rights. This new instrument, the first of a binding nature, aims to strengthen the protection afforded to lawyers, enabling them to exercise their profession freely, without prejudice or hindrance. We look forward to the early adoption of this convention, and invite non-member states of the Council of Europe to accede to it, so as to extend the scope of this protection beyond Europe.

Despite the Court's crucial role, we must not turn a blind eye to the growing difficulties encountered in executing the Court's judgments and the attacks made on it. All member states have an obligation to respect these judgments and, consequently, the Convention. Execution of the Court's decisions is crucial to the effectiveness and credibility of human rights protection in Europe.

In addition to the challenges mentioned a moment ago, my country is fully aware that this crucial role of the Court entails constraints in terms of human and financial resources. This is why Luxembourg will continue to support budgetary efforts aimed at ensuring that the Court has a budget commensurate with the task at hand here in Strasbourg.

We Europeans also face other challenges: climate change, migratory movements and the challenges of artificial intelligence, to name but a few.

There are no easy answers to the challenges of our time. Yet there is a simple truth: countries that try to tackle them alone will not succeed. History has shown us that national, even nationalistic, solutions are doomed to failure. They bring neither peace, nor social progress, nor prosperity. But together, with institutions like the Council of Europe, we can meet the challenges and opportunities of today's world.

The Council of Europe's vocation should also be to further extend the protection of the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Union's accession to this Convention remains an essential objective, to ensure that all citizens of the Union enjoy greater protection of their human rights.

Future membership of the Council of Europe for Kosovo, whose declaration of independence has been recognised by the International Court of Justice as being in conformity with international law, would enable one of the last European populations – which does not currently enjoy such protection – to benefit from the European Convention on Human Rights.

Peace and stability in Europe invite us to write the pages of our continent's future together.

The history of European construction is the result of the strength of political leadership and the collective will of citizens to build a Europe at peace after the Second World War; a Europe founded on shared values, values which must continue to guide our actions, again and again.

The Council of Europe has this difficult but necessary collective responsibility to defend the rule of law. In the face of political trends and tendencies that have forgotten the consequences of a world in which the law of the strongest takes precedence over the rule of law, we must react, resist and take action.

Against this backdrop, it is my wish, and that of my country, that the Council of Europe remain an organisation characterised by high standards and being daring.

The Reykjavík Summit marked an important moment in the recent history of the Council of Europe. The ministerial session scheduled for May 2025 in Luxembourg represents the next key stage in assessing the progress made over the past two years. There, we will jointly define the priorities and actions needed to strengthen the defense of our common values.

As a founding country and President of the Committee of Ministers, Luxembourg is committed to pursuing the momentum generated by the Reykjavík Summit, and to aligning its efforts with the strategic actions of the Council of Europe. Our Presidency will ensure the continuity and consistent implementation of the decisions taken in Reykjavík, guarantee the execution of the judgments of the Court of Human Rights, and protect those who embody the rule of law, in particular journalists and lawyers.

To overcome the challenges of today and tomorrow, Luxembourg supports a strong and innovative Council of Europe.

A somewhat revolutionary idea at the time, the Council of Europe has become a reality. It is important to maintain this pioneering spirit in the future, while drawing inspiration from the same ideas and values as our predecessors.

Let us maintain the moral ambition of the Council of Europe to nurture, strengthen and materialise the sense of a new European state of mind.

Thank you for your support.

(Applause)

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

I will now give the floor to the representatives of the five political groups to ask some questions.

I will kindly ask you to respond, if you wish, of course.

I remind my colleagues that questions must be limited to 30 seconds and no more. Colleagues should be asking questions and not making speeches.

The first question comes from Mr Ivan RAČAN on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Ivan RAČAN (Croatia, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Mister Frieden and dear colleagues.

Luxembourg is statistically never in the average of the EU but almost always at the top.

Such as the situation with foreign nationals, as well, that comprise almost 50% of Luxembourg's population. Similar is the number of people who work in Luxembourg, but do not have the right to vote. How is this sustainable for Luxembourg?

Can you elaborate what are the cultural-social effects of this situation?

Also, can something like this be the solution for the European population crisis or is it unique for Luxembourg for its relatively small size but very strong economy?

Thank you.

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

Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Thank you very much for your question.

Indeed, Luxembourg has the benefit of having many foreign citizens in Luxembourg, many of those coming from European countries.

Like other European countries, only nationals have the right to vote in national elections.

Foreigners, members of other EU countries, have the right to vote in local elections which is very important, because it is in the local communities where democracy is exercised at the first level.

At the national level, we introduced something which is very important for trying to further include the foreign community into our society. That is something, by the way, that I was able to introduce when I served as Minister of Justice some twenty years ago. That is the principle of dual nationality.

I have to say that many foreigners who came to Luxembourg have opted for this dual citizenship, thus keeping the nationality of their country of origin, yet adding the one of Luxembourg and thereby also acquiring the right to vote.

I think we need to continue to make every effort possible so that the living together, which has so far been quite successful in Luxembourg, continues. I think it's not only linked to the right to vote. Its much more than that; it is including them in many decisions, and that is what we try to do.

By the way I have to say that although the number of foreign nationals in Luxembourg is quite high in proportion to the total population, the co-existence, the living together, has been quite remarkable and positive in the past.

We will do everything possible under my term in office so that that remains like that.

Thank you.

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

I will now give the floor to Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

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

Dear Prime Minister,

Azerbaijan is a member of the Council of Europe. And for a year now Azerbaijan has totally ignored the call from our Assembly to respect the principles of our organisation.

The number of political prisoners has increased and the crackdown on civil society, media, and other government critics continue to rise.

As Chair of the Committee of Ministers, what has Luxembourg done to encourage the Committee of Ministers to engage in dialogue, with the authorities of Azerbaijan to make them respect their commitments to the Council of Europe and implement the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights.

Thank you.

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

Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): As I said in my remarks, the respect of human rights of all the principles enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights is extremely important for my country, and we advocate the full respect of those rights everywhere and on each and every occasion.

I met a few months ago with the president of Azerbaijan, by the way, on the same day I also met with the prime minister of Armenia, because we believe that not only the peaceful co-existence of those two countries, but also within their countries, the full respect of all the principles that we hold so dear in this Council of Europe must be respected.

Azerbaijanis benefited from the support of the Council of Europe in its efforts since its independence, some 20, 25 years ago to implement a number of reforms, and we will continue to encourage Azerbaijan to do so.

I also believe as a prime minister of Luxembourg, that one of the positive aspects of the Councils of Europe is that we have a channel to talk to the representatives of such countries, including Azerbaijan, to exchange views with them, to show them what human rights mean and how we encourage them to implement them in their countries.

So I think it's a common task for the ministers, but also for the Parliamentary Assembly to try to keep the channels open and to discuss this further with them.

We are strongly in favour of a dialogue with the authorities of Azerbaijan - like of any other country – and to encourage them to respect all of the principles enshrined in the constituting documents of the Council of Europe.

That will be my task as prime minister, as it will be the tasks of all of my colleagues of my government, but also of the members of this Parliamentary Assembly.

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

On behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance, I call now Mr Attila TILKI.

Mister Tilki, we cannot hear you. Have you inserted your badge?

Okay. Press once only the button and then wait for a couple seconds. Sorry.

Mr Attila TILKI (Hungary, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Dear colleagues,

Dear Prime Minister,

Among the priorities of the Luxembourg Presidency, both the promotion of European culture and living together, are programme items that are ideal tools for increasing mutual understanding and celebrating the historic diversity in unity of Europe.

In light of this, what is the position of the Luxembourg Presidency on the protection of traditional national minorities of Europe?

Thank you.

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

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Thank you for that question.

I think that the protection of minorities is extremely important.

It has been enshrined in a number of conventions of the Council of Europe and to that extent Luxembourg, like I hope all members of the Council of Europe, will continue to make sure that those rights are fully respected.

I have to say that my country Luxembourg does not have national minorities. So it's something from which we are not directly impacted in Luxembourg. But I think it's very important that the rights of all minorities, national minorities, all minorities are always fully respected as part of our fundamental values and how our democracies should function.

May I also say that what you said at the beginning of your question that indeed I think that getting to know each other better through culture, building bridges through culture is something also extremely important, and that is one of the reasons why also Luxembourg has put culture among its priorities.

I've always believed that if people come together around things other than political debates, be it culture, be it sports, maybe some other areas, that creates the bonds that you need to have the peaceful and better world. And therefore let us work using culture for a better living together, for respecting this diversity, but diversity in a certain unity around common values.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President, dear Prime Minister Frieden,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to your country and to you for being a reliable partner to Ukraine for fruitful co-operation and support.

My question would be what specific measure can Luxembourg take to expand its military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, who daily fights for its survival against Russia as an aggressor?

And as it is Luxembourg's presidency, I would also like to use this opportunity to ask for your country's facilitation in ensuring accountability for the Russians involved in the abduction and unlawful adoption of Ukrainian children by creating, according to the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a joint registry for individuals to be sanctioned.

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

Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Thank you very much for your question.

And I would like, again, as I said already in my remarks earlier on, that my country fully supports Ukraine, will continue to strongly support Ukraine, not only because we want to defend Ukraine, but because you are defending us and you are defending the principles for which this organisation was created.

If international law is violated, if the basic principles on which the world after the Second World War – our part of the world after the Second World War – has been established are violated, it is our duty, regardless of the size of the country, to stand by those who are the victims of such aggression.

And that is the reason why my government, and I would say the large majority of the people of Luxembourg, fully stand behind all efforts to support Ukraine – militarily, financially, humanitarian aid and we will be there also to help one day the reconstruction of Ukraine.

This is our moral duty, but it's also about fundamental principles.

So we will continue to look for ways to help Ukraine, also to make sure that there will be sustainable peace, and sustainable peace means, of course, peace that means that once there will be peace in Ukraine, no other war can start on the European continent.

Therefore, we will also be on the side of Ukraine when we look for ways to find a solution to end this war. But that can only be done with Ukraine. It cannot be done by others talking on behalf of Ukraine. Only Ukrainian people and the representatives of Ukraine can decide what is the best course for Ukraine.

But we must be there to ensure the safety of Ukraine in the long term and also the human rights, the fundamental human rights of Ukraine in the future. There are so many terrible things that happened. The violation of international law, there are crimes against humanity, there are material damages that were done, there were children abducted. And on all those issues, I can assure that my country, and all organisations, will help Ukraine to establish its sovereignty, but also to make sure the crimes cannot go unanswered and that there will be courts and other instruments available to the Ukrainians to make sure that what happened cannot happen again and that justice will be done to the Ukrainian people.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, I call now Mr Berdan ÖZTÜRK.

Mr Berdan ÖZTÜRK (Türkiye, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister Chair,

Mister Prime Minister,

The Committee of Ministers has been tasked with supervising the European Court of Human Rights judgments and ensuring their enforcement.

There are many cases still pending to be implemented by Türkiye, such as the cases of Mr Osman KAVALA, Mr Selahattin DEMIRTAS and also Mr Abdullah ÖCALAN, which the judgment of the Court underlines the right to hope.

In your opinion, what step should the Committee take to ensure Türkiye's compliance with the court rulings in these and many other cases?

Thank you.

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

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Thank you for that question.

My country strongly believes in the rule of law and in international judicial institutions.

That is why we have been a strong supporter of the European Court of Human Rights.

That is why we have been a founding member and strong supporter of the International Criminal Court.

That is why we are the host country and a strong supporter of the European Court of Justice.

And therefore we believe that all judgments that are rendered by international organisations, international courts of which we are a member and which other countries are members of as well, must be fully implemented. Otherwise the system on which the conventions have been adopted will not function well.

And therefore we have to tell every member of those organisations, Council of Europe, European Union, but also Statute of Rome, that the decisions of these courts must be implemented.

And it is for us, in our political fora, everywhere, in each and every country, to remind the leaders that if we believe in the rule of law, court systems are the instruments to have the checks and balances to make sure that the rights enshrined in the treaties and in the constitutions are applied. And therefore there can be no doubt on that: Court decisions must be implemented always and everywhere.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Prime Minister. I will now give the floor to a group of three of my colleagues.

So, Prime Minister, if you wish you can take some notes because you are going to respond to all three at the end.

And the first is Ms Sona GHAZARYAN.

Ms Sona GHAZARYAN (Armenia, ALDE): Thank you, Chair.

Honourable Prime Minister,

We are living in quite turbulent times wherein political dynamics, long standing, established practices, alliances, unquestionable bonds, and decade-long relations among the states may be called into question.

In this context, I would like to know, to learn how you see the future of Euro-Atlantic co-operation, collaboration or interaction.

I'll be very grateful for your valuable insights, especially from the Luxembourg viewpoint.

Thank you.

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

Mr Ricardo CARVALHO is next.

Mr Ricardo CARVALHO (Portugal, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President,

Mister Prime Minister,

Warm regards from Portugal. It's an honour for the Portuguese Delegation to have you here with us.

As you well know, nowadays one of the most important issues of the political debate in Europe it is migration.

Portugal is a country of migrants – more than 90 000 Portuguese live in Luxembourg, well integrated.

Mister Prime Minister,

Could you share with us your point of view on the challenges on migration in Europe?

And how can we learn from Luxembourg and its successful policy of migration?

Thank you very much.

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

Mr Bernard SABELLA is next. Is Mr Bernard SABELLA in the room? So I'm going to Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN.

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

Honourable Prime Minister, what lessons can Luxembourg share from its own experience in promoting democratic values? And what specific initiatives can it lead within the Council of Europe or European Union to support Eastern Partnership countries in addressing challenges to implementing human rights and rule of law reforms, as well as helping Armenia safeguard its democratic reforms and values against geopolitical pressure?

Thank you.

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

Prime Minister, would you like to respond?

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Thank you.

These are of course very interesting and far-reaching questions. I will try to summarise my thoughts on these questions.

First, starting with the question on the Euro–Atlantic relationship. The United States and Europe share, for many decades, the same basic values. Both continents are based on documents which are rather similar. The French Convention on Human Rights and the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights that followed the basic Constitution are almost identical. I believe that history and those basic texts make out of us partners forever independent of who at a certain moment governs either in Europe or in the United States. There is a fundamental bond there which was strengthened, of course, by the huge actions that the United States took when they helped us liberating Europe in the Second World War. Without the United States, my country would not be what it is today. and we should never forget that.

The United States, like Europe, is also based on a system of checks and balances, and I hope, of course, that those checks and balances will continue to function well also in the coming years in the United States and elsewhere, also in Europe.

The times that we are entering now might become a little bit less predictable due to the style of governance of those who have been recently elected. So, Europe needs to adapt to that. But my view as a European leader is that we should not follow and react to something, but that we as a continent, based on our values, based on our principles, we must try to become more sovereign in questions of security, of economy, of energy, yet at the same time trying to keep the historical bridges between Europe and the United States. We have worked well together in the past decades with the United States, including in the recent past in fighting for fundamental values in Ukraine, in resisting the Russian aggression. I think we also need to discuss with the United States to keep the world a peaceful place, a place based on fundamental values. I believe in

partnerships that Europe must make with others, and the United States is certainly a country that remains a partner and a friend. But if some fundamental values were not respected, the friendship that we have with the United States would also allow us to raise our voice.

But it is also a time for Europe to become more, I would say, more autonomous, more determined to defend its values and its voice. There are 400 million people in the European Union, even more in the Council of Europe, so we are not dependent on others. But we need friends and partners around the world, and the United States is among those.

On the second question: migration. Let me, first of all, stress once again that migration and cultural diversity is part of the richness of our continent. We see that every day with, for instance, the very big Portuguese community in our country. They contribute to the cultural and economic enrichment of our country. I'm very grateful for that.

Now, migration has, of course, many facets. The migrants from other EU countries, like also from Portugal, they are legal migrants. We have people who come to our countries, including Luxembourg, to seek asylum. Of course, we are bound, and we want to be bound by the Geneva Convention for those who flee for reasons of political persecution, that they get the right to asylum and that they can stay in Luxembourg for as long as they are under threat. That also goes, by the way, for the numerous people who came from Ukraine to Luxembourg during the war and whom we try to give all the help that they need.

At the same time, migration is a challenge to our society. Therefore, my government believes that illegal migration must be fought and that those who do not get the right to stay, either because they entered illegally or because they did not get the right to asylum, they must leave the country. Therefore, a return policy, which did not work very well in the past, is part of a comprehensive policy of migration. It is a policy that must be done by heart and reason. Heart, helping those who are in need, but also reason, making sure that society as a whole can function well. Therefore, part of migration is making sure that the integration works well. Integration needs education programmes, sports, culture, but also making sure that the number of people who are coming are in numbers that allow a successful integration into society, in the economy and that is something where Europe needs to get its act in order. I think positive steps have been taken recently within the European Union, and that is something that we need to continue to do all together. It's one of those policies also where no country can make its own policy, but we have to do it together with our neighbours and friends on the European continent.

Finally, on the question on democratic values, let me say that this is at the heart of what we have been discussing all afternoon. How can we make sure that our democracies work, that human rights are respected? I think the main element is that we have a stable environment with good functioning institutions, parliaments, governments, courts and the respect of the minorities, also the political minorities. All that is part of making sure how democratic values function. If you do not respect the minorities, if you do not respect the views of the opposition, if you do not respect the views of civil society, if you do not allow them to express themselves freely, if you do not strengthen the freedom of the media, then democratic values are in danger. So, my experience, our experience in Luxembourg is that those checks and balances of all different powers in society need to be constantly strengthened. Therefore, I would not limit my remarks to Eastern Europe or the Eastern neighbourhood. This is true even in some European countries where we've seen recent trends, where challenges to democracy have been made, and they worry me as a Prime Minister of a European country, a lot. So, we will fight for democratic values.

I appreciate the action plans for individual countries that have been set up within the Council of Europe. I think these are good steps. But all of us should make through dialogues, constantly reminding us what democracy means, what we are fighting for and to talk about that here and outside of this building.

Let me conclude by what I said at the beginning of my remarks. I said I was in Auschwitz two days ago. While sitting there, I was always wondering, how was that possible? In Auschwitz alone, 1.1 million people were murdered and many more Jews, most of them, and many more in other concentration camps. And I said to myself, "how is this possible?" I think this is possible if we allow certain tendencies to grow. Because before action, there is speech and before speech, there is thought. Therefore, let us all together fight against that thinking that otherwise may lead again to such horrific things as those which happened in the Second World War and that would be the end of our civilisation.

Let us be optimistic, but let us fight for the values at the very basis of the Council of Europe.

Thank you.

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

I have on my list two more questions and according to the programme, less than 5 minutes. If you agree, I can go on with these two questions and I will kindly ask you to reply.

Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI.

Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI (San Marino, SOC): Thank you, Prime Minister, for your speech and responses, and good work on the six-month presidency by the San Marino Delegation.

President Trump announced the end of the Great New Deal in light of the slogan "Drill, baby, drill!"

Without the United States, and given also the position of India and China, the European Union's efforts associated with the Paris Agreement to reduce the size of greenhouse gases by 55% compared to 1990 will be totally insufficient to combat climate change, it being self-evident that the spread of carbon dioxide knows no national boundaries.

It would seem, therefore, that the challenge cannot be seen through changing behavior and reducing consumption.

How, according to Luxembourg, one of the most committed and also most effective countries on this plan, should the European Union and the Council of Europe states review the overall strategy of the fight against global warming in order to win it?

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

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK is next.

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Thank you to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg for its support to Ukraine.

My question concerns the assessment of Europe's level for the preparedness for threats of war.

How do you assess the EU's capabilities to produce weapons and ammunition three years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine?

And do you support the idea of a possible deployment of EU peacekeepers to Ukraine after a ceasefire?

Thank you.

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

Prime Minister, you have the floor.

Mr Luc FRIEDEN (Prime Minister of Luxembourg): Thank you for those questions on climate change.

Our view should not depend on what others are doing.

So my government – and I hope all members of the European Union – will continue to stick to the Paris Accords and to the commitments that we are doing there.

We are doing those not only because they are commitments to a treaty that we participated in, but because they are there to make our world livable also in the future and for the future of our children and grandchildren. Therefore, while I regret that the United States will leave the climate agreement, we should continue to make sure that we stick to our ambitious goals. They are not easy to attain, but we should not change course because of what happened. We also saw that last time when the United States left the Paris Accords, they came back to them four years afterwards. So, my hope is that this is not forever.

I would like to stress once again that I think that climate change is an enormous challenge for our society, that we should not underestimate it, that we must make policies that encourage people to change their behaviour. Therefore, of course, we need to invest massively in renewable energies to make sure that we become less dependent on fossil energies. So, my main point is let us stay on course and let us try to convince others who might temporarily not be convinced of what we have agreed upon years ago for the good of all mankind.

Regarding the second question on preparedness and the future of Ukraine, but moreover the general security architecture of Europe, I think what is necessary is that all countries in Europe can live in peace and security. Therefore when I mentioned earlier on that we need to look for a sustainable peace, obviously security guarantees for Ukraine, but also for other countries are part of that discussion. Security guarantees for some are being members of NATO. Security guarantees for others are bilateral or multilateral agreements, and the details of those still have to be discussed. We started those discussions with the president of Ukraine quite recently, but they are the very beginning and there are no easy solutions to this. But they must be part of a broader package of things to make sure that once this terrible war of aggression by Russia on Ukraine finishes, we can live in a world of peace once again.

We had believed at the end of the Second World War, at the end of the Cold War, that peace would be there forever. Unfortunately, that is not true.

So, we need to invest more in defence, we need to help one another, and we must make sure – by all means, including where necessary military means – that peace and stability on our continent can be guaranteed for the long term. We as a country take part in that effort together with our neighbours and friends in Europe.

Thank you.

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

I want to thank you for accepting my invitation to address the Assembly during the Presidency that your country holds, the Committee of Ministers, and of course, for accepting to respond to the questions that my colleagues said to you.

Thank you once again.

Dear colleagues, in 2 minutes we start with the next item, which I want to remind you is challenged on some substantive grounds of the still unratified credentials of the Parliamentary Delegation of Georgia.

2 minutes. Please don't leave the room.

Debate: Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Georgia

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

The next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled “Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Georgia” (Doc. 16104) presented by Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA on behalf of the Monitoring Committee with an oral opinion presented by Ms Petra BAYR on behalf of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs (Doc. 16107).

In order to finish by 5:45 p.m., we must interrupt the list of speakers at about 5:25 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, rapporteur.

Dear Zanda, you have 7 minutes.

Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA (Latvia, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you, dear President.

Dear members,

During the June session when I spoke on behalf of the Committee at the end of the urgent debate on the developments in Georgia, I mentioned how sad it was to be discussing democratic backsliding in a country that only a few years before was seen as moving rapidly towards post-monitoring. Little did I know that only six months later I would be presenting a report on the challenge of the credentials of the Georgian delegation due to the country's failure to honour its membership obligations to the Council of Europe with regard to democracy, rule of law and human rights.

The developments in Georgia since the 26 October elections, as well as the manner in which those elections were conducted, clearly show that the Assembly's call to reverse the democratic backsliding was not heeded, but that, on the contrary, democratic backsliding continued to accelerate with unprecedented speed.

This needs a clear response, but also clear recommendations on how to reverse this democratic backsliding.

The suspension of the European Union accession process by the ruling majority, contrary to its election promises and the subsequent brutal use of force against demonstrators in violation of the right to freedom of assembly and the crackdown on their position and civil society have resulted in a deep social crisis and a complete lack of trust and legitimacy of the political institutions in the country.

The social contract between the citizens and those that govern was broken. This is clear from the daily protests in Tbilisi and many other cities in Georgia, which are largely society-driven and spontaneous. No solutions for this crisis can, therefore, be found without involving both social actors and civil society.

In a democratic society that is faced with such a deep social crisis, when the social contract between those that govern and society is broken, the adequate response is to refer the matter back to its citizens through new democratic elections.

However, it is clear that elections organised in the same conditions as the last elections, without addressing the serious shortcomings and deficiencies noted in the Assembly's election observation report, will not lead to democratic elections or resolve the social crisis.

I have therefore called for the authorities to immediately initiate an inclusive process involving all stakeholders and social actors in civil society to urgently address these deficiencies and shortcomings and to create an electoral environment that is conducive to new genuinely democratic elections to be announced in the coming months.

However, it is clear that such a process cannot start under the current conditions of police brutality and human rights abuses, of abuse of arrest and criminal procedures to retaliate against protesters, journalists and civic leaders, and under conditions of crackdown of opposition and civil society.

Dear colleagues, we have called for these practices to be ended immediately, abuses effectively investigated and political prisoners released.

The draft resolution before you tries to give the response as well as clear indications of how democratic backsliding can be reversed. Writing this report was not an easy task, but it represents and analyses a solution to which I hope all the political groups can agree.

The Committee has worked out and underlined clear conditions that have to be met by Georgia till the next session in April. At this moment the Committee proposes to ratify the credentials of the Georgian delegation, but with these conditions and with clear deadlines, while suspending several rights of the members of the delegation as a sign of our condemnation of police brutality and other human rights abuses which so far have not been addressed by the authorities.

If these conditions, which are essential to resolving the current political crisis and reversing the country's democratic backsliding, are not fulfilled, the Assembly will have no choice but to reconsider the credentials of the Georgian delegation in its April 2025 part-session.

We all sincerely hope that this will not be necessary, and we do urge the Georgian authorities to address these urgent recommendations to reverse the democratic backsliding and to listen to what its own citizens are asking and aspiring to.

I thank you, the Committee, for your co-operation in preparing this report, and I ask the Assembly to support it.

Thank you.

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

I call Ms Petra BAYR, rapporteur of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and International Affairs, to present the Committee's opinion.

Dear Petra, you have 3 minutes.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you very much dear Theodoros,

In any substantive challenge to credentials, the role of our Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs is to consider whether the correct procedures have been followed within the rules, and to consider whether the proposal in the draft resolution complies with the rules of procedure. So, our report is not on content, but just on procedure.

The proposal in the report and draft resolution of the Monitoring Committee is for the Parliamentary Assembly to ratify the credentials of the Georgian delegation, together with depriving or suspending the exercise of some rights of participation or representation of members of the Georgian delegation in the activities of the Parliamentary Assembly, and whilst requiring the implementation of a number of actions.

The proposal is compatible with the possible opinions envisaged by Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure and the proposal therefore meets the requirements of the Rules.

However, given the partial delegation, it is evident that specific efforts will be needed to seek to address the lack of genuine political pluralism in the current Georgian delegation, which poses difficulties for the effective operation of the Parliamentary Assembly. In my opinion, I therefore note that this matter could benefit from further consideration, having regard to the importance of genuine political pluralism and thus of hearing from a plurality of different voices within a democracy.

Further, my opinion also highlights that in order to ensure that the actions set out in the bullet points in paragraph 11 of the draft Resolution are meaningful, they should be followed up closely by the Monitoring Committee and its two co-rapporteurs, as well as, if appropriate, other bodies of the Council of Europe, including the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner for Human Rights – and I think you have seen that he published his report on Friday of this week. He visited Georgia in the course of January. – and to inform the Parliamentary Assembly of developments on the implementation of these actions.

I also note that in order to help the work of the Parliamentary Assembly in following up on these actions, it would be important for the Monitoring Committee to prepare a report on the implementation of the requirements set out in the draft resolution, in time for the April session.

Thank you very much.

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

We'll go on now with the speakers on behalf of political groups.

And I call Mr Frank SCHWABE, the leader of Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

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

Thank you very much for your work. Especially, I really want to thank Zanda for this excellent work, which makes it possible for us to show great unity in this Parliamentary Assembly today.

Dear acting authorities in Georgia,

The Council of Europe is the oldest multilateral organisation in Europe. The Council of Europe has one main task. The main task is to support countries on the way to more democracy, to more human rights and to more rule of law. I really want to thank the co-rapporteurs Ms Edite ESTRELA and Mr Claude KERN, as well, for the excellent work they did, and they do to bring Georgia on this right way.

But Georgia is going the other way around. It's going in the totally wrong direction. This is a message from today. It's going in the way of less democratic standards, of less respect of human rights, of less respect of the rule of law, and the respect of an independent judiciary. Let's say it's less Europe, what we see.

This is the reason why we are here, why we are discussing it; it is not the accusation of double standards and special treatments. The truth is we discuss in this way because we don't know how we deal with such countries in the future. They are going in the wrong direction because this organisation is prepared to go in the right direction. Because of this, we are here to give the very, very last warning.

We are not just concerned like in a lot of reports. We are prepared to take action. We already take actions today, and we will have a follow-up on what we ask you in the report. We will come back in April, for sure, one hundred percent sure. We will see each other back here in April. I would call it a membership on probation, with limited rights, with strictly limited rights. We limit all the rights we can limit in this Parliamentary Assembly. We ask you to do something meanwhile. We ask you to stop the violence and to take those really responsible for committing crimes at the state.

We ask you to release those who are imprisoned for political reasons. I want to mention especially Ms Mzia AMOGLOBELI. I saw the video, and it's really kind of a joke. What is the accusation, and what should be the punishment?

We saw systematic, widespread manipulations in the elections. I myself and some colleagues here saw how people were paid, how they were urged to make pictures, how there was repression on voters. So, the only way out of this crisis is to hold elections.

And I want to add something. Do not extradite people from Azerbaijan and do not put yourself in the same row. So, there are people like Mr Afghan SADIGOV, Ms Nurana ASHUROVA. They are suffering in Tbilisi, and they are scared to be pushed out to Azerbaijan. So, please take it seriously. We don't close the door today, but it is a very, very clear and serious warning we give to you.

Come back to our European way of democracy, human rights and rule of law.

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

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

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

I want to begin with congratulations – Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, also the secretary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Ms Petra BAYR.

The times were not easy. The political heat very high, the expectations extreme. And you follow the mandate of this institution: to promote democracy, human rights and always the rule of law. We are living in troubled times. The invasion of Ukraine is only one chapter in the struggle between the dark forces of dictatorship and oppression, and the brighter forces of freedom and democracy. It's a global struggle and some people have talked about a new Cold War.

75 years ago, one of the founding fathers of this institution talked about an Iron Curtain that was falling from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic. Today, in 2025, this curtain goes also across the Caucasus. And one of the countries that is on the edge is Georgia.

The deterioration of the situation in Georgia has come very fast. Today, Georgia lives in a nightmare regime, in a nightmare reality. This institution has followed this process with deep worry: political persecution against political leaders of the opposition; attacks against the free media; laws that have been approved against the opinion of the Venice Commission, only to weaken the opposition; attacks against LGBT rights using the name of honourable institutions.

In our times, we are seeing how a growth of hybrid dictatorships, non-democratic regimes use democratic forms to blank their face.

Georgia has had elections for a long time. But when there are direct threats from a foreign country like Russia to get the outcome that Mr Vladimir PUTIN will, those elections aren't free.

When the government uses all tools to silence the democratic opposition, those elections are not free. When there are physical aggressions against political opponents, those elections are not free. That happened in Georgia when the Georgian people went to the polls. And from that moment, things have become worse. The attacks against the opposition have grown. The European path that the authorities promised during the campaign, also with the use of the European flag, has demonstrated a lie.

A democracy never hits his people. A democracy never treats the opposition as enemies. A democratic political representative never speaks in the name of a state, as we have seen here, instead of their own political party.

We have seen in a lot of cases in history how a dictatorship can come through a vote. That happened in 1933 in Germany, in Venezuela in 1998.

As I said at the beginning, this institution is about freedom, democracy and rule of law. All the members commit to those principles and values. To be a member of the Council of Europe is not mandatory. Perhaps one can ask about how many drones, tanks, and bullets the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has. We don't, but we have deep principles, values and standards. That matters a lot. That's why Georgia wants to be a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

But being a member matters a lot. Being a member means that you respect the idea that the opposition has the same right to be [in the same] government as you. That the opposition is not the enemy. The opposition is the legitimate alternative. That they need to have a broad space in the public sphere; an all or nothing political situation is not a democracy. This is an authoritarian regiment.

Two months is a lot of time if the current government wants to stop the authoritarian path and reverse it. It's also time that this institution needs to see if there are real changes. The report sets out clear and accountable objectives. This is an institution of rules and the institution has tools for monitoring the situation.

In these two months, if the requirement that we should get a clear path to get this would be approved that Georgia has returned to the democratic path.

Again, congratulations to the rapporteur of the monitoring. This has been a clear, brave Latvian woman who has done a great job.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Pablo, 44 seconds. Thank you. 44 seconds over, I mean.

Now Ms Elisabetta GARDINI.

The Vice-Chair of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance.

You have the floor.

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

The issue of the Georgian delegation's credentials is sensitive and crucial. It touches on the fundamental principles of our institution and our duty is to defend democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

We know that Georgia is going through a difficult time. There are legitimate concerns about some recent policy choices and their implications for the country's democratic future. However, we cannot ignore the fact that a significant part of Georgian society looks with hope to the West, to the European Union, to the Council of Europe. These are citizens who take to the streets to demand and defend basic freedoms, who believe in the values that we represent here, and who want their nation to continue on the path to a full and genuine democracy.

Therefore, we believe that the best response is not to close the door, but to offer a path. Accepting credentials with conditions means giving Georgia an opportunity, but also a commitment. It means accompanying the country in a process of reform and democratic consolidation, with the goal of strengthening institutions, ensuring the separation of powers, and protecting the rights of citizens.

Let's be clear: our support goes to the Georgian people, their desire to be part of a community of nations based on democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms. Our support goes to civil society, to independent journalists, to the democratic forces fighting every day for a freer, fairer, more European country. All of them cannot be left alone.

And that is precisely why we call on the Georgian authorities to demonstrate, with concrete actions, their commitment to these principles. We call for actions such as respecting freedom of assembly, investigating the excessive use of force by the police, and releasing those arrested during the protests.

Europe cannot turn away from Georgia and Georgia cannot turn away from Europe.

We cannot, I repeat, close the dialogue. We must be firm in the defence of our values, but also responsible in our political action. Today we are not just voting on credentials, we are voting on a signal to give to those in Georgia who are fighting for a European future.

I ask you to keep this in mind and I thank you.

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

I'll now give the floor to Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS (Estonia, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you.

"I am Georgian, therefore I am European" [spoken in Georgian].

This is what then-Georgian speaker of Parliament Mr Zurab ZHVANIA declared in this very hemicycle upon Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1999.

This belief, this is a declaration of identity. And this has been the cornerstone for generations of Georgians who have struggled for their country's freedom, to free their country from Russian imperial domination attempts: Tsarist Russia, Soviet Russia and now Putinist Russia.

In 1999, Mr Zurab ZHVANIA also said that the majority of Georgians, every Georgian, is waiting for an important message from this hall. It's not an exaggeration to say that it's true today as well. The Georgian people are waiting for our message in their struggle, because 26 years later, a pro-Russian oligarch and his proxies are conducting an operation of state capture, of capture of Georgian institutions by the textbook we know from similar operations in Belarus, we saw in Mr Viktor YANUKOVYCH's Ukraine, and of course we saw in Mr Vladimir PUTIN's Russia.

The Georgian state and Georgian people took a treaty-bound obligation in 1999 to honour the values of the Council of Europe: democracy, the rule of law, human rights. Yet in November 2024, the *de facto* Prime Minister of Georgia, upon freezing the accession process to Europe, declared that calls from the Council of Europe and from European institutions to uphold those values are, and I quote, "blackmail and manipulation, which is utterly disrespectful to our country and society". It's clear that the majority of Georgians and obviously the majority of Europeans think exactly the opposite.

What is utterly disrespectful to Georgia and its people, what is manipulation and blackmail and worse, is what the regime is doing to Georgia and its people now. Yesterday at the committee when we discussed this resolution, the representative of the ruling party told us basically there is no police brutality in Georgia, there are no political prisoners in Georgia, and there is no need and there will be no new elections in Georgia before 2028. That, of course, makes the conditions set in this resolution somewhat moot.

But the whole group supports this resolution [for the] sake of agreement between political parties. Our message to the Georgian people who are waiting and to the regime are in the conditions set in these resolutions.

One, stop police brutality.

Second, release all political prisoners.

Third, most importantly, announce new parliamentary elections under strict international observation in a free and fair environment.

Thank you very much.

(Sporadic applause)

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr George LOUCAIDES on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

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

Dear colleagues,

The Group of the Unified European Left (UEL) expresses deep concern regarding the recent developments in Georgia.

The report contains several constructive proposals aimed at addressing the troubling situation in Georgia.

We welcome the visit of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to Georgia, as well as the process and working group he has initiated to help Georgia align with its commitments and obligations. We believe that joint action by both statutory organs of the Council of Europe is the only way to achieve effective results and remedy democratic backsliding.

Hence, we also urge the Committee of Ministers to strengthen the Tbilisi office as current efforts and programmes have proven insufficient to prevent the ongoing crisis.

We are deeply concerned, dear colleagues, about the broader trends of democratic backsliding in Georgia and in various other member states of the Council of Europe which are in similar or even worse situations.

Georgia and all other member states have committed themselves at the 2023 Reykjavík Summit to the ten principles of democracy of the Council of Europe. The commitment must be implemented in practice by all member states.

We strongly urge the Georgian delegation to continue working with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) rapporteurs in good faith and fulfil without any delay all outstanding issues mentioned in the resolution pertaining to our values and principles, namely human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We urge, at the same time, the Georgian opposition to take their seats in the parliament as soon as possible, honour their mandates and represent the voters who elected them. This will ensure their representation in this Assembly, allowing all members to actively contribute to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's work and promote dialogue between the opposition and the ruling majority on matters of mutual interest.

The UEL urges Georgia and all member states to participate in both the governmental and parliamentary organs of the Council of Europe. In case of flagrant violations of a member state, both statutory organs should act in synergy instead of unilateral actions, so that a member state can ensure compliance with statutory obligations. Therefore, we urge the Georgian government, the parliamentary coalition and the opposition, to find a sustainable solution to the current stalemate. We propose to resume this matter in our April Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe session and support ratifying the credentials of the Georgian delegation until then.

Thank you.

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

Mr Edmunds CEPURĪTIS is next.

Mr Edmunds CEPURĪTIS (Latvia, SOC): There is a lot of shared history between Latvia and Georgia. This has created a special connection between our societies – culturally and politically.

Among other reasons it is because of this special connection, I stand here to support this report and the measures proposed here.

Because I know that the recent actions of the current government do not reflect the views of the Georgian society, who support overwhelmingly democratic and European future for their country.

I strongly condemn the violence and brutality used against the protestors, members of society simply reminding of this overwhelming support for the European integration in Georgian society that the government neglects.

The violence and retaliation against protestors have to be stopped, the political prisoners have to be released and the democratic process has to be restored.

I support the measures proposed – limiting the rights of the members of the Georgian delegation now and coming back to not ratifying credentials in the next session if the steps mentioned here have not been taken.

The people in the streets of Tbilisi have been defending the values of the Council of Europe and we have a responsibility to stand with them.

Thank you.

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

Ms Linda Hofstad HELLELAND.

You are next.

Ms Linda Hofstad HELLELAND (Norway, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President, dear colleagues,

Georgia stands at a critical crossroad in its democratic journey. As we convene here at the Parliamentary Assembly, it is our duty to stand firmly in defence of democratic principles and the rule of law. The current circumstances and the lack of common ground between the government and opposition has made efficient governance and progress toward European integration impossible.

The parliamentary election held in Georgia on 26 October 2024 was clearly not in accordance with democratic standards. Violation of democratic norms and standards have eroded the trust of the Georgian people, and they resulted in a government that lacks the legitimacy to represent the will of its citizens.

Furthermore, the crackdown on peaceful protesters, illegal detentions and the suspension of Georgia's EU integration process are alarming developments that undermine the democratic aspirations of the Georgian people.

Mister President,

Throughout 2024 this issue remained on our agenda. We consistently stated that we must send a strong message to Georgia that their actions are in clear violation of our standards.

We have also said the Council of Europe should be equally visible and strong in its support to the democratic opposition forces. Our challenge today is to decide on how to best combine these two ambitions.

Personally, I believe that the right course of action for peace would have been to take decisive measures and not approve the credentials of Georgia's representatives. Approving their credentials can by many be understood as legitimising a regime that has shown blatant discard for democratic principles and human rights. Not approving this sends a clear message.

However, I acknowledge the consideration of the Monitoring Committee and the conclusion to rectify their credentials temporarily and to conduct an overall reassessment of the situation in our April session. Therefore, I support a resolution with the proposed sanctions.

That being said, I would like to underline the importance of new truly democratic parliamentary elections. As I see it, this is the only way out of the democratic crisis in Georgia today.

Thank you.

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

Mr Givi MIKANADZE is next.

Mr Givi MIKANADZE (Georgia, NR): Thank you, Mister President.

Today, in this hemicycle, we are facing a situation that does not meet those values which are essential to the Council of Europe. And the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe particularly.

Challenging the credentials of the Georgian delegation and demanding to organise new elections is a direct interference in domestic affairs and a threat to the sovereignty of Georgia. It is an unfair decision which contradicts the will of the majority population of my country.

Facts about elections speak for themselves.

The OECD observation mission report commended the election administration for the well organised and administered elections. The difference between the winner Georgian Dream and the second runner opposition party is 43%. The opposition had 25 000 members in the present commissions. The vast majority of them signed summary protocols of the elections, while only nine expressed dissenting opinions regarding the summary protocols.

Two times fewer complaints were filed in comparison to previous elections. Electronic machines were used for voting by more than 90% of voters. These machines were audited by the international audit company Pro V&V and the conclusions highlighted that they operated smoothly and in line with international standards. These conclusions were supported by the results of an investigation carried out by the general prosecutor's office. During questioning in the court, most of the witnesses were unable to provide any evidence to the investigation of election fraud. Their arguments were based solely on unverified information provided by third parties. They appealed to the facts reported in the media, while individual witnesses told that investigations the statements they made about specific facts of election fraud served as a preventive measure and did not contain information based on real facts.

The opposition is not recognising the results of the elections. For the ninth time in a row, they are not entering the parliament. However, three out of four opposition parties accepted state funding based on the results of the October election, which is 120 000 euros per month. At the end of my speech, I want to quote the Georgian ombudsman who recently said, I don't know if there were at least a thousand people who would constantly talk about it, or if 350 000 people were deprived of their right to vote. And I don't know how many months have passed since the election. There must be some evidence, basic evidence behind these statements on election fraud for the public to be convinced. The most neutral and trustworthy thing I have at hand is the OECD and its assessment. All of this combined does not allow me to blindly believe someone's statement.

Based on all of the above, it would be very unfair to ratify the credentials of the Georgian delegation with unacceptable conditions.

Once again, we express our readiness to co-operate with the Council of Europe. Based on the agreement between the Georgian Prime Minister and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe from December 2024, any decision, rather than ratifying credentials without conditions, will be ignoring the will of the majority of the Georgian population and in contradiction with the core values of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Accordingly, we call for the members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to vote against the draft resolution presented by the Monitoring Committee and support our amendment.

Thank you for your attention.

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

Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK.

You have the floor.

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

Before I address the Assembly and our rapporteur, Zanda, I would like to address the colleague who just spoke.

The intruding on sovereignty and threat to sovereignty is what Russia does to you. What they did in 2008 when they occupied part of your territory, and they want to hug you, you know, to squeeze you and to return to Belarus.

Dear Zanda, I'm thankful for the great work that you've done these days, and I think that we do have to be proud of the text that is coming. We could be more proud, but I think it is a way to show a strong signal. And that is the strong signal that we have to show to the Georgian people. It's not even about the politicians. There were a lot of politicians. But we need to give a sign to the Georgian people.

And I had a conversation with a young Georgian girl in the youth centre and they are afraid that they will be forgotten. That it will be business as usual. And at the end of the day, no one will care. We do care. We do care about the Georgian people who chose a democratic European path. When we say and talk about backsliding, I saw it. I saw it in my own country in 2013 when YANUKOVYCH did a U-turn against European integration. I saw it. I participated in the protests. And these arbitrary arrests. I saw it. We had it. We had journalists in jails. We had all of it. We had the brutality.

So I do support the resolution, especially the call to – thank you, Zanda. The call to have early elections, to release the prisoners and to release all the protesters that are unlawfully arrested.

And I would like to conclude, since I'm a journalist myself, in my previous capacity, I would like to acknowledge that it's the 18th day of Mzia AMAGLOBELI's hunger strike, who is the director of the Georgian media outlet, *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti*, and she's facing four to seven years imprisoned, and she's accused of slapping the police chief. And I do send our solidarity, my solidarity and the solidarity of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Lord Don TOUHIG is next.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC): President,

I believe that this is a very important issue, and a decision to approve or not approve the delegation credentials from Georgia should not be taken lightly.

These past days, I've listened to arguments on both sides, and as a rule, I'm a person who believes it's better that people are in rather than have them out.

But having met representatives of Georgian opposition groups and also listened to the report from my colleague Lord David BLENCATHRA, who is an observer at the Georgian elections, I believe it is right to refuse to ratify the Georgian delegation credentials.

We have very few powers in this Parliamentary Assembly, but the one power we do have is to refuse to approve delegation. That – if we do that today, I believe that underpins our commitment to our founding principles: defending human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Georgian representatives speaking at the Monitoring Committee this week made it clear no matter what we say at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, there will be no new elections. There will be no change. We've been told there are no political prisoners and no brutal assaults on those opposed to the government of Georgian Dream.

What a name. Georgian Dream. For the people of Georgia, it's more like Georgian Nightmare.

President,

Their representatives have said there has been no violence against people. Look at these photographs. Smashed faces and broken bones. There has been violence against those who are opposed to the government in Georgia.

A few hours ago, we were in this chamber remembering the liberation of Auschwitz. And you, President, you said that this place was the temple of democracy. And I thoroughly endorse those remarks. Our Secretary General said, if impunity goes unpunished, it encourages the enemies of democracy.

Colleagues, I urge you to heed those words and support Amendment 7 when we get to it, to deny ratification of their credentials. If you will do that, then it will tell the suffering people of Georgia that they are not abandoned. By supporting Amendment 7, we give them hope.

Hope that one day they, like us, will be free.

(Applause)

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

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS.

Emanuelis, you have the floor.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS (Lithuania, EPP/CD): Dear President,

Georgia was a key. Georgian society was a key power in the 1990s. In my time, when I remember when they were supporting us in Lithuania to destroy the evil empire, the Soviet Union. I remember all of them. I remember Mr Zviad GAMSAKHURDIA. I remember other friends from 1989. I remember printed anti Soviet, anti communist democratic newspapers in Vilnius for Georgia in the Georgian language. It was our common

goal to destroy the evil empire, to destroy the ruins of Mr Josef STALIN's empire. So all those years Georgians were bending in front of all Caucasian nations trying to say that they will achieve the membership of European Union and NATO. And we trusted them.

But everything started not with the current elections, but everything started before. Before was the question not only from foreign agents, but what was the question from other elections. And I was the head of our Council of Europe delegation. And I saw how the Georgian government, Georgian Dream, was trying to stage those elections before the current elections. So current elections I can say to you, I will describe to you in very simple way.

I would like to ask dear friends from Georgian Dream, what do those cameras mean, TV cameras from Georgian Dream in every polling station. Tell me please, what does this mean next to a voting box to have a TV camera. It means Big Brother is watching you, especially in the provincial sites, where the people are not so brave, like in Tbilisi. Tell me about those TV cameras. All of us saw those TV cameras next to the boxes.

So other things. About 20 recommendations from our Parliamentary Assembly to withdraw the foreign agent law. What is your reaction after years and years? We're trying to convince you not to have the same as what you have in Russia now. The foreign agents law declaring the NGO world as foreign agents. What does it mean? The answers from your side in our Monitoring Committee, I would like to declassify. That your NGO society is politicised. What does that mean, politicised NGOs? They should be politicised and they should express their opinion in the normal Western democratic world.

So from my point of view, I am absolutely amazed. I would like to congratulate here on the balcony, the position who no one member from those more like 70 become... not cross the red line and not enter the parliament. No one from a position for a party. I would like to congratulate the opposition who keep the old colours of Georgia from the 1990s, trying to distance themselves from Soviet, Mr Josef STALIN's legacy and I congratulate them.

And I think we will be adopting our law which is saying that in such a shape, the Georgian Dream cannot be presented in our Parliamentary Assembly.

Thank you very much.

(Light applause)

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I call now Ms Tea TSULUKIANI to take the floor.

Tea.

Ms Tea TSULUKIANI (Georgia, NR): Thank you, Mister President.

The Monitoring Committee heard the case concerning our delegation and examined two different options. A, not to ratify our credentials and B, to ratify our credentials with a number of conditions.

As a result, the Monitoring Committee rejected the option of not ratifying our credentials, and I shall express our appreciation for that.

However, a number of the conditions which accompany the ratification are problematic for us, especially the first condition aiming at announcing the new elections in the coming months.

I and my delegation met with many of you these days, dear colleagues, and you do know very well why it is so. Therefore, I urge you not to go for these extraordinary conditions, not to support the draft resolution and ratify our credentials with the condition to continue the normal way of work and already existing good co-operation with the Monitoring Committee rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly and with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in line with his recent visit to Georgia.

Let me underline again to whom it may concern in this Assembly that the Georgian Dream government and its 1 100 000 voters stand for peace in Georgia and will not allow any destabilisation of our country. The country which still continues to be occupied by Russia.

Let me also reiterate that the Georgian Dream government, which has litigated and won four different interstate applications against Russia before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), cannot be validly said to be pro-Russian by anyone. The Georgian Dream government is proud to have one of the best penitentiaries amongst the Council of Europe countries, to have one of the best statistics in the ECHR, to

have wonderful co-operation with the rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee, and to be one of the best partners of yours in many of other sectorial fields, cannot be said to be backsliding just because some of you, dear colleagues, dislike the Georgian people's free choice to re-elect the Georgian Dream once again.

Thank you.

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

I call now Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA): Dear colleagues,

What is happening right now?

Democracy is under attack in Georgia. They tried to kill democracy and freedom. There we see the abduction of Georgia by pro-Russian puppets. That's what's happening right now.

Who is standing in their way? The Georgian people and Georgian civil society.

That's why the Georgian regime is attacking civil society so harshly with the foreign agents' law, Russian law. With the brutal attacks, taking them to prison. That's why they hate them so much.

By the way, today is one more threat to civil society in Ukraine, Georgia, Belarusian democratic forces and so on.

The American decision to stop financing projects by the United States Agency on International Development.

And I want to address President TRUMP, Secretary RUBIO at this moment to help us restore this financing for the civil society of Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and other countries to continue humanitarian projects; building underground schools in Kharkiv; giving energy to Ukrainians who are under Russian attack; helping Ukrainian farmers to feed hundreds of millions of people throughout the world.

We need this support. This money saves lives and freedom in the world. I believe you will make the right decision.

But now I want to address the Georgian people. Kartvelians, your IVANISHVILI regimes, his gang and himself are lying to you. They're saying to you that they're taking you to Europe. That's not true. Just watch. Europe is here. Everybody says "It's unacceptable what's happening in Georgia. It's not Europe, it's not democracy, it's not rule of law." They're telling you that they're protecting peace in Georgia. It's a lie. Not Ukraine, no other country in Europe wants Georgia to be at war. No one in the world. We want to see Georgia peaceful, prosperous, beautiful, like you should be. That's one more lie. But if Russians will come, and why are Russian tanks not in Tbilisi today? Because they are in Ukraine and they can't go. They don't have enough forces to attack Georgia today.

But if through hybrid occupation they will take Georgia, then they will take your children like they did to Afghanistan to attack the Baltic states and other countries. And you know this. Don't let this happen. This is the crucial moment. Democracy and freedom are under attack in Georgia. And I want to address to the Georgian people.

***** [speaks in Georgian]. This is the moment. ***** [speaks in Georgian].

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

Mr Perran MOON is next.

Mr Perran MOON (United Kingdom, SOC): Meur ras ha dohajydh da (*Thank you and good afternoon*), Mister President.

I stand before you for the first time and greet you in the Cornish language, the language of my home in our corner of the United Kingdom. It is a great privilege to stand before you today as a member of this esteemed body which has been long at the forefront of advancing the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law across our continent.

Today, Europe finds itself grappling with multiple challenges to that democracy, but none, perhaps more urgent than the state of democracy in Georgia.

The credibility of free and fair elections is the cornerstone of any functioning democracy and we must be deeply concerned when there are questions about the fairness, transparency and integrity of the electoral process in Georgia.

The Georgian political situation is increasingly polarised and the Georgian regime's actions, particularly regarding the foreign agents law and crackdowns on media and dissent, threaten these democratic values that we hold so dear.

The public protests of recent months exemplify this profound anxiety and the UK government has expressed deep concern.

The Council of Europe plays a crucial role in supporting Georgia, particularly through the Venice Commission, which has made valuable recommendations on the foreign agents law, and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, which has supported efforts to address state sponsored violence. Like many here this week, I have seen graphic evidence of this violence, intimidation and electoral malpractice in Georgia.

What we are seeing in Georgia is a crucial test of democracy. It is vital that all political actors respect the rule of law and the rights of voters, ensuring that elections remain free from undue influence and manipulation. This is a moment where we as European nations must remain vigilant and united in defending the democratic principles that are the foundation of this body.

The values we hold are at risk, and we must act together to ensure they are preserved. And to that end, I would urge all delegates to stand up against those that wish to trash those core democratic values that we hold so dear and vote for Amendment 7 when it is put before you.

Finally, I ask, are we really to send the message to the Georgian regime that don't worry, don't worry about democracy. Come on in and join our cosy club. And what message do we send to the brave Georgian people who have endured violence and intimidation in order to protect democracy?

Tonight I will sleep well knowing that I've done my duty and protected the values of democracy and the rule of law. I hope you will all sleep well tonight having voted for Amendment 7.

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

Mr Gustaf GÖTHBERG is next.

Mr Gustaf GÖTHBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD): Mister President, thank you very much.

The current developments in Georgia orchestrated by Georgian Dream, cannot be described as anything else as a slow Belarusification of the country.

The decline of democracy and the decline of rule of law in the country has been going on for months. We all know this. It escalated last year, in May, as the government and Georgian Dream decided to pursue the infamous Russian law, whose main course is to destroy and crush the civil society and free press of the country. In the weeks before the parliamentary elections in October, which were neither free nor fair, the Prime Minister of Georgia openly stated that he welcomed the jailing of the opposition.

And the elections, which many of my dear colleagues in this hemicycle who were there observed, were not merely stolen, but also bought by an oligarch, the dishonourable honorary chairman Mr Bidzina IVANISHVILI of Georgian Dream.

The elections were a total fraud. And after this we saw and continue to see the ongoing crackdown on peaceful protests in Georgia, the beating up of journalists, the arbitrary detention of civil society activists, the threats of rape and violence aimed at these civil society protesters, ordinary Georgians taking to the streets.

And yet the people show up still on Rustaveli in Tbilisi, night after night, to peacefully manifest that they are Europeans. And I wish to say directly to them who are protesting now for more than 60 nights, we see you, we hear you, we are with you, because we are Europeans.

Georgia is Europe and Europe is Georgia.

It is the Georgian Dream which is now violently moving the country away from Europe and the very core values which this body, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe, is there to uphold and to guard.

Therefore, action is needed. A new election is needed. They have to be free, fair and democratic, unlike the one we saw and with the report of the Monitoring Committee it is important that we now see that steps are to be taken. It is now up to Georgian Dream to decide and to show evidence if they really want to be a part of this European family and to meet the standards of the Council of Europe in safeguarding democracy and the rule of law.

Mister President,

I support the draft resolution because I support the democratic future of Georgia. And I want to reiterate this to all those brave Georgians. Some of them are here on the balcony and the gallery of this very hemicycle. Many of them, most of them, back in Tbilisi, protesting.

We are with you, we see you, we hear you, because we are Europeans.

Thank you.

(Light applause)

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

Dear colleagues, I have said earlier that I'm going to interrupt at 5:25 p.m. We have only five colleagues on the list. I want, due to the cruciality of the issue, to give all of them the speech. But I would kindly ask you to limit your speech to 3 minutes.

So, next is Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE): Dear President, dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank Zanda as the chair of the Monitoring Committee and as a rapporteur, she did balance as much as possible. It was possible, crucial, important work.

So probably, as it is in the report, the members of the Georgian delegation's credentials are to be ratified with suspended rights, of course, in the Council of Europe until they repeal the law of foreign agents, release political prisoners and announce an election.

Do we believe that they will do this at least by April, when we will have to go through a more complicated suspension procedure? We at least can say we tried. There are still so many romantics in this hemicycle.

But we have to understand that we are losing Georgia. For me it's a fact. We betrayed the Georgian people, not even now, except in the delegation of authorities that has beaten and imprisoned hundreds of protesters, but in late 2008, when Russia occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Here I would like to make the analogy between the Russian aggression in 2008 in Georgia and the way HITLER annexed the Sudetenland in 1938.

We must remember how important it is to respond in time to such challenges, to prevent history from repeating.

If the world and the Council of Europe had reacted more decisively to the war in Georgia, then the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine probably would not have happened. And what do we have now? A full-scale war in Ukraine, in the middle of Europe. Russia's aggressive actions, especially in interference in Georgian, in Moldovan, in Romanian, in Bulgarian elections and its broader hybrid warfare across Europe demand our immediate actions.

What happened in Georgia is a massively orchestrated campaign by Russia. Unprecedented interference with Russian private security organisations tackling elections, sophisticated in social media, high end data profiling and primitive tactics, manipulations, call centers, voter buying.

So it leads to a lack of trust from Georgians that contributed to a fundamentally flawed election.

Russia's plan is to go far beyond Georgia and extend in particular to the EU and to the NATO countries. Our response must be joint and decisive, including maximum support to Georgia and to Ukraine in countering Russian aggression.

Thank you very much indeed.

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

Piero Fassino, you have the floor.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC): "Thank you, Mister President" [in English].

"I will speak in Italian" [in English].

I thank the rapporteur who is proposing to us a complex, difficult solution, but one that I agree with. Because in reality we are faced with an issue: we know that in all the countries that were under Soviet power for over sixty years, the transition from autocracy to democracy is not an easy one.

We see it in Russia, we see it in Belarus, where autocratic and dictatorial logics prevail, we have seen it in Azerbaijan, in the republics of Eurasia, and today we see it in Georgia.

And so the problem that we have is, what is the best way to block, counter an autocratic drift and what is the best way to foster and encourage a democratic evolution. And what has been proposed here by our rapporteur corresponds to this criterion.

We are not only called upon to make a judgment, we are called upon to put in place everything that is necessary to block the autocratic drift that is going on in Georgia, with all that has happened, and encourage instead that, having blocked that drift, we can resume a democratic path.

And we are interested in not isolating the democratic opposition in Georgia, which fatally would be weaker the moment we simply determine that Georgia be suspended from our Assembly, and we are interested in not pushing Georgia even further into the arms of Russia.

That is why I believe that the decision proposed to us is correct.

We propose a conditional ratification. We ratify as a demonstration of our will that Georgia continue to be part of our family. At the same time we say clearly to the Georgian authorities that in order for them to continue to be here they must comply with what are the principles, the rules of the Council of Europe and the democratic and liberal rules and principles that govern the life of democracies.

That is why I think the proposal that is being made to us is correct.

In these months between now and April we will not only have to wait, but we will have to put in place everything that is necessary to push the Georgian authorities to accept our demands and to put in place measures that we demand.

And I think we have to support the initiative, as a Parliamentary Assembly, that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe has already put in place by visiting Georgia a few weeks ago and putting in place an initiative that goes in the same direction as our resolution.

Thank you.

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

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK is next.

Yuriy.

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear Chairman,

Dear colleagues.

Today we are faced with the need to give a clear assessment of the situation in Georgia, which concerns fundamental democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law.

The denial of the credentials of the Georgian delegation into the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is not just a formal procedure, but an important political signal that violations of democratic norms cannot remain without consequences.

The last elections in Georgia were accompanied by numerous violations. International observers and particular representatives of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, recorded cases of manipulation, use of administrative resources and intimidation of voters.

Elections should be free and fair and the results should reflect the real will of the people and not become an instrument for maintaining power at all cost, at any cost.

Even more alarming are the facts of systemic pressure on the opposition. Opposition leaders face political persecution and trials are used as a tool to suppress dissent. This contradicts the basic principles of democracy that we all defend here.

I would like to emphasise in particular the brutal attacks on journalists and independent press are the foundation of any democratic state. Beatings, intimidation and arrests of journalists cannot and should not remain without any reactions from the international community. These are not just attacks on individuals. They are attempts to silence the voices of truth and criticism.

The European Community must demonstrate that the values we assure are not just declarations, but principles that we defend in practice. We cannot stand aside when democracy is under threat.

Today's decision on the Georgian delegation is a test of our principles. I urge you to support the decision to have conditions under which the Georgian government has to announce new elections, free all political prisoners and find justice for those who suffered at the demonstrations.

Thank you.

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

Ms Anna-Kristiina MIKKONEN is next.

Ms Anna-Kristiina MIKKONEN (Finland, SOC): Mister Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

I come from Finland, and for us, as for almost everyone else in Europe, free and democratic elections are the basis of all social activity, like most of Europe.

Finland was the first country in Europe to grant universal and equal voting rights to women, and the first country in the world to allow women to stand for election. This had already happened in 1906.

Now I'm concerned about the state of democracy in many parts of Europe. The parliamentary elections in Georgia show a bizarre political landscape. The majority of the Georgian population seems to support the dream of European leadership, not isolated recessionary leadership.

What really is the Georgian dream?

These elections were historic in many ways. They were the first elections since Georgia gained European Union candidate status, although membership was effectively halted by the EU due to democratic backsliding. It was also the first election to be held under a fully proportional voting system, and the first national election in which electronic voting technologies were used on a large scale, covering 90% of the electorate.

Overall, the elections were well organised, but the prevailing feeling was that two distinct realities coexisted on polling day: one inside the polling stations and the other outside, where a very different atmosphere prevailed. Election day was heavily influenced by party intimidation and voter control.

Georgia really needs free and democratic elections. I hope that the Georgian dream is democratic European development.

Thank you for your attention.

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

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA is next.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, EC/DA)*: "Merci, Monsieur le Président" [Thank you, Mister President in French].

I will speak in Spanish.

I would just like to say that I feel rather baffled by what I am hearing, having feeling baffled by what I read in the text, which has been presented to us today.

Now, when it comes to the credentials of the powers that have been presented by the Republic of Georgia's delegation following on from elections that were held back in October of last year, it is clear that this is the question. However, this whole text and everything that I am hearing isn't really about credentials as such, rather has more to do with the elections which gave rise to these powers.

My question therefore is why does this text assume that the people of Georgia wish to join the European Union? What is that assumption based on? What are the grounds for stating that that is what the Georgian people want? I mean, I don't see any grounds for making that assertion because that is a variance with the official results declared by the Georgian authorities if they truly are in keeping with the true wishes of the Georgian people as expressed at the ballot box.

That means that they don't know what the results are and if they don't know what the results are, then what are you basing that statement on because the majority of Georgians apparently, it is being asserted, are in favour of accession to the European Union? I think there is a glaring contradiction in terms there.

This resolution, this text, remains inconsistent with its own premises and it is essentially a political text, expressing political desires of those who are taking a very anti-democratic approach to these results.

Secondly, I am astounded that this text omits any reference to the behaviour of the President of the Republic of Georgia who, once her mandate had come to an end, decided simply to stay in office, in compliance with the Georgian constitution. Do you really think that is a democratic way of behaving? How can it be that this kind of behaviour deserves approval from people who are requesting that one way or another these results should not be considered valid?

It is not up to the Council, it is not up to the Parliamentary Assembly, not to any other body or institution here to engage in party politics. Because that is precisely the reason that the Council of Europe was set up in the first place.

That's it.

Thank you.

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

With the speech of Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA we have reached the end of our speakers list.

And I will give now the floor to the Vice Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Mogens JENSEN, to reply to the debate. 3 minutes.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Thank you very much, Mister President.

And I have to excuse our rapporteur first, the Chair of the Committee, as she had to leave because she had to catch a plane for an important meeting.

But what we've heard here today is a debate that well illustrates a general approach of the members of this Assembly that we all care for our values, we all care for democracy and the rule of law, and we all care for human rights. We are concerned whenever there is a threat to these values in any of our member states.

And I'm glad to point out that the Monitoring Committee has proven to be reactive and relevant when the situation in Georgia has started to deteriorate and there was well before the last elections.

It should be stressed that the report which was presented to you by the Chair of the Monitoring Committee at the beginning of the current debate is the result of a continuous Committee's work based on rapporteur visits, exchanges held in the Committee, discussions leading to the urgent debate last June, public statements issued by the rapporteur in December. And that's why it was possible to come out with this report which was prepared in a very short time.

And I would like to thank our Chair of the Committee for her excellent work with the report. But I also would like to thank all members of the Committee who demonstrated their responsibility by contributing to the preparation of the final report.

The draft resolution was adopted on Tuesday morning with two options available for all members, and I'm confident that all choices were well thought out and based on real knowledge of the situation.

I would like to stress that it's with great regret, of course, that the Committee is today presenting a report which puts serious conditions on the ratification of the credentials of our Georgian colleagues.

Let me recall that not so long ago Georgia was seen as an example in the region for its capacity reform and its willingness to co-operate with the Council of Europe in honouring its membership obligations and commitments.

Today, some speakers were in favour of imposing on the Georgian delegation the toughest sanction of which the Assembly disposes – the non-ratification of credentials. However, I have to stress that the Committee, in that there was a clear majority for prioritising the political dialogue on setting clear conditions linked to the ratification of the credentials and also re-assess the situation at the next part-session.

We hope that this will encourage the Georgian authorities to advance in the right direction.

So, with these words, I ask you now to adopt the resolution and follow the Committee's position on the amendments.

Thank you very much.

Vote: Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Georgia

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

Dear colleagues,

The Monitoring Committee has presented a draft resolution to which 7 amendments have been tabled.

They 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.

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

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 6 and 2 to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved, be declared as approved. However, as there are consequential amendments, they will be taken separately.

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

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 7, 4, 5, and 3 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as rejected.

Sorry, 7, 4 and 3, not 5. I repeat: I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 7, 4, and 3 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as rejected.

However, Amendments 7, 4 and 5 will be taken separately as there are consequential amendments.

Is that so, Mister Jensen?

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): That is so.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): If no one objects, I will consider Amendment 3 to be rejected. Is there an objection?

So, Amendment 3 to the draft resolution is therefore rejected and will not be called.

Now Amendment 1.

I call Ms Boriana ÅBERG to support Amendment 1.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Gustaf GÖTHBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD): Well, Mister President,

I'm not obviously Ms Boriana ÅBERG but I would like to talk in favour of the resolution which I co-tabled with her stating that it is important that we have new genuinely democratic elections and that they should be internationally monitored and also that it is of vital interest that we secure the political independence of state institutions and election administration, which we saw was not the case in the previous parliamentary elections.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Mr Givi MIKANADZE.

Mr Givi MIKANADZE (Georgia, NR): Thank you.

Of course we are against this amendment because the elections were held.

There were more than 23 000 international and local observers and no fraud has been justified, because there was no fraud and there was no evidence, therefore claiming the new election has no grounds. Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I have been informed that Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS wishes to propose an oral sub-amendment to Amendment 1, as follows.

Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS (Estonia, ALDE): Thank you very much.

Yes, for the sake of clarity, I suggest that we insert the word "parliamentary" before the word "elections" so it would read "the organisation of new genuinely democratic parliamentary elections", etc. The content of the resolution obviously supports that, but just in case. Thank you.

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

In my opinion, dear colleagues, the oral sub-amendment is in order under our rules. However, do 10 or more members object to the oral sub-amendment being debated?

Does anyone wish to speak against the oral sub-amendment?

No.

What is the opinion of the Committee on the oral sub-amendment?

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): The committee supports this oral amendment with an overwhelming majority.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I will now put the oral sub-amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The oral sub-amendment is approved.

We will now consider the main amendment, as amended.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment, as amended?

What is the opinion of the Committee?

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)):

The Committee approved this amendment with an overwhelming majority.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the amendment, as amended, to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

It is approved.

And we go on to Amendment 7.

I call Sir Christopher CHOPE to support Amendment 7.

You have 30 seconds.

Sir Chope, you have to insert your buds. If not, can you press once? Maybe you try once again. Thank you.

Sir Christopher CHOPE (United Kingdom, EC/DA): As we know, Mister President, from PUTIN, dictators exploit dialogue and continuous appeasement.

Passing this amendment and rejecting the credentials is our best hope of achieving fresh elections and the end of political prisoners in Georgia.

We have heard the Georgian Dream representatives here in defiant mood.

Surely that should be a message to us that we shouldn't go for half measures.

We should reject the credentials today and then give them the opportunity of holding elections between now and April.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Mr Pablo HISPÁN.

Pablo, Mister Hispán, are you going to speak?

Okay.

I want to inform you that the Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The amendment is rejected.

Amendment 4.

I call Mr Givi MIKANADZE to support Amendment 4.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Givi MIKANADZE (Georgia, NR): Thank you.

As we have already mentioned, all types of evidence prove that the elections were conducted in a way of fair and free style.

Therefore, there is no evidence on which the basis for the demand for new elections can lie.

Therefore, the credentials of the delegation should be, in our opinion, supported without any conditions.

This is the major idea of this proposal.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Mr Frank SCHWABE.

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

Unfortunately, there is nothing like this. The election observation mission made a report and I would ask you to read it very carefully.

And we spoke about widespread violations of everything as to what this election should be.

For sure, there was no fraud in the election in the ballot boxes, this is clear. But around, there was a lot. And because of this, this is the kind of way we want to go.

We want to say "the door is open", but we send a very clear signal with limitations of the rights of the Georgian delegation. And we say we come back in April and we will ask you to do something meanwhile. And this is the way the majority, I think should go. Because of this.

Please vote against this amendment. Vote "no".

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

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 4 is rejected.

Therefore, Amendment 5 follows.

I continue to oral amendment.

I have received an oral amendment from Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS which reads as follows:

In paragraph 11.1, replace the words "genuinely democratic new elections" with the words "genuinely democratic new parliamentary elections".

The President may accept an oral amendment, as I said earlier, on the ground of promoting clarity, accuracy, or conciliation, and if there is not opposition from 10 or more members to it being debated. In my opinion, the oral amendment meets the criteria of Rule 34.7A. And I would like to ask you if there is any opposition to the amendment being debated.

That is not the case.

I therefore call Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS to support the oral amendment.

30 seconds.

Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS (Estonia, ALDE): Thank you, President.

It's identical to the previous oral amendment that we already adopted, and it adds the word "parliamentary" before the word "elections" for the sake of clarity.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the oral amendment?

I shall now put the oral amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

The oral amendment is agreed.

Amendment 6.

I call Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS to support Amendment 6.

30 seconds.

Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS (Estonia, ALDE): Didn't we just vote number six?

Now we do the whole thing. Okay. Sorry.

[Yeah. It was the oral earlier - Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS interjects].

So the amendment adds words "to be" before "announced". That makes the sentence grammatically correct and also better to understand.

So, "parliamentary elections to be announced during the coming months". That's the clear intent of this Parliamentary Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

The committee unanimously accepted this amendment.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall now call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 6 is agreed.

Amendment 2.

I call Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO to support Amendment 2.

Yelyzaveta, you have 30 seconds.

So, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO will support the amendment.

Mariia.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Yes.

Amendment 2, colleagues.

We want to add "and work to ensure the monitoring mechanism functions effectively during pre-election period, thereby strengthening timely warnings against any democratic decline", so during this time that we're giving to the Georgian government to fulfil the conditions, we also want to strengthen the monitoring mechanism this Parliamentary Assembly currently has.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

The Committee unanimously accepted this amendment, and I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 2 is agreed.

Amendment 5... no sorry, Amendment 3.

I call Mr Givi MIKANADZE to support amendment.. sorry... okay we don't need to vote because it was rejected by a two-thirds majority.

We go on to the draft resolution. We will proceed to vote.

The draft resolution contained, as said earlier, in Doc. 16104, as amended. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft resolution in Doc. 16104, as amended, is adopted.

The next item, dear colleagues, on our agenda this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic ageing" (Doc. 16072) presented by Ms Kate OSAMOR on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.

We will start in a minute.

Debate: Immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic ageing

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Madam rapporteur, you have...

So, dear colleagues, I'm going to ask you to win your seats for those who want to attend the session.

Please do so.

Madam rapporteur, you have 7 minutes to present your report and 3 minutes to reply to the speakers at the end of the general discussion.

Madam rapporteur, you have the floor.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mister President, and esteemed colleagues,

Europe stands at a critical crossroads. Our population is aging rapidly, and as the number of elderly people continues to rise, the number of working-age individuals is steadily shrinking. This demographic shift is placing tremendous strain on our health and social care systems, businesses, families, and public finances.

Imagine for a moment an elderly person — once independent, active, and self-sufficient — now facing the challenges of aging. Their body is no longer as strong as it once was. They struggle with simple tasks, like dressing or preparing a meal. They may be dealing with cognitive decline, struggling to remember things that once came easily. The emotional toll of this condition can be just as heavy as the physical one — loneliness, isolation, and a sense of dependence can consume them.

Now picture a care worker — a migrant, perhaps from a country far away — who arrives to help. This worker doesn't just assist with the daily tasks. They bring something even more important: compassion, connection, and a sense of dignity. They listen, they engage, and they provide comfort in moments of fear and sadness. They help the elderly feel human again, connected to the world around them.

But here's the critical question: who will provide this care as our population continues to age? Who will ensure that our elderly are not forgotten, left to suffer in isolation? One answer is immigration.

Across Europe, immigrants have already become an essential part of our care workforce. According to the OECD, foreign-born workers make up around 20% of the caregiving sector. Many of these workers came through non-economic channels — family reunification, student visas, refugee protection. Despite their vital role, they remain largely invisible, often working behind the scenes, unnoticed and undervalued.

As we face this demographic challenge, we cannot ignore the role that migration plays in keeping our societies functioning. Too often, however, integration policies are fragmented, poorly supported, or simply non-existent. For many refugees and migrants, the journey is not just a physical one; it's a journey of starting over — of rebuilding lives in a new country with new rules, customs, and expectations.

Consider a refugee family arriving in Europe, hoping for safety and a better life. They may not speak the language. They may not understand the local culture or systems. At first, they may feel completely alone. But with the right support, this family can rebuild — not just for themselves, but for others. Imagine the mother, now working as a caregiver, helping an elderly woman who has lived in isolation for years. Through her care, she not only provides physical help but becomes a bridge to a future where both generations — young and old — can share experiences and offer support to one another.

This is not just a hopeful vision; it is a reality we can make possible, but only if we take action. This resolution calls for member States to act, guided by the principles of Resolution 2502 on the "Integration of Migrants and Refugees: Benefits for All Parties Involved".

I am calling on, as the report and resolution is calling on, all states to establish a new social contract, defining the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved in the integration process; implement mentoring programmes and integration guides to help newcomers navigate their new lives; provide nationwide interpretation services to bridge communication gaps; expand educational opportunities, including language classes and training on human rights and democratic citizenship; improve the recognition of foreign skills to ensure that migrants can continue and contribute their full potential; additionally, we should rethink urban planning to create spaces where different generations can interact. By fostering projects that bring together the elderly and newly arrived migrants, we can help both groups overcome isolation and build a more cohesive society.

Europe's future is intertwined. To meet the challenges of an aging population, we must embrace immigration. Skilled migrants can enhance our labour force and provide essential services — particularly in the care sector, where the need is most urgent. The EU Blue Card programme, which offers highly skilled migrants a pathway to residence and citizenship, is a promising step forward.

We must also address the harmful narratives surrounding migration. Too often, public discourse is clouded by fear and misunderstanding. We need to move beyond short-term, reactive responses to immigration and focus on a long-term, sustainable policy that recognises the value of migrants while addressing the reality of an aging population.

Imagine the impact we can have.

The elderly person who thanks the care of a compassionate migrant worker. The migrant who, finding a sense of belonging in a new country, becomes an integral part of their community. The shared joy of two generations — each learning from each other, supporting each other, and building a better future together. These are not just statistics or abstract concepts. These are the real stories of people who will shape the future of Europe — stories of resilience, hope, and human connection.

I urge you to support this draft resolution. It is not just a set of policies — it is a chance to change lives. By embracing immigration, we can ensure that our elderly are cared for with the dignity they deserve and that our migrant communities are given the opportunities they need to thrive.

Together, we can build a future that benefits us all.

Thank you.

(Applause)

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

We will now move on to the general discussion. Please note that each speaker is limited to 3 minutes.

We'll now move on to the speakers from the political groups, and I call Mr Ricardo CARVALHO for the Group of the European People's Party.

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

Dear friends,

Demographic ageing in Europe is not just a problem, it is also a reality.

This is not a new problem. We have been discussing this for over 20 years, without a common strategy and without results.

The decline in the youth and working-age population will have profound implications for individuals, public services and businesses, with a particularly enormous impact on health and social care systems, labour markets, public finances and workers' rights, and social security.

It's our competitiveness that we are talking about.

It's our future we are talking about, and the future of the new generations.

But this challenge we are facing is also an opportunity for our countries.

This is why we need to encourage and appeal to our countries to develop effective policies and initiatives to increase the birth rate with specific tax, labour and social incentives to support families; ensure the well-being and quality of life of the elderly population and integrate immigrants by promoting social cohesion and defending human dignity.

If birth rate policies and initiatives are important but with long-term expected results, migration policies can accelerate the short-term results that we need in the demographic ageing of Europe.

Let's forget about populism, we need immigrants in Europe – legal immigrants.

We have a shortage of labour in our countries. An undifferentiated but also highly qualified workforce is required.

This is why it is essential to improve state policies that promote the overall integration and social cohesion of migrants: establish a new social contract; improve education; develop targeted housing policies; improve the recognition of skills acquired abroad; adapt migrants' skills to the job market and many other policies and initiatives.

Dear friends,

At the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), we are very pragmatic.

We are in favour of legal immigration. We need legal immigrants in our countries. With humanism, with dignity.

But we also know, and we fully agree with the rapporteur, whom we congratulate, that in order to address this demographic change, member states must consider developing effective policies and initiatives to ensure the well-being and quality of life of the elderly population, as well as as well as implementing strategies to promote fertility rates.

At the same time, regular migration should be promoted to fill the existing labour shortage.

Thank you very much.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): For the European Conservatives and Democratic Alliance, Mrs Jessica STEGRUD.

Ms Jessica STEGRUD (Sweden, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Mister President.

First, I would like to thank the rapporteur for their important work in highlighting Europe's demographic challenges. The report correctly outlines the serious consequences of an ageing population, a shrinking workforce, rising pressure on healthcare and social services, and increasing burdens on public finances and pensions.

I agree with the problem description. These issues are real. But is immigration the answer? If so, Sweden should be a shining example of low unemployment, economic prosperity and social cohesion. But that is not the reality. Instead of solving demographic problems, Sweden's large-scale immigration has created profound challenges and should serve as a warning to the rest of Europe.

In the 1980s, when I grew up, Sweden was one of the safest and most prosperous countries in the world. People rarely locked their doors, children played outside unsupervised and trust in institutions was high. That Sweden is gone.

Today, after years of high immigration, Sweden has the highest rate of deadly gun violence in Europe. Most shootings are linked to criminal networks fueled by the drug trade and a failure to integrate newcomers and second-generation immigrants. Bombings have become a grim reality, with nearly one explosion per day. New forms of crime such as humiliation, robberies and rape of elderly women have emerged. Parallel societies have taken root and areas once safe are now plagued by lawlessness.

For years, Swedish leaders believed mass immigration would help those fleeing conflict, enrich our culture and bring prosperity. Instead, it has led to division, instability, rising crime and unsustainable pressure on the welfare system. Furthermore, the values of democracy, freedom of speech and women's rights are increasingly challenged by conflicting ideologies.

After decades, even hundreds of years of progress, we now risk taking a step backwards. Let me be clear. Immigration is not a sustainable solution to demographic challenges. While it may temporarily fill labour shortages, immigrants, like the native population, grow older. They usually also have higher unemployment and place greater demands on healthcare, adding strain to public services. That being said, many immigrants have succeeded in Sweden and are now a natural part of our society. But overall, immigration in recent decades has placed a greater strain on Sweden than it has brought benefits.

Well-functioning, safe and prosperous societies still take generations to build, but they can be dismantled in a fraction of that time. I hope some countries can learn from us. Immigration, as Sweden has proven, is not the answer.

Thank you, Mister President.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Lord Michael GERMAN.

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Colleagues,

I'd like to take a slightly different view of the position as described by colleagues from Sweden just now, because this is a problem which obviously is very high on the agenda and requires definite European solutions.

What the proposed resolution before us addresses is key aspects of a policy which affects all parts of our continent.

Increasingly strident populist voices promote fear and prejudice, which at least in part leads to the backsliding on integration spoken about yesterday by the Council of Europe's Secretary General. And integration is an important feature in this proposal before us.

But shouting down the populist voices only amplifies their position. We need to change the narrative and the way we think and speak on these matters.

Conflating the large numbers of undocumented people moving through the south to the north of our continent with those who satisfy the economic and social needs of our countries means that both lose out.

The resolution today deals with the economic and social needs that our countries require. There are many other areas of policy which need to be put in place, but that's for another day and for other resolutions. This one today focuses on how our governments can truly be change agents, with a focus on building a better future for our citizens.

The most important issue here is that we must be honest with our voters. An ageing Europe requires migration in order to satisfy the needs of our people. Just taking the UK alone as an example, we have 130 000 vacancies in social care. We need 40 000 more nurses. We have 100 000 vacancies in the hospitality sector, 33 000 more in education. And add to that nearly a quarter of a million workers for the construction industry in the coming years.

And the traditional answer from governments has been: we need to train more people born in the country to meet our needs. And that's perfectly proper. But that takes time and the need for this workforce is now. So the equation we had before is a simple one.

How many new workers can we train in country to fill these positions as people get older and the younger become a smaller part of our populations? And the answer is definitely not enough. Certainly in the near future, we will need many new workers from outside.

Of course, governments need a workforce plan, but we must recognise the realities of this situation. Tough talk has not resulted in public understanding of the problem.

We need to use less rhetoric and more persuasion. We need an immigration plan for Europe which is collaborative in achieving these needs. Change narrative. This narrative must be about rejecting fear and prejudice and instead promoting trust, decency and the common good.

I support the proposal before us.

(Light applause)

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

Mr Paul Gavan has the floor on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr Paul GAVAN (Ireland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, I want to congratulate the rapporteur for an excellent and very timely report.

As Kate points out, Europe is facing a demographic challenge of huge proportions in the coming years. In a time span of 50 years, the old-age dependency ratio is projected to more than double, reaching 56.7% by 2050 in the European Union, compared to 25.9% in 2001.

This dramatic shift in the age balance raises many fundamental questions, but in the short time available, I'll state just two.

Firstly, how will the working people of Europe be able to afford to pay the pensions for half of the population? And secondly, who will deliver the essential public services that modern European societies require, particularly as there will be a huge increase in demand for health and social care systems due to demographic ageing?

We really need to have a mature conversation about all of this, because one of the clear implications is that Europe will badly need an increase in our working population.

And as this report makes clear, immigration will have a very significant role to play in averting this crisis. If it is to do so, we have to call out the populist discourse that blames migrants for public policy failures. And listening to Ms STEGRUD a few minutes ago, I have to say I can tell you only about my experience in Ireland, which is that without the input of our immigrant workers, our health systems, and our care systems would literally collapse. They play an enormous role, and Irish people are hugely appreciative of that.

So, as the rapporteur suggests, member states must do much more to promote migrants' general integration and social cohesion. We welcome the call for states to implement Resolution 2502 of 2023. This was a truly excellent report written by our former colleague Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆH from Croatia, which called for a number of positive initiatives to assist with the integration of migrants and refugees, including, in effect, a new social contract.

We agree that immigration can be one means through which Europe could fulfil its current and future labour shortages and care provision. But, and this is crucial, it should only do so in a manner which ensures decent pay and conditions for these workers. And this in turn requires the right to trade union representation, collective bargaining and respect at work for all of these people.

The recent EU directive on minimum wage, which calls for an action plan to grow collective bargaining, particularly at a sectoral level, could be an important lever here, although it is currently the subject of challenge to the European Court of Justice.

So the clear message from our group is that in supporting this fine report, that planned immigration must be accompanied by strong measures to enhance the terms and conditions of work, especially in the care and health sectors, we endorse this report.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Sandra ZAMPA has the floor for the Socialist Group.

Ms Sandra ZAMPA (Italy, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, President.

Two things first of all. The first. I want to thank my colleague Kate OSAMOR for her very valuable and very thorough work. This report and the resolution turn the spotlight on two issues that are central and both pose extraordinary challenges to policy. And what more important is there? What is the point of politics if not to address the challenges we face in the future? This is the question we must ask ourselves in this Assembly.

The population of Europe is aging. We know that, but I think it is fair to recall some essential data. We get them from Eurostat, which tells us that by 2100, 1 in 3 Europeans will be over 65, while in 2023 the over-65s were 1 in 5.

This demographic change will have enormous pressure on the labor market, pension systems, and health care.

While two-thirds of the European population was still of working age in 2022, this percentage will be reduced to about half by 2100.

Each of us can estimate what this will mean in terms of impact on economic growth.

But the also wisest part and one of the smartest aspects of this report and this resolution concerns the proposal to look at immigration as a complementary approach, not the absolute solution, but complementary, of course, to other actions that will have to be put in place to deal with aging.

That of immigration becomes a successful complementary approach in the light of the modest, let me say, very modest results of birth support policies, policies that have their own dignity but which are really working very little and which risk among other things to make women's rights strongly retreat, because we hear speeches and proposals coming back into the field that tell us that women have to be paid to stay at home to perhaps look after or to work for their families.

This cannot be the answer that a society proposes to the future today.

All of this, however, demands, and here I would like to respond to those who have argued that migration has been the destruction of positive models, it demands from the member states a change of strategy. Perhaps this is the sore point. We have not been able to put in place all those actions that really serve to lead to well-managed migration.

That is what the resolution proposes, and that is why we strongly support it.

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

Ms Saskia KLUIT, from the Netherlands, has the floor.

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

I have to say – I just loved this report, and I couldn't agree more with the rapporteur. I love it because it is really fact-based on our demographic challenges and shows a wonderful, realistic attitude to migration and towards solutions that we can choose from. It also enlightens the positive spirit that most ordinary people adopt when they start living together. I mean when I was in hospital this summer, who came to bring me my food in the evening? It was my Turkish neighbour. Who is repairing my clothes? My Kurdish tailor. Who is cleaning my house? It is my Ukrainian friend. So what are we talking about. Look at Covid. Who were the ones who were taking care of our elderly? It was migrant women.

So, the Netherlands presented an elaborate report on demographics and instead of Houston we have a problem, I would like to say Strasbourg, we really have a problem. If we do not get our priorities straight we will only have two working persons for one elderly. That will be very harsh. I have two sons and they have to take care of four parents. Imagine one of us having dementia, or having rheumatic disorders, or Parkinsons. I am a former nurse for the elderly, I completely understand what that will bring. It will wreck the life of my boys, it will wreck their ability to work, and that will wreck our economy.

There is a simple solution. Our world is changing, and rapidly heating up in our climate system, so a lot of people will come to Europe whether we like it or not. And I like it – don't make any mistake about that. I think we should embrace it, it will inevitably come. Because combining the aforementioned groups: the elderly, the refugees, the migrants, we will have a good future together. And it will not be effortless; we have to do work, and our governments will need to help.

We need leaders that understand our problems and priorities, and we need governments that help our people adapt, with language courses, with intercultural communities, with accepting diplomas that come from different countries. We need proper housing for new family forms and family structures. Like Mr Paul GAVAN really eloquently said, we need a new form of social contract.

I hope this report will be one of the first steps in this new direction. I really want to thank the rapporteur. It is a really, really beautiful way of looking at this debate.

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

Ms Marija PETRUSHEVSKA from Northern Macedonia.

Ms Marija PETRUSHEVSKA (North Macedonia, EPP/CD): "Ladies and gentlemen" [Spoken in French].

At the beginning, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Kate OSAMOR for the excellent text on such an important matter.

This report, like many other analyses in this field, points to the worrying and pessimistic scenario for the negative effects of the ageing of the population on the economic system as a whole.

Many countries in Europe are confronted with these considerable changes due to population ageing, and my country is no exception to this tendency.

Like many countries in our region and Europe, we are also faced with the challenges of retaining our highly educated workforce and protecting the country's economic interests.

At a time when birth rate figures are in the minus and the number of young people immigrating is in the plus, we must make serious efforts to place demographic issues among the top priorities.

As a governing party and parliamentary majority, we are considering demographic developments as an area of key importance for economic development, state stability and even national security.

We have implemented measures for raising student standards to create better conditions and the possibility of employment. We have adopted the largest budget in history for the Ministry of Education and Science with an aim to move the process in the right direction.

One of the most important conditions for improving demographic images is stability and security in the workplace and creation of new opportunities for employment especially for young people with an income that covers the cost of the average customers' baskets and childcare expenses. Housing, as one of the most important issues for young people, is also in our focus and we are creating policies for subsidising social housing for young married couples.

We hope that with the right policy and positive actions, we will contribute to the demographic renewal.

Thank you for your attention.

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

Then I give the floor to Ms Katalin CSÖBÖR.

Ms Katalin CSÖBÖR (Hungary, EC/DA): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Dear colleagues,

Hungary believes that it is totally wrong to solve the problem of an ageing population through immigration.

The Hungarian government's strategic objective remains unchanged. We want to tackle Europe's demographic decline not through immigration, but by relying on our own internal resources and further strengthening Hungary's family support system.

We are striving to remove the obstacles to starting a family and accessing housing, enabling young people to realise their family plans. We believe that the best response to demographic challenges lies in supporting parenthood and the development of families with children, not in immigration and the forced demographic renewal it entails. Since 2010, all our decisions and actions have taken into account the interests of Hungarian families. Our main objective is to ensure that every child we want is born.

We want families to be able to live safely in their own homes, people to be successful in their own countries, have the courage to start a family, and older generations to be able to live out their final years in peace. We want to ensure that having children is not seen as a disadvantage, and that young people don't have to choose between a career and starting a family.

Since 2010, the government has put in place a stable, comprehensive, targeted and flexible family support system, which continues to develop to protect and serve in a multidimensional way the fundamental unit of our society: the family. The objectives of our family policy for the coming years are to encourage earlier parenthood among young people, strengthen the financial situation of families with children, improve their economic conditions, reconcile work and private life, and maintain good physical and mental health.

Thank you very much.

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

Now I give the floor to Mr Petri HONKONEN.

Mr Petri HONKONEN (Finland, ALDE): Thank you Mister Chair,

Demographics are one of the biggest challenges facing our European societies.

Ageing slows economic growth and diminishes the vitality of our continent as the working-age population decreases.

The elderly deserve human care, but with this trend, there won't be enough workforce to provide it.

Encouraging birth rates and supporting young families are key to addressing the demographic challenge.

Immigration is often offered as an easy turnkey solution to demographic challenges. Many populist parties around Europe have taken the problems caused by immigration as their angry driving force. But on the other hand, certain parties don't want to see the problems around immigration.

I have noticed that it is really difficult to have a factual discussion about immigration policy. The asylum system and refugee quotas are not means for states to obtain labour. They are ways to bring to safety people who genuinely need protection. It is clear that the European asylum system does not work as it should because it is widely used for entry to Europe in search of better economic conditions. Migration to our continent should happen by proper and controlled procedures.

As a legislator, I don't want to simplify and present immigration as a solution to the labour shortage caused by ageing. Immigration is a more multi-faced issue.

We need to understand that segregation and social problems caused by poor adaptation and cultural differences will not disappear just by closing our eyes and justifying the current problems with demographic factors.

Instead, active integration policies for immigrants are very essential and especially effective language training is absolutely necessary. Funding for these measures is being cut, for example, by the Government of Finland.

Utilising artificial intelligence may be a new way to streamline immigration processes, get integration started faster and quickly bring those who genuinely need protection to safety.

I hope that states will do everything that they can to support integration.

I support the resolution and I thank the rapporteur for the good work. The ageing of our continent is a fact and the biggest societal challenge we face. However, the solutions must be sustainable and societies must be able to adapt.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Then I give the floor to Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS.

Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, President. And greetings to colleagues and friends.

I note from the title of this debate that it states that it is one of the answers rather than the total solution, although many people have spoken as if this was the only way of dealing with an ageing population. And let's bear that in mind.

But secondly, I am, of course, demographically aged myself, and hope that gives me authority to speak on this matter right now. Just earlier today, I chaired the meeting of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. As the oldest person in the room, I did want to add some adjectives – wisest, most intelligent, best looking – but I wasn't allowed to do that.

I have to say, however, that I'm more than content to recognise the statistics that my friend Lord Michael GERMAN has put forward as to representing a real need for migration to happen in certain key areas. Now, this is picked up in the report as well, and I don't think anybody can deny that, especially in the care sector and in the nursing sector and in teaching and all the rest of it. I mean, it'll take us years to produce children enough to fill those vacancies. So it does seem to me there is a *prima facie* case for arguing with justification that migration can help us at this critical moment of time.

But I want to pick up another word in my friend Lord Michael GERMAN's speech, and it's the word "narrative". The word migration is now a toxic word. It produces violent support or opposition, and people don't seem to be able to listen to each other anymore. And so I want to see if, and this report is a great help in doing that, create a counter-narrative that migration can actually be a good thing in appropriate circumstances for the wellbeing of the country that receives migrants.

Now I'm going to put in a plug for what I hope will become a debate that will come before us in the future, because I'm putting forward a motion for a resolution about diasporas. You see, thirty years ago, when I was not aged, I worked in the realm of race relations and I worked with families who were recent arrivals and whose arrivals were contested by people putting forward the same arguments as we hear now. But those people in the 1960s and 1970s produced children, and those children have produced children, and most of

them now – because I've been working in schools and education for a long time with inner city children – are making their mark and helping to integrate British society as a whole. So all I can say, really, is that diasporas with agency can improve the health of a nation.

And I also say that with the short-term needs, as described by my friend, we need them now.

(Applause)

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Lord Griffiths.

The next speaker is Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ.

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

Madam rapporteur,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is ageing, and its economic equilibrium is threatened, but Europe continues to attract large numbers of migrants.

Madam rapporteur,

You have put forward a number of ideas, some of which I think are highly relevant and positive, while others are more questionable.

Faced with an ageing population, everyone agrees that governments must take measures to encourage the birth rate. Europe is not the only region of the world to do so. Having long imposed a one-child policy, China is now faced with a falling birth rate and is attempting to implement a pro-birth policy.

Measures to support the birth rate, while necessary, will probably be insufficient. Europe does not seem to be in a position to reverse the trend.

Life expectancy continues to rise, as does the proportion of the population reaching old age. In the European Union, the dependency ratio will rise from 26% in 2021 to 57% in 2050. The need for support and care will increase.

Immigration can be a solution in two ways.

On the one hand, it can help restore a certain balance in the age pyramid. Migrants are generally young and of working age. Migrant women have a higher fertility rate than European women.

On the other hand, immigration can help alleviate the recruitment deficit affecting the personal assistance sector, which is essential for the elderly population. This sector struggles to attract employees, but thanks to migrants, particularly women, Europe's senior population has access to less constrained day-to-day care.

Immigration is therefore one of the answers to Europe's demographic ageing. However, it must be carefully managed.

To be successful, immigration needs a clear basis. The rights and duties of each party, states and migrants, must be specified from the outset. States must ensure that migrants are properly integrated. Only legal immigration that enables migrants to find work, live decently, raise their children and contribute to taxes can succeed.

Mastery of the language is obviously essential. Civic education courses should also be offered to new arrivals to facilitate their cultural integration. I'm also very much in favour of reinforcing this teaching in schools.

Finally, I'm convinced that vocational training must also be a central element of successful immigration policy.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you Madam Dalloz.

I now give the floor to Mr László TOROCZKAI.

Mr László TOROCZKAI (Hungary, NR): Thank you, Mister President.

First of all, let's see what today's draft resolution is about. Immigration is now being proposed as a solution to demographic problems by the very people who caused this problem.

The point is that those who have done everything in their power to destroy European traditions, European values, European families, now want to offer us a solution. The so-called progressive, socialist, left-wing, liberal, globalist political forces have been trying to suppress traditional values for decades. The media is assisting them in their efforts. And social media has been a major factor in this over the past few years. It has censored and silenced conservative, Christian, God-fearing opinions and attacked the institution of the family. They claim that two men or two women with children can be a family. They push for same-sex marriage. But nature cannot be violated. Even the lunatics must admit that only a man and a woman can give life to children.

But it has also become clear in Hungary in the past few years that financial family benefits alone are not enough to raise more children. We also see that the world's richest countries have the biggest demographic problems. In order to have more children in Europe, we need to take action in two areas. First of all, we must support childbearing and families. The other thing that no one ever talks about is that we need a change of mindset. It is important to return to traditional values. It is important to return to the idea that children are a blessing, that there is honour in having a big family.

It seems that the only state in the world where a population with European roots can achieve the 2.1 fertility rate which is necessary for reproduction, is South Dakota in the United States. One of their secrets is that a large part of their population lives in farms in the countryside, and is engaged in agriculture. They live close to nature and are able to eat healthy food. Instead of immigration, we should also look at, for example, with what and how Europeans are being poisoned by the global corporations that the World Economic Forum always supports. Why are they making more and more infertile couples in Europe?

Instead of studying the above mentioned possible solutions, you are advocating immigration to solve Europe's demographic problems. This is nothing more than a calculated population change, that is your real goal. But we will never accept this.

Europe belongs to the Europeans!

Mr Andries GRYPFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Toroczkai. Now I give the floor to Mr Marco DREOSTO.

Mr Marco DREOSTO (Italy, EC/DA): Thank you, President.

I will be extremely direct and also try not to take up a lot of your time.

When I saw this issue on the agenda I was, I must say the truth, speechless. Immigration as a solution to the demographic problem in Europe. But are we really serious? Is there really anyone who still believes in this madness? Are there still political parties or groups today who are convinced that it is enough to bring people in to solve the plummeting birth rate?

No, I, look, I'm sincere, I don't want to believe it, and I even find it absurd that there is a debate and discussion about it. Then the demographic problem is obviously solved in only one way, and we firmly believe that, by giving our young people a chance to build a future, allowing them to form a family, to have two or three children without the fear of not making ends meet.

It is solved by fighting the cost of living, providing decent wages, security and stability. It is solved by serious family policies. Here it probably seems to me that this is never talked about. Not with the usual pattern of mass immigration. Then to hear the very left, the left even of this House, talk almost about importing migrants really makes me cringe.

But have you listened to each other when you talk? Do you listen to each other when you think about these things? Then who are the real racists? Those who defend borders or those who see human beings as numbers to be moved from one side to another at will.

We also want to talk about the cities governed by the left, now hostage to out-of-control immigration. We need to tell what is happening on our streets, in our cities.

I refer, for example, to Milan, the city of the trendy mayor, now a Wild West, one of the most unsafe cities in Italy. I believe that it is necessary, that you really have to wake up and take note of what is happening. Can't you see that the world is changing? At this point I think you have to take note that it is getting harder and harder for you to win an election in Europe and then, open your eyes, and in Washington it has come to Donald Trump.

The left is still clinging to an old ideology, an ideology that has now been swept away by history, but meanwhile you are still trying to drag down with you honest citizens and our cities. You will not succeed. We are here and we will defend our people, our citizens, our territory, our businesses.

The globalist agenda is dead. The sooner you realize that, the better it will be for you as well. Maybe you will become at least a little more connected to reality again.

Thank you.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Dreosto.

And now, I give the floor to Mrs Valérie PILLER CARRARD.

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Mister Vice-Chairman.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to declare my interest before beginning my speech. I'm a left-wing socialist and a mother of three, so I think I'm contributing to the renewal of demographics in Europe. And perhaps I'd also like to see a renewal on the far right – maybe, maybe not.

First of all, I'd like to thank our colleague Ms Kate OSAMOR for all her hard work on this report. This report has the merit of highlighting the acceleration of demographic ageing in Europe, and of proposing solutions – which we would also like to hear from the extreme right – to deal with its profound repercussions on individuals, public services and businesses.

Its repercussions include the social and health protection system, labour markets, public finances and pension entitlements. If there's one figure to take away from this report, it's this: over a period of fifty years, the old-age dependency ratio is set to more than double, rising from 26% in 2001 to 57% by 2050. We therefore need to do more to support the elderly so that they can live as independently and in good health as possible, taking into account the need for appropriate facilities in terms of healthcare, town planning, housing and transport.

In my country, Switzerland, 185 000 people work in the care and support sector. Although working and salary conditions are attractive to European nationals, immigration is not enough to meet all needs. By 2029, Switzerland needs 15 900 additional nurses, not counting the 27 000 nursing professionals who will be retiring over the next few years. Other measures will of course be needed to make up for this shortfall in nursing staff, not least by improving their working conditions.

But immigration remains a real opportunity in the face of the shortage of skilled labour, particularly in the care sector but not only in this field, offering refugees today the opportunity to carry out a useful activity in the community which, at the same time, enables them to better integrate into the host society.

I would also like to reassure those in this Chamber who are afraid of immigration, who make comments about the foreign population in their own country that go beyond all comprehension, accusing them of all evils. My country, Switzerland, is the second European country with the highest proportion of foreigners from the European Union in its workforce, behind Luxembourg. More than a third of workers in Switzerland are foreigners.

And no, immigrants don't take jobs from locals. An extensive study dating from 2023 clearly shows that, on the one hand, many immigrants accept jobs in low-wage sectors, such as construction, catering or the hotel trade; on the other hand, many work in highly-skilled professions, such as IT, or research and development in pharmacies.

According to Canadian demographer MAROIS, two conditions are extremely important for successful integration into the job market today: low unemployment and good jobs for immigrants. In other words, well-paid jobs that avoid wage undercutting, contribute to public finances and promote social integration.

Dear colleagues, let's turn challenges into opportunities. That's why I invite you to support this report.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): "Thank you, Madame Piller Carrard".
[Spoken in French]

I now give the floor to Mr Carlos SILVA SANTIAGO.

Mr Carlos SILVA SANTIAGO (Portugal, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Dear colleagues,

Eighty-three percent of the world's population live where they were born; 13% of migrants are internal; 3% are international; 0.3% are refugees.

People don't migrate to free their countries from demographic pressures or to make up for a birth deficit. Most people migrate because of job opportunities, to study, to join family or, in a minority of cases, to escape violence and oppression.

Immigration today represents a major social challenge throughout the European continent.

We tend to recognise the contribution that migrants can make to European economies, but there are still cultural and professional obstacles to overcome.

It's common knowledge that Europe is experiencing a worrying reduction in the number of young people and people of working age, resulting in a clear demographic ageing, with adverse consequences for social sustainability throughout the European continent.

Europe can and must take up this challenge as an opportunity to combat demographic ageing and at the same time promote the repopulation of certain regions of Europe where this phenomenon is more pronounced.

We need to combat demographic decline in the most rural areas, where Portugal is also integrated, by taking advantage of and benefiting from the integration of migrants, thus counteracting the tendency towards isolation and social loneliness to which they would be subjected.

There is an urgent need to remedy the current and future shortage of manpower in the most diverse sectors of society, particularly in the agricultural and forestry sectors, care providers, construction, and transport.

Multicultural impact, integrated in a humanistic way, could be an enormous source of sustainable development and a guarantee of survival for rural communities.

The various models and strategies for integrating migrants presented in this report are an example of the success that can be achieved in terms of quality of life for the elderly, thanks to the vitality imparted to communities, the intergenerational experience, the repopulation and sustainability of health and social care systems, and for the economy through the workforce.

Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right.

I fraternise, therefore I exist.

Congratulations to the rapporteur, Madam Kate Osamor, on your competent report.

Thank you for your report.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): "Thank you, Mister Silva Santiago"
[Spoken in French].

And now I give the floor to Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'd like to thank the rapporteur for her very important work.

First and foremost, I think it's essential for Europe to see immigrants not as a burden, but as an opportunity.

At a time when the concept of security is taking precedence over human rights, and the concept of power is taking precedence over equality, it's important that we all have a new point of view.

Some issues that states see as problems can be the solution to existing problems. Immigrants don't leave their countries by choice to create political crises. People are forced to flee because of human rights violations, precarious living conditions, and political pressure.

Soon, we'll be witnessing migration intensify as a result of the climate crisis.

At the same time, immigrants don't settle in border countries because they want to stay outside the borders of the European Union. They don't enter, because they don't have permission to cross EU borders. Europe, and in particular the member states of the European Union, must assume greater responsibility in this respect. EU member states must share this responsibility in a balanced way.

Viewing immigrants as a threat, providing only financial aid to border countries without monitoring the human rights situation or social conditions in those countries, and focusing solely on preventing them from entering EU borders, cannot be the behaviour of Europe, where the concept of human rights has been institutionalised.

Immigrants from Syria, Ukraine and other countries could offer a real solution to Europe's ageing population and represent an important opportunity for the sustainability of social security systems. However, this important opportunity must not be squandered by viewing immigrants simply as cheap labor.

Once again, I thank the rapporteur for her meticulous work.

Thank you.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): "Thank you, Madam Gökçen" [Spoken in French].

And now I give the floor to Ms Zdravka BUŠIĆ.

Ms Zdravka BUŠIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD): Thank you very much, Mister President.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur for her excellent report, which is timely and relevant in today's European context.

As the report points out, our continent is rapidly ageing. It's ageing with the highest shares of the population aged 60 or older. A process that started predominantly in high-income countries.

Demographers warned us long ago that this is inevitably coming. They projected with high precision that Europe will undergo a major, major demographic transformation.

Broad social and economic progress over the past decades turned into a big challenge with a serious decline of the young and working-age population, impacting, in particular, the health and social care system, labour markets, public finances and pension entitlements.

At the same time, the global refugee population has more than doubled with an enormous migration pressure on Europe. So there are several issues we are faced with today.

First and foremost, a demographic one. In the long run, we should support increasing birth rates and assist parents with child upbringing. Positive action should be urgently undertaken, supporting not merely an increase in birth rate, but also ensuring family flexibility in work-life measures such as child care services, various tax benefits, parental leave, etcetera.

And second, the problem of large-scale immigration. A global refugee population has more than doubled with an enormous migration pressure on Europe. So how to tackle these problems? The solution could be found if we have a holistic and integrated approach.

On one hand, Europe needs immigrants to solve labour shortages, and on the other, we need to help them integrate into our societies. If they are not integrated well enough, their potential can never be fully developed.

In 2023, the European Union, and therefore I wanted to mention this especially, has launched a set of democratic policy tools to manage demographic challenges under the title European Demographic Toolbox. Let us hope that something good and helpful will come out of this box to solve this burning problem for us.

Thank you.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Bušić.

I will give the floor to Sir Edward LEIGH.

Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Mister President,

Perhaps I should start by declaring an interest and therefore you can ignore what I say.

I am a proud grandfather and the father of six children, and my personal view is that we cannot solve the demographic crisis in Europe by importing people from all over the world against the will of our own people. The best way is to encourage our own people to have children, to create the housing for them.

At the same time, so many of our own people are on benefits. It's said by Paul GAVAN, introducing this debate, that we need to import people from all over the world to look after our old people. No, we should be encouraging our own people to come off benefits and look after our old people. And we should be encouraging our young people to have families. Indeed, every single opinion poll in Europe proves that there is an overwhelming desire among women in Europe to actually have children – a minimum of two children, and perhaps even more.

We should be blunt, Mister President. Immigration is not the answer to our problems. It's not any of the answers.

Democracy is fundamental to the Council of Europe. It's one of our key values. Mass migration has been consistently rejected by voters again and again. Every survey of public opinion in Europe shows that voters are exasperated with their governments on this. Some, like the Social Democrats in Denmark, have managed to make progress and turn the tide against mass migration. I fear in other countries, particularly in my own, we have not.

That is a model in Denmark we should be examining and adapting for all of our own countries. There is too much obfuscation about the very important difference between a refugee who flees for his or her life and an economic migrant who is taking risks in order to secure a better future than at home.

The draft resolution, for example, cites Germany taking refugees from Syria and Ukraine. The frequency with which economic migrants are turned into refugees needs to be called out and condemned. This is a particular problem for us in Britain; we have economic migrants who enter the country illegally, usually having passed through half a dozen safe, stable, peaceful and democratic Council of Europe member states to get to Great Britain.

Refugees flee to where they can be safe. There remains a proud humanitarian tradition amongst our peoples, which we should protect and foster. And this was evident when we worked so hard to help the people of Ukraine. But because the left constantly confuses refugees with economic migrants, they are losing the support of the people of Europe and we should call them out.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Sir Leigh.

Then I go to Mr Francesco SORBARA. You have the floor.

Mr Francesco SORBARA (Canada): Thank you.

Good evening, esteemed colleagues.

And thank you to the rapporteur Ms Kate OSAMOR for her report in today's debate.

I find myself sort of scratching my head as I listen to many of the comments this evening. I come from a city of 350 000 people, where 113 languages are spoken within that city. I come from a country where I am the son of Italian immigrants who immigrated to Canada. And many of the folks here in Canada, we have diasporic communities from probably every country that is here, from fleeing Hungarian refugees in the 1950s and 1960s to economic immigrants from Portugal, France, Italy and Croatia. Every country is represented in our country. We are a beacon of hope and we are a multicultural society that has done things quite well.

I'm sort of aghast when I hear some views on immigration that are much where our country, Canada, has welcomed European immigrants for centuries and for decades that have come there. And there's not a week that goes by where I meet a new European newcomer – very educated doctors from France, Italy or Portugal that continue to come; young people that come for economic opportunity to Canada, and we will continue to welcome them. Whether they came in the 1970s as Vietnamese boat people, whether they came as Syrian refugees or most recently fleeing the war in Ukraine, Canada will remain that.

But immigration must be done correctly. Immigration must be done right. We know that we need to have the social infrastructure in place, the housing in place, and the social services in place, but we will always be a country that welcomes those, yes, economic immigrants to our express entry system. We need those nurses, we need those, the Filipino community in Canada, the Vietnamese community, and the Italian–Canadian community in Canada are pillars of our society. And I'm so proud to be that.

To the rapporteur, this year, in Canada, we introduced our immigration levels. We did reduce them. We reduced them to ensure that we have the proper housing in place, and the proper infrastructure in place to accept them. We do that, but we need workers. Our birth rate is about 1.26. I know some of the European countries are approaching 1. I think they should actually look at why it is 1. Why are young people leaving? Why do young people want to move to the United States or Canada for greater economic opportunity sometimes? Because it does happen. We see it. I see it all the time in where I come from.

So it's very interesting to hear some of the rhetoric tonight. Immigrants make our society stronger. We believe in a multicultural social fabric in Canada. We will continue to do so. I think it definitely does have to be a controlled system. We are lucky. We live an ocean away in many ways. At the same time, for decades and generations, we have welcomed newcomers from around the world, including from the continent of Europe.

Thank you very much.

Some people forget [*off mic*].

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Sorbara.

Then I go to Mr Mehmet AKALIN.

Mr Mehmet AKALIN (Türkiye, ALDE): Thank you, Chair.

This report is very important for the future of Europe because immigration is one of the biggest defining challenges and opportunities of our time. Europe is at a crossroads. On one hand, the population is ageing rapidly, which is leading to labour shortages, increased pressure on healthcare and slower economic growth. On the other hand, immigration is not without its complexities.

Migrants most definitely bring skills, innovation and a dynamic workforce. They fill essential roles in healthcare, construction, agriculture, and technology – roles that are increasingly difficult to staff due to Europe's ageing population.

Immigrants can enrich our societies culturally and socially in turn fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

However, we must also confront the challenges. Integrating migrants into our societies requires resources, planning, and a commitment to fairness. Education, housing, healthcare and language acquisition programmes are essential, and failure to do so can lead to social tensions and polarisation.

Undoubtedly, immigration is a shared responsibility. Europe cannot succeed if some countries bear a disproportionate share of the burden while others turn away.

To provide a concrete example, let us look at the situation in Türkiye. Türkiye hosts one of the largest immigrant and refugee populations in the world due to its geographic location. It is home to approximately 4 million Syrian refugees, making it the largest host country for Syrians displaced by conflict. Many of these refugees live in urban centres, in big cities, with only a small fraction in refugee camps.

Türkiye also accommodates refugees and asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia and other countries, with the total refugee and asylum-seeker population exceeding 5 million. In addition to refugees, Türkiye attracts economic migrants from Asia and Africa, who work in sectors like construction, agriculture and domestic services.

From a broader perspective, immigration offers similar benefits to other countries facing ageing populations. The inflow of young, working-age migrants can mitigate the decline in the labour force. Migration also tends to bring higher fertility rates, which can counterbalance the challenges posed by an ageing native population but can on the other hand create a significant shift in the demographics in specific areas such as the south of Türkiye.

Despite these contributions, Türkiye and other host countries face challenges in integrating immigrants: social tensions, resource constraints.

Fair distribution mechanisms, solidarity among member states and partnerships with countries of origin and transit are essential if immigration is to be beneficial and sustainable for all.

Thank you.

Mr Markus WIECHEL (Sweden, EC/DA): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mister President,

Today I wish to address what I view as a critical oversimplification of the complex challenges posed by demographic ageing in Europe.

It is with great interest that I have read the report prepared by our Rapporteur Ms. Odamur, which discusses the potential of immigration to help address the challenges of an ageing population in Europe alongside other economic considerations.

However, I must express my concerns regarding the portrayal of immigration as a viable solution. As a European and a Swede, I have witnessed the repercussions of irresponsible migration policies in our societies.

The report's title suggests that immigration is just one among several ways to combat population ageing, yet it leans heavily on the idea of increased immigration to address labour shortages, particularly in the care sector.

This reliance seems to stem from a superficial analysis of the complexities involved. While immigration may help alleviate immediate workforce gaps, it is crucial to recognize that it cannot be a blanket solution, especially given the systemic issues within our labour markets.

For instance, Estonia has successfully increased birth rates through generous financial support for families, demonstrating that alternative approaches exist. Many member states are now aiming to significantly reduce irregular immigration due to social and economic concerns. In this context, we must ensure that immigrants who are accepted can be properly integrated into our societies—both job-wise and culturally.

The stakes are indeed high, as the Rapporteur warns that neglecting the integration of migrants could lead to negative outcomes such as social tensions, culture clashes, and economic disparities, ultimately harming overall well-being.

We have already seen evidence of these challenges manifest in various countries, contributing to political polarization. Such an atmosphere can foster public frustration and also undermine faith in the democratic process.

In conclusion, just like my dear Swedish Collegaue Ms Stegrud mentioned in the beginning of this debate, I cannot stress enough the importance that you look at my home country Sweden and see what has happened when naive politicians have opened up the borders for mass migration.

I urge you. Please dear colleagues, do not do the same mistake as these politicians did in Sweden. Let us be a warning example.

Thank you, Mister President.

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

Migration pressure has become a key issue for Europe, and big part of this it is growing refugee population.

Europe faces also a significant ageing population problem, which leads to economic, social, and structural pressures on healthcare, pension systems and labour markets.

In order to effectively manage the potential of immigration, there is a need to look at the possibly growing influx of people not as a part of a problem but as a part of the solution, especially, to the serious demographic crisis and challenges.

Poland is managing quite well the big influx of Ukrainian refugees escaping their country due to Putin's war, while accommodating nearly 60% of all refugees from there. Ukrainian refugees can legally work and of course they pay taxes.

The level of their professional activity is quite high. The employment rate of working war refugees from Ukraine in Poland is 65%, much higher than other neighbouring countries. Needless to say, by legally working, paying taxes they contribute to Polish national revenue.

Ukrainian children living in Poland with their families receive financial allowance and like Polish children, they have obligation to attend school education. Currently circa 200 000 Ukrainian children go to Polish schools.

While the humanitarian support for war refugees is our moral duty, it may have a positive impact on demographic situation and demographic indicators in future.

There is a justified expectation that by helping others we can help ourselves.

Needless to say, I support the report.

Ms Iva DIMIC (Slovenia, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

I congratulate to the rapporteur Ms Osamor whose report on immigration as an answer to Europe's demographic aging raises an important issue. Europe's population is getting older, with fewer young people to support the growing number of elderly. Immigration is seen as one way to balance this shift.

The report argues that immigrants can help fill gaps in the workforce, contribute to social security systems, and support economic growth. It emphasizes the need for effective policies to manage immigration in a way that benefits both the newcomers and the host countries.

However, the report also acknowledges the challenges of immigration, including integration, public opinion, and potential social tensions. It stresses the importance of welcoming immigrants in a fair, respectful, and humane manner, ensuring that they are integrated successfully into society.

Therefore, in my opinion, while immigration can offer solutions to demographic challenges, it must be handled carefully. Countries need to focus on integration programs that help immigrants adapt to their new environments. Additionally, governments should work to combat any negative stereotypes or fears that may arise.

Overall, the report makes a strong case for immigration as a necessary part of addressing Europe's aging population, but it also highlights the need for thoughtful planning and open dialogue. If done right, immigration can be a win-win for both immigrants and European societies.

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

Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

The demographic aging of Europe constitutes one of the most critical challenges of the coming decades.

As an organization committed to democracy and human rights, it is our responsibility to ensure the rights of all generations. We welcome the report that highlights the need for member states to adopt targeted policies to support families. In this regard, Greece is the first country to develop a national action plan to address the demographic issue, with a budget of 20 billion euro over a ten-year horizon. Our main objective is to reduce the consequences of demographic aging through initiatives that increase birth rates, support families and the elderly, and enhance employment. Furthermore, the integration of migrants by member states could serve as a solution to addressing demographic aging.

The meaningful integration of refugees and migrants can help address labor shortages in the elderly care sector.

Migrants can strengthen the workforce of host countries in various sectors, thereby contributing to the sustainability of social security systems. Greece adopts policies for the social inclusion of refugees and migrants, including Greek language learning programs, career counseling, and housing support programs. Migrants integrate into society, engage in the care sector, and revive rural areas that had been abandoned. Last year, a law was passed that legalized migrants who had been working in the country for at least three years.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the proper integration of refugees and migrants can contribute to strengthening social cohesion, sustainable development, and the economic resilience of Europe.

Ms Regina BASTOS (Portugal, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mister President,

Madam rapporteur Kate Osamor,

Colleagues,

Europe and the world are facing one of the greatest social transformations of this century: population aging.

The number of people aged 60 and over is growing faster than any other age group.

In just a few decades, Europe will be an aging continent, with serious consequences for the economy, the labour market, and social security systems.

One of the key solutions to this challenge is immigration.

The European Union and its Member States are working to establish a migration policy that is effective, safe, and humane.

All the other Member States of the Council of Europe should promote similar efforts and policies.

Portugal is a clear example of this reality. Today, immigrants represent 10% of the Portuguese population, exceeding 1 million people.

However, immigration alone is not enough. We must also focus on increasing birth rates.

Supporting families, ensuring better conditions for young parents, and promoting policies that encourage higher fertility rates are crucial to addressing demographic decline.

Without these measures, the imbalance in our population structure will only worsen.

At the same time, immigration can only be a real solution if newcomers are properly welcomed and integrated.

The 2015 refugee crisis tested our ability to respond and highlighted the tensions between security concerns and humanitarian responsibilities.

It remains a topic of heated debate, reminding us that this challenge requires careful and balanced policies.

Europe needs immigrants, but it must ensure their integration with dignity and respect.

At the same time, we must promote policies that encourage family growth.

Our future depends on how we handle these realities.

We must be prepared to address population aging and build an inclusive society, where challenges become opportunities.

Thank you.

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

Thank you, Mister President.

First of all, I would like to start by thanking to Ms. Kate Osamor for her dedication in preparing this important report.

Dear colleagues,

Immigration is vital for Europe, including for Portugal, the country where I serve as a member of the Portuguese parliament.

Immigration is essential for Europe's economic growth.

Immigration is also essential for enterprises, particularly where the local workforce is not enough or is not available, such as in social and healthcare, construction, agriculture or tourism and hospitality sectors.

And, importantly, immigration is essential for addressing demographic and ageing challenges. By 2050, over 30% of Europe's population will be over the age of 65.

As highlighted by the European Commission, immigrants already contribute billions of euros annually in taxes and social security.

When we invest in their integration—through education, training, and legal protections—they repay that investment many times over through their contributions.

Immigration is not just a need for Europe. It is one of our greatest assets to ensure development and progress.

Dear colleagues,

Immigration is indispensable for Europe's future.

It is imperative that we embrace: Humanism and not discrimination. Respect and not intolerance. Solidarity and not individualism.

Guided by these principles, we must craft public policies and laws that welcome, regulate, and integrate immigrants with dignity and respect.

A successful integration of immigrants fosters mutual respect among people.

Defending immigration with humanism is not only a commitment to human rights, but also a way to support development and prosperity.

Europe must be the world's leader in immigration with humanism and mutual respect among people and nations.

Thank you.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, EC/DA): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mister Chairman,

Demographic decline, migration, and the erosion of traditional values pose existential challenges to our nations, threatening economic stability, democratic resilience, and national identity.

The non-EU Member States of the Council of Europe face a stark reality: migration and declining birth rates are not contributing to demographic stability. Many of these nations, including Armenia, are sources of migration to the EU and find themselves trapped in a demographic deadlock—an existential challenge. Beyond its impact on economic prosperity, loss of competitive advantage, and weakening security systems, this demographic crisis also erodes the quality of democracy.

The very people leaving our countries are those who could drive dynamic national development and secure our democratic future. Instead of fostering the values and traditions of the free world within their own societies, many seek them in the West. We are losing the middle class—the foundation of democratic progress. Meanwhile, the prevailing political conservatism among older generations, coupled with civic apathy among the youth, diminishes the ruling elites' motivation to implement reforms, and has been weakening political pluralism. As a result, these demographic trends have become a major obstacle to national development.

Dear colleagues,

Armenia has the potential to become a center of gravity for the vast Armenian diaspora and to reverse its demographic decline. However, this national goal remains far from realization. It is obstructed not only by internal political anomalies that have led to severe social polarization but also by the failure of Armenia's ruling majority—together with the democratic world—to halt the catastrophic neo-Ottoman expansion in the South Caucasus. This expansion is shrinking the historical Armenian homeland and diminishing its population. The ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Artsakh has already forced 120,000 of my compatriots—including 30,000 children—to flee their ancestral lands. Thousands have since been forced to seek a better future beyond the region.

Dear colleagues,

In recent decades, the liberal momentum has prioritised individual freedom and self-expression while marginalising the institution of the traditional family. Yet the family, above all, is a phenomenon rooted in nature. Just as we fight climate change to preserve our planet, we must also strive to revive and strengthen the traditional family. Without family, there is no well-being, no happiness—no individual or national identity, recognition, or dignity. Only by reaffirming family values can we gain the confidence and moral strength to speak of new perspectives, of justice and equality, and of our place in the world.

Ms Belén HOYO (Spain, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Addressing the issue of migration is important for all countries, but I would tell that its more important for the countries in the south, the mainly reason is that affects us specially.

For example, Spain is the nearest country to Africa, the point of view abouts this situation is an emergency.

Migration is an issue trully serious, I believe that it's important not to move in demagogic and populist arguments. Leaving behind radical positions that the only goal is to obtain some political benefits from this issue. Because we are talking about people, we are talking about men, women, children, we are not talking about a number, we are talking about people who leave away their environment, their families, looking for a better life, people trying to do as its possible, in many cases does so desperately than they risk teir life.

Migration policy is an important matter of State, its so important that it must be agreed upon by the majority parties of each country and also, of course, they must be agreed in Europe. It's important because could not change every 4 or 8 years.

I agree that regular migration is good. Good and necessary. Indeed, it is necessary to keep our welfare state, to turn it around to the population pyramid we have. Therefore, we must promote legal controls to access Europe having a connection with labour market, introducing training programs, and encouraging integration plans.

However, migration flows, which in most cases arrive in our countries, are illegal. Irregular migration sometimes is a problem to our Security and to the social system we have. Some regions of Spain immigration overflowed our resources and our Welfare System.

To sum up, we need to coordinate migration policy. We must work with all European countries.

Ms Albana VOKSHI (Albania, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Honorable Members of the Assembly,

I am honored to be here today to represent Albania.

I want to discuss the report from a different perspective, highlighting a crisis that is reshaping Albania and affecting Europe: mass emigration. In the past decade, over one million Albanians have left—more than 75% are young professionals, students, and skilled workers. Their departure is not just a demographic shift; it is a depletion of our nation's future.

This situation presents a paradox:

Albania is an EU candidate country, yet Albanians have lost hope. They are not waiting for Albania to become part of the EU—they are becoming European on their own.

Albania is subsidizing the EU with its best professionals. Each doctor who emigrates represents a loss of tens of thousands of euros in family and investment, while Albania's healthcare system suffers from shortages and declining quality.

Mass migration weakens democracy. Those leaving are the most educated, independent, and demanding of rule of law and governance. Their absence lowers the pressure for change, allowing corruption to persist. So, the democracy is backsliding.

The EU invests hundreds of millions in strengthening Albania's democracy and rule of law, yet also welcomes in their countries the very professionals who could build that democracy at home. This undermines its own investment.

While Europe benefits, Albania suffers. We are caught in a vicious cycle:

Organized crime and corruption drive emigration. A lack of opportunities and weak institutions force young Albanians to seek a better future elsewhere. Emigration, in turn, fuels corruption and weakens democracy. This is not just one country problem, its not just Albania's problem; it is Europe's problem as well. If Albania continues losing its brightest minds, the promise of European integration weakens, and instability grows at Europe's doorstep.

We must break this cycle. Albania and the EU must work together to create incentives for young people to stay, including stronger rule of law, economic reforms, and targeted youth employment programs. A stable and thriving Albania strengthens Europe as a whole.

This Assembly must not see Albania only as a source of migration but as a nation in urgent need of action. Because when democracy weakens in one corner of Europe, it affects us all.

Thank you.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): So I will now interrupt the list of speakers and also ask the group over there to be quiet. The bar is outside, it's not inside here in the plenary session.

The speeches of members on the speakers list who have been present during the debate but have not been able to speak may be given to the Table Office for publication in the Official Report. I remind colleagues that the type-written texts can be submitted, electronically if possible, no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted. So this means around 11:30 p.m. today.

So now I we give back the floor to Ms Kate OSAMOR to reply to all the remarks that you have heard.

And you have 3 minutes for that.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mister President.

And I'd like to thank everyone that contributed today in this debate.

It goes without saying that Europe stands at a critical juncture. We face the challenges of an aging population, and yet there is a powerful solution before us – immigration. However, migrants are more than just filling gaps in the workforce. They are building a stronger, more compassionate Europe. These migrants are not strangers. They are fellow human beings with dreams, families and aspirations. They shape the future of our continent in ways that too often go underappreciated.

But we must do more than welcome them. We must invest in their full integration. This means creating pathways for them to thrive, not just survive. We must offer them the opportunity to build lives of dignity. And in doing so, we build a future where compassion, solidarity and mutual respect are the core of our European identity.

Together, we can create a Europe where no one is left behind. Not the elderly who rely on care, not the migrant workers who provide that care, and not the communities we are striving to build. This is a Europe I believe in. A Europe where everyone plays a part and everyone matters. Once again, thank you for your support in shaping this future. One where we embrace the strength of diversity and build a united, compassionate society for all.

Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Osamor.

And I don't know, does the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, wish to speak?

Yes. Okay. You have the floor. You have 3 minutes.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): Thank you. Thank you, sir.

Dear colleagues,

We as the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons adopted the report and draft resolution on immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic aging.

The Committee held several opportunities to hear from experts in the field and exchange views on this issue during the preparation of this report.

Let us ask ourselves, what is demographic aging exactly? On one hand, that is good news. Today people live longer than previous generations did, provided there is peace and a good quality environment and care systems. On the other hand, the older we get, the higher the certainty that assistance will be needed at some point of our lives. This creates a dependency on public services with specific needs which are not easily met.

To meet those needs of elderly people, we need to think ahead and prepare the support systems that will allow people to live in dignity as long as possible.

Given that the children of those who are between 80 and 90 years old may be retiring themselves after 63 or 65, many European countries may find themselves in a situation where they will have only one generation of persons working, paying to support social security systems of two generations of retirees.

Moreover, given that the birth rates were lower than in the past, and have been for quite some time now, the number of working age population in Europe has decreased significantly.

Immigration can provide some answers, as the report showed. This requires at the same time that measures be taken now to improve the integration process. The effort to support refugees and migrants' integration now will pay tenfold in the future, when European societies will start feeling the pressure of demographic aging and elderly persons' dependency associated with that.

The draft resolution mentions clearly that family policies must be reconsidered to support childcare better so that families make the choice of having children.

And I can give you an example from my own country. In Ukraine, for example, the monthly support for children up to the age of three is less than 20 euros per month. Less than 20 euros per month! Just imagine this. It's something which should be changed immediately. Definitely that's a question for the Ukrainian government, but the same question goes for other countries. But at the same time, Europe needs to have more people of a younger cohort already now.

I therefore call for you to support this report and welcome future actions to implement programmes like those mentioned in Ms Kate OSAMOR's report.

Thank you very much.

Vote: Immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic ageing

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Sir.

So, the debate is now closed.

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has presented a draft resolution to which 10 amendments and 4 sub-amendments have been tabled.

They 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.

So, I first go to Amendment 8, and I call Mr Marco SCURRIA to support Amendment 8.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Yes, thank you, President.

With this amendment we are asking for the deletion of two sentences in item 3 of this report, simply because they are not true. That is, the report says that for political reasons, non-European migrants are left alone with no chance to be integrated into our communities.

I think there is no country, no country of ours governed by whomever you like, right, left, red, yellow, green, that does not give non-European migrants a chance to be integrated.

So, I think that's not true, and that's why we call for the deletion of these two lines.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Scurria.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

No. Okay.

Then what's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): Dear Chairman, the Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Okay, so now we put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

19 are in favour, 55 against. So the amendment is rejected.

For Amendment 2, I go to Mr Marco SCURRIA again.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): This is an amendment that then recurs on other amendments as well. That is, it asks that without touching one more line of the report that is presented. So, without touching anything and without changing anything, however, certain aspects are integrated and that is, the protection of the family, the promotion of the birth rate, and then, if there is a response on immigration, insert, however, other aspects that help to combat the aging of the European population.

I think other groups can also make the right reflections on this.

We are not asking to change anything, we just want to add something, and I don't think it is wrong.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Scurria.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): As the rapporteur, I am against this amendment because it is not necessary to add anything more to the resolution as it stands.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Okay, thank you.

What's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

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

So I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

17 in favour, 65 against, 4 abstentions.

So Amendment 2 is rejected.

Now I go to Amendment 1.

Once again, Mister Marco Scurria, do you want to support Amendment 1?

You have 30 seconds.

Please, silence.

Microphone, please.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Here we go.

This is an amendment that echoes the previous one calling for looking at how much the youth population in Europe is declining and then investing, having tools to help grow and give opportunities to young people in Europe.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Okay. Thank you.

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mister President.

As the rapporteur, I vote against this. I'm not in favour of this. I don't think it's necessary. It's not relevant to the main body of the report.

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

And what's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee voted against with a simple majority.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): "Thank you." [In French]

I will now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

20 in favour, 65 against, 3 abstained.

So Amendment 1 is rejected.

Now we come to Amendment 3 with sub-amendments. Two sub-amendments to Amendment 3 have been tabled.

So I call Mr Marco SCURRIA to support Amendment 3.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Yes, Amendment 3 with the two sub-amendments that were approved in the Commission, so I think we all agree on that. I don't think there's anything more to add. It is always about the possibility of making family and birth investments.

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

Now we shall consider Sub-amendment 1.

So I call Lord Don TOUHIG on behalf of the Committee to support Sub-amendment 1.

Microphone, please.

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE): Oh, sorry.

On behalf of Lord Don TOUHIG, I can say that this amendment was agreed by the Committee unanimously.

The Sub-amendment 1 merely reduces the text in Amendment 3 by five words, by removing the words "mostly on relatives and children".

And it was on the basis that there was no substantive evidence that this was actually factual in terms of numbers.

So on that basis, the Committee withdrew those words.

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

Does anyone else wish to speak against the Sub-amendment 1?

No.

Does Mr Marco SCURRIA want to provide his opinion?

Okay for you.

So I learned that the Committee unanimously accepted this Sub-amendment. Thank you.

And then I should now put the Sub-amendment 1 to the vote.

The vote is open for Sub-amendment 1.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

80 in favour, 5 against, 2 abstentions.

So the Sub-amendment 1 is agreed.

And now we shall consider Sub-amendment 2.

I call Lord Don TOUHIG once again on behalf of the Committee to support Sub-amendment 2.

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE): Very straightforwardly just removes the words "actually, mostly" because again, there is no substantial evidence that that is the case, and replaces them with the words "very often", a factual change.

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

Does anyone else wish to speak against Sub-amendment 2?

No.

Does Mr Marco SCURRIA want to provide his opinion?

It's okay.

So indeed the Committee unanimously accepted the sub-amendment.

I shall now put Sub-amendment 2 to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

85 in favour, 1 against, 1 abstention.

So Sub-amendment 2 is agreed.

Now we come to the main Amendment 3 as sub-amended.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment as sub-amended?

No.

And also the Committee accepted this amendment as sub-amended.

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

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

80 in favour, 3 against, 1 abstention.

So Amendment 3 is agreed.

Then I go to Amendment 4 and I call Mr Marco SCURRIA to support Amendment 4.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Yes, thank you, President.

In point 6 of this report, she tells us all the implications that exist in the ageing population. So, accepting that implication, it is an amendment that also points here to investing in birthrate and family support.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against this Amendment?

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you.

I'm against this amendment because this associates workers, migrant workers, in a sense like they are a commodity as opposed to human beings.

So, I'm against this.

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

What's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

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

So, I shall now put the amendment to the vote?

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

26 in favour, 55 against, 3 abstentions.

So, Amendment 4 is rejected.

Now we come to Amendment No. 10.

Just as an information, if this amendment should be adopted, Amendment 5 and 9 fall.

I call Ms Anna ZÁBORSKÁ to support Amendment 10.

You have 30 seconds.

Is Ms Anna ZÁBORSKÁ in the room?

No.

Does anyone else wish to support this amendment?

You have the floor. Yes. You have the floor.

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, EC/DA): Yes, thank you.

So, this is an amendment that wants to go to replace paragraph 7, because where you go to talk about the support that you need to give to families who freely want to have children and have more children. We are told by all the cognitive surveys that young people would like to have two, three children, then afterwards unfortunately a large majority come up against the concrete difficulties. It was more focused on that because even in the original paragraph you go again, where you talk about families, to talk about immigration, which has already been discussed extensively in the other paragraphs.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Gardini.

Does anyone wish to speak against this amendment?

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you.

The resolution as it stands makes total sense to the overall report and the report has nothing to do with child control numbers. So it is not relevant.

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

What's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, 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 result to be displayed.

29 in favour, 51 against and 0 abstentions.

So Amendment 10 is rejected.

Please quiet at my right side, please, to the Italian delegation.

Now we go to Amendment 5.

I call Mr Marco SCURRIA to support Amendment 5.

You have 30 seconds,

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Yes, thank you, President,

This is an amendment that tries to imagine policies that are always *family friendly* to also increase the intergenerational possibility and thus support young couples in meeting older generations and thus help family and birth development.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Scurria.

Does anyone wish to speak against this amendment?

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): This amendment doesn't bring anything that's necessarily changing or embracing or making the resolution any better. It is not necessary.

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

What's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

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

So I will now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

30 in favour, 54 against, no abstentions.

So Amendment 5 is rejected.

So we go to Amendment 9.

Once again, Mr Marco SCURRIA.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Thank you, President.

Since the rapporteur rightly poses the need to make a communication strategy about the possibility for immigrants to be able to fit in and integrate better, with this amendment we also ask that member states make a communication strategy in favour of families and policies that can help births and thus defeat the ageing of the European population.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Scurria.

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you.

Most countries do have a policy when it comes to reproductive rights and they promote that, so it is not something which needs to be included. It already exists.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): What's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, 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 result to be displayed.

34 in favour, 49 against, 1 abstention.

So, Amendment 9 is rejected.

Amendment No. 6.

I call once again Mr Marco SCURRIA to support Amendment 6.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): Here we go.

This is simply a change of words and change "sustainable integration" to "sustainable development" for all the policies referred to in this report.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against this amendment?

Ms Kate OSAMOR.

Ms Kate OSAMOR (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Sustainable development is to do with the environment.

What I have put as in sustainable integration is the correct term.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Osamor.

What's the opinion of the Committee on the amendment?

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons): The Committee rejected this amendment with a simple majority.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): I will now put the amendment to the vote?

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

22 in favour, 61 against, 2 abstentions.

This means that Amendment 6 is rejected.

Then we go to Amendment 7 and two sub-amendments to Amendment 7 have been tabled.

So I call first Mr Marco SCURRIA to support Amendment 7.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Marco SCURRIA (Italy, EC/DA): On that, Chairman, since there are two sub-amendments that have been approved in the Commission, I would also leave the floor for those who have to explain the sub-amendments, which are fine with us.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): "Thank you" [Spoken in Italian], Mister Scurria.

We shall now consider Sub-amendment 1.

I call Lord Don TOUHIG on behalf of the Committee to support Sub-amendment 1.

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE): On behalf of Lord Don TOUHIG, the Sub-amendment 1 simply takes out the words "and democratic challenges".

Three words in the amendment, largely because it is redundant, because that's actually the title of this report, the word "demographic changes" in the front page of this report, so it is redundant.

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

Does anyone else wish to speak against Sub-amendment No. 1?

No.

Does Mr Marco SCURRIA want to provide his public opinion?

Okay.

The Committee unanimously accepted this Amendment.

We should now put Sub-amendment 1 to the vote.

The vote is open.

Yes?

Microphone, please.

I cannot hear you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Maybe I misheard, the opinion of the Committee was not announced?

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, NR, President of the Assembly): No, no, I've said it. It was unanimously supported.

Please.

So the vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

80 in favour, 4 against, and 2 abstentions.

So, this means that Sub-amendment 1 is agreed.

We go now to Sub-amendment No. 2.

I call Lord Michael GERMAN on behalf of the Committee to support Sub-amendment 2.

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE): Sub-amendment No. 2 just removes two words, the words "such as", and inserts a comma, so that all of the categories concerned: communities, families, and family networks all have equal priority in the Amendment.

It was supported unanimously by the Committee.

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

Does anyone else wish to speak against the Sub-amendment No. 2? No?

Does Mr Marco SCURRIA want to provide his opinion?

He agrees.

The Committee unanimously accepted this sub-amendment.

So, I will now put the Sub-amendment No. 2 to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

83 in favour, 2 against, 1 abstention.

So, Sub-Amendment 2 is agreed.

So, now we come to the main Amendment 7 as sub-amended.

Does anyone wish to speak against Amendment 7 as sub-amended?

No.

The Committee also unanimously accepted this amendment as sub-amended.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

78 in favour, 4 against, 3 abstentions.

Amendment 7 is agreed.

We will now proceed to vote on the Draft Resolution contained in Doc. 16072 [as amended]. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

70 in favour, 17 against, no abstention.

This means that the draft resolution contained in Document 16072 is adopted.

The Assembly will hold its next public sitting tomorrow at 10:00 a.m. with the agenda approved on Monday.

The sitting is adjourned.

I wish you all a very wonderful evening and a good night.