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Official report of debates

Openning of the sitting No 24

Debate under urgent procedure: Global peace under threat: halting the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and addressing the wider conflict in the Middle East

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

Dear colleagues, I remind you that members who wish to take the floor should insert their badge before taking the floor. As you begin your speech, press the microphone button once only, wait for a couple of seconds and then start talking.

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

I also remind members that speaking times are limited to two minutes for this afternoon's debates.

The next item of business this afternoon is a debate under urgent procedure on "Global peace under threat: halting the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and addressing the wider conflict in the Middle East", Document 16210, presented by Ms Ingjerd SCHOU, rapporteur, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

We will then hear from Mr Paul GALLES, who will present an opinion on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Document 16212.

In order to finish by 6:00 p.m. I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 5:45 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call now Ms Ingjerd SCHOU, rapporteur. You have seven minutes now, and three minutes at the end to reply to the debate.

You have the floor.

Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): President, thank you.

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.

It is with a deep sense of responsibility that I present this report, and I thank you for your trust in appointing me as rapporteur.

Let me begin by recognising the obvious: this is a deeply polarising issue. There are strong, passionate and often painful feelings on all sides of this debate across our societies and, yes, within this Assembly. But what we are trying to do today is not deepen the issue; it is to try to reach a consensus on two urgent principles.

First, the absolutely necessary de-escalation in the region and the need for renewed commitment to multilateralism, to dialogue and to international co-operation. President, we will not find lasting solutions in the language of threats, retaliation or hatred. We only find them by returning to diplomacy, the rule of law and dialogue.

Second, we must speak with one voice on the need to protect civilians from the horrors of war and be clear that international humanitarian law is our shared responsibility, that international standards are there to be upheld. And colleagues, when I took on this report, my first question was, what is the role of the Assembly here? The answer is simple, and it is essential. We are resolved to unite around our values, even in the face of division, even in the face of conflict. These values, President, are the bedrock of our continued freedom, peace, prosperity and security.

We are resolved that multilateralism is the most effective way of addressing global challenges and conflicts. It is multilateralism that has underpinned our Assembly's engagement with the Israeli parliament for nearly 70 years. It is multilateralism that brings the Israel and Palestine delegations together in this hemicycle. The current situation is a complete breakdown of this multilateralism, and it is a serious threat to global security. We must work here in this Assembly for the peace that democratic security builds. We will not accept the erosion of international law and reaffirm our commitment to peace, dignity and justice.

Since the appalling terrorist attack by Hamas in 2023, the region has been thrust into a dangerously escalating and increasingly complex crisis. This Assembly clearly condemned the attack, and we reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. But we must also confront with equal clarity the scale of human suffering that has followed and the critical situation engulfing the Middle East.

The humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza is quite simply beyond tragic. Israel's response in exercising its right to self-defence has, in many instances, been disproportionate. The resumption of hostilities in Gaza, despite international appeals, has stretched any understanding of what is proportionate and what is human and what is within the bounds of international law.

This Assembly cannot and must not look away from the devastation. The regional context is no less alarming. We now face direct hostility between Israel and Iran and military intervention by and against the United States. The risk, President, of wider conflict is now very real and the consequences could be catastrophic, not just for the Middle East, but for global peace and stability.

We must be clear-eyed about Iran's destabilisation role in the region, its defiance of nuclear commitments, its military ties with Russia. This is a regime that threatens not just Israel. It is a regime threatening peace across the region and ours. But amid this broader geopolitical crisis, we cannot allow the suffering of civilians in Gaza to become secondary.

To this end, the report is clear in its aims. It called for urgent and sustained regional de-escalation. It calls for a permanent and unconditional ceasefire for the sake of the civilians of Gaza, for the hostages who remain in captivity. It urges unimpeded humanitarian access; access that is vital to prevent further loss of life and restore basic human dignity. And finally, President, it insists that the principles we seek to uphold – human rights, accountability, the rule of law – must be applied universally, not selectively.

Colleagues, this report does not claim to offer easy answers to a crisis of such scale and complexity. But it does rest on a clear foundation that international law matters and that human life must never be threatened as expendable.

Thank you, President.

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

I call now Mr Paul GALLES for the opinion from the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. Paul, as you know, you have three minutes.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you very much, Mr President.

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has been asked for a report of opinion. And we were honoured to do so because it's not a usual thing. And this is good that our Committee has been asked for our opinion, because in our discussions in the Committee, we saw that we brought a lot of the experiences that many of our members have made in the last weeks and months into the discussion. I want to thank my colleague Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU for the very good report. And I want to thank all those who have worked in these days on these reports and on our commitment as the Assembly of the Council of Europe to have a strong position.

We wanted to follow our mission as the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. And it means to strengthen the humanitarian aspect of the conflicts, to underline it and to repeat it. Yes, we also share this common mission to be balanced and to pronounce, repeat and defend multilateralism. And that's why in the discussions in our Committee, we tried to hear all the voices and to raise our opinion in a way that will be as balanced as possible.

It was nevertheless very important to the Committee to clearly condemn all the horrible things that have happened. 7 October, but also the current situation in Gaza with the killed civilians, the destroyed hospitals. And we went until the point also to talk about the genocidal intent. We also mention in our Committee the difficulties and the negative consequences for the civilians of Israel. We talked about the crisis of refugees that could now approach coming from Iran and the horrifying actions of the Iranian regime that just also in these days have arrested many people and killed many who have been condemned for actions that are not in a good way presented by the regime.

As the Committee, we wanted not only the Assembly to call upon all those responsible, but also to motion ourselves, as neighbouring countries of Iran and also as parliamentarians, to stay in touch and to keep our contacts with all the representatives of the different countries. It is a very complex and difficult situation. As a Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, we try to underline our mission to defend human rights and humanitarian aid rights.

Thank you very much.

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

Dear colleagues, I will open now the list of the speakers on behalf of the political groups. I remind you all speakers from now on have two minutes. We start with Gabrielle CATHALA, on behalf of the United European Left. Gabrielle, you have the floor.

Ms Gabrielle CATHALA (France, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr. President,

For 21 months, our fellow Gazans have been bombed, starved, thirsty, humiliated and exterminated.

Twenty-one months since the first genocide in history was filmed live, showing the powerlessness of the international system.

Genocide, ecocide, urbicide, educicide, futuricide, what is happening in Gaza has brought to light unprecedented categories for understanding disaster. Atrocities that are depriving Gaza of schools, hospitals, universities and farmland, where life is rendered impossible in the long term.

The genocide spares no one: 56 000 people murdered, thousands still lying under the rubble. Children, doctors, aid workers and journalists killed with impunity. One state wants to wipe out the Palestinian people and deprive them of a future.

My group therefore regrets the absence of the word genocide from the proposed text. Yet this mass crime has been characterised.

In return, is Israel subject to 16 sets of sanctions like Russia? Is its Prime Minister, Mr Benjamin NETANYAHU, under arrest warrant from the ICC, forbidden, like Mr Vladimir PUTIN, to fly over the airspace of states that have ratified the Rome Statute?

Have the member countries of the Council of Europe, such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, immediately stopped supplying Israel with weapons that enable them to massacre a people? Have they recognised the State of Palestine along with 146 other states around the world? Have they worked to break the EU-Israel Association Agreement, as Spain has? Do these same states condemn, on a daily basis, the war crimes committed during the macabre food distributions that have also become a killing machine?

No, they don't.

Worse still, the West perpetuates the narrative that history began on 7 October. It's as if the *Nakba* had never happened, as if the Palestinians had never suffered decades of colonisation, land confiscation and crime. A narrative that would have the world believe that the Palestinians somehow deserve what is happening to them. That they are dying through their own fault. As if the Israeli colonial enterprise had not also accelerated in the West Bank. As if Israel could not respond to the atrocities of 7 October with civilisation, with diplomacy, with the weapon of law.

Dear colleagues, international law and human rights are universal, not just for white people.

What credibility will Europe have in defending international law if it is incapable of enforcing it, if it makes itself an accomplice to international crimes? If in our world, only the law of the strongest prevails, if it is not capable of listening to the European peoples who are rising up everywhere to stop the massacre.

Our Assembly must unequivocally condemn these mass crimes, name genocide and do everything in its power to ensure that Palestine is free.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): On behalf of the Socialists, Greens and Democrats, Piero FASSINO.

Piero, you have the floor. Two minutes.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): I will speak in Italian. [in English].

We have all warned of the enormous risks raised by the conflict between Israel, the United States and Iran. We hope that everyone will now respect the ceasefire and that it will not be a temporary decision and that the parties will agree to participate in negotiations to define the nuclear issue. Just as we strongly renew our demand to the authorities of Iran to cease their activities to destabilize the political order in the Region.

The drama of the events of the last few days cannot remove from our attention the extremely serious situation in the Gaza Strip. For 18 months indiscriminate shelling, destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, continuous displacement, shortage of essential goods and, above all, 50 000 victims, including thousands of children, women, civilians, aid workers, journalists, international officials. The world has recognized and recognizes Israel's right to self-defence, but that right cannot turn into collective punishment of an entire people, violating fundamental human and civil rights.

Therefore, from this Assembly, we strongly renew our call for the Israeli military to respect the rights of the Palestinian people and the prescriptions of the International Courts of Justice to be respected.

Above all, the decision we call for is for an end to military hostilities with a permanent cease-fire, the gradual withdrawal of the Israeli army, and the deployment of an international force to enable an independent Palestinian administration to be established in security in Gaza. And we call at the same time for an end to organized aggression by extremist settler groups in the occupied West Bank territories.

The goal in conclusion remains to get back on track for a two peoples, two states solution. We all know that today that solution appears distant and difficult, however, there is no other way and it is the responsibility of the international community, hence ours as well, to work toward that goal.

And in this direction, the Council, our Assembly, must act, strengthening cooperation with the Knesset, the Palestinian Legislative Council, the representative institutions of the Arab countries and with other international institutions and the world of NGOs and civil societies.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): On behalf of the European People's Party, Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS. Emanuelis, you have the floor.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS (Lithuania, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you dear friends.

We have just finished our meeting in the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, overviewing your great job done by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, but sorry some amendments were rejected and we will discuss these amendments here for a very clear reason. A very clear reason.

Israel was attacked, and from our point of view, of course, Israeli blood and Arab blood have the same value, that's clear. But until now we have hostages in Gaza and this card, the house of cards of Iran was destroyed and Hamas was a part of this house of cards and that is clear that after five elections in the democratic state of Israel the during COVID-19 and later we have no real at all expression of the will of Gaza people while they're in the hands of dictatorial Iranian type fanatics like Hamas.

So telling. Yes, we have tragedies in Gaza, but we should remember that those people who were attacked belong to the peace camp. They left. It was not settlements. I'm sorry. It was small cities, mostly led by Social Democrats on the Israeli side, like Sderot and others. It was a peaceful, huge, peaceful Woodstock-type festival, including homosexuals, women and Buddhists and all possible nationalities and those people who presented the anti-Netanyahu camp, peace camp.

They were attacked and they were pressed and they now are eliminated after this terrible Hamas attack on peaceful Israeli, very Israeli soil. From my point of view, I am encouraging you to support the opinion of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, and to restore the idea that, after this Iranian conflict, Israelis have the right to think about their security.

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

On behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Lord BLENCATHRA. Dear David, you have in floor.

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza was caused by the evil terrorist organisation Hamas when it invaded Israel and brutally murdered 1 200 men, women and children and kidnapped 250 more. They are the cause of the war in Gaza. Hamas, of course, is funded and supplied with guns, missiles and bullets by Iran.

The war in southern Lebanon was caused by the evil terrorist organisation Hezbollah launching missiles into northern Israel. Hezbollah gets its money, guns, missiles and bullets from Iran.

The innocent international shipping in that vital Red Sea Suez Canal route is being attacked by the evil terrorist organisation, the Houthis of Yemen. They, too, are supplied with money, missiles and guns by Iran.

Mister President, Iran is behind all terrorist attacks on Israel. In fact, it's been waging war on Israel for 25 years through its terrorist organisations. We've all known that and we've known it for some time, but we've done nothing about it except talk about peace. Iran is developing nuclear weapons, not for defence, but solely for the purpose of wiping Israel off the face of the map and exterminating 8 million Jews.

Between Trump and Israel, they may – may – have cut off the head of the snake, possibly bringing about a whole new peace settlement in the Middle East.

Calls for de-escalation and peace are premature. The only peace which matters is the one where terrorist guns have been silenced in defeat.

Of course, Iran is not alone. It has the support of other evil dictatorships like PUTIN in Russia and North Korea. But if Trump and Israel have really neutralised Iran so quickly, then I hope that the lesson is not lost on PUTIN.

I now call on the United States to pile in more military aid to Ukraine to support them in their heroic battle. PUTIN must not win. I also call on Israel, since Iran is now possibly out of the picture, to step up food and humanitarian assistance to the population of Gaza. There is strong evidence that many in the UN Relief and Works Agency were conspiring with Hamas, and some participated in the murderous attack in October. So, Israel, get the food to the people directly, not through Hamas.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, Damien COTTIER. Damien.

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

In 1864, the States gathered in Geneva wanted to bring a little humanity into the heart of war.

This was the first Geneva Convention.

In 1949, the new Conventions broadened the humanitarian field, protecting civilian populations and humanitarian workers in particular. The Geneva Conventions are universal in scope. They apply to everyone, State or armed group. They are the foundation of our common humanity, especially in the most difficult of times.

The ALDE Group makes a fervent appeal to Israel: it is high time to keep this commitment, which implies immediate, complete and unconditional humanitarian access.

Humanitarian access is not an option, it is an obligation. The right to defend oneself is undisputed, but it implies obligations, in particular towards civilian populations and humanitarian workers. Hamas must also respect its obligations and immediately and unconditionally release all hostages. Their detention for two years is unacceptable, contrary to the law and to our common humanity, and is aggravating the conflict.

Our group calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, to put an end to civilian suffering. It is at difficult but crucial times like these that the political will must be strongest: the will to finally resolve a conflict that has gone on far too long. A two-state solution must finally be made possible. We must "put an end to the tragedy of war before it becomes an irreparable abyss", as Pope Leo XIV said a few days ago. The longer the conflict goes on, the more suffering there is, the more difficult and distant reconstruction will be.

The risk of contagion in the region is, alas, very real, as we can see. We call on all parties to strictly respect the ceasefire between Israel and Iran, and to refrain from any action likely to reignite hostilities. While Iran's policies pose a serious threat to the region, a new military spiral would only exacerbate instability.

It's time to give way to diplomacy.

We need fewer missiles and more diplomacy.

We are here in Strasbourg, a city that has been at the heart of two world wars, and which proves that it is possible to overcome the horrors of war if there is the will to build peace.

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

Dear colleagues,

With Damien, we have closed the list of speakers on behalf of the political groups, and now I will open the list of the rest of the colleagues.

I will start with our colleagues from Israel and Palestine, who will address the Assembly online. Meirav BEN ARI is the first speaker. Meirav, are you online? We can hear you.

Ms Meirav BEN ARI (Israel): Thank you, Mister President,

I would like to begin by apologising for not being able to come this week due to the situation in the area.

Two weeks ago, Israel launched Operation Am KE'Lavi – "with the strength of a lion" in order to thwart Iran's plan to develop a nuclear bomb.

As the German chancellor said, Israel is doing the dirty work of all of us. While Israel is carefully targeting nuclear facilities, ballistic missile sites and senior military commanders, Iran is targeting civilians, including homes, kindergartens, schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.

Yesterday morning, one hour before the ceasefire went into effect, Iranian missiles struck a building in Beersheba, killing four civilians and injuring 26 others. The Iranian terror regime has launched more than 450 missiles and hundreds of UAVs at population centres in Israel. Almost 30 people have been killed and 1 200 injured across more than 40 impact sites.

And now, regarding Hamas, Iran's proxies in the regions. While Israel is engaging in a difficult and ongoing conflict against Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, we continue to uphold our humanitarian obligations. Even during wartime, Israel provides extensive humanitarian assistance to the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. Every day, hundreds of humanitarian aid trucks enter Gaza through the crossing carrying essential goods including food, water, medical fuel, medical supplies, tents and hygiene products. I want to make it clear: Israel is not against the people of Gaza, it's against terrorism. We remain committed to the humanitarian principle even under fire. And we call all the international community to stand with us, bring our 50 hostages back home and call on Hamas to put down their weapons and end the war.

Thank you.

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

I just want to inform our colleagues that by Ms Meirav BEN ARI it was our colleague Mr Boaz BISMUTH who has asked for the floor later.

And now I will give the floor to Mr Bernard SABELLA from Palestine. Bernard, you have the floor.

Mr Bernard SABELLA (Palestine): Mr President,

Distinguished colleagues,

As a Palestinian parliamentarian, I speak today not only with deep concern, but with deep pain.

For over 20 months now, Gaza has endured unimaginable suffering. Entire families erased, hospitals turned to rubble, children pulled from the ruins, some alive, many not. Over 55 000 lives lost. This is not a statistic. It's a collective wound on the conscience of humanity. And yet we Palestinians often feel invisible. Our pain, our narrative, our rights, too often dismissed or sidelined by the double standards of international politics.

The proposed draft resolution of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy addresses many of the urgent issues facing Gaza, its people and the ongoing crisis between Palestinians and Israelis. It rightly calls for a political solution. But let us be honest. Unless Europe and its governments summon the will to act, statements and resolutions, no matter how well worded, will remain just that: words without consequence.

We welcome the ceasefire between Israel and Iran. Every step away from war is welcome. But peace in the region is impossible while Gaza remains under siege, while the West Bank is strangled by occupation, and while Palestinian aspirations for freedom, dignity and statehood are continuously denied. This war on Gaza must stop, not only for Palestinians, but for the peace and security of all, including Israelis. Our freedom is not a threat to others. It's the pathway to a lasting peace. I hope. Thank you.

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

Michael FARRUGIA is next. Michael.

Mr Michael FARRUGIA (Malta, SOC): Thank you very much, Mr President.

Words are not enough. It is time for action.

I am not in favour of Iran manufacturing a nuclear bomb. Neither am I in favour of other countries harbouring armaments of mass destruction. I am a person who believes that problems can be solved around the table, and any war can be terminated diplomatically if there is goodwill and mutual understanding by all sides. I condemned, I condemn, and I will always condemn what happened on 7 October and the abduction of hostages by Hamas. But I have no hesitation in condemning whatever happened in the decades before 7 October and after, in Gaza and the West Bank.

I am not a person who harbours Islamophobia or antisemitism. I have close friends on both sides. How can I be? How can I stay quiet? How can I – how can we not condemn the humanitarian crisis in Gaza? The starvation; persons murdered while desperately queueing for food; the destruction of nearly all hospitals, all schools, all support services; a country that has been flattened; the continuous displacement of 80% of the population in Gaza; the cold-blooded killing of aid workers while at work; the killing of doctors and nurses; whole families dying under the rubble; the killing of 56 000 persons, most of them women and children; the killing of journalists and the thousands of children who are either orphaned or mutilated.

We are told that this behaviour is acceptable, collateral killing. Stop killing journalists and let foreign journalists into Gaza and the West Bank to see with their own eyes and to report freely what they see happening around them.

It is not enough for a tear or two to come out of our eyes – the anger in you. We have to put pressure on our governments to press Israel and Hamas to come to peace.

In the meantime, let's give the children of Gaza a future and a dream of growing up in peace.

Thank you very much.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Saara-Sofia SIRÉN is next.

Ms Saara-Sofia SIRÉN (Finland, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mr President.

The situation in the Middle East is serious. It concerns the entire international community. My heart breaks for the situation in Gaza, the children, the families. It is right that we condemn the suffering of civilians, be it caused by terrorist groups or state actors. All countries have the right to defend themselves, but no country has the right for war crimes or violations of international law.

We demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire, removal of all obstacles to humanitarian aid, protection of civilians and aid workers and release of hostages. I am also deeply concerned about the situation in Iran, the nuclear question, as well as support for armed groups. These undermine security also here in Europe. Iran's support for Russia in Ukraine is an example of how conflicts and wars are interconnected.

I believe that the people in Iran want change. We need to continue supporting movements like Women, Life, Freedom, the voices of Iranian people. These voices are genuine and come from within, not from outside. And our job is to support justice, freedom and human rights. During past weeks, Israel and Iran were engaged in an open military confrontation with the US supporting Israel. Our message should be clear: the cycle of violence must be broken.

We must rely first and foremost on diplomacy and respect for international law, human rights, democracy and rule of law.

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

Sir Edward LEIGH is next.

Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, ECPA): Mister President,

I've been a friend of Israel for the whole time I've been in parliament for 43 years, and I fully support the right of Israel to defend itself. I condemn, utterly, Hamas and all their actions. I support the actions of the United States and Israel over the last 10 days. But I just want to be balanced in this.

Just because you are a friend of Israel doesn't also mean that you can't be a friend of Palestine. Just because you support the human rights of Israelis doesn't mean that you can't support the human rights of Palestinians. And we are not seeing that at the moment. The death of 1 500 medics in Gaza, the weaponising of food, the mass bombing – this is not proportionate. Israel has a right to defend herself, but she does not have a right to obliterate whole areas of Gaza into rubble.

And at the same time – and I've seen this with my own eyes – visiting the West Bank recently, it's not just me surmising, it's actually the policy of Prime Minister NETANYAHU not to have a two-state solution. I've seen with my own eyes Israeli settlers threatening Palestinian villagers and forcing them out of their villages. The action of the present Israeli government is an extreme policy designed to make a two-state solution impossible forever.

And I put this question to this Assembly. Are we not humanitarians? Do we not believe in the human rights of all people? Are all people not equal? Have not the Palestinians the right to yearn for their own nation and their own human rights? Just as the Jews for 2 000 years yearned for their nation and their human rights?

So let's be equal, let's be proportionate and let's support the Palestinians and the right of Israel to exist.

Thank you.

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

Alfred HEER is next. Alfred, you have the floor.

Mr Alfred HEER (Switzerland, ALDE): Mr President,

I'm somehow surprised about the discussion in this room. And you, sir, as a British citizen, a former occupying force of Palestine, you are not a very good example to talk about human rights. If you see what you did before 1948, I'm sorry to say so, maybe you're part of the problem.

But the main problem we have, the hostages are still being kept by Hamas. That's the root problem that we have. Israel is trying to liberate the hostages. They are trying to fight Hamas. And Israel is giving humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. You know exactly Hamas, what did they do with all the money we sent to them? They bought rockets that they can send to Israel. They made a military fortress out of Gaza. Did they use the money that we sent for humanitarian aid? Did they use it for their people? No, they keep their people hostages.

And if you speak about Iran, they made a ring of fire. They destabilised Lebanon with Hezbollah, Yemen with the Houthis. They were active in Syria with the Assad regime. And now it was the time that we had to destroy their nuclear capabilities. And Donald Trump tried it in a diplomatic way. You know it exactly. He was speaking with Iran. They had the option to renounce nuclear weapons. They refused it. And if you can't get through diplomatically, then you must use military force. I'm sorry to say so, but that's how the world is. And I'm happy that they acted together. And I'm convinced that Saudi Arabia and the Arabic neighbours of Israel will soon find peace and Iran will be isolated.

And if Hamas goes away, there will also be a bright future for the Palestinians. Free Palestine from Hamas.

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

Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI is next.

Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC): President,

Dear colleagues,

The situation in the Middle East doesn't give us time for a relaxed summer yet.

Gaza in particular is in extremely urgent need of international help. Also, for the ceasefire way towards the two-state solution and international humanitarian aid.

I want to welcome this report, which is quite balanced through this infected topic and managed to navigate through polarised issues.

But we are a house of human rights. We are not here to take sides, but we are here for the people, and we are here not to close our eyes to civilian victims. I underlined that the draft resolution says that we should not lose sight of the people of Gaza and that the main focus should be on tackling the humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in front of our very own eyes.

Israel started defending itself, but disproportionate attacks by Israel for 20 months in response to Hamas terrorist attacks have caused immense suffering and deaths of tens of thousands of civilians. UNESCO is giving us the figure of 15 000 child victims. As the text states, we must clearly and loudly condemn the clear violations of international law, all attempts to obstruct the distribution of humanitarian aid and attacks against civilians seeking aid.

I urge us all to call a ceasefire to stop these brutal attacks that have practically burned Gaza to the ground and allow humanitarian aid to reach the starving people, families and children and stop the suffering of innocent people still under siege of their destroyed land, hospitals, schools, homes, water, district systems and so.

So at least we have to require to let the rapporteurs to enter the zone of war.

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

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS. Nico.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD): Cyprus has always valued its strong partnership with Israel. We condemned from the beginning the horrific Hamas attacks of October 2023 and we fully support Israel's right to security and self-defence. However, the scale of their response in Gaza has gone too far. Thousands of civilians have been killed. Homes, schools and hospitals are in ruins. Access to water, food and medical aid is dangerously limited. Gaza's population is facing a severe humanitarian crisis. This level of destruction does not bring lasting security. It risks creating more instability and anger, not only in Gaza, but across the region. Children who grow up in rubble, who have lost everything, may carry pain and hatred into the future. We must break this cycle, not fuel it.

We urge Israel to protect civilians, allow full humanitarian access and act within international law. And we call on all parties to return to diplomacy. Only a political solution can lead to lasting peace. Both Palestinians and Israelis deserve a future of safety, dignity and co-existence. Let us act now, before more lives are lost and before peace slips further out of reach.

Thank you very much.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Nicos. Ms Seda GÖREN BÖLÜK Beluk is next.

Ms Seda GÖREN BÖLÜK (Türkiye, NR): Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

Before I begin, I would like to say that this speech will be dedicated to a little girl, Ward AL-SHEIKH KHALIL.

On the night of 25 May, Israel bombed a new school shelter in Gaza. Among the 35 victims, at least 18 children were burnt to death in the flames, while dozens of others were seriously injured.

Two classrooms burned to the ground, with many refugees sheltering inside. A video widely circulated on social networks shows a little girl, Ward AL-SHEIKH KHALIL, trying to flee the burning school.

I know we all watched in shame.

Unlike others, she managed to escape unharmed. That evening, however, Ward sadly lost her mother – who was a doctor like her father – and six of her siblings, buried under the rubble of the collapsed classrooms, which were then ravaged by flames. She survived. But can we really speak of life after such a tragedy?

That night, to escape death, little Ward had to walk over the bodies of her own family. The only thing she was able to take with her was a slipper, one of her brother's, which she never let go of.

After the horrific bombing, Ward cried out: "There was a lot of fire. I had to walk on the flames to get away. I had to walk on the flames to get away." What Ward experienced is no invention. It's a terrifying reality.

For months now, images from Gaza have confronted us with an unbearable reality. In the face of this reality, one word continues to be avoided: genocide. This silence commits us. It undermines the credibility of our institutions and calls into question our values.

Our responsibility here is not to look the other way, but to name the facts, to demand accountability, and to act to protect human rights where they are most violently denied.

Let me conclude with the words of the Gazan writer Nour ELASSY: "If human rights and morality mean anything, the Gaza Strip is the place where these values must endure or die. For if the world continues to look at us without doing anything, none of what it claims to stand for would be real."

Thank you very much.

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

Oleksii GONCHARENKO. Oleksii.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA): Thank you, President.

And I want to thank Israel. Let us thank Israel for what they are doing because we are here only talking and we are talking and we are talking again. We are making resolutions. But can you stop Iran from having nuclear weapons? With 1 000 resolutions, maybe with 1 million resolutions, can we stop Iran from having nuclear weapons? Oh, let us imagine if this Mullah's regime which killed so many Iranians. Yes, they're killing Iranians every day, this awful regime.

So what do we want? For them to have nuclear weapons? Maybe to attack Strasbourg by nuclear strike? Why not? Imagine Mr KHAMENEI now seeing this Assembly. I want to tell you, dear ladies, he will not like the way you look. He will not like the way we speak here. He will not like us at all. So maybe he will just send a nuclear missile at us. Why not?

So Israel is protecting the basic values we all have here. We're speaking here about women's rights. Who is protecting women's rights in the Middle East? Israel. We're speaking about democracy. What is democracy in the Middle East? Israel. We're speaking about human rights. We're speaking about rule of law. Israel. Israel. Israel. So instead of criticising Israel, instead of attacking Israel, we need to support Israel. If we can do nothing, at least let us not intervene and let us not attack Israel when Israel is doing its job, protecting Israel itself, definitely, but also all of us. All of us. Arm Israel! Thank you to Israel for what they are doing. Let's support them, not taking any steps to stop them because what they are doing is important for all of us.

Thank you.

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

Stefan SCHENNACH. Stefan.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

We are talking, dear Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, we are talking about Gaza. Gaza is probably the world's biggest humanitarian disaster at the moment. And when the previous Turkish speaker said that nobody dares to use the word genocide here - I have done so several times, including in the Austrian Parliament, including in this Assembly. What is happening in Gaza is genocide. It no longer has anything to do with Israel's self-defense. It is killing, it is murder. And that must stop. Starving people, depriving hospitals of any possibility of energy, shooting 190 journalists. That is not acceptable. We cannot accept that.

And furthermore, we cannot accept that criminal settlers in the West Bank believe that they can play sheriff here and simply harass or kill the Palestinian population. None of this is possible. This humanitarian crisis is alarming and it should not be overshadowed by other things. This is the biggest humanitarian crisis at the moment, which we must definitely and rightly call "genocide", because it is a breach of all international humanitarian law. That is a fact. And the latest report by the European Union also underlines this when it writes of torture, murder and an apartheid system.

With this in mind: stop the killing in Gaza and give the people food again!

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

Garret AHEARN is next.

Mr Garret AHEARN (Ireland, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President.

The situation in the Middle East is a central foreign policy priority for Ireland. Israel's blockade of humanitarian and commercial supplies for Gaza, imposed on 2 March, has rapidly deepened the hunger crisis in Gaza. Ireland is deeply concerned by the latest assessment by the IPC Global Hunger Monitor that the entire population of Gaza is facing high levels of food insecurity. With half a million people facing starvation, the small trickle of aid that is getting into Gaza is a drop in the ocean. Israel must lift the blockade immediately. The obstruction of life-saving aid by Israel is a violation of its international obligations. We are deeply concerned by the mass casualty incidents as Palestinians try to reach distribution centres.

We call on Israel to allow a full resumption of aid in accordance with international law and humanitarian principles and to enable UN and humanitarian organisations to work independently and to do their job.

Ireland urges all parties to return to talks aimed at securing an immediate ceasefire and hostage release deal. The remaining hostages must be released, and Ireland has consistently called for the unconditional release of all hostages held in Gaza.

Ireland is extremely concerned about the situation in the West Bank. Since January, Israel's military operations have displaced at least 40 000 people and caused destruction of civilian infrastructure and homes. The scale, speed and severity of this placement are unprecedented.

This is in addition to a rising trend of settlement expansion and settlement violence prior to 7 October, conducted within an environment of impunity. Ireland has strongly supported sanctions adopted by the EU against both individuals and entities involved in settler violence.

We welcome the announcement made at the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 May that the EU will conduct a review of the association agreement with Israel. Ireland and Spain first called for this step in February 2024.

And to conclude, I listened to the Israeli speaker talking about how they're not against the Palestinian people. Well, tell that to the 1 700 children under the age of one who have been killed.

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

We cannot hear you. Have you inserted your badge? Have you pressed the button?

Just press the button once.

Ms Carla MOONEN (Netherlands, ALDE): I am deeply concerned about the catastrophe in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza.

Palestinian people are suffering immensely from starvation, bombings, and forced displacement by the Netanyahu government. Too many innocent lives have been lost. Too many children have been killed. Too many families live in fear, in mourning, and without hope.

The International Court of Justice has ruled that there is a real and present danger of an infringement of the rights of the people in Gaza that the Genocide treaty should protect. We already see ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

As parliamentarians, we do not only have the political mandate but also the moral imperative to act. We need an immediate and real ceasefire in Gaza, the unconditional release of hostages and political prisoners and unrestricted humanitarian access. The access to medical care, food, and production is a non-negotiable right.

We must advocate for a peace process that recognizes the legitimate rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, confronts historical injustices, and ensures that all people can live in dignity and freedom in two states. Free from rockets, checkpoints, displacement and fear.

I call on all of us to urge our governments to pressure the Israeli government to comply with international law. Let history not remember us as passive witnesses to suffering, but as leaders who chose courage, action and compassion when it mattered most.

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

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD is next.

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Dear Colleagues, last January, we accepted a report from our Social Committee entitled *The absolute and urgent need to put an end to the humanitarian crisis concerning women, children and hostages in Gaza*. The report denounced the horrors being experienced by the Gazan population and the failure to respect international law. At the time, we had hope, because a ceasefire had come into effect. We had hope that humanitarian aid would be distributed to the Gazan population, that access to healthcare would be re-established, that children would be able to grow up in safety and return to school. Yes, we had hope.

But on 2 March, with the first phase of the ceasefire barely over, Israel decided to suspend all entry of goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip. All aid crossings into the Palestinian enclave were closed. From that moment until 19 May, the population of Gaza faced a critical risk of starvation. This situation is unprecedented.

Israel's behavior is a blatant form of illegal collective punishment and commits the war crime of using starvation as a method of warfare. Its declared intention to expand its military operations, annex territories and forcibly displace Palestinians in the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip, constitutes a grave violation of international law.

We have a responsibility, the member states. We must commit ourselves to putting an end to this humanitarian catastrophe by allowing experienced NGOs to enter Gaza to carry out food distributions, by securing them and not by shooting at the population who come to get a little food. We must call for a new ceasefire. Above all, we must uphold international law in order to promote a lasting peace.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Valérie. Benjamin DALLE is next.

Mr Benjamin DALLE (Belgium, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mr President.

Dear colleagues,

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has reached a critical point. Independent NGOs face severe restrictions. Aid is limited to narrow corridors under Israeli control. Civilians queue for hours for food or water. Some are shot. Many return empty handed.

Who can accept that people, including children, are starving while trucks are parked at the border, unable to enter?

This Assembly has spoken clearly: in January through Resolution 2582, and again in April during our urgent debate. We called for full and unconditional humanitarian access and compliance with international law. Those calls were not answered. The situation has only worsened.

I welcome a new Report and Resolution.

But let’s be honest with ourselves: we said these things already, in January, in April, and we were ignored. If we want our voice to matter, we cannot simply repeat our positions. We must demonstrate that this Assembly has the courage to act when its calls are disregarded.

And let me be clear: terrorist organisation Hamas bears grave responsibility. But Israel is a sovereign state, a democracy, and an observer to this Assembly. That status comes with responsibility, to uphold the values we defend here.

That is why I have tabled a motion to suspend Israel’s observer status.

Because our credibility as a human rights institution is at stake.

Let us prove that our values mean something. Let us prove that international humanitarian law means something, in words and in action.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr Armen GEVORGYAN, you have the floor.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, ECPA): Dear colleagues, the escalation in the Middle East is already echoing beyond its borders. These events pose a direct threat to the South Caucasus. The last five years of Armenia's geopolitical history make us understand that international institutions are losing their authority, universal norms are losing their relevance, national borders are losing their stability. And ultimately, each country is forced to have its own survival strategy.

The conflict in the Middle East has shown the importance of the partnership factor and the value of trust in relations. Unfortunately, for Armenia today, they are challenging. When we talk about values, we become pro-European. But when we need to deal with risks and resolve conflicts, we become a real part of the wider Middle East. And then completely different rules of the game come into play.

Optimistic expectations cannot fight the dangers on the ground. Unlike our organisation, recently, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation adopted an openly anti-Armenian resolution, which is weaponising religion against Armenian cultural heritage and Christian identity. The Council of Europe keeps a diplomatic silence and balanced approach on the Armenian-Azerbaijan track, avoiding speaking with moral clarity and political determination.

At the same time, European institutions are pushing Armenia to accept further so-called "bold compromises" in its relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which will ultimately undermine the long-term stability of Europe.

Mr Chairman, in the global region of the Middle East, the greatest support for Armenia today is not to hinder its efforts to strengthen traditional partnerships and not put it in new geopolitical dependencies. Forcing Armenia to abandon historical and objectively established geopolitical ties will only make it more vulnerable and open the door to new aggression.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

Now Mr LOUCAIDES has the floor.

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

I will speak in Greek.

I would like to start by saying that I am extremely satisfied because I can see colleagues from all political parties, from all ideological families, doing exactly what we are supposed to be doing here in this organisation.

We need to be on the right side of history. And the right side of history is quite straightforward in this matter. We are a human rights organisation. We are an outfit which seeks to safeguard democracy and the rule of law. We are an organisation which protects international law and international humanitarian law and that is why it is our duty as well as our obligation to fight as hard as possible and to call out as loudly as possible a genocide and to demand that the bombing cease, demand that Israel stop starving the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and demand that ethnic cleansing in Gaza cease. The apartheid regime that has been imposed on the Palestinians must end.

This is all happening in the only democracy in the Middle East. We cannot allow Gaza to be destroyed, and we have to put an end to complicity, either by silence or by supplying arms to Israel, and put an end to this genocide.

And I will conclude, colleagues, by saying that we should launch an appeal. We need to be on the right side of history, and therefore, we must pass all of the amendments which were rejected in the Committee on the basis of an argument, which sounds pretty much like Mr GONCHARENKO, and it's shameful and I am ashamed of what happened there.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Ms Salma ZAHID is next.

Ms Salma ZAHID (Canada): Honourable colleagues, last January, this Assembly passed a resolution condemning Hamas' appalling terrorist attack and the "unimaginable humanitarian crisis" in Gaza that has resulted from Israel's response.

That is "incessant bombing and ground operations." The resolution called for "an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and the immediate release of hostages."

Here we are, however, six months later, approaching two years of death and the destruction of Palestinian homes, hospitals, and schools, and tragically, too little has changed.

Wars have rules, and international law must be applied to everyone. I don't know how any parent can look at what is happening in Gaza and explain it to their children.

I don’t hesitate to say, as I have in the Canadian Parliament, that what is unfolding in Gaza bears the hallmarks of genocide. And in that respect, the International Criminal Court’s arrest warrants and South Africa’s proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice must be respected in the name of justice and accountability.

While today’s debate is rightly focused on the horror in Gaza, we must not lose sight of the broader picture. We must do everything in our power to hasten the realisation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, living side-by-side, in peace and security, with Israel.

This remains the only credible path to lasting peace. Recognition of the Palestinian State is long overdue. I applaud the European countries that have already taken that step. I hope more will follow, and Canada as well.

But as illegal settlements continue to expand in the West Bank, where settler violence and hateful rhetoric routinely target Palestinians, there are those who seek to foreclose that possibility permanently.

I visited The West Bank and Occupied East Jerusalem, as well as refugee camps in Jordan, in 2024, to meet Palestinian families and hear first-hand. They are forced to endure daily humiliations and inhumane treatment.

If we are serious about the two-state solution, about peace, then the time for bold action is now. Until peace is achieved there must be stronger sanctions. There must be a full two-way arms embargo. There must be accountability and justice for alleged war crimes.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Ms Louise MOREL is next.

Ms Louise MOREL (France, ALDE): Thank you President and the Rapporteur.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I'd like to commend the work of the rapporteur, whose report is, I believe, equal to the stakes: clear, firm and demanding.

Session after session, our Assembly returns to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. But this is no longer just a crisis, it is an unprecedented tragedy, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, far from subsiding, is becoming entrenched and spreading. Since the attack on 7 October, the human toll has been unbearable. More than 56,000 dead in Gaza, 80% of them civilians, according to the UN. Tens of thousands have been wounded, and just a few days ago, strikes killed civilians who had come to collect food from humanitarian distribution points.

My heart goes out to all the victims, to each bereaved family and to the relatives of the hostages, whether Palestinians or Israelis. The message from these families is clear. They are begging us to stop this war. They are waiting for us to act.

In this respect, I would like to emphasise a key sentence in your report, Rapporteur, the one that mentions the need to create, and I quote, "an inclusive political process aimed at laying the foundations for lasting peace, stability, respect and reconciliation between peoples". Let's be clear: this must go hand in hand with the recognition of two states. There can be no real peace without a sovereign, viable and democratic Palestinian state alongside Israel.

And on this point, France has been clear. It is ready to recognise the State of Palestine not only as a symbol, but even more as a political, diplomatic and strategic lever to break the deadlock. This must be accompanied by concrete measures: an effective ceasefire guaranteed by an international monitoring mechanism, the immediate release of all hostages, international justice without exception for the war crimes committed, and free, secure and massive humanitarian access to Gaza. These are the indispensable foundations of a true peace, a peace that cannot be based on revenge or silence.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Ms Aysu BANKOĞLU is next.

Ms Aysu BANKOĞLU (Türkiye, SOC): Dear colleagues, the humanitarian emergency we have witnessed in Gaza has reached unimaginable levels. More than 55 000 people have been killed, 130 000 people have been injured. These are devastating facts to which we unfortunately have become accustomed.

We check the latest numbers, underline the grave situation, express our wish for ceasefire, as well as unhindered humanitarian aid. We also say that hostages should be released. But we have to admit that we fail time and time again to take decisive action. It is commendable that we will be adopting a resolution today and we will be taking a stand against the grave injustice that the world is turning a blind eye to.

But we have to look beyond this chamber and this organisation. It is time we start mobilising our peoples and communities to put pressure on our parliaments and governments to make sure that the crimes of Israel are not condoned and, as we have seen lately, not encouraged by governments.

It is time we take responsibility and free Palestine from illegal occupation and settler colonialism. If we claim to stand for human rights, for peace, for international order, then this is the moment to prove it. Not with words, but with courage, with conviction and with concrete steps. The people of Gaza deserve nothing less.

Thank you.

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

Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues, I want to devote my speech to all women of Iran and other countries who are silenced, who are struggling and fighting for a voice, and very often to access education, to access the right to sing. Do you know that in Iran, for instance, women cannot sing? It's forbidden. Do you know that in Afghanistan, if you are a young woman, a child, there is no guarantee that you will receive an education? And that revolution in Iran, where women were singing and expressing their resistance through the music, was incredible. I'm very happy that in my life I had the honour to talk to some of them and I think our role here is to acknowledge their bravery.

I want to emphasise that when we talk about the Middle East, Iran, it's not just a political battlefield there. That's the area where there is lost trust and a lot of pain. How to recover from that pain?

A few minutes ago, the US President, Donald Trump, gave a press conference after the NATO meeting. He said that he came back a completely different person. He finally believed in NATO. So, dear Chair, dear President, I want to suggest maybe on behalf of this Assembly, we invite US President Donald Trump here to reflect and to talk with us about the future of international law.

I really hope that together we can change his views on international law and we can use this discussion as the invitation. That would be great. And I think it would be our role and even the mission of our European solidarity here. Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): When he can say a few good words about the Council of Europe, be sure Yelyzaveta will ask him to come.

So, Meryem GÖKA.

Ms Meryem GÖKA (Türkiye, NR): Thank you so much dear President and colleagues.

Israel's radical ultra far-right government continues a deliberate strategy of regional destabilisation through massacres in Gaza, attacks on Iran, Lebanon and Syria, and open defiance of international law. We condemn all acts that endanger peace. Justice must never be selective. What has been unfolding before our eyes in Gaza is not a war. It's a genocide. Despite the word's once promised, "never again". It's settler colonialism driven by ethno-supremacism and executed through starvation, bombardment, dehumanisation and forced displacement. It is the calculated erasure of a people's future. And yet the world delays, excuses, enables.

Approaching an aid truck has become a death sentence. Breadlines have become frontlines. Dystopian footage fills our screens daily. This is quite literally a textbook definition of dehumanisation. And this must never become the new normal. Conscience has reached its breaking point and it's rising across borders, across voices. The Madleen ship and international marches to Gaza were some of its responses. And once again, Israel blocked hope and morality.

As a country from the region, we know all too well our region cannot afford another war. President ERDOĞAN reaffirmed Türkiye's readiness to facilitate diplomacy and dialogue, offering the only viable path to just and lasting peace.

Dear colleagues, the world must stand for justice, not whitewash crimes under political pressure. How long will Israel remain the forever-justified, immune to consequences, exempt from morality, shielded from justice? I cannot help but ask, upon a recent unfortunate remark, what is the context of this so-called dirty work? Are we surrendering the rules-based international order to a system where power excuses everything, regardless of law?

Thank you.

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

Mr Kacper Maciej PŁAŻYŃSKI.

Mr Kacper Maciej PŁAŻYŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): Hamas' attack two years ago was horrible. But Israel's response is not justice. More than 50 000 Palestinians are already dead, most of them women and children. Another tens of thousands are wounded. Hundreds of thousands are homeless and starving. It's not justice. Also, volunteers of humanitarian aid organisations are being killed in Gaza. One of them was Polish citizen Damian SOBOL. I ask the Assembly to pay respects to all of the victims. I ask to give them a moment of silence.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Excuse me, colleague, maybe you are new in this room. Please sit down, be seated.

There are some rules that have been announced many times by me and the Vice Chairs. Whoever wants to ask for a minute of silence has to present the paper to the Secretariat and the Presidency, who is presiding at the time, will decide if and when. So if you want, you can continue your speech and give us a paper asking for the moment of silence.

Thank you.

Now I'm going to Saskia KLUIT.

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

As you know I've been a rapporteur for the humanitarian crisis for children and women in Gaza, so let me tell you about the children.

Children have the right to go to school, yet all schools and universities in Gaza have been bombed to pieces.

Children have the right to family, yet 40 000 Palestinian children are orphans.

Children have the right to safety, health and life and yet 15 000 children are dead.

Thousands and thousands of children have lost an arm or leg, or have been wounded otherwise very often after being directly targeted by snipers.

Children have the right to housing. All houses have been gone.

Children have the right to a homeland; 80% has been taken from them. They have no right to return.

Children have the right to food and water. They are hungry, they are thirsty. And if they try to get food, you know what they do get? They get bullets. They are being shot everyday. Tens of children, dozens of children are shot each day.

What kind of government does this to children? I mean, I'm so desperate. And what kind of politicians keep silent again and again? Why do we not speak about ethnic cleansing? Why do we not speak about genocide?

If we don't speak about this now, when do we do it? Then we lose all right of existence.

I am so sorry. But if we do not act today, if we do not accept the migration amendments, we can just as well bury humanitarian law. We can bury it in the ground, the Palestinian ground, next to the children who are there lying dead after us, doing nothing.

So please, dear colleagues, let's act. Please.

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

We will connect now online with our colleague from Israel, Mr Boaz BISMUTH.

Boaz, are you with us? We listen, you have the floor. Boaz, we cannot hear you. Is there a problem with your microphone? Do you need to press any button there? No, we cannot hear you. Maybe you can use the microphone that Meirav had earlier, or was it the same microphone? No, sorry, I cannot listen. I cannot hear you. Okay, Boaz, please stay. Please stay online. I will go to the next speaker and I'll come back to you.

Ms Lianne ROOD is next.

Ms Lianne ROOD (Canada): It has been almost 630 days since Hamas terrorists carried out the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust – murdering, torturing, and kidnapping innocent civilians.

Fifty hostages remain in captivity. The majority are believed to be dead. Today's debate highlights the urgent need to put an end to the war in Gaza – a goal everyone here in this place shares.

I am certain much of this conflict could have been avoided... [Interrupted by the President]

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Lianne, can you go closer to the microphone, please?

Ms Lianne ROOD (Canada): I am certain much of this conflict could have been avoided, and that we would be on a path toward long-term peace if Hamas had released the hostages and disarmed.

Palestine is not the only country who foolishly refused to act in the interests of global peace. After decades of warning, Iran pursued its weaponised nuclear agenda while failing at the bargaining table.

Justifiably, Israel intervened before Iran could complete their schemes and follow through on their abundant threats towards this neighbour.

In the words of the Canadian Conservative Party Leader, Pierre POLIEVRE:

"I think the idea of allowing a genocidal, theocratic, unstable dictatorship that is desperate to avoid being overthrown by its own people to develop nuclear weapons is about the most dangerous and irresponsible thing that the world could ever allow. If Israel were to stop that genocidal, theocratic, unstable government from acquiring nuclear weapons, it would be a gift by the Jewish state to humanity."

I am glad this gift has been given, and hope the people of this unstable region are able to overthrow the harmful regimes they have been forced to abide by for far too long.

President TRUMP announced he has brokered a peace deal, and we will see if this will last.

It is up to the Palestinian people to remove Hamas and decide whether hatred of Israel is greater than love for the people of Gaza.

It is up to the people of Iran to remove the Supreme Leadership Authority and end the hatred of Israel and the Western world so they may live in peace and prosperity.

Throughout history, Israel's enemies have tried and failed to destroy the Middle East's only true liberal democracy. I truly believe, that ordinary people across the region long to live in freedom, peace, and security.

Since October 7th, and now with recent events, they have learned again that Israel, when provoked, will not hesitate to respond forcefully and with the aid of powerful allies.

As the G7 leaders reaffirmed last week in Canada, Israel has the right to defend itself.

Thank you.

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

Nerea AHEDO is next.

Ms Nerea AHEDO (Spain, ALDE)*: Thank you, yes, I will be brief.

First of all, I want to say that we express our deep concern for the state of affairs in the Middle East, the instability which has been created in the area and is drawing attention away from the terrible situation in Gaza that we have talked about on many occasions. I am also concerned by the conflict, which runs the risk of widening to become a global conflict, and we have a situation now in Iran going further than the previous situation in which people were deprived of their rights, compounded by the number of displaced persons due to the conflict.

A ceasefire in Gaza is needed now, and also on the front unilaterally opened by Israel and the United States in Iran. Trump was supposedly going to put an end to all these wars, and quite the opposite is now happening. He is provoking or triggering more, and we're seeing a great degree of instability. What we need now in Gaza, of course, is first and foremost, the hostages to be released, that goes without saying, but then we need to have proper access to humanitarian relief with guarantees. This is absolutely essential, but there is a real trap now. We've got children dying of starvation, but the only option then potentially is to be gunned down while queueing up for food. So they are forced into that trap.

I find it sad to see supposedly-democratic governments, some even observer states in this very Council, not complying with international standards and not respecting human rights. We are living in uncertain times, and in Europe, we have a situation in which we study the situation a great deal, but, in fact, do very little.

Now, there is a situation, of course, we have Russia and Belarus and the invasion of Ukraine, and then, of course, we have the genocide in Gaza. But the two are not the same. They cannot be equated with one another. We have to be very careful because we are seeing a diversification of different hotspots or conflicts flaring up, but we cannot forget that all conflicts and humanitarian crises are important. The Middle East does not mean that we forget Ukraine, not to mention Sudan. We have to try and work to de-escalate tensions in the region and try and make sure that we find a solution that is based on dialogue and democracy in order to try and find peace, stability and multilateralism.

Thank you.

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

We will now go back to Israel.

Boaz BISMUTH. Boaz, are you there? Can we try to dialogue with Israel again? Can you please try again, Boaz?

Since I see that we are still having technical issues, I will go to my colleague, Dan ALDRIDGE. But we will try to connect again with Israel. Dan.

Next is Iwona ARENT.

Ms Iwona ARENT (Poland, ECPA): Mr President, dear colleagues, Gaza is suffering.

Women, children, simply people are dying under the rubble and from hunger. The International Court of Justice has found that there is a real risk of genocide. Amnesty International's Human Rights Watch confirm that we are dealing with mass war crimes. The United Nations is sounding the alarm. People in Gaza are starving, bombed and have no access to water or medical care.

Innocent children suffer the most. Do Palestinian lives matter less than the lives of the other nations? Are human rights only for some? We here, as an ongoing organisation that was founded to protect human rights, should be the moral voice of our organisation in the face of the suffering of other people. Silence in the face of crime is complicity.

Poland, which I represent, knows the price of suffering and occupation. My mother stood at the wall of the dead and told me about the fear of a small child watching loved ones die. She also told me about the fear of hunger. Today, here in our organisation, we must express our opposition to the Israel blockade of Gaza, where one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world is taking place.

We must stop this silence. Thank you.

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

Zeynep YILDIZ is next.

Ms Zeynep YILDIZ (Türkiye, NR): Thank you.

For 628 days, Israel has caused a collective trauma, not only for Palestinians, but for all humanity, through its genocidal crime perpetrated against the people of Gaza, carried out with insane cruelty.

From the outset, we warned that if international institutions fail to act, Israel's violation of international humanitarian law will endanger the entire world.

Today, we see with deep sorrow that this warning has tragically come true. This course is filled with lessons humanity must urgently internalise. It has revealed that to prevail or to be defeated is ultimately a matter of moral stance. Those who surrender to Zionist capital for political interests have been defeated. The international institutions whose dysfunction has been laid bare have been defeated. Those who turned Gaza into an open-air prison, then a graveyard, who deliberately targeted children, women, journalists and hospitals, have been defeated. Those who once feared the Mavi Marmara, which carried playgrounds for children, and now fear a small boat of 12 people carrying only a bit of flour, have been defeated.

On the other hand, those who had the courage to name genocide as it is have prevailed. Those who marched for Gaza across the world, who stood by humanity, have prevailed. Those who remained in their destroyed cities, the dignified people of Gaza, resisting starvation and genocide, have truly prevailed.

In this moral reckoning, it is Israel that stands defeated, overwhelmed by the conscience of our shared humanity. Gaza, through its endurance, now bears the mantle of moral supremacy.

Dear colleagues, to give meaning to our presence under the umbrella of this Assembly, I urge, once again, that it falls upon us to act, to go to Gaza with a fact-finding mission to ensure humanitarian aid reaches those who are in need, through a diplomacy guided by parliamentary conscience.

Thank you very much.

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

Perran MOON is next.

Mr Perran MOON (United Kingdom, SOC): *Meur Ras.* Thank you, Mr President.

The breakdown of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the devastating return to violence in Gaza have had catastrophic consequences, both for the people of Gaza, and potentially for the remaining Israeli hostages. The scenes of human suffering are beyond shocking. It is now glaringly obvious that the Israeli government's response to the horrific attacks of 7 October have been wholly disproportionate. As European allies, we can and must work with international partners to amplify our collective voice and push for an immediate ceasefire and a path for peace.

I am deeply troubled by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Aid must never be used as a political tool. Blocking essential supplies, goods and energy is a breach of international humanitarian law. The most desperate scenes of starving people coming under fire from what appear to be Israeli military forces needs to be urgently and independently investigated. I am also deeply alarmed by the impact on healthcare services. The targeting of medical staff and facilities is a disgrace.

While UK ministers are working to apply pressure through close collaboration with our allies, the Council of Europe must continue to press for urgent action to end the crisis. I strongly support the UK government's recent sanctions targeting individuals responsible for violence in the West Bank, including Israeli Ministers SMOTRICH and BEN-GVIR. And the UK has suspended all free trade negotiations with the Israeli government. The recent escalation between Israel and Iran and the intervention by the US has added a dangerous new dimension to the conflict. De-escalation must be a priority.

The path to peace, the path to a two-state solution is found not at the nose of a missile, but at the point of a pen. We must continue to raise our voices for a just, lasting peace for the people of Gaza, the hostages, and for all those poor souls caught in the crossfire across the Middle East of this truly devastating conflict.

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

Lesia ZABURANNA is next.

Ms Lesia ZABURANNA (Ukraine, ALDE): President, dear colleagues, this is one of the most difficult topics for the Ukrainian delegation. We highly understand all the pain and we highly sympathise with all those who suffered from this strategy and from this conflict. Because we met with the same axis of evil which includes Russia, Iran, North Korea and others in 2014. All our kids, all our people. If you ask small kids what the Shahed is, they know the answer. Because Iran's Shahed drones kill our kids every night, every day. Even yesterday, we had about 20 people which were killed. Among them, a lot of small kids.

Iran is Russia's accomplice in the war against Ukraine. Tehran supplies Moscow with drones and technologies, which are systematically used to kill our people and to destroy critical infrastructure. And we have to admit that Russia is highly interested in the conflict in the Middle East. Why? Because they need money. And when the conflict started, oil prices increased. And this is very good for the Russian budget for the war.

So, who is interested in this conflict? A few hours ago we had the NATO summit declaration, which mentioned that Russia is a long-term threat for the alliance. And now we together have to understand who with whom we are. With the axis of evil or with democratic values.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. I will go back to Israel now. Let's make a third try with Boaz BISMUTH.

Mr Boaz BISMUTH (Israel): President, does it work?

I would like to thank you, Mr President, for being patient. And I'm so glad. I wish I could have spoken before because I heard the speech of Ms Saskia KLUIT and I was supposed to speak just after her. And I would like to say, in the most empathic way, I would like to reassure, Israel not only is not targeting children, we're targeting terrorists. And you know that perfectly well.

Yet I would like to know if her tears, if the tears we have seen, if the sincere tears I saw, if she had the same tears for little Kfir and Ariel BIBAS, one and four years old, when they were kidnapped after the massacre of the 7 October. Murdered, bare hands. When she says little Palestinians deserve school.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Boaz, I'm afraid that we cannot hear you. We heard you for the first minute, but then there was a lot of noise. Let us try. Let us try once again. Can you try? No, I cannot listen. I cannot hear you. Let us be patient, colleagues. Let us be patient.

Boaz, can you try once again? No. I will come back to you. I will come back to you.

Colleagues, we continue with Edite ESTRELA. Edite.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC): Thank you, dear President.

Dear colleagues, how many more children must die before we call this a genocide? How many mass graves? How many bombed schools, shattered hospitals and starving babies?

Children are dying of hunger and a lack of medicine. Not because aid doesn’t exist, but because it is being systematically denied. Trucks are blocked. Relief workers are killed. Starving people are shot at while waiting for food. This is not collateral damage. It is barbarism.

Prime Minister Netanyahu calls it “self-defence”. There is no defence for targeting civilians. There is no justification for starving children.

How is it possible that this inhumanity is committed by a people who themselves were victims of the Nazis’ inhumanity?

I say this not to insult the Jewish people, whose suffering should never be forgotten, but to remind us of what Hannah ARENDT, herself Jewish, warned us about: the banality of evil. Evil doesn't always shout. Sometimes it comes wrapped in flags, in orders, in silence.

We must not be silent. Not now. Not ever.

We must demand an immediate ceasefire. We must open the gates to aid. And we must hold those responsible, Netanyahu and his generals, accountable for crimes against humanity.

This is not just about Gaza. This is about who we are.

Thank you.

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

Cat ECCLES, if I pronounce it correctly, is next. Cat.

Ms Cat ECCLES (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you.

And I rise to tell you of my recent visit to Israel and Palestine to bear witness to the situation on the ground. I met with politicians and civil society on both sides. I visited the Kfar Aza kibbutz and the Nova Festival site where the 7 October massacres played out. The kibbutz sits just one kilometre from the Gaza border. And as I looked on into the distance, drones buzzing above my head, mushroom clouds of smoke, followed by the boom of bombing, littered the landscape. I was witnessing the genocide first-hand, safe behind a fence.

Meanwhile, back in Tel Aviv, life continued as normal, families visiting the beach, going for dinner, shopping. And this juxtaposition I cannot reconcile, but I think it sums up the essence of this conflict. Those who have freedom and rights, and those who do not. We can all agree the ongoing assault on Gaza and the West Bank is intolerable. Yet since the strikes on Iran started, the world's attention has shifted away from the Palestinian people. We must not allow these atrocities to become normalised. We must not stop speaking up and we must call for an end to this conflict. It is duty-bound on every one of us, colleagues, under the goals of this organisation to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law, we must insist on an immediate ceasefire, a return to diplomacy, allow aid into Gaza, release of hostages on both sides, and political will to work towards a sustainable peace option. The State of Palestine must be recognised, but we cannot let them move forwards with Hamas at the helm.

There are no winners in war, only human tragedy and trauma.

Thank you, colleagues.

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

Larysa BILOZIR is next.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE): Mr President, dear colleagues, this debate reminds us that continued hostilities, obstructions of ceasefire, hostage-taking and denial of humanitarian aid only deepen suffering in the Middle East, in Ukraine and beyond. We must respond with decisive political and humanitarian actions. Conflicts in the Middle East, Indo-Pacific tension and African escalations form one global chain with Russian influence at the centre. Crises benefit Moscow in energy market directly fuelling the Russian war machine. As a Ukrainian from a country facing daily missile strikes, displacement and civil loss, I urge you to see this not as isolated wars but as one global confrontation.

Ukraine and the Middle East are connected not by geography but by shared weapons, allies and and strategies. World War 3 won't start with a declaration. It begins when Iranian Shahed drones exploded in Kyiv, when North Korean missiles entered Russian stockpiles and flew over Europe, when Moscow offered Iran nuclear co-operation while buying its Iranian drones by the thousands, showering Ukrainian heads. This is the authoritarian axis. In the Middle East, Russia fuels chaos: it supports Hamas, meets with Hezbollah and props up ASSAD using bombing tactics in Syria on Ukraine.

These conflicts are not separate they are co-ordinated in Moscow, tested in Syria, armed by Pyongyang, echoed in the Middle East. This is a reality unfolding now. Peace is not a slogan; it's a responsibility we must act on together.

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

Stéphane MAZARS is next.

Mr Stéphane MAZARS (France, ALDE): Thank you, President.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past few days, attention in the Middle East has focused on the Israeli and American strikes aimed at bringing a welcome halt to the mullahs' nuclear arms race. But this episode should in no way divert our attention from the dramatic situation in Gaza and the suffering of its civilian population, now caught between war, hunger and despair.

Over 40,000 dead, nearly 2 million displaced. As a French member of this Assembly, I would like to express with seriousness President Emmanuel MACRON's position. Like many heads of state, President MACRON has been calling for months for an immediate ceasefire, for the removal of obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid, and for the essential respect of international law. For to deprive the people of Gaza of health care, food, water and shelter is not only a violation of the law, but a profound denial of our humanity.

Of course, no lasting peace can be envisaged without a clear political solution, the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This position has been supported by France for many years, and was reaffirmed only recently. For this to happen, full recognition of the Palestinian state must become a reality. This is a clear commitment that France has also made to the international community.

Condemning the acts of violence committed by the Israeli government today - acts for which the perpetrators and those responsible will have to answer to history and to the competent courts - does not mean amnesia or denial about the origins of the conflict. Of course, we have not forgotten the horror of the 7 October massacres, nor the full responsibility of Hamas, a terrorist organization, in triggering this spiral of violence. But today, the military response, the hunt for terrorists, the reprisals carried out in Gaza, all come at a human and moral price that is unacceptable.

Finally, I'd like to relay a strong message from the families of the Israeli hostages still being held. In their grief, these families are constantly begging their own government to agree to a ceasefire, because they know that every day of bombardment in Gaza puts the lives of their loved ones in greater danger.

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

Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues,

The people of Gaza continue to endure endless torment, yet the world remains mostly silent and inactive in the face of their suffering.

We cannot remain silent any longer. The international community must act urgently to prevent the further loss of innocent lives.

We all share an undeniable obligation to uphold human rights and respect international law. When these are so blatantly violated, our silence contradicts our core values and undermines the very purpose of this Organisation. By failing to respond with meaningful and concrete action, we betray those principles.

Dear Colleagues,

The people of Gaza do not need our pity; they need our action. They need us to stand with them, not only in words, but in deeds.

Gaza’s agony is not merely a regional crisis; it is a global failure. We can no longer afford to remain silent. We must take decisive action.

We must not only raise our voices and demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire, uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid, and accountability for those responsible for this tragedy. We must also take concrete, collective action to ensure that these demands are met.

Thank you.

Mr Denis BEGIC (Sweden, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mr President, dear colleagues,

The escalation of war in the Middle East from Gaza to the West Bank, from Iran to Lebanon is not only a regional tragedy. It is a global danger. A danger to peace, to international law, and to the human values that bind us as Europeans.

This is not the time for neutrality between the powerful and the displaced. It is the time to reaffirm our commitment to human dignity, international humanitarian law, and the protection of civilians whoever they are, wherever they live.

The situation in Gaza is catastrophic. We have condemned the attacks that triggered this cycle of violence and we must equally condemn the disproportionate response that has turned entire cities to rubble, left children starving, and blocked lifesaving aid. There can be no justification for the use of starvation as a method of war. No justification for attacking food convoys, schools, or hospitals.

This resolution rightly stresses humanitarian access must be guaranteed, international law must be respected, and those responsible for violations must be held accountable. We cannot allow aid to be used as a political weapon. And we must never allow the forced displacement of an entire population.

Colleagues, the resolution also points to the wider regional picture and it's a dark one. The conflict between Israel and Iran, the role of proxy groups, and the continued destabilisation of Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

But amidst all of this, we cannot lose sight of the people. The families in Gaza trying to survive under bombardment. The hostages whose lives remain in limbo. The refugees in Lebanon and Jordan who fear being forgotten again. And yes also the civilians in Israel who live with fear and grief, and deserve peace just as much as anyone else.

The path forward is clear even if it is difficult. We need a permanent ceasefire. We need renewed diplomacy, not escalation. And we need to support a political solution based on a two-state reality not endless conflict and occupation.

Let me end by saying this the measure of our commitment to peace is not what we say when things are calm, but what we do when things fall apart.

This resolution shows we still have a voice. Let us use it not just to speak, but to act.

Thank you.

Mr Cemalettin Kani TORUN (Türkiye, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear Colleagues,

What is happening in Gaza today is neither a war nor a conflict. It is an organised genocide and a crime against humanity, and it is time for everyone to acknowledge this fact. For the past 20 months, Israel has been committing massacres in Gaza. It continues to bomb hospitals, schools, and residential areas indiscriminately. Just as people were once burned alive in concentration camps, today, those waiting in line for humanitarian aid are being shot at. The target of these massacres is not only human lives but also a people's right to exist, their collective memory, and their future. This is not a conflict between two equal sides. The aggressor and the oppressed are clear. Israel is systematically trampling on human rights and international law.

At the same time, Israel is attempting to legitimise its latest attack on Iran under the pretext of a nuclear threat. Despite Israel being the initial attacker, the Western world continues to cling to the mantra of "Israel has the right to defend itself." This is hypocrisy in its most blatant form. The so-called civilised world is rewarding the aggressor.

This must end now.

Stop supporting the NETANYAHU administration, which refuses to recognise either the European Court of Human Rights or the International Court of Justice.

If you truly believe in the rule of law and human rights, which you so frequently cite, then act now for a ceasefire and a lasting peace based on a two-state solution.

Otherwise, you will be remembered in history as hypocritical governments that used human rights only when it served your interests.

Mr Kristoffer LINDBERG (Sweden, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Thank you, President,

Honourable colleagues,

International law applies in the Middle East as well. Israel, of course, has every right to defend itself against Hamas' horrific terrorist attack. Hamas must be condemned. The hostages must be released. Now.

But the reckless killing. The use of starvation against the civilian population as a weapon goes far beyond self-defence. Everyone knows it. Everyone sees it.

More than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli government's warfare. Among them over 15,000 children. That equals an entire school class of children every day for the past 19 months. Dead.

Humanitarian efforts to reach Gaza are blocked and the borders closed for delivery of food and medicine. The Israeli government has also declared its intention to take full control of Gaza. This amounts to forced displacement and ethnic cleansing.

This must come to an end.

Israelis and Palestinians have the same right to live their lives in peace, freedom, and security.

An ceasefire must be established, and food, water, medicine, and other essential supplies must be allowed in to the civilian population.

The road to peace is long and full of obstacles. But nothing but peace can be the goal. This assembly must do what we can to be a clear voice for international law, for peace, and for the equal value of all human beings.

Stop. The. Killing.

Thank you.

Ms Pelin YILIK (Türkiye, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear President,

Dear Colleagues,

Today, in Gaza, we bear witness to one of the longest and the most horrifying tragedies in the history.

Since the start of Israeli aggression back in September 2023, death toll in Gaza exceeded 55 thousand of people. Moreover, immense suffering was further compounded by the forced displacement of Gazans, obstruction of humanitarian aid and destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Gaza is now on the brink of famine and water shortage.

Israeli aggression has already reached genocidal proportions.

In the face of the humanitarian catastrophe and immense suffering in Gaza, silence, neutrality or inaction is not acceptable.

Regrettably, Israel enjoys total impunity for its crimes. It evades all international calls for the unhindered humanitarian aid, cessation of its aggression and permanent ceasefire.

Instead, Israel launched bombardment of Iran. That is another clear violation of international law.

This relentless cycle of violence not only inflicts immediate suffering but also undermines the prospects for peace and stability in the region.

It is imperative that this Assembly urgently steps up to demand an immediate end to Israeli aggression and work toward a just and lasting two-state resolution that respects the rights and dignity of all.

Thank you.

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

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

Thank you, Chair.

Please allow me to contribute four points to our debate:

Point One: The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is the result of a blatant violation of international law and international humanitarian law by the Israeli Armed Forces.

Condemning terrorism and national or religious fanaticism is a necessary starting point. But we should also condemn every breach of international law- without applying double standards.

We must continue to demand an immediate ceasefire, the termination of ethnic cleansing in Gaza, the release of all hostages of Hamas, the resumption of humanitarian aid and the active promotion of the UN-proposed two-state solution, with the recognition of a State of Palestine peacefully and securely coexisting with the State of Israel.

Point Two: The so-called “pre-emptive” war launched by Israel against Iran risked triggering a regional spillover, especially following the military involvement of the USA. An effective and durable ceasefire is the first step, but it should not be the final one. Seven years after US withdrawal from the JCPOA, a new agreement on the nuclear program of Iran is needed more than ever, ensuring transparency, accountability and international cooperation. Sustainable peace can only be achieved through diplomacy, not through the strength of weapons.

Point Three: Europe should closely monitor the transition of Syria to a new regime which for the time being appears unable, at least, to safeguard minorities, as demonstrated by the recent terrorist attack in a Greek Orthodox Church in Damascus. Europe should be actively involved in Syria’s democratic institution building.

Point Four and Final: This Organisation was founded on Europe’s commitment to uphold human rights, peace and democracy throughout our continent and beyond. This must remain our compass today.

We cannot allow ourselves to be drawn into geopolitical analyses and cost-benefit calculations based on national interests.

Peace and the dignity and security of all peoples in the Middle East should be our sole purpose.

Today we send a clear, unwavering and strong message that we defend international law and a rules-based international order.

This is the very reason why are here today.

This is what the Council of Europe stands for.

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

Unfortunately, the technical issue with Israel could not be fixed.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers. The speeches of members on the speakers list who have been present during the debate but have not been able to speak may be given to the Table Office for publication in the official report.

I remind colleagues that the type-written texts can be submitted electronically, if possible, no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

I call now on Ms SCHOU, our rapporteur to reply. Ingjerd, you have three minutes. We cannot hear you.

Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): It's okay? Yeah.

Thank you, President.

Dear colleagues, thank you for this debate, and also for the seriousness with which you have engaged in this debate.

I said at the outset that this is a deeply polarising issue. And it is. There are no easy answers here. But the work of this Assembly is not to mirror division. It is to rise above it and seek clarity, unity and a way forward, especially when the situation is most complex.

Therefore, I have tried to find our consensus on two urgent principles. First, the absolute necessity of de-escalation in the region and the need for renewed commitment to multilateralism. And second, we must speak with one voice on the need to protect civilians from the horrors of war. This means stopping the suffering in Gaza. We must keep advocating for humanitarian solutions and an end to intolerable suffering. This need to try and bridge a consensus has been my guide for this report, and in the consideration of the amendments.

I have held as a principle that the Assembly does not and cannot substitute itself for a court. Nevertheless, we have a clear responsibility to speak out and take action when confronted with a serious violation of international law.

This report does indeed outline Israel's obligations under international law and calls for all states to uphold their duties under international law.

I repeat what I said, President, at the start of this debate. The role of the Assembly must be clear: resolve to unite around our values, even in the face of division, even in the face of conflict. We must work here, in this Assembly, for the peace that democratic security builds. And we will not accept the erosion of international law and reaffirm our commitment to peace, dignity and justice.

Thank you, President.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does the Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, Mr Bertrand BOUYX, wish to speak?

Bertrand, you have three minutes.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to thank you for the quality and seriousness of the debate we have just had. This is a profoundly difficult subject, fraught with emotion, suffering and division. But that's precisely why our exchange today is necessary.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your commitment, your frankness, your words and your sense of responsibility. I would first like to thank our rapporteur, Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU, for her work on this report. She has carried out this task with serious balance and in a spirit of responsibility that we have found throughout today's debate.

I would also like to highlight the in-depth work carried out by the Political Affairs and Democracy Committee, under the leadership of its rapporteur on the situation in the Middle East. I am referring to Ms Dora BAKOYANNIS, who has been following developments in this crisis for many months, always seeking to make the voice of dialogue and international law heard.

I particularly welcome the role of the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World, chaired by Mr FASSINO, which continues to follow events closely, while striving to define a constructive role for our Assembly in an increasingly unstable regional context.

The active participation of Israeli and Palestinian delegations in the Committee's work, including at recent meetings, and their presence here today, are tangible signs of this approach. Maintaining this space for discussion, fragile though it may be, is in itself an important political act, and I wanted to emphasise it today. It is precisely this that gives meaning to our work, keeping multilateralism alive, not in theory, but in practice, by keeping the channels of dialogue open, even in moments of intense tension.

The strength of our Assembly lies in its ability to bring people together, to talk to each other, even in difficult times, and to defend common principles. This debate does not, of course, erase disagreements, but it does affirm a shared conviction that international law, the protection of civilians and the quest for peace must remain our compass, and our compass alone.

Once again, I would like to thank all our colleagues for this difficult but indispensable debate.

Thank you all.

Vote: Global peace under threat: halting the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and addressing the wider conflict in the Middle East

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

The debate is closed. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, Document 16210, has presented a draft resolution to which 26 amendments have been tabled.

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that amendments 3, 15, 23, 18 and 21 to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved by the Committee, be declared as definitely approved. Is that so, Mr BOUYX?

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Yes, Mr Chairman.

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

If no one objects, I will consider the amendments to be approved. Any objections? No.

So the amendments are approved. And I repeat, it is Amendments 3, 15, 23, 18 and 21.

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 1, 24, 5, 6, 22, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 25, 16, 19 and 20 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as definitely rejected.

Amendments 26 and 13 were also rejected by two-thirds of the Committee. But this will need to be taken separately, because if Amendment 26 is agreed, Amendment 13 falls.

Is that so, Bertrand?

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): That's right, Mr President.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. If there is no objection, I will consider the amendments to be rejected. Any objections? Yes.

So, if there is an objection, we will need to verify that the objection has the required support of 10 people. So it's obvious that's more than 10 people. And thus the request of the Committee is rejected. So each of the amendments will be taken individually in the order in which they appear in the compendium. Amendment number one. Yes, I am listening.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS (Lithuania, EPP/CD): Point of order.

Yes, it's in. Dear President, can you investigate, please, the issue why those guys from the Knesset were switched off and give and come back to us with your investigation? Well, people, they're known, some of them in Israel, as opposition members against NETANYAHU. Others are in favour, but that was the democratic procedure, and we have to know their voices. Look to their biographies. It will be important to have that. Sir, please.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Two points. First of all, we are not talking about guys, if I may. We are talking about colleagues, parliamentarians. The second point is that I'm not Sherlock Holmes to investigate. Of course I can ask, but the reply is obvious. One of our colleagues was there and we heard her at the beginning. Then we made at least 10 tries to listen to the other colleague of us, who was listened by us for one minute. And then, suddenly, we all have heard that there was noise.

So for sure the Secretariat will ask what happened and if we have any info on that, we will come back. It's the connection that was very difficult, as we can all understand.

I go now to amendment number one. I will call Mr Paul GALLES to support amendment number one. Paul, you have 30 seconds.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you, Mr Chairman,

The Migration Commission voted by a large majority in favour of Amendment number 1, as will be the case for the other amendments we'll be discussing next.

Our concern was for balance. Our definition of balance is perhaps a little different, but we wanted to emphasise this and include Israel's response in the text to achieve this balance.

Thank you.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

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.

Amendment 1 is agreed.

Amendment 24. I call Mr LOUCAIDES to support Amendment 24. George, you have 30 seconds.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL): Dear colleagues,

We are rightly in paragraph four and many other paragraphs criticising, rightfully, Iran about what it is, a theocratic oppressional regime.

Nevertheless, at the same time we have an act of aggression by Israel and the US that violates international law. And this amendment strikes to include this perspective of the reality as well, in order to be correct.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

You can take the floor and speak against the amendment. 30 seconds.

Mr Kacper Maciej PŁAŻYŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): Okay. Well, I think this amendment is going too far. We don't have the security info on how advanced the nuclear programme of Iran was actually or is actually, or what progress has been made in the last years. And I believe that all of us would not like to have another North Korea in the Middle East.

Thank you.

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

The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

Ingjerd, I didn't ask you because it was the Committee that rejected.

So the vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 24 is rejected.

I call Mr Paul GALLES now to speak on Amendment 2. 30 seconds, Paul.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Amendment 2 is about the movements that were reported from Tehran. And I think this one has been accepted, Mr President, because it has also been accepted by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. If I remember well, if I see it well.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment? Ingjerd, including you, if you want to speak against the amendment. Okay.

What is the view of the Committee? Bertrand.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

The Commission's position on this Amendment number 2 was acceptance by a large majority.

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

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 2 is agreed.

Amendment 4. I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 4. Paul.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Mr President, thank you very much.

We only added the number of the resolution which has been voted on here by the Assembly. So the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons has voted unanimously, I think, for this amendment.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Okay, thank you. Does anyone wish to speak against? No. I shall now put the amendment to the vote. The vote is open.

Just a moment. Mr BOUYX.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Thank you.

The Commission's position was unanimous approval.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Unanimously approved. Okay.

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 4 is agreed.

Amendment 5. I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 5.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Mr Chairman, these are the numbers we received from UNICEF.

We want to put them in the text to be more concrete.

So, the Migration Commission was overwhelmingly in favour.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority. But I have to ask first, sorry, if anyone wishes to speak against.

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): I wish to oppose this because I believe that the figures need to be verified. And I'm not sure that the UNICEF figures are trustworthy because they get them from the Gaza Information Ministry and Health Ministry. I'm opposed.

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

The Committee, I repeat, rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

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 5 is agreed.

Amendment 6, I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 6.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you, these are clarifications that we felt were important.

The Migration Commission voted overwhelmingly in favour of this amendment.

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

Alfred, yes, Alfred HEER.

Mr Alfred HEER (Switzerland, ALDE): This is propaganda that you're writing, I'm sorry.

Israel is delivering enough water and enough food. And when you saw, when they presented the hostages, those Hamas terrorists, did you see how well fed they were? And did you see the hostages? How thin they were? So stop lying.

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

Amendment 6 is agreed.

Amendment 22. I call Zeynep YILDIZ to support Amendment 22. Zeynep, 30 seconds.

Ms Zeynep YILDIZ (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Chair.

The proportionality is important and the current violations of Israel to the international humanitarian law is far from self-defence. That's why we moved that amendment. Thank you.

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

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): I believe this amendment assumes guilt without due process or any investigation. And I don't think this organisation should be making declaratory accusations. And I think it's legally and morally inappropriate for us to do so. It has not been confirmed. We can only say that if there's a proper investigation and it's confirmed, in my opinion.

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

Colleagues, colleagues. We have a lot of amendments, and a lot of work, and the night is long.

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.

Amendment 22 is agreed.

Amendment 7. Paul GALLES to support. Paul.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Mr Chairman,

Our Migration Commission was of the opinion that there was not only the risk of violation, but that this violation had already taken place. This is why the Migration Commission voted overwhelmingly in favour of this amendment.

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

Lord BLENCATHRA.

Press the button.

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): Yes. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy strongly rejected this amendment on the basis that it has not been proven. If it has been proven, we're happy to go along with it. If it has not been proven, then we should not be saying so.

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 result to be displayed.

Amendment 7 is agreed.

Amendment 8. I call Mr Paul GALLES to support.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you.

Our Immigration Commission saw it as its mission to put into the text, at any rate, the great suffering in Gaza's hospitals, with all the consequences that are part of it.

Our Commission therefore voted overwhelmingly in favor of this amendment.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anybody wish to speak against? Lord BLENCATHRA.

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): I think the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy again rejected this, with a huge majority, on the basis that the amendment fails to point out that Hamas have deliberately hidden their terrorists inside hospitals, their missiles are being fired from inside hospitals. They have militarised hospitals which unfortunately and regrettably, under international law, make them a legitimate target.

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 result to be displayed.

Amendment 8 is agreed.

Amendment number 9. I call Paul GALLES to support amendment number 9.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you, President.

In the interests of balance, we also wanted to make it clear in the text that parts of Israeli society are on this side, and so our Committee on Migration once again voted overwhelmingly in favour of this amendment.

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

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): President. And unless my memory fails me, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy...

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Lord BLENCATHRA, I have given the floor to Ms SCHOU.

Press the button. Okay, now, you can go.

Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): We have a competition here. So that's why. Sorry.

I want to speak against, because it's confusing to have this domestic reflection in this paragraph which is about the actions of the international community and their calls on Israel to meet its international obligation. So that's why I think it's, in a way, it's not the right place to have it here. Thank you.

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

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 10. Paul GALLES to support Amendment 10. Paul.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you. Also, after long discussions, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons had the impression that this sentence is important. We put it into discussion and into the vote and the Committee on Migration voted in favour.

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

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): Again, Mister President, I think our Committee rejected this with a very large majority on the basis that it is not true.

It is the United States that said it wanted to remove the Gaza people elsewhere. That is not the policy of the Israeli government. And Operation Gideon is not about removing people from Gaza. It's about occupying Gaza permanently, keeping the Gaza population, but trying to destroy Hamas. It is technically untrue.

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 result to be displayed.

Amendment 10 is agreed.

Amendment 11. Mr GALLES, support the amendment.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you again, Mr Chairman.

Adding the word "serious", *serious*, is very important to us. It's true that every crime is serious, but we wanted to add this word. So the Immigration Commission voted in favor of this amendment.

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

Does anyone wish to speak against?

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.

Amendment 11 is agreed.

Amendment 12. I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 12.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you again, Mr Chairman.

This is a very important amendment, because it concerns terminology.

I know it's difficult, we had this discussion in the Committee, and I'm following the mandate, the mission of the Committee that voted in favor of this amendment, and to propose it here.

So to put in our text what's really going on.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Ingjerd, to speak against.

Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Do you hear now? Yes. Thank you. I want to speak against this amendment because, as we said at the start of this meeting, we are not a court. We are not in a position to substitute ourselves as a court. We are trying to build a consensus. To build a consensus report on the urgent need to protect civilians and for regional de-escalation.

I feel that these amendments take us away from that goal. So I want to vote against.

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 result to be displayed.

Amendment 12 is agreed.

Amendment 25. Mr LOUCAIDES. Sorry, my mistake. We are all making mistakes.

I repeat. *Amendment 12 is rejected.*

Amendment 25. I call now Mr George LOUCAIDES to support Amendment 25. George, you have 30 seconds.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL): Our colleague, Ayman ODEH, is under a petition for the expulsion of him from Knesset. And we urge our colleagues from Knesset not to proceed with expulsion, to stop the procedure.

Ayman ODEH is an advocate for the Arab Jewish Partnership for Peace and Justice. And it's one of the few voices in Knesset that is opposing what is happening now in Gaza by the government of Israel. So if Knesset and Israel is a state of democracy, should respect what we are asking.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Ingjerd SCHOU, you have the floor to speak against.

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

Yes. I recommend voting against this amendment because this is a domestic parliamentary issue that is outside the scope of the title of this report.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority, 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 25 is rejected.

Amendment 26. I call George LOUCAIDES to support Amendment 26. George.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL): It's the similar amendment that we have voted earlier. I have given the reasoning for tabling this amendment.

Allow me to say furthermore that as we have heard in the discussion that Israel had the right of self-defence. There was no self-defence issue. It was an act of aggression that happened.

And at the same time we have Tulsi GABBARD rejecting on 25 March that Iran has nuclear weapons or intent to have nuclear weapons. This is the intelligence of USA.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Pablo HISPÁN has asked to speak against.

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD): Yes, thank you President.

This amendment supports Iran and condemns the United States. That's not only unbalanced, it's a false issue. And I think that if this Assembly reaches and approves a resolution that supports Iran and condemns the United States, we will be out of scope in this moment of history and what is happening now in the Middle East.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Pablo. 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. Amendment 26 is rejected.

Amendment 13. I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 13.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Yes, thank you, Mr President. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons thinks that it is not only important to be concerned about the direct hostilities which have been there since a longer time, but also about the breaches of international law that are happening now. So the Committee has been in favour of this.

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

Ingjerd SCHOU has asked for the floor to speak against.

Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): President, I also recommend here that we vote against.

We are not making judgements about international law in this report. We need to keep the message clear about the need for de-escalation and restraint.

Thank you.

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

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.

Amendment 13 is rejected.

Amendment 14. Mr GALLES to support Amendment 14.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons was in favour, as far as I know. I remember also the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. So, yes, we are in favour on our side.

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

What is the view of the Committee?

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): That's it, then. I was waiting to be given the floor.

The Commission's position is approval. We have approved this amendment.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The Committee approved the amendment.

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 14 is agreed.

Amendment 16. I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 16.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Amendment 16 is about the weaponisation of humanitarian aid. Many of us this afternoon have talked about this topic, which we think is very important. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons was in favour of this amendment.

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

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): I think the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy are strongly opposed to this as well. On the grounds that it misses out the fact that Hamas has been weaponising aid. They've been commandeering all the aid into Gaza and using that for their own political ends, keeping a lot of it for their own fighters, but also being in charge of distribution, which was quite unfair. So they weaponised aid as well. And the motion should say that.

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

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.

Amendment 16 is approved.

Amendment 17. I call Mr GALLES to support Amendment 17.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you, Mr President.

It's a topic that we have discussed several times. We will also do it tomorrow here in the Assembly, in a side event.

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons is in favour of this amendment.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against? What is the view of the Committee, Mr BOUYX?

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): The Commission approved.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Approved by the Committee. 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 17 is agreed. Amendment 19. Mr GALLES to support Amendment 19.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thanks again.

For the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, it's important to have humanitarian assistance that is sufficient and adequate.

So the Committee is in favour of this amendment.

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

Ms Ingjerd Schie SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Yes, President.

I want to speak against it because here, I think we cannot support calling on the Committee of Ministers through a resolution rather than a recommendation, I would recommend. And it's an inappropriate version for the call. So I think this would rather be a very good thing to have in a resolution, but not here, because the Committee of Ministers, we cannot address them like this.

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 result to be displayed.

Amendment 19 is agreed.

Amendment 20. I call Mr GALLES to support 20.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur for opinion): Thank you, Mr President.

I made a mistake before because I was talking about 18 and it was 19, but I'm very happy that we accepted it.

So, about Amendment 20. Also, here, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons is in favour because it sees in it a very important instrument.

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

Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS (Estonia, ALDE): I'm strongly against this amendment. While it's good that the EU is conducting a review, the review has no conclusions. And in this amendment, we already throw blame on Israel as if recommending what the outcome of the review should be. This is very unbiased. We shouldn't accept it.

Thank you.

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

Amendment 20 is rejected.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution as amended, contained in Document 16210. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

Colleagues, we vote for the draft resolution.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft resolution in Document 16210 as amended is adopted.

Colleagues, the next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Social Mobilisation".

Yes. Who is asking for the point of order? Yes, I'm listening.

Ms Carla MOONEN (Netherlands, ALDE): Dear President,

As head of the Dutch delegation I would like you all to pay attention to the following. Several times, my Dutch colleague, Ms Saskia KLUIT, has been personally attacked by members of the Knesset. Each time, they mention her name. It happened yesterday, it happened again today, this afternoon.

On behalf of the Dutch delegation I ask to stop these personal attacks and references. The Dutch delegation, and I hope you all, want to protect the work of our valid colleague, Ms Saskia KLUIT.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The leader of the Dutch delegation has put her point on the record.

Debate: Social mobilisation, social unrest and police reaction in Council of Europe member States: is there a need for a new social contract?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I'm continuing by saying that the next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Social mobilisation, social unrest and police reaction in Council of Europe member States: is there a need for a new social contract?", Document 16191, presented by Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

In order to finish by 7 p.m., maybe a bit later, because we are already late, we shall interrupt the list of speakers a bit earlier.

I call Mr FRIDEZ. Pierre-Alain, when you are ready, you can take the floor. You know that you have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes at the end to reply to the debate.

Colleagues, I remind you that all other speakers have 2 minutes this afternoon.

So, Pierre-Alain, when you are ready, you can take the floor.

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Rapporteur): The motion for a resolution accepted by the Bureau, which led to this report, had its origins in the massive demonstrations in France against pension reform in 2023. The protests were on an unprecedented scale, marked by violence, injuries and extreme tension. The reform was forced through, and with it a profound sense of injustice, incomprehension and disconnect between some citizens and those who govern them. But France is not the only country facing such situations. Across Europe, social mobilisations are multiplying, tensions are rising and the response of the authorities is sometimes questionable. Think of the clashes in Greece linked to the rail tragedy in 2023, or the recent nights of rioting in Northern Ireland. Elsewhere again, demonstrations have turned violent, law enforcement has been criticised, and confidence in institutions has waned.

The draft resolution was inspired by the situation in France, and my fact-finding visits were made to French stakeholders. France is often cited as an example in the explanatory memorandum. But in the text of the resolution, I have been careful not to mention any particular country, because yesterday, today or tomorrow, all our countries could be concerned.

The plan of the explanatory statement follows a three-step approach inspired by the pillars of the social contract. First, to examine the role and doctrine of policing in our democracies. Secondly, to identify the institutional and social mechanisms that deepen the fractures in society. Thirdly, to propose concrete reforms to restore trust, prevent violence and revitalise participation.

The tone of demonstrations regularly gives the impression that they are no longer the expression of simple demands. They reflect a social contract in crisis. With serial industrial action, weakened authorities and increasing violence, the picture is worrying. In response, the state is adopting an increasingly heavy-handed approach to policing. Since 2018 in France, for example, during the gilets jaunes crisis, there seems to have been a turning point. We've moved from policing based on distance and restraint to a logic of rapid, mobile and firm intervention. At the heart of this change is a weapon: the LBD, or defensive bullet launcher. Officially less lethal, this weapon has caused serious injuries. Widely used by non-specialised officers, it has become a symbol of increased security. This is why the draft resolution calls for a reconsideration of the use of intermediate weapons in the context of policing demonstrations, reserving their use to specialised and properly trained units.

But beyond weapons, it is the philosophy of policing that is called into question. The GODIAC project, carried out in several European countries, proposes a different approach, that of de-escalation. This model is based on four pillars: knowing protest groups well, facilitating demonstrations, ensuring constant communication and targeting only problematic individuals in a robust manner. The draft resolution calls for the active promotion of the right to demonstrate within a democratic framework by prioritising de-escalation as a guiding principle in the management of demonstrations, in place of pre-emptive questioning, prevention strategies and any repressive approach, and by reinforcing dialogue and mediation before, during and after demonstrations.

The second chapter opens with a clear observation. Tensions between law enforcement and young people from working-class neighborhoods in certain French cities have become a major flashpoint. In 2023, the death of Nahel, a 17-year-old killed during a traffic stop, sparked ten days of rioting. These mobilisations reflect a feeling of injustice, isolation and of a lack of recognition. At the heart of this unrest were repeated identity checks, seen as humiliating and discriminatory. Young people perceived as Arab or Black are twenty times more likely to be stopped. In 2025, the French Human Rights Ombudsman even denounced an institutional policy of evicting certain populations from public spaces. The draft resolution calls for action to combat all forms of profiling, particularly ethnic profiling, during identity checks, and for the introduction of an effective system of traceability and monitoring of checks to prevent discriminatory practices, even if unintentional. It calls for mandatory modules on cognitive and discriminatory biases, and crowd management, to be included in police training.

The restoration of community policing, which has disappeared in France, is also a promising way forward. It is more rooted in local areas, and officers are better trained and more in touch with residents. Finally, the draft resolution recommends sustained investment in ongoing training and equipment of law enforcement officers, to enable them to carry out their duties in the best possible conditions.

The third and final chapter carries a simple message. Democracy is not consensus, but dissent. It thrives on debate, contradiction and inclusion. In recent years, this dynamic has become more fragile. Two trends are fuelling this divide: protest is perceived as a threat, and on the other hand power is becoming centralised, to the detriment of counter-powers. At the time, the gilets jaunes movement in France expressed raw anger, a desire for dignity, a need for recognition. At the time, the refusal to engage in dialogue reflected a loss of trust. The protest against the pension reforms in 2023 continued this trend. The use of Article 49.3, although constitutional and perfectly legal, was seen as a show of force. This fuels the idea of a government deaf to its people. Other countries such as Switzerland, Denmark and Germany show that more inclusive forms of democracy, based on participatory instruments, and a culture of compromise can prevent this mistrust. The draft resolution calls for inspiration to be drawn from approaches based on a political culture that fosters inclusive debate in public policy-making.

In summary, no, I'm not denying the presence of rioters. No, I'm not downplaying the violence suffered by law enforcement. They deserve recognition and protection. But yes, it must be said that certain uses of force have been disproportionate. And yes, these excesses fuel mistrust. My report does more than simply highlight shortcomings, it is based on experiences from different countries, on hearings and testimonies. I've listened to

all sides of the debate: police forces, unions, young people from the suburbs, NGOs, parliamentarians, human rights defenders and researchers. They all say the same thing: we need to rebuild trust, we need respect, we need meaning.

So, in conclusion, I propose four clear courses of action. Firstly, rethink the use of so-called intermediate weapons, in particular the LBD. Second, put an end to discriminatory identity checks. Third, restore the democracy of dialogue. Fourth, establish a culture of consensus. No, we will not respond to anger with force in the long term.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

I give the floor now to Mr Francesco VERDUCCI.

Mr Francesco VERDUCCI (Italy, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): President, I want to thank Mr Alain FRIDEZ for his work.

This report addresses a neuralgic point in any society, namely the dynamic between mobilisation, social protest, institutional power, and law enforcement.

While authoritarian regimes suppress critical voices, the heart of a democracy is participation and conflict in peaceful and nonviolent forms.

We have a duty not only to protect this freedom but to encourage it. Instead, many democracies today are being distorted by a creeping authoritarian twist that restricts and prevents space and freedom to demonstrate, and this is unacceptable. This often happens in systems that concentrate power in the executive at the expense of parliaments. Never in a democracy should demonstrators and police forces face each other as enemies.

Remember what happened in Genoa in the summer of 2001 during the G8 summit, I remember what happened to my generation, the repression, the abuse, the torture against defenceless young people who just wanted to make their voices heard by the powerful of the world.

The security forces are an indispensable garrison to protect our freedoms, which is why any abuse of power, even single or isolated, is intolerable, because it is perpetrated by those whose job it is to defend each of us our rule of law.

That is why it is right that every uniform has a name and an identification code, to strengthen the trust and the pact between citizens and law enforcement, which in a democracy no one, not even some bad ruler, can set against each other, and which instead stand together, and together are the strength of our democracies.

Thank you, President.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Francesco.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister Speaker.

Thank you to the rapporteurs.

One word that best describes this new social contract is trust. Trust in institutions, trust in democracy and trust of the people in us that we can deliver. Deliver in wages, deliver in economy, deliver in security, deliver in social stability.

Thus, a partnership that promotes this report between institutions and citizens is fully recommended. We have seen various influences on our democratic systems, from foreign interference to populist parties that offer solutions that, in practice, do not work, but sound appealing.

In our democracy's elections are accepted as regular, free and fair. And citizens believe that change must occur through democratic means, not violence. These are the values we promote, and these are the values that the Group of the European People's Party promotes.

When we discuss social mobilisation, social unrest and state response in Council of Europe members, Croatia brings important lessons to the table. First, we learned that peaceful mobilisations can lead to systemic political change. Second, we recognise that a vibrant civil society plays a crucial role in oversight of the power and pushes the reforms. Third, we learned that democratic maturity includes tolerance and dissonance. It requires political courage to hear criticism.

What we can bring to the table is also experience from the systems that we built from the European Social Fund, the partnership between the government and civil society. We have doubled the number of people working in civil society in the last 10 years and invest more than €300 million a year into civil society.

To conclude, we must act now, and we must show trust between citizens and institutions. That's the way forward, and we congratulate the rapporteur.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Marko.

Mr Simone BILLI has the floor.

Mr Simone BILLI (Italy, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, President.

Standing by our national police is not an ideological position, it is a national responsibility. Because it concerns two pillars of democratic life: public safety and social cohesion.

Those who make accusations against our police, when such claims are unfounded and unsupported by solid evidence, undermine every single security check and erode the vital trust between citizens and the State.

My colleagues, this approach has two serious consequences.

First, it damages the credibility of the Council of Europe itself, whose authority depends on impartiality and institutional integrity. Rhetorical excesses or lack of concrete proof compromise the legitimacy of the work of the Council of Europe in front of a public opinion and national parliament.

Second, my friends, it damages the credibility and morale of the national polices, fostering mistrust, social tension, and a climate of insecurity. It discourages police from taking necessary action in complex or high-risk situations.

My colleagues, I often hear it directly from police officers: “If we intervene to stop a fight involving non-European citizens and someone gets injured, we end up under investigation. If the police are the ones injured, we still risk our lives. Either way, we lose.”

Unfortunately, certain narratives, sometimes even within the Council of Europe, can contribute to this dangerous climate. My colleagues, that is unacceptable.

We therefore invite international monitoring bodies, when raising concerns about national police forces, they must present clear and solid evidence, citing reliable sources and transparently listing all meetings and consultations held during their missions.

Bodies like the ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) Commission must ensure that their press releases and public statements reflect an impartial and institutional tone, so as not to compromise the credibility of the entire monitoring process.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): So the floor goes now to Mr Mr François CORMIER-BOULIGEON.

Mr François CORMIER-BOULIGEON (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Dear colleagues, Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ's report and the resulting resolution are, to say the least, a source of astonishment.

It is astonishing that a Council of Europe report, contrary to our customary practice, should focus to such an extent on just one of its member countries, France, without taking into account either the insights of colleagues from the French delegation with whom the rapporteur has met, or the conclusions of the monitoring procedure to which France was subjected some time ago, with the agreement of the French delegation, incidentally.

It is astonishing that a report should ignore the fact that France is an exemplary constitutional state, where all civil servants act in strict compliance with the laws passed by the people's representatives, deputies and senators. And the law you mentioned on pensions is no exception to this rule.

It's astonishing how little you know about the unprecedented acts of violence perpetrated by armed extremist groups against property and people in France and elsewhere, starting with the unionized demonstrators protected by the French republican police force. And these acts of violence have nothing to do with democracy, Mr. Rapporteur.

The resolution is surprisingly naïve on two counts. Naïve in its observation that the origin of violence lies in the lack of social cohesion in our societies, and in its recommendation that it would suffice to re-establish a social contract to make the violence of extremist groups disappear. Quite apart from the fact that this is a perfect illustration of the culture of excuses, which solves nothing - quite the contrary. Our Assembly cannot ignore the fact that France devotes a great deal of attention to social cohesion, devoting 57% of its national wealth to public action, the vast majority of which is spent on social issues. This fact alone invalidates the thesis of the resolution.

Nor can our Assembly ignore the fact that these groups are radically opposed to the rule of law, representative democracy and the free market economy, nor that these movements are often manipulated by foreign powers attempting to interfere in each of our democracies.

And this report is a form of peaceful interference.

For all these reasons, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe will vote against the resolution.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you.

Yes. A point of order?

Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Yes Mr President,

I would like to ask, if you would please ask the honourable members here not to refer to "your report", the report is from the Committee and not from one person. I think it is good if we keep the content on the content of reports and not on persons.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The point of order is right. We all refer to the Committee. Mr George LOUCAIDES has the floor.

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

Dear colleagues, let me begin by thanking the rapporteur for this timely and important report.

Across Europe, in many Council of Europe member states, we see an alarming trend. Excessive police violence and mass arrests, not only during these protests, but even at peaceful demonstrations.

This debate, focused on restoring the social contract as the foundation for protecting the right to peaceful assembly, is both timely and vital.

The right to protest, dear colleagues, peacefully, is not a privilege. It is a fundamental democratic right and a cornerstone of civic life. Yet, this right faces increasing attacks. Let us be clear. Violence, whether by individuals during protests or by state authorities, must never be tolerated. But we must ask why so many civilians take to the streets. The answer lies in the social and economic injustice surrounding us. When people confront unaffordable housing, dismantled health and welfare systems, climate crisis impacts, systemic racism and political exclusion, when their voices are ignored by institutions claiming to represent them, their mobilisation becomes not only understandable, but also necessary.

What is unacceptable is when democratic governments respond to legitimate grievances not with dialogue, but with batons, repression and tear gas.

The Assembly, dear colleagues, has made progress through Resolution 2435 and Recommendation 2230. Yet more is needed. We must tackle the root causes of social unrest, not only the symptoms. Austerity, social exclusion and discriminatory policing erode trust and fuel unrest. The solution lies in renewing a shared social contract founded on dignity, justice and equality. This means investing in public services, community policing, meaningful participation and viewing the state as a rights guarantor, not an agent of fear.

True, social peace is not imposed. It is built through social justice, democratic dialogue and equal respect for all.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr LOUCAIDES. The floor now goes to Ms ZAMPA. We are not hearing you.

Ms Sandra ZAMPA (Italy, SOC): Thank you. [in English].

Thank you, Chairman.

Mr FRIDEZ's report poses for all of us a theme for reflection that goes far beyond, as Mr FRIDEZ himself mentioned, geographical limits, – France in this case – and focused on France because of the topicality of certain demonstrations, episodes that have opened the discussion in so much of the rest of Europe.

The theme brings to our reflection the very close nexus of what a society is and what a social contract is today and points us to a number of important limits, but also to new thinking necessary to return to the creation of a social contract that restores to citizens the desire to participate in the destinies of their society.

So those who want to stand by the police, who are to be thanked for what good the police do in the collective interest and for the protection of our individual and collective freedom, must today question the negativity of pushing the police into confrontations because there is no capacity to give society any other response.

Our societies experience a great malaise due to so many issues that I certainly cannot point to. I just want to mention most recently the Covid pandemic that has taken away the ability of citizens to express themselves, to participate, to work, to live in a certain sense. And today we need to know and understand that. So we really need to rethink our social contract.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Sandra.

Sir Christopher CHOPE has the floor.

So, we proceed with Mr Bertrand BOUYX.

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

Dear Colleagues,

The report by Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ, adopted by the Social, Health and Sustainable Development Committee, calls for a number of comments.

Firstly, while the title of the report adopts a general perspective, as does the draft resolution, which makes recommendations to all Council of Europe member states, the explanatory memorandum is particularly critical of France. Why not? But it is at odds with the stated aim of the report.

The report focuses exclusively on France. In this respect, the introduction states, almost ironically, that "France did not have a monopoly on social mobilisation and the use of force in the event of excesses". This sentence comes almost as a balancing act, given that no other country is mentioned negatively in the body of the report, and any mention of a country other than France is part of a desire to highlight the good practices that can be identified, accentuating the impression of a report that is excessively critical of France. So, while France doesn't have a monopoly on the use of force, we're left a little unsure as to which other countries use force. The innocent reader of the report would be left with the impression of a country of barbarism in the middle of an ocean of democracy, or else that the report is leading a personal crusade.

What's more, the draft report only marginally reflects the point of view of the many representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the members of the French delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe whom the rapporteur met during his visits to Paris, while largely emphasising the point of view of his interlocutors from civil society, with a number of factual inaccuracies to which I shall not return.

Lastly, this report is presented on behalf of the Social Affairs Commission, but goes well beyond its scope to focus solely on the regal issues of police and justice. This poses a problem for the perimeter of our standing committees.

All in all, this is a report that lacks seriousness and seems to be trying to replay the return match of the monitoring report discussed last year in this hemicycle. It weakens the Council of Europe and discredits its Assembly.

I will obviously vote against it.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Mr Yunus EMRE has the floor.

Mr Yunus EMRE (Türkiye, SOC): First of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur. This report is of great importance both in terms of its timing and its content.

Social mobilisation has been on the agenda since the earliest days of democratic politics. As democracy has evolved to foster consensus-building and the establishment of a space for critical and rational debate, there has been a decline in the expression of social unrest through protests. However, at the most advanced stages of democratic consolidation, the door must remain open for social discontent to be expressed through protest. Attempts to ban or obstruct this, for whatever reason, reflect a fundamental mentality problem and run counter to the core principles of democracy. I would like to express my support for the main views and recommendations highlighted in the report.

In my own country, Türkiye, I would like to draw your attention to two waves of discontent that have emerged under the current government. The first began in May 2013 in Gezi Park in Istanbul and quickly spread across Türkiye. Initially sparked by environmental concerns, the protests swiftly evolved into a broader movement against authoritarianism in the country. To this day, there are individuals imprisoned due to their involvement in the Gezi Park protests. Osman KAVALA was sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment. Can ATALAY, who was elected as a member of parliament from the city of Hatay in the last elections, along with three others, was sentenced to eighteen years in prison and remains in jail.

More recently, on 19 March this year, following the detention of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, widespread protests took place. Many were detained during these protests, and a significant number of demonstrators were sent to prison. These protests also brought to light issues of injustice and economic problems in my country, with a strong demand for democracy being the central theme.

In conclusion, at a time when democracy is facing many challenges, there is a great need for active citizenship. The topic we are discussing today is of major importance in terms of citizens' participation in addressing public issues.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Okay, thank you very much.

The Secretary of the Council just informed me that we can have another three speakers.

So now I give the floor to Ms Denitsa SACHEVA from Bulgaria.

Ms Denitsa SACHEVA (Bulgaria, EPP/CD): Colleagues,

I sincerely commend the initiative of this report and appreciate the work of our rapporteur, Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

Currently in Europe we are witnessing many social protests and rallies, including in my country Bulgaria, which also have violent outcomes. Recently, during an anti-euro protest, some police officers were harmed during the rally and the building of the European Commission and the European Parliament in Sofia was damaged. In many cases, the police officers were unable to exercise their function to keep the public order and to prevent the perpetrators' violent acts.

There is a clear trend that some police officers are afraid that after imposing force to maintain the public order, they will be accused of excess use of force. This situation is definitely not acceptable. Free demonstrations are part of democracy only if they are peaceful and non-violent. In this regard, I would like to list some of the Bulgarian initiatives, such as the Declaration adopted by the Standing Committee of the Assembly in 2015 in Sofia, during the Bulgarian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, as well as the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of 1999 on Education for Democratic Citizenship. This report may be considered in the context of the current discussions on the New Democratic Pact for Europe. The New Democratic Pact for Europe could be achieved through dialogue involving not only the governments and parliamentarians, but also civil society, the media, associations of workers and entrepreneurs, churches and all other social interlocutors. For this purpose, the Council of Europe is the best place among the institutions of the European architecture where such a dialogue could take place and produce satisfactory results.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Denitsa.

And now the floor goes to Mr SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA)*: Thank you, President.

These documents, which have been submitted, in my opinion, and other speakers before me have said so, are disconcerting on the one hand. Rhetorically, we're told to think of various things, but the ideological bases and the intellectual bases seem very flimsy, thinking about what really lies behind them, the ideas that have been shared and hence, when it comes to participative democracy, the policy of consensus.

Now, I have been aware of various studies about this, but we haven't thought about Plato or Aristotle or others, and it is also surprising because a reference is made to take into intermediary bodies. Now, this is a traditional idea, I think, this sort of social idea of the Catholic church.

More precisely, this report refers expressly to social mobilisations in 2023 in France, and regarding the pension reform. We have had an internal discussion here, in this house, just about France. We were aware of what had happened outside, La France Insoumise, and what they were doing there. I thought this was a disaster for France and for Europe, but I don't understand this idea here of dealing with a national problem and debating it here.

Now, there seem to be many different contradictions, and it creates a negative image of the forces of law and order in the most old, the stale and outdated way of thinking of the left. And I don't manage to understand that, and I don't know why this text has been submitted.

When we look at this, we can see just how clear it is when a reference is made to the possibility of participatory democracy. Also, when we hear about euthanasia. Well, you'll understand, it's not the example of anything, rather it is just a group of a few people who decide to meet together in some cinema.

And for all of these reasons, we cannot share the sentiments behind this, and we hear about parties and states and when things are overburdened with the ideology and we hear about new social contracts. Social contracts, as you know, are intellectual fiction. Nothing more than that.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

So, last but not least, Ms Sandra REGOL.

Ms Sandra REGOL (France, SOC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll speak in French. [in English]

Strengthening our democracies is a major issue for all of us here, and it's even one of the issues that brings us together. A living democracy is permeated by criticism, opposition and social mobilization. So thank you very much, Mr. Rapporteur, for your work, which, using France as an example, asks us to reflect collectively on the social foundations that our democracies could and should share.

The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen reminds us of what the police are: "The guarantee of the rights of man and of the citizen requires a public force: this force is therefore instituted for the benefit of all." This is not anecdotal. In France, the police are thought of as the tool that guarantees the rights of all, and that's why they are loved, but sometimes also infinitely criticized, because they are crucial to our democratic foundation. It's particularly interesting, and always complicated, to pose the social question through the prism of security, because we often drift, as we've just seen, from a fundamental debate to a question of "are you for or against the police?" It's a question that makes absolutely no sense. Let me remind you that the police are the guarantors of our rights. The only question is how and with what means they can best do their job.

Yet the doctrine of policing in France has changed little in recent years, and in some cases has even regressed. We have barely moved away from the internationally condemned "*nasses*", which provoke violence during demonstrations, whereas our European neighbours moved away from them in the 1980s. And every time these acts of violence come to light, the international news gives France a very degraded image, which we all regret.

A number of countries present in this Assembly have chosen to use research and science to inform their debates and to help their forces of order, their police and their gendarmerie move forward. This is not the case here, and I regret it. Why don't we choose to move upwards towards what works best?

I've heard a lot of criticism of this report, and yet point 7 of your proposals seems to me to be of the utmost importance, and I'll conclude on this point, Mr Chairman. The growing complexity and difficulty of the missions entrusted to the forces of law and order, as well as the daily commitment of their agents to ensure the protection of people and property, call for institutional and societal recognition commensurate with the responsibilities they assume.

That's what it's all about, ladies and gentlemen: taking a step back and addressing the substance of the issue. It's not a question of beating up on France, it's not a question of beating up on the police, it's a question of asking what kind of societal vision we want. So, thank you for this report, which I will gladly support.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms REGOL.

Ladies and gentlemen, I must tell you that right now we have some good and some bad news. The good news is that we are proceeding with the speakers. The bad news is that President ZELENSKYY will be here 45 minutes later. So 9:15 p.m.

So we proceed with the list. And the next speaker is Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK from Ukraine.

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear sir, dear colleagues, today we are confronted with a profound and timely question. Do our democracies need a new social contract? I want to thank Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ for his courageous and thoughtful report. It speaks not only to France or Western Europe, but to every one of our countries.

As a member of parliament from Ukraine, I know how fragile democratic trust can be and how high the price of its loss is. We are defending not only our land, but also the right for our citizens to participate in public life without fear, with dignity and with confidence. Even before the war, the Ukrainian nation faced this challenge. During the Revolution of Dignity, we saw what happens when the state stops listening. Violence may silence people temporarily, but it never erases the demand for justice.

This report makes a powerful point. When citizens, especially youth and marginalised groups, are excluded, trust erodes. When the police act as an instrument of repression instead of protection, the social fabric is torn. Strong democracy is not about silent streets, it is about dialogue, transparency and participation. In Ukraine, despite martial law, we are striving for direct dialogue with our citizens and working on maintaining connection through appropriate civic engagement tools. That is a new social contract we are striving to build. Not a radical idea, but the foundation of legitimate governance.

Thank you.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much. Short and sweet. So we proceed with Mr Patrick CASEY. Patrick is not with us.

We are proceeding with Ms Gabrielle CATHALA.

Ms Gabrielle CATHALA (France, UEL): Thank you, Mr President,

I have read this report, which I personally will support and which my group supports. And I can see that my Macronist French colleagues here today are cut to the quick by this report. They are right to be, because this report is disastrous for France and Mr Emmanuel MACRON's France has got only what it deserves.

The colleague who presented the report talked about the fight against the reform of retirement at 64. You have to realise that Mr Emmanuel MACRON's violence began much earlier. It began with the gilets jaunes. With the gilets jaunes, more than 300 people have suffered head injuries and 30 have had their eyes grazed by the French police. Because the French police, unlike their neighbours, use tools, weapons that are said to mutilate, called the LBD or the GLI-F4 grenade, which are banned in other European countries and have since changed their name. But these weapons have the same TNT content and continue to injure demonstrators. They have injured demonstrators during the pension reform, environmental activists fighting against the mega-basins at Sainte-Soline, demonstrators during youth demonstrations or demonstrations in support of the Palestinian people.

And I'd like to mention a few figures here so that all my colleagues are aware. In 2023, at the time of the pension reform, the Prime Minister announced the 49-3, i.e. to force through the reform without a vote, despite the fact that millions of people had taken to the streets, the biggest demonstrations in France for 30 years, that all the unions were opposed and that 93% of working people were against the pension reform. When Prime Minister BORNE announced this, 425 people in France were taken into police custody in the 3 days that followed. Of these people, 52 were prosecuted, referred to court, and none were convicted. So we had both police and judicial repression.

And so I salute my colleague here for leading this report, because Mr Emmanuel MACRON's authoritarian liberalism can only hold together thanks to his police force, and that's why it's so violent.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very, very much.

Mr Oğuzhan HASIPOĞLU has the floor.

So, we proceed with Mr Stéphane MAZARS.

Mr Stéphane MAZARS (France, ALDE): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I take the floor, I feel like a defense lawyer pleading the cause of his country, which has been severely criticized in an indictment by Mr Prosecutor FRIDEZ.

First of all, it's surprising that such a report on such a subject should come from the Social Affairs Committee. Clearly, this is a subject for political or legal affairs, with members of parliament familiar with these matters.

Secondly, the work carried out by our colleague Mr FRIDEZ, which was supposed to concern the reaction of state police, in reality concerns almost exclusively France. The rapporteur clearly has an a priori view of my country.

Thirdly, one wonders why such investigations are being carried out in France, when the country was put under monitoring a few months ago, and the subject has already been widely discussed here.

Fourthly, it would appear that the reactions and reflections of the French interlocutors met by the rapporteur in Paris were in no way taken into account by him, which is particularly regrettable in terms of objectivity.

Finally, as a member of the French National Assembly's Law Commission, I would like to remind Mr FRIDEZ that, in recent years, a new law enforcement doctrine has been implemented in France, precisely to deal with the new behaviours encountered during major mobilizations and demonstrations.

What's more, a magistrate now replaces a Ministry of the Interior official at the head of the General Inspectorate of the French National Police to assess any abuses committed by police forces in the course of their work, since zero risk cannot of course be ruled out.

Finally, over the past few years, the French Parliament has passed a number of new laws to better isolate ultra-politicized and increasingly radicalized and violent troublemakers, and to better protect so-called peaceful demonstrations - a laudable objective, to say the least.

In conclusion, it is regrettable that Mr Prosecutor FRIDEZ did not take these elements into account in his closing arguments. It is therefore in defense of my country that I am obliged to recall them in order to bring a little objectivity and fairness to our debates.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Ms Saskia KLUIT has the floor.

Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Here as Chair, Mr President. So you can go to the next.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

So now we are visiting San Marino, and Gerardo has the floor.

Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI (San Marino, SOC): Thank you President, I will speak in Italian. [in English].

Democracy is not supported only by the right to vote; it is only a tool through which the citizen decides by whom to be represented.

There are other rights necessary to the very life of democracy: the right to information is one of them.

It is essential to have the opportunity to make decisions in the light of free, truthful information, capable of triggering dialogue and not conflict, discussion and not partisan positions.

Already this is a more difficult challenge than in the past, paradoxically, thanks to the saturation of news, often misleading, circulating in the new media, on social media. This is, let's say, a right passively exercised by the citizen that is then used to actively practice democratic participation, which must be fostered, not demonised, but not limited either.

Participation in political life has declined significantly in recent years, both because of the crisis of parties in so many countries and because of the diminished perception of the importance of individual engagement for the collective good and not only for one's own. That is why this report and its recommendations are so timely and centered. One cannot trade public order for silence or the inability to demonstrate except at the risk of undue scrutiny or even personal safety.

The report distinguishes well what is the difference between violent expressions of an adversarial minority and the vast majority of demonstrations that are the outcome of a desire to publicly represent a battle or one's political positions.

The trend that is emerging in several of our countries, unfortunately, instead is to confuse the need to maintain law and order with repression, and this is one of those elements that simultaneously leads to violation of human rights, dismantling the rule of law through special laws, undermines democracy at its root, one of the fastest ways to autocrature and authoritarianism.

So thank you to the rapporteur Mr FRIDEZ, who through this report sets the conditions for a new social contract, for a margin to this drift.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Gerardo.

Ms Louise MOREL has the floor.

Ms Louise MOREL (France, ALDE): Thank you, Mr, Chairman, rapporteur,

Dear colleagues,

As its title suggests, this text is supposed to deal with social mobilisation, unrest and police response in Council of Europe member states. Yet it focuses almost exclusively on a single country, France. I firmly believe that this imbalance undermines the credibility of the parliamentary work carried out here.

The report also contains a number of inaccuracies. Firstly, there is a serious semantic error.

In the introduction, it is stated that the pension reform was "passed by force". There's nothing innocuous about this formulation, which echoes the language of a French political camp. I would like to remind you that recourse to Article 49 paragraph 3 of the French Constitution is perfectly in keeping with our constitutional order, in force since 1958, and used on numerous occasions in our parliamentary history. It provides an institutional balance. In response to the Government's assumption of responsibility for a piece of legislation, Parliament can table a motion of censure. In this case, the motion was tabled, it was rejected, and the law was therefore legitimately adopted.

Secondly, on the events of summer 2023. The death of a young man during a traffic stop is mentioned. But this omits essential elements. It was a case of resisting arrest and attempted escape. The exact circumstances are now in the hands of the French justice system, which shows once again that our system works, that the police are not above the law and that they too can be investigated.

Finally, Mr Rapporteur, in your bill you call for justice to be dispensed impartially in these matters. You propose that the law be improved. We have voted in favour of the Ministry of the Interior's orientation and programming law, which gives greater resources to our police and is in line with your report.

That's why, in view of the imbalance and lack of rigour in your report, I urge you not to adopt it.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Louise.

Allow me to give the floor to Mr HASIPOĞLU. He's with us now. So, Mr HASIPOĞLU, you have the floor.

Mr Oğuzhan HASIPOĞLU (Cyprus* [Resolution 1376 (2004)]): Thank you, Mr President, for this opportunity. I am the elected representative of Turkish Cypriot people in this Parliament. Here we are talking about political culture of promoting inclusive debate in our countries. Also, fostering a relation of trust in our societies, equipping our law enforcement mechanism to prevent discrimination and maintain security, combatting all forms of profiting such as based on ethnicity. In the island of Cyprus, unfortunately, many practises run contrary to these principles.

I would like to address a deeply concerning development involving a series of unlawful arrests in Cyprus. At the moment, two Hungarian, one Ukrainian, one Israeli and one German businesspeople have been arrested in Cyprus and the main reason is they are doing business in the northern part of the island. I am talking about the property cluster which is under the intensive supervision of the Council of Ministers, literally more than 20 years. The matter is about the rights of Greek Cypriots who left properties in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1974.

On the issue of property, the European Court of Human rights delivered, in 2004 a decision and, after that, the Turkish side had fully executed the cluster in connection with the rights of Greece Cypriots who left properties in North Cyprus. With the guidance of the European Court of Human Rights, the Turkish Cypriot side had formed an Immovable Property Commission, and this Immovable Property Commission had been recognised by the European Court of Human Rights as an internal remedy. On one hand, although we are not recognised, we are following the European Court of Human Rights principles and the country that this council is recognising is unfortunately violating the European Court of Human Rights principles.

Thank you very much.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): So, thank you very much.

That concludes the list of speakers.

I call Mr FRIDEZ, our rapporteur, to reply. You have 3 minutes.

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mr Vice-Chairman.

Thank you for a very lively debate. I expected no less. I'd like to start with three remarks.

The first is that I am not the author of the motion for a resolution. It was tabled by a French parliamentarian. It was presented to the Social, Health and Sustainable Development Committee, accepted by the Bureau of the Assembly, and then returned to the Committee. Someone had to be designated. That's the first thing. I'm not the author of the other reports on the subject that were dealt with very recently.

Secondly, after repeated requests, we actually met with French parliamentarians just before the report was submitted. A meeting with three members of parliament at the Senate, which lasted 40 minutes. It was a rather off-the-cuff discussion, but it's true that in any case, I sought dialogue, the result was rather complicated, everything was already a bit tied up. That's one element.

The last point, before I make a few comments, concerns Ms MOREL's remark. I'd just like to say that before, when I spoke, I said that the use of article 49.3, although constitutional and perfectly legal, was seen as an act of force. That's what I've just said, and I don't take anything back. What you're doing in France is perfectly legal and constitutional, so there's no problem.

The problem, perhaps, that we have or that you have had, is the fact that I may be Swiss, and very familiar with French affairs. And in this report, there are indeed references to a few other countries where there have been problems. Greece and the Netherlands are mentioned by name. Before that, I mentioned Ireland in my presentation. And then, somewhere along the line, it was said that this was happening just about everywhere. Yes, that's true. That said, my aim was to try and see if there was a possible analysis between what was happening and a social situation to be able to calm things down and reach a social contract.

I can tell you quite clearly that this report was very complicated; it's a subject I took up because it was suggested to me. Perhaps it was the doctor in me who told me that I wanted to try and heal a few complicated situations.

What I've seen in your country is that there are indeed major social tensions, there are rifts. I've been told about these fractures, and I've actually seen a lot of people. And then, on the other hand, there's a way of resolving problems that's a little complicated, in the sense that, unlike the Swiss horizontality, you have a high degree of verticality, which makes it difficult for counter-powers to express themselves, and indirectly, this ends up in the street.

So what I'm proposing is simply that we should perhaps, in all countries, think about more extensive systems of participation that enable people to have alternative means of not using violence as their only recourse. But, for example, the Swiss system involves referendums and things like that.

It's simply the fact that, as a Swiss living right next door to France, I had this example of your country, which gave me the opportunity to link up the different problems and make a diagnosis and, above all, proposals.

In the meantime, I'd like to thank Ms Claire DUBOIS-HAMDI again for her help, and thank you for your attention.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you.

Does the Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Saskia KLUIT, wish to speak?

Thank you very much. You have 3 minutes as well.

Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Thank you very much.

I want to ask for a few more minutes afterwards, as this is Pierre-Alain's last gathering here, and he has done a lot.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has examined a report on social mobilisation, social unrest and police reaction in the Council of Europe member states. We did so, amongst other things, in Helsinki, and we have noted that no amendments were put forward for this report.

And I think it's important, as Chair of the Committee, to just note that without democratic security, there is no real security. Security must be grounded in rights, institutions, in social peace and in public trust.

The report calls for institutional reflexivity, including the ability of public powers, even in sovereign areas, to question themselves.

We heard a lot about the French, but I have to say I was a parliamentarian in the Covid-19 times, and I also voted for people to be home at night with a curfew. It was a very difficult decision, and we had a lot of social unrest because of it. We had a lot of demonstrations against it, and they were violent. So I completely understand the situation you're in, but I think, personally, and also in our Committee, it's better to open and listen to your citizens than to fight them.

The report is based on facts, and all sides were consulted. We also talked to the police, and they also asked us to pay attention to their equipment. We paid attention to the complexity. There's no right or wrong. It is important that all we do is do our best, better. The existence of violent actors is not denied. But the danger that police officers face is also seen and accepted. But excessive force just undermines legitimacy and fuels public distrust.

And alternatives exist. Pierre-Alain said it very concretely. Rethink the use of intermediate weapons. They scare people, they become angry, and you find no solution in public trust.

And discrimination in identity checks. We should either all be identified or no one, but not one every time. We should rebuild proximity policing, i.e. restore trust through local presence, you know, the officer of the area that you know, you can talk to. Long-term community engagement is important, and it strengthens both security and social cohesion.

And of course, the most important point Pierre-Alain made is that we need to discuss, we have to have a culture of consensus and not of conflict. And with this, disagreement is not a threat to democracy. Anger should not be answered by force. We need a new social contract.

And now I come to Pierre-Alain. Because it's your last plenary session and your last report. And although you speak a kind of strange French that I hardly understand, in our Committee, we feel that you have been of immense importance to our work. And also for me, because when I first came to the Committee meetings, you were sitting behind me, and if I didn't understand, you would always be there and explain what I needed to do.

For the term you have been here, you have had an impressive career. You were a general rapporteur on imprisoned migrant children. You were Vice-Chair of three Committees, Chairperson of three Committees, You were President of your delegation, Vice-President of the parliament. And you still look like you're very young and rested.

I will say, however, that your best work was in your reports. Because you're not only an extraordinary, a kind person and a joyous person who is very nice to be with, you are also a doctor, you're very knowledgeable on the content we spoke about in our Committee, and you always do the work not only from your head, which is good, but you also do it from your warm, social heart. Wherever ordinary people are in trouble, you will come and you will help them and you'll find really workable solutions.

Let me say some reports that were really great: the maltreatment in institutions. You really changed many people's lives by just acknowledging them and the suffering they had suffered in the institutions they had been in. On climate and migration: you were one of the first to identify the problems we have with migration due to changing weather patterns. And you showed a way how we as societies can prepare for that. And three years ago, you also made a report on the prevention of the misuse of migration topics as an election campaign issue; these are not easy topics. I'm sure not everyone would put their hands up, but you do. And the same is with the report today. You explained it very well.

So we, as a Committee, decided it's a strong report, and I hope the General Assembly will support you just as clearly as we did. Because we accepted it with great support.

Vote: Social mobilisation, social unrest and police reaction in Council of Europe member States: is there a need for a new social contract?

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I am sure what Ms Saskia said represents all of us.

Thank you, Mr FRIDEZ, for everything you have done all these years for this hemicycle and to the committees and everywhere.

So, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, the debate is closed.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has presented a draft resolution to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 16191. A simple majority is required. The vote is now open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Adopted. The draft resolution is adopted.

Congratulations.

Debate: Draft protocol amending the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

If we can clear the chamber quietly, so that we can move on with further items on the agenda.

Colleagues, once again, can we clear the chamber so we can move on to the next item?

Thank you very much.

The next item of business is the debate on the report titled “Draft protocol amending the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism” presented by Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

This debate will conclude on time with time to reply and vote.

I call now Mr CORLĂŢEAN, rapporteur. You have 7 minutes now, and 3 minutes at the end to reply to the debate.

The floor is yours.

Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN (Romania, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you very much, Mr President and colleagues.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, commonly known as the Warsaw Convention, was opened for signature on 16 May 2005. In our Resolution 1400 of 2004 on the challenge of terrorism in the Council of Europe member states, the Assembly stated that the protection of human rights plays a key role in the fight against terrorism. These rights are central to our credibility. Any violation of these rights weakens the international coalition in the fight against terrorism and drives new supporters into the hands of the terrorists.

Twenty-one years later, these words remain as relevant as ever. Since the adoption of the Warsaw Convention, the world and particularly our European continent have tragically witnessed numerous devastating terrorist attacks. These brutal acts have not only resulted in substantial loss of our lives and widespread trauma, but also left indelible marks on our national consciousness, security strategies and international co-operation efforts to combat and prevent terrorism.

It is evident that the threat of terrorism continues to evolve, constantly presenting new and complex challenges. To effectively confront this dangerous phenomenon, our legal definitions and frameworks must evolve accordingly. The draft protocol amending the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism is a welcome step in this direction. It aims to introduce the first ever international, binding and comprehensive definition of terrorism, acknowledging contemporary threats such as cyberterrorism and environmental terrorism, which were not fully anticipated in 2005 when the Warsaw Convention was adopted.

Currently, the Warsaw Convention relies on key international anti-terrorism treaties to define a terrorist offence, resulting in a situation in which some offences which could be considered terrorism by nature and context do not fall within the scope of this instrument.

The aim is to encompass all forms of terrorism currently prevalent, thereby solidifying a common Pan-European legal definition deemed essential in the context of evolving threats.

The proposal will introduce a list of criminal acts which, when committed intentionally with a terrorist aim and which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation, should be considered as terrorist offences in addition to those contained in the existing key international anti-terrorist treaties.

The proposal is closely aligned with the definition contained in the EU Directive on Combating Terrorism. However, while welcoming the much-needed amendment, we must also ensure that it does not inadvertently lead to legal uncertainties or misuse. It is our duty to ensure that combating terrorism goes hand in hand with protecting human rights and respecting the rule of law. We all know too well that countermeasures to terrorism may be misused to disproportionately restrict individual freedoms or thwart political dissent.

Although the draft protocol and its explanatory report have been designed to include deliberate safeguards in this regard, I believe that further clarity can be achieved.

Consequently, I propose that the scope of criminalisation of terroristic threats be limited only to a credible and serious threat. In line with recommendations of some of our member states and international experts, the purpose of my proposal is to raise the threshold of liability so that genuinely dangerous conduct is targeted while avoiding the prosecution of vague, trivial and or non-credible threats.

I also propose that the explanatory report be expanded to clarify that the public expression of radical, polemical, polemic, shocking or controversial views on sensitive political questions does not fall within the scope of this amending protocol, in line with the well-established jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.

Such clarifications will further ensure that legitimate freedoms of expression and protest are preserved and not subject to criminalisation under the new protocol.

Additionally, I consider it important to support the notion that legitimate activities, such as those undertaken by humanitarian organisations, should be clearly exempt from being criminalised under the new provisions. Given that such an addition would fall outside the scope of this amending protocol, I propose that the future comprehensive review of the Warsaw Convention should incorporate this humanitarian exemption to align with international developments, including recent resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

In conclusion, colleagues, I ask you to endorse this draft opinion. I also urge the Committee of Ministers to seriously consider the Assembly's opinion and swiftly adopt the amending protocol so that it can become open for signature as soon as possible. By ratifying the amendment, the Council of Europe member states will reinforce our collective resolve to combat terrorism in all its forms, while ensuring the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Allow me to reiterate that combating terrorism and protecting the Council of Europe's standards and values are not contradictory, but complementary. Combating terrorism while ensuring respect for human rights, the rule of law and our common values truly demonstrates our unwavering commitment to a more secure Europe.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Rapporteur, Mr CORLĂŢEAN.

I welcome all the spectators and public on the gallery, but I also ask you to please do keep quiet while the debate is in the House.

Thank you to the rapporteur.

Now we pass on to the speakers on behalf of political groups and on behalf of EPP, I give the floor to Mr Christophe BRICO. The floor is yours.

Mr Christophe BRICO (Monaco, EPP/CD): Thank you, President.

Exactly ten years ago, in France, on 7 and 9 January 2015, the Charlie Hebdo newspaper and the Hyper Cacher were attacked. A few months later, on 13 November, the Bataclan was attacked.

In a way, this was conventional terrorism.

The millennium opened with two planes crashing into high-rise buildings, or six years earlier, in the Japanese subway, sarin gas was released.

Threats are becoming protean, and this Convention is a welcome step towards adapting our legal tools, adapting our definitions and considering that intent is just as important to take into account. I share some of the rapporteur's reservations about the fact that some States might use such a convention to go beyond the fight we all have to wage, and which I think we all agree on.

Nevertheless, by voting in favor of this opinion, we are collectively affirming that we remain committed to the fight against terrorism, that we believe it is necessary to regularly define the means of doing so, and that we support the work done to adapt the Warsaw Convention.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for his work, and will of course vote in favor of this opinion without reservation.

Thank you.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr BRICO.

I now give the floor to Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA on behalf of the ECPA Group. The floor is yours.

Please press once and wait a couple of seconds.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

The Committee of Ministers is asking the Assembly for its opinion on this protocol amending the 2005 Warsaw Convention.

As you know, the aim of the Convention is to establish national prevention policies in order to improve and develop international cooperation. And then, in Articles 5, 6 and 7, to ask each member state of the Council of Europe to criminalize certain conduct, public provocation of terrorist acts, recruitment for terrorism, training for terrorism, in the three cases mentioned, intentionally.

Now, the amending protocol proposes a list of cases with material content as a terrorist offence, still defined as a criminal offence under the national law of Council of Europe member states and other possible signatories. Instead of this generic reference to a terrorist offence, as is the case in the current text, the content of which would be specified by reference to the treaty annexed to the Convention.

So the purpose of this project seems perfectly reasonable to us. And I wonder why the draft opinion raises the question of possible infringement or insufficient respect for the principle of criminal legality in relation to this amendment. I just can't understand it. It seems to me that a list of material criminal offenses is always more appropriate and more in keeping with the principle of criminal legality.

I also wonder why the draft opinion questions the absence of a political exception clause to protect the legitimate activities of humanitarian organisers. It's hard to understand, since this clause already exists in article 20 of the current Convention, and its purpose is to prevent States from politically justifying terrorist acts that would constitute criminal offences.

And there are other issues that I don't fully agree with in the draft opinion, but in any case, the group on whose behalf I speak will vote in favour of this draft amendment, because it seems to us, all in all, satisfactory.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you very much.

I ask all speakers to please stick to the timeline because we still have one more debate before Mr ZELENSKYY gets here.

I give the floor to Ms Lesia VASYLENKO on behalf of ALDE.

Ms Lesia VASYLENKO (Ukraine, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): On behalf of the ALDE Group, I would like to thank our rapporteur for this very careful consideration of an important matter.

Terrorism remains one of the gravest threats to democratic societies and it is essential that the legal definitions we adopt are clear, targeted and resilient against any misuse. As the rapporteur rightly highlights, the very power of such international legislation also makes it vulnerable to abuse. The European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency, as well as the ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), have flagged how overly broad definitions have in some states been misapplied to prosecute peaceful activists, suppress dissent or intimidate civil societies. We only have to look at Council of Europe ex-member state the Russian Federation to understand the dangers of vague anti-terror laws and their broad application.

The PUTIN regime has long relied on imprecise and politicised definitions of terrorism to imprison nearly all forms of domestic opposition, from pro-democracy activists to journalists and lawyers. Today, these same tools are being exported and abused by Russia in occupied Ukrainian territories where so called anti-terrorism charges are used to abduct, silence and imprison Ukrainian citizens, many of whom are simply teachers, local officials or ordinary people refusing to collaborate with the criminal aggressive regime. Thousands are deprived of liberty not because they pose a real threat, but because they resist occupation. This is not counterterrorism. It is systemic political repression cloaked in legal language.

It is vital, therefore, that the new protocol draws a bright line between actual terrorist threats and the legitimate expression of political or radical views, however uncomfortable they may be. As proposed in paragraph 36 of the Explanatory Report, the Convention should further be strengthened to explicitly protect controversial, but non-violent speech. The reference to the European Court of Human Rights is apt. Vagueness in law must be balanced by rigorous application in line with human rights standards.

Colleagues, if we are to defend democracy, we must also defend the rule of law from distortion. Let us adopt this protocol, but with clarity and safeguards that are to ensure it protects our values rather than undermines them.

Thank you.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call now Ms Sevilay ÇELENK.

Ms Sevilay ÇELENK (Türkiye, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, President.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for this very well-prepared report.

The tragic large-scale violence of recent years, including in Council of Europe states, has understandably triggered calls for a more comprehensive legal framework. Updating the Convention is not only necessary, but also urgent from a legislative and security-driven standpoint.

But we must not ignore the fact that the terms terrorism or extremism have often been instrumentalised by authoritarian governments to suppress dissent.

Too often, peaceful protests, civil disobedience or controversial expression are treated as politically motivated violence. Those who dissent, even those who think differently on certain issues, have found themselves accused of extremism or subversion. The power to define violence in this way must be approached with caution. The draft protocol draws on existing international treaties and also includes acts that are punishable under national law if they are intended to harm a state or an international organisation. But vague formulations such as the destabilisation of fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures risk criminalising legitimate activism.

Three key changes are needed. Threats must be limited to serious and credible threats. The definition must exclude radical, controversial or shocking statements. Humanitarian and civil society activists must be clearly excluded. Then the protocol can contribute to real safety while protecting fundamental freedoms and democratic values.

Perhaps it is also time to rethink the term terrorism itself. Perhaps change it altogether.

Thank you.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Ms PRAMMER on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

The floor is yours.

Ms Agnes Sirkka PRAMMER (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Chair.

Dear colleagues, we all want to prevent terrorism. We all want to protect our societies from those who seek to spread fear and destroy lives. But in doing so, we must not become careless with the very values we seek to defend.

This protocol expands the definition of terrorism dramatically. It includes acts that may cause serious damage, based not on outcome, but intention and context. But what exactly counts as "serious damage"? A protest that disrupts traffic? A cyber-attack with political motives? The line becomes dangerously thin.

Let’s be honest, vague definitions in the wrong hands are not a safeguard. They are a weapon. A weapon that can be turned against dissent, against civil society, against those who challenge the powerful.

Once we allow states to call anything they dislike "terrorism", we lose more than legal clarity, we lose trust, we lose freedom, we lose ourselves.

That is why we strongly support the draft opinion and thank the rapporteur for his balanced work. It sends a clear message: the fight against terrorism must never be used to justify the erosion of human rights. We need legal precision, democratic oversight and unwavering respect for fundamental freedoms.

Let us not fight fear with fear. Let us stand firm in the rule of law.

Thank you.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Now we pass to the speakers list. Thank you.

We have seven speakers and we will accept them all as we have time.

The first is Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN from the Group of the European People's Party. The floor is yours.

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

First of all, I would like to congratulate Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN, the rapporteur, for this excellent opinion. It's a bit of a pity, I would like just to say that, when we are discussing the statutory opinions – actually about the binding legal instruments which should be adopted by the Council of Europe – and we have less interest in this report than we have in other cases where we have just the documents of the recommendation nature.

So I would like to encourage all of you to take very seriously the statutory opinions, because we are shaping the future conventional basis for the fight against terrorism within the Council of Europe. And it's quite important to amend the notion of terrorism to meet the contemporary challenges we have.

And I would like to also take into account the previous speeches to say that it's quite important to have the clear-cut notion, definition of the crime of terrorism, because without it, it is impossible to guarantee the respect towards the three pillars our organisation has. I mean the rule of law, human rights and democracy as such.

I cannot touch upon also the very important issue of our interaction with the Committee of Ministers. If our dear colleagues send us documents for statutory opinions and we provide some recommendations, these recommendations should be taken into account. Otherwise, the whole idea of having sedentary opinions becomes null and void.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur for this excellent report.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Next is Mr GONCHARENKO from Ukraine. The floor is yours.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA): Thank you very much.

We're speaking now about terrorism, and what terrorism is and who is a terrorist. A terrorist is a person who commits acts of terror with the aim of horrifying. So, who is the main terrorist in the world today? It is the Russian Federation and PUTIN. This is the "Osama BIN PUTIN" of today's world. And Russia is not just the state sponsor of terrorism. It's not actual anymore. Russia is a terrorist state. And this is the definition we should give to them, or we should say that Russia is the mother of terrorism.

Russia, mother of terrorism [In Ukrainian]. Russia, mother of terrorism.

Because Hamas, the Houthis, all these terrorists, they are children of Russia, they are nourished by Russia, they are prepared by Russia. And this is a long-standing tradition, starting from the Soviet Union. Who was preparing terrorists in the world, the Red Brigades, and other terrorists? It was the Soviet Union. And now we see the same with what Russia is doing. They try to horrify, they try to make people afraid of them. So if you are afraid of acting against Russia, it means that they are successful.

We, in Ukraine, are exhausted. We hate Russia, but we are not afraid of them. We are not, because that's the only way to oppose them, to not be afraid, to fight against them. You shouldn't have negotiations with terrorists. You need to eliminate terrorists. And they are terrorists, and they should behave in this way. And you should understand that the only language which terrorists understand is the language of strength, the language of force. So let us speak in this language with the state terrorist, the mother of terrorism in the world, the Russian Federation and its leader, Vladimir PUTIN.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr GONCHARENKO.

Now I call Mr COTTIER from Switzerland. The floor is yours.

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

Turning to the subject of this debate, Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN, our rapporteur, is accustomed to delivering excellent reports, and I must say that this one is no exception. I would really like to thank him for the quality of his reflections.

The modernisation of the 2005 Warsaw Convention was clearly necessary. New definitions were needed, particularly for acts such as cyberterrorism or environmental terrorism. And the fight against terrorism is absolutely essential to protect our democracies. But as several speakers have said, and as the rapporteur rightly points out, this must not be at the expense of defending human rights and the rule of law. And our Assembly, in particular, must be attentive to this.

During the preparatory work on this protocol, a number of stakeholders, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Professor Ben SAUL, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and my own country, Switzerland, expressed certain concerns about the proposed new definition. The fear is of introducing legal uncertainty and then, on this basis, allowing arbitrary, excessive or abusive application of this definition, which would enable the provision to be misused by governments wishing to use anti-terrorism provisions to target political opponents and silence them.

Dear colleagues,

We know that this risk exists. And so we must ensure that these anti-terrorism measures protect people against credible and real threats of political violence, but cannot be used to restrict legitimate political activities. And the right to freedom of expression applies not only to well-received or inoffensive comments, but also to those that sometimes offend, shock or even worry. This is a part of democratic debate. We must therefore take note of the precision of the explanatory report mentioned by the rapporteur, and perhaps we should clarify this explanation, as he suggests. Above all, the wording of the threat in Article 1, paragraph 1, subparagraph J, which would increase the risk of criminalising freedom of expression, should only be used for serious and credible threats. This is what the rapporteur proposes in his opinion, and I think it's very important that we support it. And our colleague Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN is right, this is an important debate, and it's important that the Committee of Ministers listens to the Assembly's opinion.

Thank you very much.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Time. Thank you.

Next is Ms BASTOS from Portugal. The floor is yours.

Ms Regina BASTOS (Portugal, EPP/CD): Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman, colleagues,

The draft protocol amending the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism reflects our shared responsibility to respond to a changing threat landscape.

Over the past year, many countries have faced a rise in cyberattacks targeting hospitals and public services, while security services have disrupted planned attacks on transport networks and places of worship.

The revised Convention addresses these evolving risks. It introduces a harmonised and binding definition of terrorist offences and extends the scope to include contemporary methods, such as large-scale cyber intrusions and environmental sabotage.

This acts designed not only to cause harm, but also to destabilise democratic societies. That's why this progress is essential. But so is legal clarity. What do our citizens want? Our citizens expect to be protected from terrorism. But they also expect us to do so with fairness, legal clarity and full respect for the values that give a solid foundation to democracies, and guarantees the rule of law and human rights.

Citizens rightly expect protection, but also accountability and legal certainty.

Our duty as their representatives is to ensure that the tools we adopt to fight terrorism are effective, proportionate, and fully aligned with the Convention’s founding principles.

Finally, I want to congratulate the rapporteur for this important draft opinion.

Thank you very much.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I give the floor to Ms IORDANOVA from Bulgaria. The floor is yours.

Ms Nadejda IORDANOVA (Bulgaria, NR): Thank you, Mr Chair.

Dear colleagues, "if we sacrifice our values in response to terrorism, we are delivering the terrorists a victory they could never achieve on their own."

These words of former US President OBAMA capture the very heart of our debate now. I commend the Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism for drafting a protocol that amends the Warsaw Convention, establishing the first international binding, comprehensive definition of terrorism. This definition rightly reflects the evolving nature of terrorist threats, including cyberterrorism and environmental terrorism.

In our age of growing global challenges, a co-ordinated and lawful international approach is not just helpful, it is essential. However, we must proceed with caution. Broader counter-terrorism laws carry the risk of overreach. As our rapporteur, Mr CORLĂŢEAN wisely warned, a vague definition can lead to injustice, to injustice prosecution, a potential human rights violation.

Our fight against terrorism must never become a tool to silence dissent and criminalise opposition. As the final text of the protocol is drafted by the Council of Ministers, the balance between security and liberty must be considered further. Legal measures must not infringe upon fundamental freedoms or violate international humanitarian law.

I support the rapporteur's call for an appropriate threshold for criminal liability, especially regarding threats of terrorist acts.

Today, our responsibility is clear to strengthen our legal response to terrorism while upholding human rights, protecting civil liberties, honouring our commitments and international law.

Thank you.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Ms Ingjerd SCHOU from Norway. The floor is yours.

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

Terrorism is a complex threat that affects many nations. It causes a tragic loss of life and significant destruction. And terrorism impacts not only security, but also the economy and social stability.

In Norway, we experienced dramatic terrorist attacks in the most tragic way. First, in 2011, when 77 people lost their lives, most of them young people, and in 2022, when two people died after an attack on a Pride event. In both cases, President, we see that survivors and families of the victims continue to suffer from their traumatic experiences for a long time – a long time. Some never fully recover.

Regrettably, not only Norway, but far too many of us here in this Assembly, know firsthand how devastating this is to a society and community. And we condemn terrorism in all its forms in the strongest way. I am therefore proud to be part of an organisation that, for years, has been developing key legal standards to combat terrorism. And I agree with the rapporteur that the introduction of a common pan-European legal definition of a terrorist offence is a welcome and desirable step.

Combating terrorism requires a wide range of measures, and having a solid legal foundation is of great value, particularly with regard to the necessary international co-operation we need to combat this threat. It is important that the amendment of the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism reflects the challenges of our time. And I believe it is a step in the right direction that the definition now also includes acts such as cyberterrorism and environmental terrorism.

And lastly, I applaud the Committee for pointing to the fact that parts of the draft protocol are imprecise and that legitimate activities such as freedom of religion and concerns and freedom of expression, hence could be subject to criminalisation. This must, of course, be avoided and I therefore support the recommendation of presented by the Committee in this opinion.

Thank you, President.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

And I call Mr MARCHENKO from Ukraine. Is he present? He's not present.

Then I call the rapporteur, Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN, to reply for the debate. You have the floor and 3 minutes to reply.

Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN (Romania, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you very much, Mr President.

Colleagues, first of all, I would like to thank all the political groups and all the colleagues who took part in this debate for their contribution, their support, and also for the nuances.

I think it's important to underline the fact that it is the Council of Europe. There is no other international organisation. It is the Council of Europe that reached this goal to have the first ever legal definition within international law, having legally binding force that will be part of an international treaty defining terrorism. This is a huge achievement, and this is somehow miraculous. I'm speaking on behalf of a person who worked for 31 years in foreign policy and national security for my country and for the international Euro-Atlantic organisations. And we need to underline this important topic.

The fact that we have to deal with a horrible challenge against the international society, against our democratic societies, implies being well armed in legal terms, first of all, to combat terrorism. But at the same time, as I mentioned in what is my proposal as a statutory opinion, we need to combat terrorism with democratic tools and we need to avoid mistakes. We need to avoid the misuse of the need to combat terrorism that might touch our fundamental values within the Council of Europe, which means the fundamental freedoms and liberties.

This is why I'm proposing one amendment. This is why I propose to introduce a supplementary text within the explanatory memorandum. And, of course, it's up to the Committee of Ministers to take on board this proposal. And this is why, and I make reference to one nuance that has been mentioned. I take on board, but my proposal is for the future work of the governments, for a more general revision of the Warsaw Convention, to look at the need to exempt the work of the humanitarian organisation when discussing combating terrorism. And this is reflected in the way of an important resolution of the United Nations Security Council.

So once again, it's an extremely important step forward. Like my colleagues, Mr VARDANYAN and Mr COTTIER, I will refresh our request. It's not an appeal. We are members of our national parliaments. We are members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It's our duty to ask the Committee of Ministers to take very seriously on board what our proposals are, because these are advocacy proposals that are reflecting both dimensions, the need to combat terrorism, but also at the same time to ensure the respect of fundamental human rights.

My last comment will be the following one. I draw your attention that this is an amendment protocol. So I encourage, on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, please allow me, I ask member states not only to sign, but to ratify as soon as possible this amendment protocol and of course, to put in place this new legal definition.

And finally, I want to thank Mr Rafal SOKOL and Mr Guillem CANO PALOMARES for their support, and I encourage colleagues to vote for this statutory opinion.

Thank you so much.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN.

Does the Chairperson of the Committee, Lord KEEN, do you wish to speak? If yes, the floor is yours and you have 3 minutes.

Lord Richard KEEN (United Kingdom, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights): Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN, on his opinion regarding the draft amending protocol to the Warsaw Convention. I should say that it was unanimously adopted by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. The draft protocol underlines the Council's commitment to adapting our legal framework in response to evolving challenges.

Since its adoption twenty years ago, the Warsaw Convention has served as a vital tool in the fight against terrorism. Yet, as with many other legal instruments, it must remain dynamic, capable of responding to the changing nature of threats. The draft amending protocol is a positive example of the Council of Europe recognising where its legislation required updating.

It reflects a genuine consensus among member states, a consensus achieved through dialogue, mutual understanding, and a shared commitment to upholding human rights while improving our collective security.

The new definition of a "terrorist offence" will allow state parties to prevent the commission of acts of terror more effectively, by enhancing cooperation between states, and strengthening mechanisms to counteract terrorist financing and recruitment. And these enhancements will be crucial.

However, I also wish to stress that while we must empower our states to act effectively against terrorism, we must do so without compromising the fundamental freedoms and rights that unite us in this Council. And that is why the amendments proposed in Mr Titus CORLĂŢEAN's opinion aim to ensure that this delicate balance is struck.

President, I urge this Assembly to support his opinion.

Thank you.

Vote: Draft protocol amending the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism

Mr Marko PAVIĆ (Croatia, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Lord Richard KEEN.

The debate on this is closed.

The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights has presented the draft opinion, Document 16186, to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft opinion contained in the document and a two-thirds majority is required.

A vote in the hemicycle and a remote vote are now open. Please do vote.

Thank you very much. The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

And I declare that the draft opinion in Document 16186 has been adopted. Congratulations.

Debate: Analysis and guidelines for a sustainable and socially fair energy transition

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Colleagues, the next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Analysis and guidelines for a sustainable and socially fair energy transition" in Document 16182, presented by Ms Saskia KLUIT on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

In order to finish by 8:25 p.m., we must interrupt the speakers list at 8:15 p.m. to allow time for the vote.

I call on Ms Saskia KLUIT to speak. You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes to wind up at the end of the debate. Saskia.

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

I am sorry for my colleagues that you have to watch me again today, but this is how the planning goes when we are in a week like this week. So thank you very much. This is actually a report I am very, very happy to present here, because it is a topic that is extremely, extremely alive in our societies. We debate the clean energy transition and any results for our population on a daily basis.

When I started working 20 years ago or 30 years ago, I started working on the energy transition, but my first steps were in mobility. And what we saw is when you introduce clean mobiles, clean cars, you first do it where it will achieve the most reduction in CO2, and that is with people who drive a lot and people who have big and heavy cars. There you have the biggest impact on climate change.

The same then we did in our normal energy system. So we started with the places where pollution was the biggest, to make the biggest impact. And, as a result, we kind of, I will not say we forgot, because every week and every year we worked on making it a socially just transition, but it was very difficult to find a socially just transition. And now we are in a point of time where we really need to get our act together, if I can say it like that, and make a transition that is not only sustainable, but is also fair to all people, whether you are rich or poor, whether you have your own house or a rented house, or whether you have knowledge of technologies or you do not have knowledge of technology.

And the good news is, our societies are doing a great job in making the transition. And it's not easy, but we are doing it. We set targets, and every time we set a target, we feel it's ambitious and it is hard to get. But in reality, again and again, we meet the targets that we set for ourselves. And we don't only set those targets for ourselves, we set them, of course, for our children, because we want to keep climate change to as little as possible to give them also a bright future in our nation.

So, if you look to a transition, what will it bring to society? It will not only bring clean energy. If you transition from fossil fuels to clean energy, it will also reduce the health impact, because we have less particles in the air, less children get sick, less workers get sick in the mines.

If you look at mobility, we have many, many cities that are not so pleasant to stay in because we have a lot of cars, cities where children cannot play on the streets, children cannot walk or cycle to school by themselves because it's just unsafe. If we make a new mobility system where you can drive a car, but it will be phased down, if you can bike to your work, even if it's 20 miles away, it will bring you not only health, but it will also bring you a lot of good clean air and pleasant cities to live in. Pleasant cities to live in are not only nice for people, but they are also economically interesting, because the value of houses will go up, interesting companies will come, because they like the people who are working in your city.

So, we had two topics. One was mobility. The other one is the housing sector. About 75% of the buildings are still energy inefficient, which means they are either too hot in summer or too cold in the winter. And with climate change accelerating, it is important that we make insulated houses that keep people cool in summer and warm in winter with affordable energy costs. So these things are achievable, but they will not happen overnight. We have to work on it.

One of the big things that is related to energy use in housing is energy poverty: people who do have a heating system, but are not able to pay for it. I stayed in an Airbnb house a couple of years ago, and the lady was only there in the summer in her own house, because in winter she could not afford it anymore, even though it was a really nice house, she could not afford to heat it anymore. If she could get help to insulate it, she would be able to live there in a nice proper house. And all people could not only have a nice holiday in the summer there, but also in the winter.

If you look to people who live in deprived areas, you not only have the problem where they cannot pay their bills and they will be cold or warm, it will also hinder their ability to work because they are tired. It will also, if their house, for example, is too wet, it will make them sick and unhealthy, because they have mould on the wall which makes them sick. So there are a lot of benefits to clean energy for our societies, but we need to work more on how to work with our society to make it work, not only technically, but also socially, make it work and also make it politically work.

So one of the things that people ask for, both companies, people, normal people, but also governments, is predictability. So you can work together and make steps forward together, so a company knows where he will stand in 20 years, so they can make an investment plan. So one of the first recommendations is that every country makes a national strategy, with how the transition should look, what needs to be done to achieve the transition not only technically, but how to make it also affordable, which instruments are to be used, which budgets have to be planned and which, for example, communication campaign needs to be done.

I will have one minute and then I will finish.

Local promotion of local energy is very important. Organise communities around energy because they can help people and also give people a kind of feeling of support and grip on their life, and involve citizens and municipalities in how to do it. So not only make a national strategy, but also make a local strategy. Thank you very much, President. It must not have been my best speech, but I have to say, it was a long day.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): I think you've had a very good day, Saskia.

Colleagues, before we start the speaking, can I just remind everybody that it is a speaking limit of 2 minutes – 2 minutes in this debate.

And I call the first speaker on behalf of the political groups. That's Ms Sigríður Á. ANDERSEN on behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates.

Ms Sigríður Á. ANDERSEN (Iceland, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Mr President, when it comes to transitioning from fossil fuels to more sustainable energy, our countries differ greatly in regards of their possibilities in the matter.

Iceland, for example, my country, is running 90% on sustainable energy. The total energy mix consumption is 90% renewable. But even Iceland, with such an advantage, has been implementing EU law on energy transition. For example, an obligation to import expensive but energy-inefficient biofuels. An obligation to buy emission quotas from European countries that have a much lower share of sustainable energy. A 90% country, Iceland, is buying emission quotas from EU countries with perhaps less than 20% renewable energy. This is flat out a scam. And who are the real victims of the so-called energy transition scams such as these? The consumers, the families and households, many of whom are in no financial means to take on the extra cost of this agenda.

The real question is what has been the result of all these costly endeavours? Does anyone know that? Can anyone really confirm that these burdens have been placed on households and enterprises and have led to a substantial reduction of CO2 emissions? Especially bearing in mind that this hanky panky has led to a massive exodus of production and industry from Europe to less developed countries and countries that have even less percentage of renewable energy than EU countries.

Dear colleagues, the EU has implemented a lot of actions. We know that these actions have led to a loss of jobs and a lessened competitiveness of the EU. But do we know for a fact that these actions have reduced greenhouse gas emissions? I warn against letting the end justify the means. Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Our next speaker, Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA. I think she may be greeting... Oh, she's here. I thought you were going to greet the President. Ms OVCHYNNYKOVA, you have the floor.

Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA (Ukraine, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Mr President.

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I want to thank our rapporteur very much for the wonderful work, and I continue, and I'm honoured to speak today on the topic that holds strategic importance for every nation in our common European home.

So we have heard a lot of discussion about the European Green Deal, but it's also very important that we have witnessed a growing consensus. The energy transition is not only a climate imperative, it's a moral, economic and geopolitical one, but it's really our green future. This is a line and paradigm of our development in every country. But growing inequality, climate crisis and geopolitical insecurity are all interwoven. The way we produce, distribute and consume energy lies at the heart of these challenges. And we, as policymakers, bear the responsibility to lead this transformation, not tomorrow, not in 10 years, but now.

So, there is no true sustainability without security. There is no just transition without freedom. For a too long time, Europe depended on fossil fuels from authoritarian regimes, compromising both its strategic autonomy and its values. But the war in Ukraine has reminded us that a truly democratic energy system is one that is decentralised, transparent and people-centred. This system cannot be weaponised because it's owned by communities.

So, its liberal vision of transition is one of the empowered citizens. So the offered proposals in the draft resolution, such as regarding infrastructure investment, green taxation, energy storage and inclusive job creation, are not isolated policy choices. Together they form a coherent strategy for climate action with justice at its core, sustainable and socially free energy is an opportunity to rethink the social contracts and to build Europe green, more sovereign, more equal and more future-ready.

Thank you very much.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Ms Gabrielle CATHALA on behalf of the UEL.

Ms Gabrielle CATHALA (France, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

The report before us reminds us that there can be no ecological transition without social justice. We cannot impose environmental measures that penalise the most vulnerable. Ecology cannot be a luxury reserved for the few. It must be accessible to all. Ecology must be popular. We must ensure that energy transition policies do not further exclude the most disadvantaged, but rather protect and support them.

The rapporteur, Saskia KLUIT, cites with approval the introduction of low-emission zones in major French cities. I would like to take this opportunity to express my disagreement, because what is rightly denounced in this same report, namely the risk of socially unjust environmental measures, is precisely what we are seeing with the introduction of LEZs. They make the owners of the oldest and therefore most polluting, vehicles, who are often the most disadvantaged, feel guilty, while the wealthiest can continue to drive SUVs. This system is socially unjust when accessible alternative means of transport are not available, or when the remaining cost of replacing the vehicle is unattainable.

The ecological transition must focus on the essentials: getting away from fossil fuels and guaranteeing clean, stable and accessible energy, which are essential conditions for preserving fundamental social rights. But beyond the social stakes, this transition to renewable energies is also a question of sovereignty and peace. The global scramble for scarce resources is intensifying conflicts. Need we remind you that one of Donald TRUMP's first reflexes in supporting Ukraine was to demand privileged access to their rare earths and materials? The link is clear. The more scarce resources become, the more conflicts will escalate.

I'd also like to alert you to a growing threat to ecology: the rise of the extreme right across Europe. In France, the far right has joined forces with the conservative right to vote for a moratorium on renewable energies and to reopen the Fessenheim Nuclear Power Plant near the German border. Fortunately, yesterday our National Assembly was able to put things right. But it does demonstrate the dangers of the climate-skepticism of extreme right-wing conservatives in Europe and around the world.

We must do better. We need to bring about an energy and ecological bifurcation rooted in social justice, founded on solidarity and equal to the ecological emergency.

Thank you for your support.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And our third speaker is Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Spokesperson for the group)*: Thank you very much, President.

I would like to begin by recognising the excellent work of our rapporteur. It offers us a wonderful roadmap, and a human roadmap, as well.

For sustainable, just energy, it is one of the major challenges of our time, transforming our energy system to be more respectful to the environment and to be more socially equitable. It is not a luxury; it is something that is absolutely imperative for European welfare and prosperity. And to deal with the problems of the Earth, climate change, pollution and the loss of biodiversity. This transition ought to be part of human rights so that nobody gets left behind. And this is why this ought to take place in a just fashion. And we need decisive measures, governance that is effective for a transition, which is truly profound.

Public policies are to promote innovation, support undertakings, and protect, of course, workers as well in transition.

The housing sector is very important because 75% of buildings in Europe are energy inefficient. We need insulation, new systems, and retrofitting, and this will help to reduce emissions, and it will help to fight energy poverty as well.

For this group, it is absolutely clear that we have access to all, particularly for the most vulnerable and for vulnerable homes as well.

Transport ought to be clean, and mobility accessible as well. There are wonderful examples, in France, low-emission vehicles, the Deutschland ticket in Germany, and in my country, there are systems as well. These particular projects are to be extended and are to take place throughout Europe as well.

To reduce the import of combustible fuels, it is necessary to have diversification, modernisation of infrastructure and renewables. It is a strategic issue, actually. It requires responsibility, courage, and the future of energy in Europe ought to be just, politically equal and express a sense of social solidarity as well.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And our final speaker on behalf of the political groups is Mr Christophe BRICO of the EPP.

Mr Christophe BRICO (Monaco, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I'm part of a generation that lived through the days when those who warned us about climate change were regarded as hippies and a bit eccentric. Happily, that's no longer the case.

The Reykjavik Declaration mentions the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental right. And, as recently as a month ago, at the 134th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, a strategy for the environment was adopted in Luxembourg on this occasion. And incidentally, I think it would be in our interest to pool this strategy with our own resolutions or recommendations, since on a subject like this, it doesn't seem useful to me to spread ourselves too thinly.

So, a few words on this report, nonetheless. And a few important points.

For an energy transition to be socially equitable, it seems to me, the means of this energy transition must be based on a viable economic model. We're in a market economy, like it or not. We need to find viable economic models. We need to leave room for innovation. In my country, for example, we use thalasso-thermal

loops to generate heat and cold, which are perfectly green, using the temperature difference in seawater. We take the temperature difference and we reject it. Period. There are lots of ways. Leave room for innovation. Very important.

And finally, I'd just like to reiterate two points, and I think I'll have time, yes.

The first is to point out that our continent is the most virtuous continent in the world when it comes to a sustainable economy. We need to continue, of course, but we also need to look at what's happening in Asia and on other continents that are far less virtuous than ours.

And secondly, and I know that this will probably not please everyone, some European countries use nuclear energy, which is decarbonized and provides access to electricity that is ultimately inexpensive and less strategically dangerous than gas or oil.

Thank you very much.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

And I now call Ms Aurora FLORIDIA from Italy.

Ms Aurora FLORIDIA (Italy, SOC): Thank you.

Mr President, dear colleagues,

I thank Ms Saskia KLUIT for this valuable report that highlights the imperative to ensure clean, safe and affordable energy for all users across Europe. Affordable energy for all represents, in a certain sense, a basic right to ensure dignity, health, and participation in society for all. It is one of the conditions for guaranteeing and protecting the right to an adequate and decent standard of living, as food, water and housing are.

On the other side, this is also key to addressing the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss.

We believe that human rights and the environment are intertwined and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations. Let me be clear: a healthy environment is essential for survival, for ensuring a decent quality of life, it strengthens social cohesion, social justice and the stability of the entire productive fabric. We must not forget that rights are not concessions, nor favours to be granted at the discretion of politicians. They are fundamental to guarantee democratic stability.

We therefore insist on the role and responsibility of States in steering sustainable energy policy choices for all stakeholders and keeping implementation steady over the long-term.

We ask our member states to support to the most vulnerable users in the early phases of the transition to more sustainable energy systems.

We plead for a large-scale deployment of renewable energy sources: they are abundant and free-of-charge, offering huge long-term savings. There’s no time to waste.

And today, more than ever, it is our duty to think about the safety of our countries.

As Alexander LANGER once said: “The ecological conversion will only succeed if it appears socially desirable.”

This report is a contribution in this direction.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK of Ukraine.

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues, countries on the front line, like Ukraine, know well as long as we pay for Russian energy, we finance the war machine.

Since February 2022, over 200 billion euros flowed to the Russian Federation, funding aggression and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. This is not just a climate or economic issue. It is about strategic resilience and sovereignty. Every new contract with the Kremlin prolongs the war and risks European stability.

Ukraine's example speaks loudly. Synchronisation with ENTSO-E mobile generators, microgrids and rapid restoration of infrastructure under fire demonstrates the power of layered resilience.

I urge this Assembly to support a clear, enforceable phase-out of Russian fossil and nuclear supplies, scaled up investment in decentralised, resilient grids and renewables across Europe, and a new decision-making paradigm, evaluating energy policies not just by cost or carbon, but by whether they strengthen our collective security.

Today, energy is not merely what we consume, it is what we enable, either aggression or our shared safety.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now invite Mr Yunus EMRE of Türkiye to address us.

Mr Yunus EMRE (Türkiye, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

Dear colleagues, first of all, I would like to extend my gratitude to Saskia for her outstanding work. Like her previous contributions, this report holds great significance for the policy recommendations and decisions of our Assembly.

I believe the issue of justice brought to the Agenda through the concept of just transition in the report is of great importance.

We must pay attention to the disparities in development between countries and regions, as well as the historical extent to which the environment and nature have been polluted. Consider, for example, the fact that a person living in the United States causes 20 times more carbon emissions than someone living on the African continent. In such a context, can we truly argue that every individual and every society bears equal responsibility in the energy transition process?

While it is necessary to share the opportunities arising from this transition equally, we must ensure that the burdens are shared fairly. For this reason, developed industrial countries must approach the issue of justice with the utmost seriousness.

Another important dimension of justice relates to intergenerational justice. We must recognise that intergenerational justice is a multidimensional concept. It is not only about the political decision-making process, but also about redefining the relationship between humans and nature.

We are talking about regulating the relationship between the past, present and the future. I am pleased to observe that efforts are being made around the world to establish standards that can help to implement this multidimensional concept in practice.

The Council of Europe has made significant contributions to the recognition of environmental issues as a human rights issue and and this resolution, along with similar initiatives, is of great value in deepening those contributions.

Once again, I would like to thank Saskia and everyone involved in the preparation of this timely and well-targeted report.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Mr Perran MOON of the United Kingdom.

Mr Perran MOON (United Kingdom, SOC): *Meur Ras.* Thank you, Mr Chair.

It's a privilege to address the Assembly on a matter that lies at the heart of our shared future, ensuring that the energy transition is not only a sustainable one, but a socially just one.

I want to focus on a specific aspect of the energy transition: the shift from a fossil fuel-intensive economy to a materials-intensive one. The technologies that will power our net-zero future electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels and grid-scale batteries depend on a secure and ethical supply of critical minerals – tin, lithium, tungsten and rare earths.

The UK constituency that I represent in Cornwall is rich in geological potential for many of these materials. And in previous centuries, Cornwall was at the heart of the extractive industries for tin and other metals, which brought great wealth to the region. But as the price of tin collapsed and global supply chains shifted, Cornwall lost its beating heart. Many skilled miners emigrated, and now Cornwall is one of the most socio-economically deprived areas in the UK.

However, the opportunities of the shift away from fossil fuels present the dawning of a new age. Today, the UK and much of Europe import nearly all of their critical minerals. Global supply chains are highly concentrated, often in regions with serious geopolitical, environmental and human rights concerns. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, China and Myanmar, according to the IEA, demand for lithium, copper and rare earths is set to double or triple by 2040. Yet by 2030, 85% of lithium refining is expected to take place in just three countries. We're also heading for a global shortage of tin, which is used in virtually every single electrical device.

We must act now in partnership to build resilient, transparent and ethical supply chains. And that means investing in domestic capacity. Because for us, it's not just about rocks and resources, it's about reviving left-behind communities, restoring pride and rebuilding opportunities.

In conclusion, a socially just transition means ensuring that the benefits of green growth are shared through good jobs, skills and training and social regeneration. Cornwall is a powerful example of how industrial heritage can evolve into a new and sustainable future, benefiting both the planet and our communities.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Ms Maria-Nefeli VASILEIOU CHATZIIOANNIDOU of Greece.

Ms Maria-Nefeli VASILEIOU CHATZIIOANNIDOU (Greece, EPP/CD): Thank you Mr President,

I want to thank Ms Saskia KLUIT for the draft report on the vital topic of clean, safe, and affordable energy, a cornerstone for Europe's democratic resilience, environmental responsibility, and long-term prosperity.

We gather here at a moment of global urgency and responsibility. As the draft resolution rightly affirms, the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss, demands not just pledges but swift and coordinated action. The energy transition is not only a technological or economic challenge, it is fundamentally a human rights issue. Energy underpins our rights to housing, health, work, and education. It determines whether a family lives in dignity or in poverty, particularly in times of inflation and instability.

The transition to renewable energy must be just. That means targeted support, renovation grants, tax incentives, and fair pricing mechanisms, so no one is left behind.

At the same time, the transition brings opportunity. Making renewables not just viable but central to the economies.

We fully support the Assembly’s call to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, promote sustainable mobility, and empower citizens as "prosumers." As the resolution suggests, it is essential to involve municipalities and local actors, because energy democracy starts at the community level.

Furthermore, digital tools, including artificial intelligence, must be harnessed not to increase consumption but to optimize efficiency and equity in our energy systems. This is where innovation meets responsibility.

Dear colleagues, the future is not something we enter, but it is something we shape.

So let’s shape it with justice, innovation and cooperation. Let’s ensure that clean energy becomes not a privilege for the few but a right for all.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Mr Oğuzhan HASIPOĞLU of Cyprus. No?

Then our next speaker will be Mr Stefan SCHENNACH.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

I would also like to thank the rapporteur, because this report makes it very clear that there must be an energy transition, because climate change will be more expensive if we have bad weather, extreme weather. That will cost many lives. But it will also cause a lot of costs. That is why there is no alternative to the energy transition.

And we have seen it in many examples: an energy transition is only possible with an appropriate social program so that all sections of the population can participate. Former German Environment and Economics Minister HABECK also had to painfully experience this with his debate on heat pumps. If this is not widely discussed and people's fears are not allayed, then it won't work.

Dear friend, Christophe BRICO, I appreciate you very much, but please don't start saying again that nuclear energy is clean energy or cheap energy. It is neither clean nor cheap. It has little CO2, that's true, but it is extremely expensive if you look at the ruins and memorials alone over hundreds of years. And it has to be extremely subsidized during construction. That is simply a fact. And should an accident happen - as we have seen in enough examples around the world - then things get really expensive. So nuclear is not an alternative. The sun and the wind don't send any bills. Many countries are lucky, they still have water and can also exploit water energy. These are all things that can be done.

And in the years when I was President of the Union for the Mediterranean, we made the Mediterranean Solar Plan, something that would have done away with the plastic bags around the Mediterranean, which are all made of petroleum as a basic material. These are all ways in which we can create this transformation, this necessary, vital technology.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Mr George LOUCAIDES of Cyprus.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL): Mister Chairperson,

Dear colleagues,

Let me begin by sincerely thanking Ms Saskia KLUIT for this important report, which does not merely describe a technological transition, but confronts a deeper political and ethical question. Who controls energy, and for whose benefit?

Today, energy has become both a tool of geopolitical leverage and an object of financial speculation across Europe. Private and strategic interests have seized control over resources and prices, transforming a basic social necessity into a source of insecurity and exclusion.

In this context, energy poverty is not an unintended consequence. It is a systemic injustice. In countries like Cyprus, Greece and Spain, more than one in five people cannot afford to heat or cool their homes adequately. These are not just numbers. They are open wounds in our democratic societies. And unless we act, the green transition risks becoming a new line of inequality between those who can afford to be sustainable and those left behind.

That is why the report is right to assert that access to clean, affordable energy must be recognised and protected as a fundamental social right enshrined in binding legislation. States must not retreat behind the market. Governments have the responsibility to intervene by banning electricity disconnections. They have the duty to subsidise measures that strongly enhance the energy efficiency of households, to support green mobility and public transport, and to ensure fair and progressive pricing, making clean and affordable energy accessible to all.

Dear colleagues, the energy transition is not just about megawatts. It's a choice between profit and people. It's about who we are and the future we choose to build – inclusive, fair and sustainable.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI of San Marino.

Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI (San Marino, SOC): Thank you, President.

Aside from the challenges of democracy and the rule of law, the challenges of combating global warming and the ecological transition are undoubtedly the most important ones, and they will be more and more about how we conceive of these things related to the environment, human health, but also the economy as a right from now on.

And you have to change the narrative a little bit, though, because so many speeches have also been rightly critical, but this report, and we have to thank Ms Saskia KLUIT, therefore, for bringing it to our attention, puts at the centre of the debate precisely the issue of sustainability, which is crucial, but it is also somehow secondary to the fact that this challenge will have positive effects both ecologically, economically, and geopolitically.

Why this? From the ecological point of view, there is no need to go to such lengths. The challenge is not to undermine the planet more than what we are already doing.

From an economic point of view, though, because the jobs of the future will definitely not be tied to the fossil economy.

Can we still afford to think that for decades we will go on with this economic model? No, there is another one that is growing and that we have to embrace because it is positive from the point of view of skills, from the point of view of young people, from the point of view of effects; so even in Europe, which by the way, and this is the last point I address, from the geopolitical point of view, is not endowed with fossil resources. And so there is also an issue that has to do with not creating further, as it has been in the past, problems from the point of view of what fossil extraction creates, which ultimately becomes economics for some, but war for others.

Thank you.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And our final speaker is Mr Dave ROBERTSON of the United Kingdom.

Mr Dave ROBERTSON (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

The climate crisis is real. It is here, and it is already costing lives and livelihoods. The fact that we are still having to say so after so many years, so much evidence and the overwhelming weight of scientific opinion beggars belief. There will always be people and political voices who are not strong enough to make a difficult choice. That has always been the way, and it will always be the way.

And I know not everybody has the same knowledge as me, and in my opinion, there are far too few legislators who are physicists, but I do find much of the debate around the just transition to be frustrating. Because this is no longer a difficult choice, nor is it any longer a scientific exercise. It is an economic one. Low carbon energy sources are cheaper, it is fact. But cheaper energy sources don't always translate into cheaper energy prices quickly though, because the capital cost of building infrastructure is high, even though revenue costs are low.

Member states need to seize the opportunity that this transition provides. New jobs, energy security, lower bills are all within our reach. All it takes is the confidence to free up the capital that we need, to support the measures to create an environment for that transition to happen. But in too many places, the West runs the risk of missing that chance. We risk turning a blind eye to the opportunity that we have before us. And if the West does not grasp it, other actors will. If we do not act, then what will be the answer to the slave labour solar panels that come from states who do not respect human rights? We must create alternatives which support our values and the human rights that we value, here in this place. Oil wealth gave freedom to states with horrendous human rights records to act with impunity in the last century. We must not allow the next energy transition to provide the shield for abuses of human rights in the next.

Please support this.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

That concludes the list of speakers.

I now invite the rapporteur, Ms KLUIT, to reply. You have 3 minutes.

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

I want to thank Ms Gabrielle CATHALA and Mr George LOUCAIDES about the principal point that it is a human rights situation, if you look at the energy transition, and that was the basis of the report. We try to work on many instruments that can address these kinds of things that you mentioned. For example, if you talk about zero-emission zones, of course you need to help people with fossil fuel cars to get other cars, to get good public transport or to get other means of transport to go to their work. And that will also benefit children on the streets that they can play on when we have less space. And SAFs might never have been a good idea anyway.

If you look to housing and work, you have to look at it from different angles. The right to housing and the right to work and mobility is not only being threatened by high energy prices, it's also threatened if you lose your house, like we just saw in Austria, if a glacier collapses. We also lose our houses and our safety when water floods are coming in our houses, as in our country a couple of years ago, in Germany and Luxembourg and Belgium. But what is very important is that we give back control to normal people, and if we want to give them back control, we need to give them incentives so they can pay, so they can join and so they can get power. And the local energy communities is a wonderful instrument to give them that.

The rare metals were mentioned and that is really true. We don't have to look away. Many mines that are in the Global South are not good for the environment, they are not good for the people who work in them, they are not good for the people who live around them. But we also have to see the solutions for that. Mr... I forgot your name, but you talked about innovation. We can also innovate our way out of this. The circular economy we talk so much about needs to be pushed very hard, to the maximum, so we can reuse the energy metals that are already here and otherwise we go to Cornwall for tin.

And another thing we keep forgetting: we need to reduce, reduce, reduce. The less we use, the less materials we need. Then the last thing, but it might be the important thing is that our whole financial, taxation and financial systems are based on centralised fossil-based systems. And it is extremely urgent that we change this to a system that benefits the green energy transition, that benefits a system where people with low incomes can enjoy as much the fruits as people with high incomes. And to get that, we need to change taxation, we need to change capping on energy pricing and we need to help people who cannot pay their bills. Thank you very much.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call on the Vice-Chair of the Committee to respond. You have 3 minutes.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, ECPA, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Ladies and gentlemen, the Reykjavík Summit has stressed the link between human rights and the environment. It stressed the right to a healthy environment and highlighted the importance of social justice. Our states drive that social justice, including through energy policies and public investment; their actions should therefore support the energy transition in a socially fair manner.

This transition is an opportunity for Europe to be stronger and more resilient, geopolitically, economically and socially speaking.

The report emphasises the importance of renewable energy sources, abundant, local and free of charge, with a huge potential to ensure our shared energy security.

However, to ensure a smooth transition, there is a need for partnerships to mobilise resources and cross-border solidarity to demonstrate the benefits in public discourse and protect the vulnerable in the early stages of the energy transition.

It is obvious that the conceptual discussion on the topic of energy transition in Europe has not yet been completed, and this debate proves that.

In this regard, it is important to mention that this report specifically proceeds from the fact that Europe needs more clean, safe and affordable energy, which is paramount for the prosperity of our countries, and we owe this to our population.

And as our debate is ending, allow me to thank all of those who have contributed to the debate, and I would also like to thank the rapporteurs and the members of the Secretariat for the great work they've done.

Thank you.

Vote: Analysis and guidelines for a sustainable and socially fair energy transition

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The debate is now closed.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has presented a draft resolution in Document 16182, to which three amendments have been tabled.

I understand that the Vice-Chair of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that all three amendments to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved by the Committee, be declared as definitively approved. Is that so, Mr Vice-Chairman?

If no one objects, I will consider these amendments to be approved. If there is an objection, we'll need to verify that objection with 10 people standing.

Are there any objections? No.

Amendments 1, 2 and 3 to the draft resolution are therefore approved and will not be called.

Colleagues, we'll now proceed to the vote on the draft resolution in Document 16182, as amended. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

Please reveal the vote.

The draft resolution is therefore adopted.

Colleagues, if people would just remain in their seats now. We're seeing the arrival of President ZELENSKYY, and he will be addressing us shortly.

Address: His Excellency Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY, President of Ukraine

Mr Ian BORG (President of the Committee of Ministers): Your Excellency, President ZELENSKYY, Mr Secretary General, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

It is with profound pride and an unwavering sense of responsibility that I welcome you here today for this signing of the bilateral agreement between the Council of Europe and Ukraine on the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine. This is not merely a signing ceremony. This is a defining moment for international justice. It is a resolute declaration that the rule of law must prevail over the rule of force.

Today's Agreement stands as a powerful affirmation of principled multilateralism. It is living proof that genuine international co-operation, grounded in legal clarity and political courage, can achieve what once might have seemed improbable. This Tribunal will confront one of the greatest violations of international law, the crime of aggression. And it will do so by ensuring that those who wield power are not shielded by it. They will be held to account, not through retaliation, but through law; not by vengeance, but through justice, administered with fairness and due process.

This Agreement is the culmination of more than three years of sustained legal, political and diplomatic endeavour. I pay special tribute to the Core Group, led with distinction by Ambassador Anton KORYNEVYCH, whose vision and perseverance have guided this process through 14 rigorous and focused meetings.

In this noble pursuit, the Council of Europe and this very Committee of Ministers has stood firm from the very outset of the war. As the pre-eminent guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, there is no institution better placed or better suited to lead this historic undertaking. The Council's swift, principled and unwavering response has reaffirmed its enduring relevance and moral authority in Europe and well beyond.

As President of the Committee of Ministers, I'm deeply honoured that this landmark step is also being taken under Malta's Presidency, where once again, following also our recent tenure on the Security Council and as Chair-in-Office of the OSCE, we also hosted the Peace Formula meeting for Security Advisors in Malta, Malta is putting Ukraine at the top of its multilateral agenda.

And so today's signing ceremony also reflects our resolute commitment to justice and accountability for Ukraine and its dedication to upholding international law.

President ZELENSKYY, we all draw strength and inspiration from the extraordinary resilience and courage of the Ukrainian people. And today we reaffirm our solidarity, not in words alone, but in concrete action. Because today we send a clear message to the world that the crime of aggression will not go unpunished. Justice and accountability will be served.

Now, I am pleased to give the floor to the Secretary General.

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

Dear President ZELENSKYY, Ministers, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen.

Dnipro – another strike, another crime. This is Europe's largest war since the Second World War. And this war did not begin last week, it did not begin this year. It is relentless, senseless, lawless. And it is escalating.

As new strikes intensify and global attention shifts elsewhere, we cannot hide, we cannot hesitate, we cannot look away.

Dear President ZELENSKYY, your presence here today in Strasbourg, at the height of the war in Ukraine, sends a very strong message that reaches people far beyond these walls. As Ukraine's men, women and children continue to suffer, it tells Europe and the world that the law must speak louder than the bombs. That the arc of history bends toward justice. And that this Europe – 46 nations strong – will write its own destiny.

We always have the choice. We can treat aggression as politics, not a crime. We can let those who planned and launched the war in Ukraine walk free. We can let global attention drift and pretend that Europe's security and Europe's values are not on trial again.

But that would be the wrong choice. Ukraine did not choose this war. Russia did. And from day one, the Council of Europe rose to the moment. We, the wide European family, excluded Russia. We, at the Council of Europe, created a Register of Damage with more than 30 000 claims and counting.

Mr President, you are here at the heart of what Europe is today – 46 nations united in their determination to shape their future. You stand at the core of our European institutions, the Committee of Ministers, representing here in this room the governments of 46 member states, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, which continues to hear thousands of cases from this war and from Crimea and Donbas before it.

On 9 July, the European Court of Human Rights will deliver a major ruling. An interstate case covering Russia's military actions since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, and the conflict that began in 2014, including the downing of flight MH17. A judgement that will speak not only to Ukraine, but to Europe and to the world.

Ukraine and the Council of Europe are signing an agreement to establish the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression. A Tribunal to judge between victims and aggressors, between impunity and accountability. Because without accountability, there can be no lasting peace for Ukraine and Europe as a whole.

Last Sunday was Ukraine's day of mourning and remembrance of war victims. This Saturday, Ukraine will celebrate Constitution Day. And this year marks the 30th anniversary of Ukraine's accession to the Council of Europe. And at this very moment, this historic signature reminds us that we are building a strong Europe for more justice and for more stability in the world. That the rule of law is and must remain the bedrock of our societies, and that international law must apply to all, with no exceptions and with no double standards.

"Long live a free Ukraine! Long live Europe!" [spoken in French]

Mr Ian BORG (President of the Committee of Ministers): Thank you, Mr Secretary General.

And it's now my honour to invite President ZELENSKYY and the Secretary General to proceed to the table to sign the agreement.

Sitting's bailiff: Ladies and gentlemen, His Excellency Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY, President of Ukraine, and Mr Alain BERSET, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, will now sign the agreement between the Council of Europe and Ukraine on the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes the signing ceremony.

And His Excellency, Mr Ian BORG, President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, will join His Excellency, Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY, President of Ukraine, and Mr Alain BERSET, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, as they leave the meeting room of the Committee of Ministers.

Thank you very much.

Mr Alain BERSET (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): Welcome to everybody at the Council of Europe and a very, very warm welcome to President ZELENSKYY. Thank you. And sincere thanks for being here tonight.

Mister President, you know that this House is your house and the house of the people of Ukraine. Ukraine joined in the 90s, so since 30 years. Well, we meet at a critical moment in our collective support to Ukraine, support for justice, support for the fight against impunity, so that order and the rule of law prevail. And together with President ZELENSKYY, we have signed a bilateral agreement between Ukraine and the Council of Europe. Today's signature is a decisive step towards establishing a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine.

What comes next? We will open negotiations on an Enlarged Partial Agreement to allow the widest possible number of countries to join, to support and to help manage the Tribunal.

It has now been 11 years since Ukraine came under Russian aggression. More than three years since the full-scale invasion began. All institutions have a role to play. For the Council of Europe, that role is justice and accountability through the European Court of Human Rights, through the Register of Damage and the future Claims Commission, and through the Special Tribunal. We have been with the Council of Europe there from day one. And Ukraine can count on the Council of Europe.

Thank you very much, Mister President, for your presence this night in Strasbourg. It's a very, very important message that you pass us, that we have this possibility to have this Agreement together.

Let us work together and have accountability.

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): Thank you so much, Secretary. Thank you very much. And this is a really, truly very important step.

Today, we are launching the process to create a Tribunal for Russia's crime of aggression against Ukraine. Every war criminal must know there will be justice, and that includes Russia. And we are now boosting the legal work in a serious way. There is still a long way to go. Politically, we have already made big progress, and I am grateful to the Committee of Ministers, to the Council of Europe, and to everyone showing leadership. Justice takes time, but it must happen, I'm sure.

And today's agreement and this Tribunal give us a real, real chance to bring justice for the crime of aggression. Other institutions, even international ones, don't have the tools to do this. And we need to show clearly, aggression leads to punishment, and we must make it happen together across all of Europe.

"Glory to Ukraine" [spoken in Ukrainian].

Thank you.

Sitting's Bailiff: His Excellency, Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKY, President of Ukraine.

[Applause]

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

Dear colleagues,

As a Greek,

I come from a tradition where war was not glorified, but understood. Where theatre did not entertain, but reveal. Where truth was sung on stage because the wounds were too deep to name in prose.

And so, I turn to the voices of our ancient dramatists – those who, twenty-five centuries ago, knew what we are once again forced to confront today.

Euripides wrote: “What else is war but the suffering of the innocent?”

Sophocles warned: “The long day presses hard on the heart of the brave.”

And Aeschylus, who fought at Marathon, told us: “We must suffer – suffer into truth.”

These words are not relics. They are, today, the daily reality of Ukraine. For over 1,200 days and nights, the people of Ukraine have endured not only explosions, but the silence that follows. Not just losing your home, but the quiet pain of seeing the world scroll past horror.

They have lived what I once called a thousand nightmares. And among those nightmares, one stands out as the most dangerous: That the world might become accustomed to this war. That a full-scale invasion of a sovereign state becomes normalised. That war crimes become invisible.That suffering becomes “business as usual.”

But this Assembly – this Council – was created to stand precisely against such moral erosion. This Assembly took the initiative – through a long and difficult session in which I had the privilege to participate – to expel the aggressor from the Council of Europe.

To this day, we remain the first and only institution globally to have done so.

The Special Tribunal is an idea born in this hemicycle.

And today, Mr. President, we place a few quiet signatures on paper. Simple gestures – almost routine. But they carry the weight of a continent and the voice of a people who have suffered in silence.

This agreement is more than a legal document. It is a forge. It is where law meets memory, and where steel meets justice.

You, Mr. President, were not born in a palace or a capital. You come from Kryvyi Rih – a city forged in the heat of mines and metallurgy. There, people know what steel is – not just as a material, but as character.

And here in Strasbourg – a city that once lay on the frontlines of Europe’s wars and now hosts the instruments of peace – steel becomes statute. The ink that flows today is not soft. It is tempered, like iron – by courage and memory.

The Greeks taught us a timeless lesson: first comes “Hybris”, the arrogance of unchecked power, followed by “Atis”– blindness, when impunity masquerades as strength, until “Nemesis” restores balance – not through vengeance, but by setting limits. Above all stands “Justice”: not as punishment, but as memory, as law, and as the true beginning of peace.

It is why they founded “Areios Pagos” – the high court for crimes of blood. There, law replaced vengeance. Reason spoke louder than rage. “Justice” as a goddess walked silently.

A silent but unstoppable force of History.

Today, in Strasbourg, we echo the spirit of that sacred court. We say – together – that aggression is a crime. That sovereignty is not optional. That truth matters. And that justice is not the end of war – it is the beginning of peace.

Because where there is no justice, there can be no closure. And where there is no justice, “Nemesis” waits in silence.

Mr. President,

I now invite you to address our Assembly.

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): Thank you very much. *Slava Ukraini.* (Glory to Ukraine).

Welcome home.

Mister President,

Mister Secretary General,

Madam Secretary General,

Honourable Members of the Assembly,

Dear friends.

First of all, thank you for supporting Ukraine.

Your support has been strong, clear and important. In many ways, you have shown real leadership.

Your clear political positions calling Russia's actions a crime of aggression, supporting a just end to the war and rejecting any attempt to legitimise the Russian occupation of our Ukrainian territories have helped shape the political response of all of Europe.

You've set the standard for every democratic nation across the continent. Thank you for that. Thank you.

[applause]

Since the start of the full-scale invasion more than three years ago, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has adopted almost 30 resolutions in support of Ukraine. The Council of Europe was the first major international organization to expel Russia for its aggression. You made it clear: Russia's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of Europe. And that's exactly what it is. It's a war against our shared way of life – a way of life that changed Europe for the better.

Europe was once the source of many bloody wars and brutal ideologies that caused huge suffering, not just here, but around the world. Not long ago, in just one century, Europe brought itself to ruin – twice. The devastation was total both times. But Europe learned its lessons. It rebuilt itself as a continent of peace. And today, Europe helps others find peace and recover from tragedy. It defends international law and human rights around the world. Europe also shows the world how nations can respect each other – even after a difficult and painful shared history. And these achievements didn't come by accident. They are not only the result of political will or public opinion – though those played a huge part. These changes also came from the right choices by leaders and the sincere beliefs of people across Europe. And, of course, they are also the result of the work of European institutions, like the Council of Europe and this Parliamentary Assembly, that unite the continent. And importantly, they are also the result of Europe's commitment to justice – to holding evil accountable not just by force, but by law, by courts, by verdicts based on proven guilt.

We all remember the tribunal that brought justice after the horrors of Nazism – and the world will never forget Nuremberg. Years later, when hate and war returned to part of Europe, another tribunal was needed. This time, for the crimes in the former Yugoslavia. And again, Europe and its partners made sure justice was done, in The Hague. Now, we need the same for Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This crime must be judged clearly and fairly. The world needs an honest, historic verdict. So everyone responsible for this war must be held to account. And not just because of what we all see happening in Ukraine, but through a proper legal process. It was here, in this Assembly, that the first call for such a tribunal was made. The idea was endorsed here, and now it's gaining real support from partner countries in Europe and beyond. I also want to thank the members of the Committee of Ministers who took a vote and supported the decision on establishing the Special Tribunal.

[applause]

Thank you.

Yes, there's still a long road ahead – and really, we know it. Today's agreement to create the tribunal is just the beginning. Now we must take real steps to make it work. And it will take strong political and legal co-operation to make sure every Russian war criminal faces justice. Including PUTIN.

[applause]

This is the path we must walk, all the way to real charges and real verdicts. I urge you to stay involved and keep leading, just as you've done so far.

Some people – and understandably so – ask: What can a tribunal really do? Wouldn't it be better to focus entirely on weapons, technologies and drones?

Of course, military support for Ukraine, tough sanctions against Russia, political pressure on the aggressor are all essential. These are the things that make Russia feel the true cost of this war. And yes, the aggressor must lose. We're working on that. Ukrainian lives must be protected, and I thank everyone who supports our defence.

But justice matters too. It must work so that war criminals have nowhere to hide – not in Europe, not anywhere. Justice must work in a way that makes it clear to anyone planning such crimes of aggression that accountability is certain. And justice must work in a way that sets a legal principle: no rewards for aggression. That's why the crime of aggression must be recorded, judged, and punished. The Hague – the perfect venue for it – the Hague is waiting for justice to be delivered. Thank you to everyone who is making that happen.

Thank you all. *Merci à vous ! Slava Ukraini!*

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

Dear colleagues, President ZELENSKYY has agreed to answer questions, as the procedure is in this Assembly.

I will start with the leader of the Socialists, Greens and Democrats, Mr Frank SCHWABE. Frank, you have the floor.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Mister President.

Dear Mister President ZELENSKYY,

Thank you very much for your speech and thank you very much for your leadership, not just for Ukraine, but to be an example for all the countries in the free world.

I would like to assure you full support of my group, the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, for Ukraine and for your work.

I really want to say you can be very proud of your members of the Verkhovna Rada here who are here in this Assembly. They do their very best to support Ukraine from here, whether they are from your governmental party or whether they are from the opposition.

And I hope, I know it's a very difficult time for you, and it's not an easy day for you as well. I hope you feel the strength from this Parliamentary Assembly to support you and Ukraine.

I would like to ask you a question, and I know for some people it sounds strange on a day like this where you lose so many lives. So, how is the situation of rebuilding in the country? I know it's important for you to give hope in rebuilding already. Where are we now, and how can we increase the pace of rebuilding Ukraine?

"Glory to Ukraine" [spoken in Ukrainian].

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

Dear President, would you like to respond?

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): I don't think I have a choice. Of course, I will answer.

[President] You are not in the White House.

Thank you so much. First of all, I'm very thankful to all the parliamentarians here and, of course, to all the Ukrainian parliamentarians, and I think that we have one big opposition and one big enemy. This is Mr Valdimir PUTIN, and we need unity, unity here in Europe, and of course, in Ukraine. And I'm very thankful for the unity in Ukraine. Thank you. It helps a lot. Thank you so much.

Then you said, and of course, it's under the leadership of Mr Ruslan STEFANCHUK in the Ukrainian Parliament. I'm very thankful. He's a very strong man, and he's a very, very big man. Big and strong, but he has a very big heart. Really. Yes, he has a very big, Ukrainian heart. It's very helpful.

About reconstruction, really. I can say it's an urgent question, because reconstruction is not only a strategic question, it's a tactical question. We have a lot of damage after each winter because of the huge attack of Russians, because of hundreds of drones per night. So it's about thousands, dozens of thousands of drones attacking our infrastructure each winter. So there is a tactical reconstruction, which goes on every day. And of course we need your support, we need involvement of your businesses – the private sector – they give jobs, and we need financing from different institutions. This is when you invest during the war. I think this is maybe it's more important than even after. Because you believe in an independent Ukraine, you believe that Ukraine will prevail. And that's why it's so important to come to Ukraine now, to invest in Ukraine now, to invest, not in dreams, in the real Ukraine, to help our people.

And about the strategic programme, I mean that we will have a very good meeting on 10 and 11 July, the closest period of time in Italy – this time in Rome – under the leadership of a good friend of Ukraine, the Prime Minister of Italy, Giorgia MELONI. And we will have a meeting with the leaders there. And we will not only speak, but this is a very good result for this year's meeting. It will be a really a lot of projects and we will sign these documents, contracts, and I hope that we will do it.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): On behalf of the European People's Party, the leader of the group, Mr Pablo HISPÁN. Pablo, you have the floor.

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

Distinguished President,

Welcome to the Parliamentary Assembly. One of the founding fathers of the Council of Europe was Winston CHURCHILL. Today, Mister President, you, with your leadership and defence of your people and Europe as a whole, are a Winston CHURCHILL of our time. And I've felt that way since the first time that I met you in Kyiv.

I speak on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), the political group which led the report on the legal aspects of the Russian aggression, which laid the groundworks for the Tribunal and the Register of Damage.

Unfortunately, today, we have a more divided Europe, very often provoked by Russian interference. We have countries which lack the political or military commitment to adequately support Ukraine on the one hand and to prepare for our defence and security on the other. The EPP believes that the fight of your country is our fight. What could be the consequences of these divisions for the brave people of Ukraine?

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

Dear President, I know that now you want to respond.

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): So, it was from the very beginning a goal of Russia's. So this is a hybrid war. It's not just a weapon, because you saw that they've not been successful from the very beginning of this war, that they wanted to occupy us, and we stand up to it with all our heroic soldiers, with our people. It's really the strongest of our people, of our nation.

But what was the most important? Unity. And we could organise unity in Europe, even with different parties with different views, but with the same values. And I think this is the question of values, this unity. And Russia is targeting this, by using social media, TV, different kinds of media, but also with hybrid attacks and cyber attacks – a lot of different things. These are instruments in the hands of the Kremlin.

What we need not to lose is unity. I began with these words and I really address this to you: we need unity in Europe. First of all, it's our continent, a continent of real humanity, real freedom. And, of course, for PUTIN, it's quick steps to divide all of us. And of course, if he prevails in this, in dividing Europe, he will occupy it, occupy all these values and destroy all these countries.

It's not only about Ukraine. I think we help Europe a lot today. And really, the price is very high. We pay this price. We are very thankful to all the countries, all the participants of this fight, but we really pay a lot. It's our Ukrainian losses, it's broken families, destroyed lives. And that's why we need from you complete unity. You are much stronger than Russia. They alone, really alone. Repeat it each day.

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

On behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots and Affiliates, Sir Christopher CHOPE.

Sir Christopher CHOPE (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): President,

May I thank you for your inspiring leadership by example, for freedom and also against appeasement. It is so important that Russia is defeated and that full democratic sovereignty is restored to the whole of Ukraine. To that end, what do you want us to do to help? Do you want us, for example, to provide more military assistance? Do you think we are doing enough in terms of sanctions against Russia? What else do you think we can be doing? Because at the moment we are obviously not doing enough in order to defeat the enemy.

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

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): It was an important signal from the very beginning of the full-scale invasion. Your support. Political support, yes, but it's steps, one by one.

Then, what we needed after political support and voices, which is extremely important now, also, we needed military support very much. So it was like an urgent help to survive. And then, when the war is not short, we needed to greatly decrease the economy of Russia, because they pay for this war. They increase their production each day. Their production today is bigger than the production of Europe's – all of Europe, including the EU and other countries, like UK, Norway. So this is, this was, very important.

And I think this is the time when we have to put pressure, do everything we can, of course, with military support. But military is to stand. But to decrease the Russian appetite, it has been to put sanctions as strong as possible. Banking, energy, and, of course, on components for their defence sector. It's very important and it comes always with - it's a pity - it goes to Europe, Asia, China, even Taiwan and other countries where businesses sell components. And then Russia uses a large number of missiles to attack us. Without these components, they can't have such a huge number of missiles.

Sometimes countries really don't know. The private sector, they really don't know that they sell to Russia. Of course, in Europe and some other countries, they don't want to sell. But we have to focus on this. We have to think. We have to be cautious and smart. Yes. And to look where it goes. And this is very important so not to help Russia increase this war.

And you said, what else? I think. What else? Do you know President TRUMP?

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): We have heard of him.

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): We need a strong connection with him. We need Europe. I think we need unity between Europe and the United States. And we will prevail. Thank you.

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

And now, on behalf of the Liberal and Democrats, the leader of the group, Mr Iulian BULAI. Iulian.

Mr Iulian BULAI (Romania, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): President Zelenskyy,

You are the great defender of the free world and of Europe. And we've been talking about you so many times.

We've been following you, fighting for your country and also for the sake of the whole European human rights protectors, rule of law and democracy. It's fantastic to see you here. I'm very privileged that I can address you this question on behalf of the liberal group and where, by the way, most of the Ukrainian delegation are sitting. And I'm very privileged that they've entrusted me with this task.

Also, on behalf of all the Romanians, I want to thank you for keeping away from our borders, Romanian borders and Moldova's borders, the Russian troops and tanks. That is so important, and we owe it to you. A big thank you.

Now, Mr. President, no peace without accountability and justice. Nobody is above the law. No matter how high Mr PUTIN and his accomplices sit, no peace agreement that would normalise occupation of Ukrainian territories. This is the firm position of the ALDE group in this assembly.

And now my question is, what progress would you like to see on the treaty you have just signed by the end of the year? And what message should we bring home to our people, our parliaments and our governments?

Thank you.

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

M. President, you have the floor.

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): Thanks so much.

What was the last thing about? The next steps after the Tribunal? Better to provide it this century, I think.

I think this is the main signal that I can say.

First of all, this is a very strong instrument, and we need judicially, and I think, that this is really the first time that there is such strong judicial recognition of the crime of aggression, and that's why this is a very important step.

What do we need? We need not only words, and not only signatures. This is great, but this is a political win. But we need real, practical steps, and that is why we will need all the parliamentarians, all the participants here, all the countries, all our family – the European family – and I think, yes, to do it and to bring peace closer. This is one of the instruments that can help.

Thank you for all the words you said, from the very beginning.

I am not sure that I have the right for these words, but anyway, I will say them because we are in a war and I want to tell you: I want to congratulate your country on a very important choice. That is it.

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

On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, the co-Chair of the party, Laura CASTEL. Laura.

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

Mister President, thank you so much for your speech, and welcome to this Assembly.

As you know, we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people during all these challenging and devastating times. The Ukrainian people and our continent deserve peace.

On the one hand, what is your vision for a just and lasting peace settlement?

And on the other hand, at the same time, Mister President, we also believe that even under martial law, people deserve safeguards of their human rights, democracy and the rule of law in compliance with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. We know, though, that the Ukrainian Constitutional Court faces several serious problems, such as a lack of quorum and chairmanship. So, can you elaborate on these problems and whether you have a strategy to safeguard human rights, democracy and the rule of law for all Ukrainians?

Thanks again, Mister President, for being here with us, and I want to welcome you again on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Thank you.

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

Mr. President, you have the floor.

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): Thank you very much for your question.

What was the first part about? Sorry, it's a little bit late. It was about the plan. I think we had a lot of different documents, and we can share different views. And there are some views which I don't want publicly shared because Russia will know about it, and that's why it's not good. But what is very important, now, we have to focus on instruments which will pressure Russia and put them to the table. We can say negotiations or talks, or dialogue, but anyway, to the beginning of a way without weapons.

Russia doesn't want it without any kind of ultimatums. This is very important. If we speak about peace talks, it's not peace ultimatums, because freedom for us, and I think we showed it from the very beginning of this war, freedom doesn't have a price. We don't sell it and don't sell our independence. That's it.

[Applause]

Really, to save what he wants to occupy; this is Ukraine, this is more about not only territories, it's more about identity, it's more about philosophy, more about freedom, really. And I think he won't destroy it, because without Ukraine he wouldn't be able to build the empire. He needs bases, and he needs Ukraine. We don't sell Ukraine.

[Applause]

About the constitutional court. I'm in that. So we have some questions concerning it, but we will manage it.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr President, we may have offered you just a cup of coffee...

Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY (President of Ukraine): Greek coffee!

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): ...Greek coffee, yes, I didn't mention it because I have said a lot about Greece and my country... I believe some hope, but be sure, a lot of support and support that is unconditional – only the conditions of democracy are being served here.

Thank you so much for being with us. It is an honour.

Dear colleagues,

The Assembly will hold the next sitting tomorrow.

The sitting is adjourned.