



Provisional edition

Tuesday 27 January 2026, afternoon

Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting n°4

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): So the sitting is open. Sorry for the delay.

There was a blackout, not only here in the hemicycle, but in the whole region. But it also took a while after the electricity was back on to settle all the systems here in the room. We wanted to make sure that you really can speak and vote. It was not so clear. But now everything should work. Let us know if there are any issues, please.

The sitting is open.

I remind members that in order to be registered for this sitting, you should insert your badge when you take your seat and keep it inserted for at least 30 seconds. You should also insert your badge in order to speak or vote. To request the floor, please press the "request" button.

I also remind the Assembly that members who have not submitted an annual declaration of interest 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. And I remind members that the Assembly agreed this morning that the speaking time this afternoon is 2 minutes. Please also be aware that after these 2 minutes, the microphone will be cut off.

Then we come to the debate on – [Ms Petra BAYR is interrupted]. Just a second, please. Perfect.

So now I can come back to what I wanted to do originally. Because this morning, you know, we held the ballot to elect a judge for the European Court in respect of Cyprus and the Netherlands.

I will now announce the ballots, and I will start with the election of the Netherlands.

The total number of members voting: 168. The number of blank ballot papers: 4. The number of spoilt ballot papers: 2. The number of votes cast: 162. And that makes an absolute majority of 82.

And the votes were cast as follows:

Mr Sjoerd BAKKER, 42. Ms Tamara TROTMAN, 2. Ms Corinna WISSELS, 118.

Ms Corinna WISSELS, having obtained a majority of votes cast, is elected Judge of the European Court of Human Rights for a term of office of nine years, which shall commence not later than three months after her election.

And then let's come to the votes in respect of Cyprus.

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.

The number of members voting: 168. The number of blank ballots: 14. The number of spoilt ballots: 2. The number of votes cast: 152, which makes an absolute majority of votes cast of 77. And the results are as follows:

Mr Nicholas EMILIOU: 121. Ms Natasa MAVRONICOLA: 26. Ms Margarita PAPANTONIOU: 5.

Mr Nicholas EMILIOU, having obtained a majority of votes cast, is elected Judge of the European Court of Human Rights for a term of office of nine years, which shall not commence later than three months after his election.

So we have two new judges. Perfect.

So the next item of business is the debate on the report entitled "Elections in times of crisis", Document 16297, presented by Mr Damien COTTIER on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

In order to finish by 5:10 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 5:00 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

And I call Mr COTTIER, rapporteur. You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes later to respond. Over to you.

Debate: Elections in times of crisis

Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE, Rapporteur): Thank you, Madam President, and congratulations to the judges we have just elected to the European Court of Human Rights.

Imagine, Madam President, that we wanted to hold a sitting of the Assembly and suddenly the power went out. This demonstrates, as we have just experienced, the importance of infrastructure resilience, and it is exactly the same type of issue that can arise when organising an election on a small, but also on a large, scale.

This report has its origins in a period that we have not forgotten, even if, I must say, it seems a very long time ago, given all that has happened in the world since: the Covid-19 pandemic. A fundamental disruption that has confronted our societies, but also our democracies, with unprecedented challenges, and even dilemmas: how can we protect public health without weakening fundamental rights?

And in this context, the fragility of our electoral systems became apparent, sometimes brutally, just as the fragility of an assembly in the face of a lack of electricity became apparent a short while ago. Polls have been postponed. Rules have been adapted as a matter of urgency. Electoral authorities faced extreme pressure. During Covid-19, elections everywhere became a full-scale test of our democratic resilience.

These challenges led our Assembly, together with the Swiss Parliament, to organise a conference, the 2023 Berne Conference, which I had the honour of chairing, on elections in times of crisis. This was an essential step in our collective reflection. But the years that followed only served to reinforce the initial observation, because since then the crises have multiplied. Unfortunately, there was a natural disaster in Türkiye shortly before the elections. There was, of course, the war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which is unfortunately still going on. There has been an increase in hybrid threats, disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks.

All these crises have shown with increasing clarity that protecting free and fair elections is not a technical or procedural issue. It is the very protection of the foundations on which fair, free and democratic societies rest. And this morning, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Mrs Maia SANDU, stressed this very clearly here in this House a few hours ago. I quote: "I cannot stress enough," she said, "the elections. In democracies, they are the most vulnerable and decisive point of entry for foreign manipulation". And that is exactly what this report is about. In a world marked by unpredictability and instability, elections are not just a time for making political choices; they have become an essential anchor of democratic legitimacy, a marker of continuity and trust.

So I have three messages for this report, which was drawn up following a visit to Sweden. I would like to thank the Swedish authorities, who gave us a warm welcome and showed us a number of things they had put in place. Also in Stockholm, we visited an institution called International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, which promotes democracy, and I would also like to thank them for their invaluable collaboration.

Three messages.

Firstly, elections are a fundamental right, even and perhaps especially in times of crisis. We must continue to refer to Article 3 of Protocol 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, with universal, equal, free, secret and direct suffrage. This is not an option, it is an obligation, and it was confirmed two and a half years ago by the Heads of State and Government in the Reykjavík principles.

The second message is that the crisis is no longer the exception. They are even becoming the norm, so we need to adapt. I've mentioned some of them: pandemics, natural disasters, terrorism, armed conflict, misinformation, foreign interference, extreme polarisation, and so on. More and more elections are taking place in contexts of vulnerability, and we cannot postpone elections every time or ask ourselves questions when crises arise. We have to prepare for them if we are to be resilient.

My third message is that here at the Council of Europe we have considerable assets and therefore a duty to act. We have the Venice Commission, the case law of the Court, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Council for Democratic Elections and, of course, this Assembly, which has been observing elections for over 40 years. The electoral cycle defined by the Council of Europe provides us with a coherent and recognised theoretical framework, and we must make greater use of it.

So what we need to do is, firstly, to prepare a legal and institutional framework in the various countries so that we are ready. We also need to increase the level of operational readiness. Basically, all countries should consider their electoral infrastructure to be of strategic importance, for the reasons mentioned this morning by Ms Maia SANDU, because it is essential and because it is vulnerable. Foreign interference and disinformation must be thwarted. We need to safeguard and strengthen and probably rethink electoral observation. Even in emergency situations, observation must be able to take place, perhaps even more so in crisis situations. And we probably need to rethink where we look, because we are extremely talented and efficient, and we have built up expertise in this Assembly in observing elections, particularly on polling day and in the days leading up to it. But it is not necessarily at that time, or in a physical ballot box, that the problems occur. It's sometimes upstream, in the legislation, in the campaign, in the way in which you can or cannot be a candidate, or on issues that are obviously digital, and so we have to rethink the way we observe elections to remain effective.

We need to manage protracted crises and post-conflict situations. And, of course, we need to support Ukraine effectively in its preparations for elections, which must be possible when conditions permit and martial law is lifted. Strong support will be needed, and the Council of Europe and the Assembly are active in this area and must obviously continue to be so, because it will be a considerable challenge.

And finally, we need to strengthen the role of our Assembly by putting the electoral cycle at the heart of our action, as I said, by rethinking the way we observe elections. And that can also mean where we observe them. And one of the proposals in the report is that we should do this not only in the countries that are under observation, in monitoring, but also in other countries, because we can all learn from each other to be more resilient.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Damien COTTIER.

I open the general discussion and I remind you that the time limit for the spokesperson for political groups is three minutes. For everybody else it is two minutes. And please be aware that the microphone will be cut off after these two or three minutes.

And first on my list on behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates is Lord David BLENCATHRA.

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

I congratulate Mr Damien COTTIER on his excellent report, Elections in times of crisis, because it sets out a clear practical roadmap to strengthen legal clarity for emergencies, bolster operational preparedness, protect electoral infrastructure from foreign interference and cyber threats, adapt and preserve robust election observation and build long-term resilience across the electoral cycle.

Colleagues,

These are not abstract ideals. They are urgent, actionable priorities and Mr Damien COTTIER has got it absolutely right.

The recommendations call first for legal and procedural clarity. This legal backbone is the guardrail that keeps emergency responses lawful, proportionate and temporary.

Operationally, the report urges comprehensive risk assessments, contingency planning and strengthening electoral management bodies, resources and communication strategies.

Crucially, the report recognises the modern vectors of disruption. That's systemic disinformation, co-ordinated foreign interference, cyber attacks and AI-enabled manipulation.

It calls for whole-of-society strategies – and that's a great idea – involving parties, media, civil society, academia and security services to protect information integrity and electoral infrastructure.

Early warning capabilities are essential to defend the vote in the digital age.

What I'm particularly pleased about is that these recommendations dovetail directly with the practical priorities I set out in our annual report from the Parliamentary Alliance for Free and Fair Elections, which I presented yesterday to this Assembly.

That set out some clear operational steps:

We need a concise observer checklist, translating parameters into clear indicators.

We need a dedicated methodology for out-of-country voting so diaspora ballots meet the same standards as domestic ones.

We need to observe the whole run-up to an election, and not just on polling day.

We need a lean [*audio cuts*] to brief observers and to run the threat scans.

Colleagues,

Our two aims of Mr Damien COTTIER's report and the Alliance Action Plan for the Future are inseparable.

High standards without operational tools leave elections vulnerable.

Operational tools without legal safeguards risk abuse.

By implementing the report's legal, operational and digital recommendations, and by adopting the concrete measures in paragraphs 59 to 79 of our Alliance Annual Report, we create a resilient electoral ecosystem, one that protects voters, empowers observers and preserves legitimacy even in times of crisis.

So, colleagues, let us commit to turning these recommendations into law, into budgets, into trained teams and into everyday practice.

Democracy is not a default setting. It is a responsibility.

We must act now to ensure that whatever crisis comes next, the ballot remains the people's voice.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

And on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I call Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Madam President, dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteur Mr Damien COTTIER for such a crucial resolution and the big work on ensuring, with this report, that elections in times of crisis must guarantee the free and expression of all voters, which is the foundation of democracies.

Across Europe, elections today face unprecedented challenges: disinformation, foreign interference, cyber attacks, security risks. The rapporteur emphasises those risks. We must take into account the experience also in Moldova and Romania's recent elections, of the challenges they faced during those elections.

I also want to greet the conference that took place in Bern. It was a wonderful conference in May, I think 2023. It included also a shared commitment and declaration to support Ukraine in ensuring the integrity of its future elections, once security conditions allow.

As a Ukrainian, let me be very clear. Elections today are not possible because the country is at war. Some want to push Ukraine for this. Ukraine's priority is to defend people, to survive and to achieve just and lasting peace. No democratic process can be genuine when citizens live under constant security threats and shelling.

Voter stations and voters would immediately become military targets. Soldiers on the frontline will not have the possibility to vote – and it's one million people, with six million people outside. We need to create polling stations, thousands of additional polling stations.

Any electoral outcome produced under such unequal and unsafe conditions during wartime would inevitably be questioned both domestically and externally.

That is why the constitution of Ukraine forbids elections during wartime. After the war, Ukraine wants to hold elections. We have already created a group of which I'm a member. We are working on issues of security, legitimacy, on preparations for elections, and it is established already, and the amendments to the law are ready.

But we need this war to be finished.

The Council of Europe is also a very key partner in this process. Under the current action plan there is all the expertise. They support reform, transparency and integrity in our electoral system.

But after the war, we would like also the help of your member states, sustained support from your member states.

This is why the resolution before us really matters. Elections must express the will of the people and must be free, genuine and safe in the first place.

Thank you, colleagues.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Next on the list, on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, is Ms Sevilay ÇELENK.

Ms Sevilay ÇELENK (Türkiye, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Madam President, dear colleagues,

On behalf of my group, I thank the rapporteur for this carefully prepared report. It is perfect indeed.

But I would like to take this opportunity to discuss key issues within the framework of elections and democracy. Protecting elections must prevent the invalidation of results by those in power. National security cannot be an excuse to restrict elections. Disinformation includes not only foreign interference, but also the use of media in favour of governments. Today, crises are no longer temporary exceptions. They are often deliberate modes of governance. Severe economic hardship, poverty and unemployment combined with the systematic polarisation of society. Public institutions lose independence and are transformed into instruments of authoritarian control. Elections occur where trust in the judiciary is eroded, public institutions lack neutrality and media faces intense pressure. Societies are kept in perpetual states of fear, while crises are misattributed to vague external threats. This climate doesn't strengthen democracy, it drives citizens away from politics.

Consequently, elections in times of crisis often struggle to produce genuine democratic legitimacy. Repeated elections, declining turnout and post-electoral deadlock have become familiar patterns. Yet, one truth must be clear. Elections do not end at the ballot box. Türkiye illustrates this clearly. Despite pressure, citizens continue to participate with high turnout. However, the systematic appointment of trustees since 2019 has nullified local electoral outcomes.

Democracy depends not only on holding elections, but also on respecting results. Removing elected officials suspends the will of the electorate. The Council of Europe must treat elections not as technical procedures, but as processes encompassing pre- and post-electoral phases. International observation must ensure respect for results and protection of democratic gains. Elections framed as existential threats undermine peaceful political competition. Authoritarian governments use them to consolidate power, entrenching domestic and international tensions.

And the United European Left, we call on the Council of Europe to defend democracy firmly in times of crisis, ensuring that elections remain meaningful, peace is protected and the will of citizens is respected. Because where elections lose their meaning, democracy and peace cannot remain.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

On behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA.

Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA (North Macedonia, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

On behalf of my group, I would like to thank and to congratulate the rapporteur on this timely report, because free and democratic elections are the core of human rights and democratic societies.

But just when we thought we had overcome the elections organised during Covid-19 pandemic, we thought we had already read everything about elections during natural disasters. And when everyone thought that a clear checklist was possible for elections in wartime, a new type of war is in front of us, using tools to ease the processes. While information and communication technologies were introduced as a new way of voting, they also bring new risks as artificial intelligence and cyber tools expand the scope of disinformation and manipulation prior to elections.

Our vulnerabilities are being weaponised by foreign powers, amplified by technology and artificial intelligence, financed through cryptocurrency disguised in democratic language.

"These are no longer attacks on institutions; these are assaults on our own sovereignty." These are the words of a great leader of a small country, but determined not to be food on the menu, but rather strives to sit at the table. She strives for building democracy that can resist manipulation. History is full of such examples of small but determined forces valiantly fending off aggressors.

In late September, when tiny Moldova used superior tactics, enlightened citizen-focused leadership and the strong support of friends and allies to successfully resist intense Russian interference in historic parliament elections on 28 September, the ancient Greco-Persian Wars came to mind.

To recover resilience in society, democratic champions must reflect on the vulnerabilities exposed by interference and transform this failure point towards structural improvements. New norms, new rules and practices that reflect lessons learned should take priority and ensure that tangible outcomes are felt by citizens. National governments, civil society and responsible institutions should work hand in hand to resist future threats and deliver new investments and concrete opportunities to secure citizens' trust.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

And the last speaker on behalf of the political groups is Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ for the Group of the European People's Party.

Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ (France, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Digital interference is a major component of the "hybrid" threat and a particularly serious threat to the functioning of our democracies. Elections are a prime target. The aim is simple: to break the bond of trust between citizens and the institutions responsible for representing them.

The development of disinformation and "fake news" undermines the credibility of the electoral process. A wide range of techniques are being used, including the use of influencers to amplify certain narratives, the out-of-context dissemination of images and videos that distort what is being said and, increasingly, the use of artificial intelligence to create false positions. Not to mention cyber attacks. Elections are being undermined by digital technology, particularly in times of crisis.

The dematerialisation of part or all of the electoral process accentuates these risks. A cyber attack can bring the system to a standstill, and digital protection becomes essential to preserve the reliability of elections.

This is particularly important when elections are organised just after a serious crisis. The example of the post-conflict elections mentioned in the resolution shows that, contrary to what Mr Donald TRUMP's peace plan advocates, it will not be possible to hold elections in Ukraine 60 days after the guns have fallen silent. Building reliable electoral registers, finding legislative solutions to enable Ukrainian refugees abroad to vote, ensuring the security of an electoral campaign and the vote, and making sure that hybrid threats do not disrupt the process, because after a war and a serious crisis, the credibility of the elections and their results is fundamental if reconstruction is finally to begin. Consideration is already being given to introducing the necessary legislative reforms.

In this context, the role of the Council of Europe is essential. The Venice Commission has shown that by supporting legislators and raising awareness of democratic issues, elections can be held even in times of crisis. In coordination with the Parliamentary Assembly through the Elections Council, it is building the essential foundations for the holding of free elections. Observation missions, in which I have participated, as have a number of you, are another tool for building confidence in the electoral process.

Dear colleagues, crises and new threats are challenges for our constitutional states. Elections are the beating heart of our democracies. We must protect them.

I would like to thank Mr Damien COTTIER for presenting us with this excellent report.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Now we start with the list of speakers.

I want to remind you, you have 2 minutes now and the microphone will be cut off after 2 minutes.

The first on the speakers list is Ms Aysu BANKOĞLU, my former neighbour.

Ms Aysu BANKOĞLU (Türkiye, SOC): Thank you, Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

I thank Mr Damien COTTIER for this report, which addresses the pressure that crises exert on democratic institutions and electoral processes.

This report speaks directly to the reality my country, Türkiye, is living today.

In Türkiye, we are no longer debating abstract risks to democracy, we are experiencing them. Our presidential candidate, Mr Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, has been unjustly imprisoned. His university diploma was revoked to eliminate him from political competition. Elected mayors across the country have been behind bars for nearly ten months.

This is not crisis management; this is the manufacturing of crisis to silence opposition and weaken democracy.

On the other hand, around the world, we are witnessing the dangerous normalization of authoritarianism. Leaders openly question the value of elections themselves. Mr Donald TRUMP suggested that “maybe elections are not even necessary”, a statement that would once have been unthinkable in democratic societies and it reflects a wider global trend: power without accountability, authority without consent.

The report rightly reminds us that elections are the foundation of democratic legitimacy. When governments manipulate crises to postpone, distort, or override the will of the people, democracy is dismantled.

The imprisonment of opposition leaders, the silencing of local governments, and the criminalization of dissent must be named for what they are: violations of democratic principles and human rights.

This Assembly cannot remain a mere monitoring; we must send a clear message: no crisis justifies the suspension of democracy. No government has the right to rule without the consent of its people.

Democracy is not a luxury for stable times. It is most essential precisely when power feels most tempted to abandon it.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I call on Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you Madam President.

I want to thank the rapporteur.

I think it's one of the most practical reports, not only because of this report, but because of the recommendations that we can use as the start of a big process, because it's a recommendation of the whole process of organisation of elections. It's very important to understand the specific problems that we have not only in Ukraine, but a lot of countries after the post-war period.

We all remember the pandemic elections, but we can't even imagine how hard it is to organise elections during a period of war, the post-war period that we had in Ukraine in 2014, when it was the first invasion of the Russian Federation. We organised these elections, and not only parliamentary elections, but presidential, parliamentary and local elections.

But it's impossible to imagine now how to organise these elections in a period of war, just now, after the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation.

First of all, it's maybe very easy to announce elections, but it's very hard for these elections to be recognised first of all by the citizens of this country, by international organisations, by our organisation. So it's very important to understand where the most complicated questions are in the organising of these elections.

For example, for us Ukrainians, we understood that it's impossible to organise elections abroad for more than 8 million people.

And you can imagine what will be on the borders of Ukraine with your countries, when these people will try to return back to vote, and to use their right to vote in these elections.

Second, of course, it's very hard to organise these elections for those who are inside the country and living in different situations.

So I want once more to say thank you, but it's only a start of a big, big piece of work.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And we now turn to Ms Victoria TIBLOM.

Ms Victoria TIBLOM (Sweden, ECPA): Thank you Madam President,

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy. Yet, this report reminds us that it is precisely in times of crisis, war, pandemics, natural disasters or severe political instability that elections are most vulnerable.

Crises put extraordinary pressure on democratic systems. Authorities may be forced to act quickly, but speed must never come at the expense of legitimacy, transparency, and trust. When electoral standards are weakened, even temporarily, the long-term damage to democracy can be profound.

The report rightly underlines that crises must not become a pretext for postponing elections indefinitely, restricting political competition, limiting media freedom, or undermining the independence of electoral bodies. Emergency measures must always be lawful, proportionate, time-limited, and subject to democratic oversight.

At the same time, the report offers constructive guidance. Flexibility is sometimes necessary; whether through adjusted voting procedures, expanded early or postal voting, or the use of digital tools. But flexibility must go hand in hand with robust safeguards, equal access for all voters, and strong protection against disinformation and foreign interference.

Particularly important is the emphasis on public trust. Citizens must understand why measures are taken and how their vote is protected.

Finally, this report is a call for preparedness. Crises will occur again. Democratic resilience depends on planning in advance, strengthening institutions, and anchoring emergency electoral measures firmly within the framework of the European Convention on Human Rights.

I strongly welcome this report and its recommendations.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

And now we listen to Mr Benoît LUTGEN.

Or we don't. Obviously, we don't listen to him. Then Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN is the next on my list.

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN (Türkiye, SOC): Dear colleagues,

Guaranteeing fair elections in times of crisis demonstrates the extent to which we are committed to democracy at such times. There may be an earthquake, attempts to manipulate elections, terrorism or armed conflict. It is precisely in the face of these exceptional crises that our commitment to the rule of law is put to the test.

Dear colleagues, will we see crises as an excuse to abandon free elections, or will we create a system that is resilient in the face of such crises?

The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Mr Donald TRUMPS's messages about Greenland after Venezuela, the climate crisis that is beginning to have a direct impact on our lives, and of course, conflicts. All this shows that crises are no longer the exception, but have become the rule.

So, instead of creating exceptions to our rules and suspending them, we need to defend our values even more forcefully. Certainly, we must hold free elections during crises, but we must also prevent the elections themselves from turning into a crisis, as happened in Türkiye. Just as important as holding elections, freedom of expression during the electoral process, respect for election results, the fact that the winners of the election are not in prison like Mr Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, that municipalities are not run by administrators appointed by the government. All this is an inseparable part of democracy.

Thank you very much.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA is next.

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

And thank you, Mr Damien COTTIER, for your excellent report on this highly relevant and pressing topic.

Elections are truly the cornerstone of democracy, and elections are our democratic jewel. At the same time, elections have become a primary target of our adversaries, across Europe and even across the Atlantic.

Several referring trends can be observed repeating themselves from country to country. First, malicious usage of artificial intelligence (AI). AI is now available to everyone, but some use it not only for tech generation but also for highly realistic deepfake videos and algorithmic-driven armies of social media accounts. This is unprecedented. Reality itself is becoming relative, and emotions are being deliberately weaponised.

Second, growing dominance of social media over the consumption of high-quality independent journalism, simplified answers to complicated problems in times of crisis are becoming more and more popular.

And third, foreign interference in elections itself. In an increasing number of European countries, foreign interference in electoral processes has been clearly observed, identified and proven. The most striking example is Russia's operations in Moldova. They failed. Moldova serves as an example to study, to learn from and to admire. One of the key preconditions for Moldova's resilience was not only the co-ordinated work of multiple institutions, but also direct, open and honest communication with society. So foreign interference must be prevented, not corrected, after it has already taken hold. The Kremlin's broader objective is to weaken support for Ukraine, and we should not allow it.

Therefore, this support is also very important. Thank you so much.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And now over to Mr László VÉCSEY.

I think he is not in the room, obviously, so we go to Mr Gergely ARATÓ.

Mr Gergely ARATÓ (Hungary, SOC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair,

Dear Assembly,

Thank you, Damien, for this excellent report on a critically important topic – elections during crises. Maintaining public trust in electoral processes is absolutely essential for democracy's foundation.

My particular concern is that extraordinary circumstances could be used to obstruct elections. Coming from Hungary, where we've had a state of danger for nearly six years, I can clearly see prolonged emergency status and the assumptions related to prolonging the elections, or limiting them, could seriously undermine democratic legitimacy and public confidence, even if they are not necessarily true.

The report's recommendations are excellent: clear legal criteria for postponements with parliamentary oversight and judicial review, national election co-operation networks strengthened election observations even in crises.

But this cannot remain solely a national competence. The Council of Europe has a duty to address it systematically, establishing uniform standards to protect electoral integrity across all member states.

From this perspective, the recommendations of the report regarding the tasks of the general assembly and the ministerial council are also important, but maybe we need to go further later.

That is why I am very grateful to the rapporteur for his work, and I recommend the adoption of the report.

Thank you very much.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

And we now turn to Mr Sali BERISHA.

Mr Sali BERISHA (Albania, EPP/CD): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the matter of elections in crisis, but also out of the crisis, the most fundamental question is, is there an election or an election farce? Elections serve the rule of law. An election farce does the opposite.

I strongly condemn Russian interference in elections in other countries. But I'm here also to denounce two other major factors which could ruin the elections. One of them is state party or party state. Like it was told here by observers that in Albania elections were in the climate of a party state. Second major problem is the narco state.

The narco state is a condition in which drugs and crimes are transformed into votes and the votes later are transformed into crimes. 28 MPs were entered in parliament supported by most powerful drug cartels. After that, they got 450 permissions for hotels, motels, buildings, touristic resorts. After that, their mandates are used to entirely block the prosecutor's office.

The prosecutor's office asked to arrest and remove immunity of Vice Prime Minister. Edi RAMA, the Prime Minister, who is called "Ramaduro", blocked the prosecutor's initiative and is not allowing it. So, why? Because in every three lines of this file is his name. The same is happening with AKSHI, the National Agency of Technology.

[interrupted by the President]

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

The microphone is off, so there is no translation anymore. Thank you very much.

Before we skipped Mr László VÉCSEY because he had a different list. But now we can take him and he's ready.

Please, you have the floor. You need to press the button on the microphone.

Mr László VÉCSEY (Hungary, ECPA): Thank you for the floor. It's okay, now?

In accordance with the draft resolution, the Fundamental Law of Hungary contains clear provisions on the holding of elections during a state of war and state of emergency, including clear and limited criteria for postponement, in accordance with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and temporariness.

Under Hungarian constitutional regulations, in accordance with the draft resolution, a decision by the National Assembly and a qualified majority are required to postpone the election.

During a state of war or a state of emergency, the National Assembly shall neither declare its dissolution nor be dissolved. During a state of war or a state of emergency, general elections for Members of the National Assembly may not be scheduled and may not be held; in such cases a new National Assembly shall be elected within ninety days from the time of termination of the state of war or state of emergency. If the general elections for Members of the National Assembly have already been held, but the new National Assembly has not yet been formed, the President of the Republic shall convene the constitutive sitting for a date within thirty days from the termination of the state of war or state of emergency.

If the National Assembly has dissolved itself or has been dissolved, it may be convened during a state of war or state of emergency by the President of the Republic.

The National Assembly may declare a state of war in three cases. First, in the event of proclamation of a military conflict or threat of war. Second, in the event of armed aggression from abroad, an act equivalent to an external armed attack, and an imminent threat thereof. Third case, for the purpose of fulfillment of an alliance treaty obligation of collective defense.

A majority of two-thirds of the votes of all Members of the National Assembly shall be required for the declaration of state of war.

Thank you for the floor.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Now the floor is for Ms Louise MOREL.

Ms Louise MOREL (France, ALDE): Thank you, Madam President.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin by warmly thanking the Rapporteur, Mr Damien COTTIER, for the quality of his report, which deals with a subject that is becoming increasingly important in our work: the holding of elections in times of crisis.

This report is based on a lucid observation: today, elections rarely take place under normal conditions. Disinformation, foreign interference, cyber attacks, health crises, armed conflicts or prolonged emergencies are common and have a structural impact on the integrity, and sometimes the entirety, of our democratic processes. And it is our responsibility as members of the Council of Europe, committed to the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, to preserve the democratic legitimacy of these elections, especially in these constrained contexts.

I would like to say that I particularly appreciate the fact that your report rejects any binary approach. It reminds us that it is neither the postponement of elections nor their organisation at all costs that constitute, in themselves, democratic guarantees. What matters are clear legal frameworks, proportionate and transparent decisions subject to parliamentary and judicial control, and a comprehensive approach covering the entire electoral system.

Your report also stresses, and I would like to ask you about this, the need to strengthen democratic resilience, particularly in the face of foreign interference and the manipulation of information that is amplified by digital technologies. We were reminded of this again this morning by the Ms Maia SANDU. Protecting electoral integrity can no longer be limited to polling day: it must start well beforehand, with media education, transparency of political financing, protection of electoral infrastructures and cooperation between institutions.

My question is this, and I'd be happy to hear what you have to say about it: how do you think the Council of Europe could act beforehand, before crises or interference compromise voters' confidence? In your opinion, should the status of international observers also be extended to elections in the digital space? And if so, how?

Thank you very much.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Koloman BRENNER is the next on my list.

Mr Koloman BRENNER (Hungary, NR): Thank you, Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I would also like to thank the rapporteur for this excellent report and all my fellow members who have contributed to it.

After 1945, balanced civic democracy brought prosperity and freedom to the west of Europe. For us in Central Europe and Eastern Europe, the Soviet-Russian occupation brought something else.

That is why it is important to emphasise elections as the heart of bourgeois democracy in this assembly as well. They are also particularly important in times of crisis. In times of crisis, of course, when completely new phenomena such as internet-based communication, artificial intelligence, cyberattacks and the like naturally shape the circumstances of elections somewhat differently than in an ideally imaginable bourgeois democracy.

What's more, it is mostly American global companies that are often beyond our jurisdiction. The well-informed citizen is treated differently by different media. Who decides what is in the media? Which journalist is paid by whom to set a certain framework for a topic? All of this influences the democratic process. So this is a particularly important report and I would like to thank the rapporteur and all my colleagues for this special piece of democracy.

Thank you very much.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Now on the list is Mr Armen GEVORGYAN.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, ECPA): Dear colleagues,

Elections are a test of the resilience of democracy, trust in institutions and society's ability to resolve conflicts peacefully. Armenia, on the eve of the parliamentary elections in June 2026, finds itself at the crossroads of these challenges.

Voter turnout in the last two parliamentary elections in Armenia did not exceed 50%. Low turnout is the result of a deliberate policy by the authorities to cultivate a sense of predefined election results. This policy is promoted by putting pressure on political opponents and journalists, implementing selective justice and systematically exploiting administrative resources.

The ruling party's unconstitutional fight with the Armenian Apostolic Church, as well as the arrests of spiritual leaders on politically motivated charges, in this pre-election period, completely undermine the possibility of elections to serve as a mechanism for achieving public consensus.

Claims regarding political prisoners in Armenia are not only a human rights issue. They are a direct question of the conditions of the upcoming elections. As long as some of the government's political opponents are under criminal pressure, it is impossible to talk about equal competition, a free campaign or trust in the electoral process. Elections cannot be democratic in an atmosphere of fear and judicial dependence.

Dear colleagues,

The erosion of trust in state institutions means that even formally correct procedures do not ensure the legitimacy of election results. This intensifies social polarisation, because the public no longer trusts those responsible for the electoral process.

This is why the Council of Europe must actively engage in a fair and objective assessment of the electoral environment and, as a first step toward credible elections, call on the Armenian authorities to release all political prisoners.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And now I call on... Sorry, sorry, sorry... Mr Georgios PSYCHOGIOS. Sorry.

Mr Georgios PSYCHOGIOS (Greece, UEL): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Many thanks to the rapporteur for a report that contains important references to the restrictions on freedom of expression, on gathering and demonstrations, double standards and campaigns due to financial or other support, decline in the access to election and standards, as well as the international monitoring.

Moreover, on fake news and accounts that are paid or instructed to produce and share false information and defamation and cyber attack danger.

Dear colleagues,

The report also indicates and enlightens us that avoiding and tackling those practices requires that civil society and people are well informed, are given the true feedback, are trained to recognise them and to resist through continuous education, communication through media and social media, and emphasises that elections and strengthening democracy and its constitutions is not a technical detail.

This is what we totally agree on, but we need to force, to give power to elections in times of crisis, because it's a matter of basic guarantees; but we also need elections and democracy not to be in crisis, which means not widening the inequalities, the rage, the hate speech, the scandals and corruption and of course the law of power and the law of the jungle that certain policies try to impose all over the world. So we have to fight for both of them.

Thank you very much for the excellent report.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And that brings me to the last speaker of this debate, which is Mr Bernard SABELLA.

In case he is not here, we move on to Mr Ioannis OIKONOMOU.

Mr Ioannis OIKONOMOU (Greece, EPP/CD): Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you to the rapporteur.

Free and fair elections are a cornerstone of democracy. But times in which parliamentary terms in Europe were completed, and elections were held under conditions of normality, now seem very distant.

Today, crises are the new normal, and this situation has three basic political consequences.

Politics has become a magnet for people who combine public relations skills with audacity. At the same time, it has become more online than live and direct.

Secondly, every election is treated as if it were the last chance.

And thirdly, there is a gap between real social problems and the readiness of the system of governance to address them, as well as serious mismatches between social expectations and reality.

To all this, we must also add two more factors. First, the enormous capacity for intervention provided by technology. Secondly, the economic wealth is held by many of those who don't like liberal democracy.

All of the above can, in several regions, put the right to free and fair elections into question. And we must protect this right everywhere with actions and tools like those described in the resolution. But above all, through the proper and effective functioning of democratic parties.

Political parties must once again become agents of opinion formation, political mobilisation and the articulation of competing political agendas. Amid the flood of political generalities that overwhelm us, democratic political parties must articulate policies with sharp edges, social representation and dialogue with the needs of those who do not see themselves in the stagnant political game.

Dear colleagues, democracy can survive, but we have to fight for it!

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call on Mr Damien COTTIER, rapporteur. You have 3 minutes left, Mr Damien COTTIER.

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

We speak about elections and actually I should have started by congratulating you on your election yesterday. "Congratulations Madam President" [spoken in French].

Thank you, colleagues, for your interventions and the support on both sides of the aisle, as one would say, some other place. Now, from all political groups to this report, I think the diversity of the topics that you mentioned and you picked in this report also shows how broad the topic is itself. Actually, it's a holistic perspective and perhaps it's an answer to the question by Ms Louise MOREL.

Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE, Rapporteur): This is an issue that really needs to be addressed holistically.

Basically, we need to strengthen the democratic aspects in our society as a whole, the resilience, obviously, of our institutions and our infrastructure for elections, but also the whole democratic debate in our countries, throughout the electoral cycle, which, indeed, lasts several years, as we know here in the Council of Europe. This is part of the new democratic pact proposed by the Secretary General, and it is a question of the quality of democratic debate throughout society and over the years.

So we won't be able to solve everything with a single report and a single element on election observation, but it's something that we need to promote constantly in all areas, whether it's social media, public debate, the role of the media – the convention on artificial intelligence, for example, is an important element, etc., – and we need to make sure that it's not just a question of the quality of the democratic debate, but also of the quality of the electoral process.

Mr Damien COTTIER (Switzerland, ALDE, Rapporteur): Maybe two elements, quickly.

Thank you, Lord David BLENCATHRA, for mentioning the Alliance observers. I think it's very important that we work together and in this Alliance on the topic of this report, because there really are many things we should be working on and implementing.

We were thinking of this report a little bit as a toolbox, and now we should implement it in the Alliance, but also in our national parliaments. We are all members of national parliaments. We should look at this toolbox and implement it in our countries. It's the way we have been thinking of this report.

And on Ukraine. Yes, it's totally true. Several of you mentioned this – Ms Larysa BILOZIR, Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV, Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ and others.

It's not possible to organise elections now. It's martial law, but it's also concretely not possible. It would be possible if one country would decide to do that, and that's Russia, if they would stop their aggression against Ukraine, but it's important to be ready when the time comes.

That's what this report is all about in this section.

So thank you very much for your support.

Thank you very much also to the Secretariat for the tremendous help and very good work on this report.

Thank you very much.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Damien COTTIER.

I understand that also the Chairperson of the Committee wants to speak.

And before I call Ms Elisabetta GARDINI to speak, I want to congratulate you on your election as the chair of the Political Committee, as I want to congratulate all the already elected chairs of committees. And now over to you, Elisabetta.

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Thank you, Madam President. Congratulations to you too.

Dear colleagues, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, I warmly welcome this report and the quality of the debate it has generated.

From the outset, I would like to thank the rapporteur for his strong commitment to this work. Thank you, Mr Damien COTTIER. His role in the organisation of the Bern conference in 2023, his sustained engagement with experts and his ability to connect practical experience with the core values and the standards of the Council of Europe have been essential in shaping this text.

As our discussions have highlighted, elections across Europe are increasingly held in difficult circumstances with accelerating challenges. Crises place growing pressure on electoral processes and on public trust in democratic institutions, and these processes are the bedrock of our democratic engagement.

This report reaffirms a fundamental principle: free and fair elections are not optional, even in times of crisis. The text brings a focus to preparedness, resilience and proportionality, drawing on the Council of Europe's unique standards and tools, legal standards, observation and institutional co-operation across the entire electoral cycle. It offers guidance that is firmly anchored in our organisation's mandate. In doing so, this report makes an important contribution by the assembly to the work towards a new democratic pact of Europe, ensuring that electoral integrity and democratic resilience are placed at the heart of efforts to protect and renew democracy on our continent. For these reasons, and many others that I don't have time to say, the Committee strongly supports this text and invites colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

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

Ms Maryna BARDINA (Ukraine, ALDE): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Honourable Chair, dear colleagues,

Speaking from the perspective of Ukraine – a country living through an ongoing war of aggression, I would like to address a matter of fundamental importance: elections in times of crisis.

Free, fair and democratic elections are the foundation of every democratic society. They allow citizens to choose their leaders and shape their future. However, while elections are already difficult to organise in times of peace, they become far more complex and fragile during crises — and especially during war.

The Council of Europe has clearly recognised that when elections take place in crisis situations, the risks to democratic integrity are significantly increased. These risks affect voter participation, electoral competition, institutional capacity, and public trust in the results.

In such conditions, the key issue is security. Without full security of the electoral process, holding elections is simply impossible. People must not be forced to choose between their democratic rights and their lives.

This is not a theoretical concern. In September 2024, a missile struck the city of Poltava just two minutes after the air-raid siren. It happened during peak morning hours, when people, including children, were on their way to school. More than 50 people were killed.

This example clearly shows what elections without security could mean. Voters may be exposed to deadly risks while going to polling stations, or they may decide not to vote at all out of fear. Such conditions would undermine both participation and the legitimacy of elections.

At the same time, all citizens must be able to take part in the electoral process. This includes military personnel, internally displaced persons, and forced refugees. Their right to vote cannot be ignored or postponed indefinitely.

Finally, elections must be protected from any form of hostile attacks, intimidation or violent interference linked to the ongoing armed aggression — both on election day at polling stations and against candidates who decide to stand for office. Without such protection, democratic competition itself becomes impossible.

In conclusion, elections can only take place when security is guaranteed for voters, candidates and election officials. Without this, elections risk becoming dangerous, unequal and fundamentally undemocratic.

Thank you.

Mr Đorđe STANKOVIĆ (Serbia, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Elections are meant to be the moment when power belongs to the people. In Serbia, elections have become the moment when power proves that it cannot be challenged.

For five consecutive years, not a single election in Serbia has met basic democratic standards. Not one. What we are witnessing is not electoral imperfection — it is systematic electoral manipulation.

Voters are pressured, public resources are abused, media space is monopolised, and political competition is reduced to illusion. In 2023, this process crossed a red line with organised voter engineering, including the relocation of voters across borders, openly violating the principle of equal suffrage. This was not an incident. It was a method.

The Council of Europe warns that crises can be exploited to concentrate power and weaken democratic institutions. In Serbia, crisis is no longer an excuse — it is a permanent state of governance. Emergency has become normality. Control has replaced accountability.

Institutions tasked with protecting elections are not independent. They are obedient. Oversight bodies do not correct abuses — they legitimise them. Laws are changed not to protect voters, but to protect those already in power.

Let us be clear: this is not democracy under pressure. This is autocracy preserved through elections.

Modern autocracies do not abolish elections. They simulate them. They keep the form, erase the substance, and demand international recognition for a process their own citizens no longer trust.

Serbia belongs to Europe — not because its government claims it does, but because its citizens insist on dignity, freedom, and choice. And yet, values without action become empty declarations.

Europe cannot continue to recognise elections that citizens do not recognise. Neutrality in the face of systemic abuse is no longer neutrality — it is complicity.

And let me end with this:

We have been here all these years. We have resisted, and we will continue to resist — together with citizens and students who are on the streets today. We are fighting for normality. We are fighting for a generation that deserves a future. And together with that youth, we will build a better Serbia — a democratic Serbia, firmly anchored in Europe.

Thank you.

Vote: Elections in times of crisis

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much. The debate is closed.

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy has presented a draft resolution (Document 16297) to which one amendment has been tabled.

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

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

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendment 1 to the draft resolution (Document 16297), which was unanimously approved by the Committee, be declared as definitively approved.

Is that so, Madam Chairperson?

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Yes.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Yes, it is. So, if no one objects, I will consider the amendment as approved. *Amendment 1 to the draft resolution is therefore approved* and will not be called.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 16297 as amended. A simple majority is required. The vote is open.

How long do we wait? I think you can close the vote now. Thank you very much. The vote is closed.

I've called for the results to be displayed.

The draft resolution in Document 16297 is adopted. Congratulations.

And we will now proceed to vote on the draft recommendation contained in the same document. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

Again, The vote is closed. I call for the results to be displayed.

And so it's also adopted. *The draft recommendation in Document 16297 is adopted. Congratulations.*

The next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Supporting the commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine and the security of the European continent", Document 16311, presented by Mr Piero FASSINO on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

And in order to be finished by 7:10 p.m., there will be an interruption of the list of speakers at about 6:40 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

So we will change now.

Debate: Supporting the commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine and the security of the European continent

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Yes, dear colleagues. We will now start the debate.

And I call on the rapporteur, Mr Piero FASSINO. You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes at the end to reply to the debate.

The floor is yours, Piero.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mister President. I will speak Italian.

Almost four years have passed since Russia attacked Ukraine. An aggression that began in 2014, when Moscow militarily occupied and unilaterally annexed Crimea. A war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and devastated an entire country.

We all want, after four years, for them to put down their weapons and start negotiations.

But if this has not happened so far, it is because PUTIN pursues a peace based on a military victory and a humiliating surrender for the Ukrainians. Moscow declares that it is ready to negotiate, but it sets unacceptable conditions for Ukraine and, at the same time, brutally intensifies the bombing, striking indiscriminately: the civilian population, schools, hospitals, railway networks, power stations and infrastructure essential for daily life.

Our first task here is to denounce this bare-faced Russian aggression and reiterate our support for Ukraine.

PUTIN accuses Europe of not wanting peace. This is false: we do want peace, but we want a just, worthy and lasting peace.

What does a just peace mean? A just peace means that the war crimes, massacres and gross human rights violations committed by Russian troops cannot be forgotten, nor amnestied, and for which Russia and its leaders must answer before the International Court of Justice, because there is no secure peace without justice and truth.

Just as there can be no just peace without the return of thousands of abducted and deported children to their families.

A just peace means the rejection of the Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories, or their annexation to the Russian Federation and the Russification actions aimed at erasing the Ukrainian identity of those regions.

A just peace means the release of all Ukrainian military and civilian prisoners, according to international conventions.

A just peace means securing Ukraine's independence and sovereignty, rejecting the Russian claim to subject it to "limited" sovereignty, and ensuring that Ukraine is free to choose its own destiny and alliances.

Just peace means sheltering Ukraine from further aggression by putting in place international guarantees such as those outlined by the coalition of the willing. And, the United States must be asked to be an integral part of protecting Ukrainian sovereignty and independence, not sacrificing Kyiv on the altar of bilateral relations with Moscow.

Just peace means swiftly bringing Ukraine's full integration into the European Union, thus responding to the repeatedly expressed will of the Ukrainian people.

We want a just and secure peace because we are aware that what is at stake today is the safety and stability of the entire European continent, which is being called upon to take tough decisions for its own security and freedom.

And just peace means saying no to the destabilisation of the multilateral system of governance, in order to replace it with balances based solely on power relations.

A just and secure peace requires full and continued European support for Ukrainian resistance, to enable the leaders in Kyiv to go to the negotiating table on an equal footing with Moscow.

To this support, the Council of Europe, our Council, has offered and continues to offer a concrete contribution with the "action plan" promoted since the beginning of the war and, today, through the proposal for the establishment of a tribunal for crimes committed by Russia and the creation of the Register of Damages suffered by Ukrainian citizens, to which adequate reparations will have to be paid.

Four years of war have shown us that peace, security and the stability of the whole of Europe are at stake, and we must be aware that the Ukrainians are fighting for themselves, but also for us.

For all these reasons, I urge the House to support the Resolution, which once again expresses our full and unwavering support for Ukraine and its people, for a just, secure and dignified peace.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Now I will open the general discussion.

I remind you that the time for spokespersons for political groups is 3 minutes, and for everyone else it is 2 minutes.

I call first Mr Bertrand BOUYX, speaking for Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Please, Bertrand.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our continent is under attack from all sides. In the East, in Ukraine, by Russia in an open war that has been going on for over four years. We know this. We have been debating it at every part-session since 2022. To the West, in Greenland, by our oldest ally, the United States. And this is more unexpected. To convince yourself that these are two sides of the same coin, all you have to do is listen to Sergey LAVROV, the Russian Foreign Minister, who, and I quote, said: "Crimea is no less important to the security of Russia as Greenland is for the United States". For the President of the United States, attacking Greenland is also a way of abandoning Ukraine and legitimising Russia's war of aggression against it.

All this is paradoxical, because the first sentence of the draft resolution, and I quote: "The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the diplomatic efforts of the United States, Ukraine and its allies to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine..." is also correct. Yes, on the one hand, the United States is making efforts to achieve a just peace in Ukraine, but on the other, it is creating the conditions for Russian victory. This is the complexity of the geopolitical moment we are living through.

So, once we have moved on from our astonishment, as Europeans, what can we do? As the old saying goes, if you don't want to be on the menu, you'd better have a seat at the table. And there is only one way to do that, and that is through power and strategic autonomy. To this end, we call on our European colleagues who are fascinated by Mr Donald TRUMP to choose between this fascination and the defence of their country's sovereignty. The survival of all of us as free peoples depends on it. Yes, Ukraine's security is first and foremost a European matter. It is our vision of the world. A vision that respects the sovereignty of states, multilateralism and respect for international law. A vision that goes against the imperial designs that seem to be at work. It is about defending our interests, because Ukraine is not just defending its territory, it is defending the integrity of Europe as a whole. It just so happens that they are on the front line.

To achieve our strategic autonomy, we must not only rely on diplomacy but also, together, on the defence industry, digital technology and space, and be able to offer credible alternatives to American or Chinese goods and services. We must also – and I couldn't finish this speech without mentioning this point – be capable of feeding ourselves. Agriculture, ladies and gentlemen, is perhaps the most essential and most forgotten activity, so accustomed are we to it working in our own country.

Ultimately, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and I obviously agree with all the points in the resolution, but it is only one facet of everything we need to get to grips with. And we must do it together in a spirit of co-operation and fraternity in the face of the headwinds that threaten us all.

In this context, the ALDE Group will, of course, vote in favour of the resolution presented by our colleague Mr Piero FASSINO.

Thank you very much.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call on Mr Dionysios-Charalampos KALAMATIANOS to speak on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr Dionysios-Charalampos KALAMATIANOS (Greece, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Esteemed Chairman, dear colleagues,

It is our fundamental principle that Russia's invasion of Ukraine constitutes a blatant violation of the United Nations Charter and international law. We must always focus on upholding them. This war should never have happened, should never begun, and must end as soon as possible. We agree that peace should not translate into capitulation or into regarding the aggressor. A peace without justice would only pave the way to the next conflict.

Our goal should be to achieve just and lasting peace. Unfortunately, the international climate is alarming. There are attempts to replace international law by "might makes right" foreign policy. We must be united against this approach in Ukraine, in Greenland, in Cyprus, everywhere. We should be very cautious as the crisis in Ukraine may evolve into an international crisis. We should be very cautious, and our progressive proposal should be founded on two principles: just peace and accountability.

Europe should lead all diplomatic initiatives towards lasting, just peace. We must support the Ukrainian people. We must support an agreement in line with international law and human rights. Europe should ensure that Ukraine achieves democratic security and resilience. The path to peace runs through the strengthening of international law and through upholding human rights.

Europe must stand united against revisionism while safeguarding its democratic values. Europe must achieve a twofold goal. First, strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the US and NATO through a common foreign defence policy with an emphasis on peace and security and a clear break from Cold War era thinking and from a new arms range mentality. Second, we must ensure that social coherence and resilience remain at the heart of our policies, protecting European citizens, especially the most vulnerable, from energy crises, for example, and soaring costs.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Now I call on Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI to speak on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Miapetra, you have the floor.

Ms Miapetra KUMPULA-NATRI (Finland, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. President and dear colleagues, when the world calls for a ceasefire in Ukraine, Russia answers with destroying civil infrastructure. When the aim is peace, and the other side fires more missiles targeting the civilian infrastructure, it doesn't sound like someone aiming for peace, but terrorising the lives of civilians.

I would like to thank the Rapporteur, Mr Piero FASSINO, for this very important and timely and well prepared report at a time when peace is in our reach, but still all too far away to be just and fair to Ukraine. The brutal cold winter is currently affecting millions of Ukrainians' lives already devastated by war and destruction. Living in houses in the middle of the cold winter without heating, water or electricity in the Arctic kind of temperatures causes a humanitarian disaster that needs to be addressed immediately. We need to help.

Dear colleagues, it's not enough to talk nicely here. When you go back to your countries, we are responsible. Please urge your governments to increase their political, but also economic and military support for Ukraine. That is the way to strengthen Ukraine's position in ongoing peace negotiations and to defend regional security and our common values like democracy.

Peace on paper is not even enough. Real life peace requires more. A just and lasting peace is not achieved by laying down arms and stopping fighting. Any peace must include a plan for reconstruction, the repairing of damages, as well as the immediate return of prisoners of war, illegally detained civilians and forcibly transferred and deported children. Most of all, peace requires accountability to prevent things like that from happening.

Peace without accountability will not last. It will only lead to a vicious circle of hatred, revenge and hostility. The Council of Europe has been at the forefront of ensuring accountability. The creation of the register of damages, the International Claims Commission for Ukraine and the Special Tribunal are proof that this organisation can and will act to defend peace, democracy and human rights. Now it must speed up the process, having the accountability system up and running without delay and with proper funding.

Russia's crimes and violations have been denounced in the report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine at the United Nations General Assembly, which explicitly refers to them as crimes against humanity. Such crimes cannot be unpunished. We need to work every day to help Ukrainians.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

The next speaker is Ms Marianne BINDER-KELLER. You have the floor.

Ms Marianne BINDER-KELLER (Switzerland, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Vice President,

Dear colleagues,

During the impressive Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony this morning, we heard the following question: "Are you doing what's right or what's comfortable?"

This uncomfortable question was posed by the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Federation in Ukraine.

Are you doing what's right or what's comfortable?

The question hits the nail on the head, because in this war in Ukraine, it's not just about Ukraine and its neighbours who, as we heard this morning, fear Ukrainian defeat the most.

It is also about Switzerland, my country, and all the other countries in Europe. It's about all countries that have enjoyed peace and freedom for a long time and have become unhealthily used to it.

Ukraine is fighting for its independence, but also for the independence of all of Europe.

We therefore cannot afford to sit comfortably back. If Ukraine falls, then a democratic European system that we promised to preserve in this Council of Europe will collapse with it.

I would therefore like to thank you, in the name of the Group of the European People's Party, for this excellent report.

The report clearly shows where right and wrong is. It names the Russian crimes and violations of international law and does not allow any speculation about the cause of this war and who is to blame for the fact that it doesn't end.

The American President offered a rather far-fetched interpretation of this war at the World Economic Forum. "The war is continuing," he said, "because Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY and Mr Vladimir PUTIN hate each other".

No, Mr Donald TRUMP, the war is continuing because Putin started this war, is constantly attacking the civilian population, destroying civil and public facilities and kidnapping children because he wants to starve and freeze the population; because he's destroying beautiful cities, the culture and the monuments of an entire country.

Ukraine doesn't give in. Why? Because they do not want to live under Russian terror.

I always ask those who are advocating for Ukraine's submission, would you like to live under Russian suppression?

Shortly before the onset of winter 2022, I visited Ukraine with the-then Federal President and saw the destruction around the capital.

In one village, for example, 85 of 100 houses were completely destroyed. In the ruins there was a ball. This image is a warning to us all. These could be our ruins. And this ball could belong to our children.

This report is a precise action plan for achieving a just and lasting peace in Ukraine, not a peace of the graveyard.

As ambassadors of our countries, it is our duty to ensure that it is implemented.

I thank you all.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

And the last speaker from European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates will be Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

Oleksii, you have the floor.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much.

And first of all, we're speaking about peace. And definitely we need to support all efforts towards peace. We need peace in Ukraine as soon as possible. So all efforts in this direction should be supported.

But now I want to tell you something that I've never told this Assembly, never before, because I always was concerned that revealing the truth can hurt my country. But now I clearly realise that unfortunately not revealing the truth can and will hurt even more.

And the truth is that inside the country, President Volodymyr ZELENSKYY is acting more and more against the core values which we are here to protect: democracy, human rights and rule of law.

Human rights: brutal and violent mobilisation and corrupt mobilisation. When the rich and loyal can pay off from their duties and others can be beaten and even killed by mobilising teams called TCK.

Rule of law: when President ZELENSKYY, by his own decision, without any court decision, imposes sanctions against his political opponents, against businessmen and, after this, their property can be raided and they can be blackmailed.

Corruption: fortunately, we have independent anti-corruption bodies in Ukraine. But when it became clear that they are investigating the closest entourage to President ZELENSKYY, he tried to get rid of their independence and to take them under control last July. Only when Ukrainian people came to the streets, it was stopped.

I was the only one from 13 MPs who voted against this in the parliament. After this, many people from close entourage of President ZELENSKYY received suspicions of corruption. Some of them ran away from the country.

In December last year, a month ago, the Ukrainian parliament created the Special Investigation Commission on corruption during the martial law time. And I was elected its chair. And you know what support I received? I received a criminal case in state treason, which has been started against me. Can you imagine this? I am the only acting MP and only acting member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who is not just in some Russian ban list, but sentenced by a Moscow court.

But today, to speak about corruption, to fight against this, is it treason in Ukraine? All of this is not right. And it's something that should be stopped.

All this proves one thing. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Nobody should have absolute power. And what I told you doesn't mean that you don't need to support Ukraine. But opposite, you need to support Ukraine even more. Not just to combat Russian aggression, but also to protect democracy, human rights and rule of law inside the country.

Because a small democracy can win and survive against a big autocracy. A small autocracy has no chance against a big one. So please help Ukraine remain a democratic country. Thank you very much.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Now we continue with the rest of the list of speakers.

The speaking time is 2 minutes.

The first one is Mr Christophe LACROIX, you have the floor.

Mr Christophe LACROIX (Belgium, SOC): Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Thank you, dear colleagues.

As an elected representative in my constituency, I often meet people who say to me: "But is the war in Ukraine our war? Why should we continue to support Ukraine? It's a long way away. Shouldn't we support Vladimir Putin? Shouldn't we be pushing Ukraine to give Vladimir Putin some territory in order to put an end to this conflict?"

I tell them every time, my dear fellow citizens, that this is our war. It is Europe's war that others are fighting for us, because it is a war for freedom, for democracy, for the rule of law, for the sovereignty of a people, against a brutal and violent aggression by an autocrat none other than Mr Vladimir PUTIN.

And the day we give in to Mr Vladimir PUTIN, other parts of Europe will be under threat. And the best way to preserve Ukraine is to eventually integrate it into the European Union. And I salute the work of Mr Piero FASSINO on this issue and in the context of this report. On the other hand, and I agree with our colleague Mr Bertrand BOUYX, I find that in this report there are elements relating to the United States that give me cause for concern. There is talk of sharing the same ideas. There is talk of the United States as an ally. No, Mr Donald TRUMP's United States is no longer an ally. It is no longer even a partner, but an adversary. And perhaps even enemies in the future, since they are threatening the sovereignty of their allies, in particular Greenland. Because this regime murders pacifist citizens in Minneapolis. So let's be careful about this Americanophile rhetoric.

Thank you very much.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): And the next speaker is Ms Andrea EDER-GITSCHTHALER.

Ms Andrea EDER-GITSCHTHALER (Austria, EPP/CD): Very good, Mr Vice President.

Dear colleagues,

No electricity, no water, no heating. Not for a few minutes like we had a few hours ago, but for days. That's what people in Ukraine are currently suffering. And right now in this cold winter, minus 20 degrees, Russia has mercilessly attacked the country's critical infrastructure and energy grids. People are suffering. This war of aggression, which violates international law, has resulted in heavy human and material losses and serious human rights violations and war crimes.

For me, one of the worst chapters is the abduction of Ukrainian children to Russia. We have already debated this in our Parliament and tabled corresponding motions. More than 20 000 children have been stolen, abducted and taken out of the country. This is a gross violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which we laid down in 1989 how children must be protected in war situations. This should be pointed out and emphasised time and again. And Austria is doing a great deal in this regard.

For example, we have also supported *SaveUkraine* and the non-governmental organisation *Die kleinen Herzen*. And to finally put an end to this suffering, we need an immediate ceasefire, real negotiations, which Russia is unfortunately refusing. And that is why this report is so important in order to restore a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

Many, many thanks to the rapporteur. Austria will continue to stand by Ukraine's side and provide support.

Just last week, we announced an increase in the humanitarian aid provided by a further three million from the Foreign Disaster Fund, which will be used to make houses and flats habitable again, to provide winter emergency shelters and to repair and maintain heating systems.

"Glory to Ukraine" [spoken in Ukrainian].

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

And the next speaker is Ms Ester MIELI, you have the floor. Is Ms Ester MIELI not present?

Then we'll go to the next speaker, which is Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA. You have the floor.

Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA (North Macedonia, SOC): Thank you.

The year 2025 was the deadliest for civilians in Ukraine since 2022, said the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine today in its monthly update on civilian harm. They verified that conflict-related violence in Ukraine in 2025 killed 2 514 civilians and injured 12 142. The total number of killed and injured civilians in 2025 was 31% higher than in 2024 and 70% higher than in 2023.

Two parents of a one-year-old say that they have electricity for about 4 minutes a day. Their charging stations and power banks do not hold beyond those 4 minutes. They say that for the first time in a while, they have a real winter in Ukraine. And with this -20 to -16 degrees and no heating, their apartment in an old Soviet-era apartment block on the east side of the Dnipro river gets cold pretty soon.

Russia is deliberately exploiting the bitter winter to target power stations, energy storage facilities and other critical infrastructure. Kyiv's problems are exaggerated by the fact it has borne so many Russian airstrikes against homes and critical infrastructure installations and is home to more than 3 million people. The power shortages impact many people.

The most recent Russian attacks against energy installation in the capital and other big cities have had a cumulative effect that is much worse than before. More than 500 residential buildings were without power for several days after these attacks. Repairs of the cables and grids are harder and harder. Since the start of hostilities, 1 640 historical monuments have been damaged in Ukraine. And for Ukrainian children, life under Russian occupation often means continuous exposure to Russian propaganda as occupation authorities seek to assimilate and militarise them. According to a report by Save Ukraine published on September 11, more than half of Ukrainian children living under Russian occupation have been subjected to indoctrination, while some report sexual violence.

For Ukrainians, the end of the winter is near, but the end of the war, no.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Garret AHEARN.

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

Ireland's commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine and to the security of the European continent is rooted in the values we share in this Council. Human rights, international law and the sovereignty of nations. Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine is not only an attack on a sovereign state, but an assault on the very foundation of the rules-based international order that has safeguarded peace in Europe for decades.

This aggression undermines the security of all who believe in democracy and the right of people to determine their own future. I visited Ukraine four times as part of the United for Ukraine group, including in April 2022, at the very start of the war. On those visits, I saw the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people, the destruction inflicted upon communities, and the profound human cost of this conflict. These experiences have strengthened my conviction that peace must be just, not merely the absence of war.

In his address to the Irish Parliament last December, President ZELENSKYY reminded us all of the importance of sustained support and shared values. He said, and I quote, "our peoples, Ukrainian and Irish, are among the few in Europe who spent centuries fighting for the right to remain themselves. Ukraine wants peace. It's a community of nations that makes peace truly lasting".

Ireland stands in full solidarity with that vision. A just peace must respect Ukraine's independence, its internationally recognised borders, and the right of its people to return to a secure and sovereign homeland. It cannot be built on appeasement or the reward of aggression. While Ireland retains a policy of military neutrality, our neutrality is not indifference. It is a principled neutrality that defends human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Values that are essential to European security and their erosion anywhere threatens security everywhere. Ireland will continue to support diplomatic efforts. We will work with partners in this Council and beyond to ensure that peace in Europe is built on justice and respect.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

The next speaker is Lord David BLENCATHRA, you have the floor.

Lord David BLENCATHRA (United Kingdom, ECPA): Mr Vice-President,

This evil war of aggression threatens not only Ukraine, but the whole of Europe.

There can be no lasting peace in Europe if the Kremlin's campaign succeeds.

Peace built on the acquiescence to territorial conquest will be a fragile, dangerous illusion.

To secure a durable peace, we must ensure that Russia does not win.

That means enabling Ukraine to prevail on the battlefield.

So any negotiated settlement is founded on justice, territorial integrity and accountability.

Now, the international community's diplomatic efforts are welcome and necessary, but diplomacy without strength is hollow.

Europe must act with urgency and realism.

First, let Ukraine buy what it needs from any sources. The EU's 90 billion-pound support package rightly prioritises defence, but restrictions that force by European or French procurement, risk delaying or denying critical systems such as the Patriot air defence missiles or other third-country capabilities which Ukraine needs now. We cannot let industrial policy trump survival.

Second, we've got to accelerate delivery and financing for air defence, long range strike capability, ammunition and sustainment so Ukraine can hold and then push them back.

The coalition of the willing security guarantees must be backed up by immediate materiel and logistics.

As the Latin maxim says, *qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum*: "He who desires peace, let him prepare for war".

Well, colleagues, we did not prepare for war in Europe and we're paying the price now.

If we want peace again, we must be prepared to win the war that prevents a much worse peace and a threat to the Baltic states, to Finland, Norway and Sweden and the rest of Europe – because if Mr Vladimir PUTIN wins, make no mistake, the rest of us are next.

So let us choose a Europe where peace is not the product of appeasement, but the fruit of justice and strength.

Let all European partners put Ukraine's survival above narrow industrial lobbying.

Let us enable victory for Ukraine, because only then will Europe have a lasting peace.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the next speaker is Mr Mike READER. You have the floor.

Mr Mike READER (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mister Vice-President,

Colleagues,

This report is clear about a simple but vital truth. The security of Ukraine and the security of Europe are indivisible.

Russia's war of aggression shapes our continent's safety and threatens the international rules-based order. And that matters profoundly today. As negotiations were ongoing over the weekend, in Abu Dhabi, Russia continues to bombard residential areas and power stations, all whilst it escalates its hybrid and military threats all across Europe.

Peace cannot be built whilst a country is negotiating under fire, and the Assembly is right to insist on a lasting and just peace that does not reward aggression.

The UK has been clear and consistent. We stand unequivocally for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and right to self-defence. And the UK has provided sustained military, economic and humanitarian support, working closely with European partners, and we have backed accountability measures to ensure Russia is held responsible for its crimes.

But colleagues, at the heart of this report is one of the most disturbing crimes of this war. And that's the forcible transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children. Ukrainian authorities have verified that at least nineteen thousand children have been taken, with credible evidence that the real number is much higher.

The United Nations has characterised these acts as crimes against humanity. These children should not be bargaining chips in any future negotiation. Justice for them must be central to peace, not deferred, not diluted and not ignored. There is a moral imperative and a legal obligation to return these children. And the Assembly must act.

By supporting this report, we send a clear signal of solidarity with Ukraine and a firm message that aggression, human rights abuses, and the theft of children will never be normalised.

I urge colleagues to support the report.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the next speaker is Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA.

Zanda, you have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

First, let me thank Mr Piero FASSINO and the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy team for this excellent report.

I strongly support the resolution.

This war is not only about Ukraine, it is about the future of Europe.

Let us be clear about the facts: peace cannot be built on denial or ambiguity.

This resolution rightly affirms that a just and lasting peace must respect Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and internationally recognised borders.

Only a settlement, grounded in international law, accountability and credible security guarantees can prevent future aggression.

Russia has weaponised energy, disinformation, migration pressure and human suffering.

Supporting Ukraine is not charity. It is the self-defence of our democratic order.

Today, in the context of Europe, the Kremlin's broader objective is to weaken support for Ukraine, overturn sanctions, reshape relations with Russia and even install sympathetic leaders.

But we must be stronger. Accountability and justice are a must.

Peace without justice is not reconciliation, it is impunity.

War crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression must be investigated and prosecuted. Reconstruction must go hand in hand with responsibility. This is how Europe proves that the law is stronger than violence.

Colleagues,

Today our message must be firm and united.

We support Ukraine. We reject aggression. We stand for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

Dear colleagues,

The situation in Ukraine this winter is devastating. Children, families, are freezing because of Russia's attacks on civilian infrastructure. So we must support better and do more. And this resolution might help.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And now I call on Mr Gusty GRAAS. You have the floor.

Mr Gusty GRAAS (Luxembourg, ALDE): Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current international situation is marked by the gradual erosion of the rules and foundations of the international order established in the aftermath of the Second World War.

As President Maia SANDU pointed out this morning, this erosion is manifesting itself today in two interconnected wars: a visible war of a military nature, and a hybrid war of a more insidious nature. Both have the same objective: to fracture Europe and undermine our cohesion. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, now approaching its fourth year, is the most dramatic illustration of this.

The inauguration of President Donald TRUMP has profoundly transformed the transatlantic context, introducing an unpredictability that undermines our traditional alliances. Negotiations are progressing, unfortunately without adequate European participation. Let's hope that they will resume at the end of the week.

But let's be clear: every day of war is one day too many, but we cannot accept peace at any price. Only a peace that recognises Ukraine as a victim of aggression can be just and lasting. Only a peace that guarantees Russia's full accountability for all the crimes committed, including the systematic attempts to erase Ukrainian cultural identity, can be accepted.

We must maintain our diplomatic pressure and make these mechanisms operational without delay. Justice cannot wait.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must reiterate this forcefully: no decision on Ukraine without Ukraine, no decision on Europe without Europe. Our institutions have responded with determination. But we must not relax our efforts. We must be ready to step up our support, particularly if American aid is withdrawn.

Now is the time for Europe to come together and assume its role.

Thank you very much.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And now I call on Mr László TOROCZKAI. You have the floor.

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

First of all, I would like to clarify that we need just and lasting peace in Europe. However, this report talks about justice, yet it has nothing to do with justice. Let's have a closer look at this so-called justice.

The report claims that the peace treaties of 1938 were wrong and unjust, but those of 1945 were right. What hypocrisy. According to the report, the 20th century peace treaties that were considered to be fair forced 32% of the Hungarian population, a total of 3.2 million Hungarians, into minority status and cut off 72% of Hungary's territory.

You now claim that it is unacceptable for a country to use force and weapons to redraw borders. But this is precisely what happened during the 20th century peace treaties that you consider fair. The Beneš decrees were also part of the 1945 agreement. These decrees seriously violated human rights by collectively declaring two nationalities, the Germans and Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, to be guilty.

Millions of Germans and Hungarians were deported simply on the basis of their ethnicity, and their lands and property were taken from them by force. The Beneš decrees are the most extreme violation of human and international rights. And instead of offering compensation or an apology, the Slovak government just confirmed the Beneš decrees a month ago. And even today, property is still being confiscated in Slovakia based on ethnicity.

What's more, according to the new law, anyone who questions the validity of the Beneš decrees will be imprisoned in Slovakia. Imprisonment awaits anyone who voices criticism in, including myself, for the speech and the Council of Europe remain silenced. You have no problem with this? Do not talk about justice.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And we go to the next speaker, which is Mr Fabian MOLINA.

Mr Fabian MOLINA (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank Mr Piero FASSINO for this concise report.

As we speak, despite the freezing winter and ongoing talks between the Ukrainian government and Vladimir PUTIN's regime, the Ukrainian people are being terrorised, bombed, their energy infrastructure destroyed, and people killed, day after day. It is crucial that the Parliamentary Assembly underlines Europe's unwavering support for Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy, and international law, and tells it like it is: Europe's democracy and freedom are being bravely defended in Ukraine, and that Ukrainian security is European security.

And therefore, it is also clear: if Vladimir PUTIN wins, the war against Europe will go on.

It is precisely why it is essential that this Assembly reiterates today that a lasting and just peace in Ukraine can only be achieved with Ukraine and Europe at the table. A ceasefire must be a premise for serious peace negotiations, and business deals for a select few cannot bring justice. The Council of Europe is making an important contribution to supporting Ukraine through the Register of Damages, the Claims Commission, and the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine. It is high time that the member states also agree on financing issues and a compensation fund for reparations to Ukraine.

We must never give up on Ukraine, because one thing is sure, spring is coming.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the next speaker is Mr Markus WIECHEL. You have the floor.

Mr Markus WIECHEL (Sweden, ECPA): Distinguished colleagues,

As Russia's war against Ukraine nears its fourth year, the Kremlin's refusal for an immediate ceasefire remains alarmingly clear.

This draft resolution robustly condemns Moscow's ongoing offensive, which targets civilian infrastructure and energy networks, especially this winter, while militarising an occupied nuclear plant.

The report reveals systemic crimes against humanity: forced deportations of children, indoctrination in camps, and torture of prisoners. These horrors extend beyond Ukraine, marked by Russian provocations throughout Europe, deliberate airspace violations, drone incursions endangering civil aviation, and cyberattacks.

Failure to address these aggressions normalises hostility and erodes our collective security. It is imperative to recognise that Ukraine's security is also Europe's security. We must demand an immediate and complete ceasefire as a precondition for genuine negotiations. No forced territorial concessions legitimising borders changed by force. Reject any recognition of occupied lands as Russian. Let's secure binding guarantees and fund accountability and reconstruction, especially through frozen Russian assets.

The lessons of history are clear: appeasing aggression invites further threats. Russia initiated this war and refuses peace, showing no commitment to the norms of independence and international law. We must strengthen transatlantic unity, enhance support for Ukraine, and isolate Russia both diplomatically and economically.

Let's stand for independence, justice, and a lasting peace. Together for Ukraine.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much. And the next speaker is Mr Hasan TAÇOY.

Mr Hasan TAÇOY (Cyprus* [Resolution 1376 (2004)]): Mister President and dear colleagues,

Recent developments have once again demonstrated that security in Europe cannot be taken for granted and requires our constant collective attention.

Unresolved conflicts continue to undermine stability far beyond their immediate geography and pose a threat to the security of the entire continent.

In this context, the persisting status quo on the island of Cyprus, which has been on the agenda of the sustained Assembly for more than six decades, continues to have direct implications for the security of the eastern Mediterranean region, the European continent and beyond.

As is well known, the partnership Republic of Cyprus, established in 1960, and subsequently admitted to the Council of Europe, was destroyed in December 1963 as a result of the Greek Cypriot partner's onslaught against the Turkish Cypriot partner. All Turkish Cypriot elements were forcibly ejected from state institutions. The seat of the government has been unlawfully occupied by ever since.

The tragic period between 1963 and 1974 was marked by widespread violence, during which hundreds of Turkish Cypriots were killed and tens of thousands were forced to abandon their homes, seeking refuge in enclaves amounting to merely 3% of the island's territory.

This period culminated in the 1974 coup d'état, orchestrated by the Greek Cypriot side and backed by the military junta in Greece. As also acknowledged by this esteemed Assembly in its resolution 573 (1974), this coup attempt led the Turkish government to exercise its rights of intervention in accordance with Article 4 of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, thereby bringing an end to a decade of bloodshed.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And now I call on Ms Boriana ÅBERG. You have the floor, please.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues,

Europe's protection against Russia's aggressive imperial ambitions begins and ends in Ukraine. The Ukrainian people are fighting not only for their own freedom, but for our freedom too. That is why our support must increase. As we speak, more than 1 million Ukrainian households are without electricity, without water and without heating in -25 degrees.

To be blunt, Ukraine needs more funding and, above all, more weapons. Throughout this war, European countries have helped to keep Ukraine afloat on the battlefield. But never enough to give Ukraine a real chance to win. We need to step up. The Nordic countries are doing our part. Last year, Sweden, Norway and Denmark were among the top contributors to Ukraine relative to GDP.

Together, the Nordic countries accounted for one-third of NATO countries' total military support to Ukraine. But all of Europe must take greater and more long-term responsibility. This will require substantial commitments for years to come. And it is worth remembering that while the war continues, EU countries still buy Russian gas and oil for sums that exceed the support provided to Ukraine. Is it not a good look to indirectly fund Russia's war chest? I would like to emphasise that Ukraine is not merely a recipient of aid. Ukraine is a strategic partner and must be treated as such. *Slava, Ukraine.*

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And now I call on Mr Richard BAKER. You have the floor.

Mr Richard BAKER (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

Dear colleagues,

I want to congratulate Mr Piero FASSINO on this excellent report. I want to focus my remarks on the humanitarian crisis faced by Ukrainian citizens. In particular, the crisis faced by disabled people. Because when so many Ukrainians were forced to flee their homes following Russia's brutal invasion, this was not an option for millions of disabled people, including 260 000 Ukrainian people with learning disabilities.

On a visit to Kyiv last year, I met Raisa KRAVCHENKO and her colleague Yulia KLEPETS, who founded the All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities. They told me how Raisa KRAVCHENKO spent 25 days sheltering in a basement with her son Oleksiy, who has a learning disability, without food, without electricity, without gas. They told me about Vitaliy ZEGELEV, wholly dependent, as an autistic person, on his mother, and so terrified by air raid sirens that he did not leave his flat in Kyiv for three years. This took a toll on his health, and Vitaliy ZEGELEV died. These are war crimes Russia has perpetrated against disabled people, for which they must be held accountable.

The disabled community in Ukraine is at breaking point and beyond. Today they will be suffering from freezing conditions because of the actions of Russian forces. Humanitarian support which has been provided for disabled people is welcome, but we have to do much, much more. This has been powerfully communicated in important reports by the United Nations, Inclusion Europe and the World Economic Forum. We must make sure that systems of compensation for Ukrainian citizens are accessible for disabled people and their families who have lost so much.

The resilience of Raisa KRAVCHENKO, Yulia KLEPETS and their colleagues, their families, is awe-inspiring. The international community must do more to support the rights and welfare of disabled people in Ukraine at times where these rights remain under sustained attack because of Vladimir PUTIN's invasion.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the next speaker is Sir Edward LEIGH.

Sir Edward LEIGH (United Kingdom, ECPA): Russian aggression is absolutely appalling, and, of course, we must stand up to it, and there could be no surrender.

I don't think we should be depressed about the outcome of this appalling act of aggression by Mr Vladimir PUTIN. He may be a tyrant, but he's not really a very effective war-making tyrant. In the four years of this war, he's marched, let's say, 30 miles. In that time, Josef STALIN marched all the way from the Volga to Berlin.

So there is hope. We must pile pressure on Russia. Sometimes, we know what they're doing. They're trying to break the spirit of the Ukrainian people. But with sanctions, I think we can achieve a great deal in perhaps breaking the spirit of this utterly wrong Russian government.

Look what's happened in so many tyrannies in world history. They seemed so secure. Look at what's happening in Iran.

So if we keep up the pressure, I think eventually we can win.

But we must not impose a settlement. The West must not impose a settlement on Ukraine. It is for Ukraine to decide whether or not they give up territory.

Make no mistake, what PUTIN is trying to do is not just have a ceasefire, but to take the fortress belt to make Ukraine defenceless. This would be like the Sudetenland in 1938, and then in two years or three years, he can march again. There'd be absolutely no point in having 7 000 British troops or 7 000 French troops.

We must have a just peace, but we must rely completely on American guarantees.

We protected West Germany during the Cold War with some 900 000 troops.

So no Munich, no appeasement, no imposing a peace on Ukraine.

Support them to the hilt.

Long live Ukraine.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And the next speaker is Mr Benoît LUTGEN. You have the floor.

Mr Benoît LUTGEN (Belgium, ALDE): Mr Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

On 8 March 2022, as soon as the war broke out, I travelled to Ukraine to provide practical humanitarian support using the resources available to my city. Very quickly, at the Polish border, I was able to see thousands of refugees, who were welcomed in Europe with great generosity by our people. The European Union also took action, admittedly sometimes too late and with and we would have liked to see stronger action. But all the same, nearly €193 billion has been provided in military, financial and humanitarian support for Ukraine.

Why was this? Because this war, as others have said, is our war. Our war, because the fundamental values we defend are shared by our Ukrainian friends. They are doing so with great bravery and courage. And the least we can do is support them with the means at our disposal. So we are doing so in an economic and budgetary context that is not so simple. It is essential to explain to our populations how important it is for us to support Ukraine, how important it is to have this bulwark and to stand by the Ukrainians every day, to provide this unfailing support. It will continue to do so, and will certainly intensify in the coming weeks and months.

However, in this context, I regret Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKY'S remarks last week about the European Union, when he spoke of a lost and fragmented Europe. In this context, where we have to explain to our populations that this support is necessary in a difficult budgetary and economic context, it is not so simple.

These comments are also unfortunate, in a context where the United States is increasingly backing away from Ukraine, let's face it, with parts of its territory that would be, in any case, desirable through Greenland in particular. I think we have a duty to look at this with the necessary clear-sightedness and to ask, of course, for support to be stepped up, while also taking into account the reality of the men and women who suffer every day in Ukraine.

Thank you very much.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much. And the next speaker is Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV. You have the floor.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): I want to start my speech with a big thanks to all your nations, for all Europe, for the United States and all other countries that saw the threat of Russian aggression, of a new Russian fascism that is growing all over the world.

When somebody tried to ask the question and make parallels between the start of the second World War and this period of Russian aggression, I want to answer this question by saying it's not a parallel, because only now, in comparison with the Second World War, all European nations, all democratic nations of the world understood very quickly that Russian aggression is a threat for all democracy.

And when Russians tried to use their ideology of dividing the world between the three big nations, Americans, Chinese and Russians, this plan fell down, thanks to you. And the last speech of Mr Mark CARNEY at the Davos forum, that maybe middle not big, but very strong economic and military countries can unite and make this world more protected. I think it's very important to improve this.

We have a long period of cooperation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but now it's not a question that Ukraine must be a member of NATO. I think it's more important for NATO to have all efforts in order to have lessons of Ukrainian protection for the whole world and to help Ukraine and Europe as well as NATO and Ukraine to cooperate at this moment. So this report is the answer to many questions. And I think that history lessons, are more now than all other. We all are together.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

And the next speaker is Lord Don TOUHIG. You have the floor Don.

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

The people of Ukraine are fighting for us now, today, at this moment.

These brave people are resisting an aggressor that shows no respect for human life. An aggressor that has murdered women and children and yet before that, subjected them to horrible abuse, children as well as their mothers.

An aggressor that has no desire to limit the suffering of the civilian population.

Ukraine is resisting an aggressor who not only wants their country, but has kidnapped their children. More than 19 and a half thousand children taken from their families and treated like the spoils of war, offered up for adoption by Russians.

President Volodymyr ZELENSKY's message last week was clear, simple and to the point.

Wake up, he's telling Europe. Wake up, because if Mr Vladimir PUTIN crushes Ukraine, you will be next.

And we have to be honest, Europe can no longer rely on the United States. And I'm most sorry about that, because despite his boasts about being a peacemaker, Mr Donald TRUMP has done more to assuage the aggressor Putin.

The truth is Europe has to stand united in its own defence.

We must, all of us, dramatically increase our defence expenditure and face the fact that our once most trusted ally, the United States, might enter into conflict with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in order to gain Greenland.

When we go home from this place after this part-session, let us all give one clear message to our governments: Europe unite. Give Ukraine the weapons and resources it needs. And stand with Ukraine against the Russian tyrant and an American president. Make sure they get the clear message: we will never surrender to bullying, blackmail and aggression. The peoples of Europe are free now. We will fight to remain free.

'Glory to Ukraine!' [spoken in Ukrainian]

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And I now call on Mr Christophe CHAILLOU. You have the floor Christophe.

Mr Christophe CHAILLOU (France, SOC): Thank you, Mr President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

This report by our colleague Mr Piero FASSINO is a useful reminder of an observation that, unfortunately, some people still doubt: defending Ukraine against Russia means defending Europe as a whole. If we were to allow Mr Vladimir PUTIN to go any further, we would run the risk of ending up with an unjust peace that would have far-reaching consequences for all the countries on the continent.

Allow me to give my particular support to the recommendation calling for an immediate and total ceasefire. "Ukraine must not be forced to negotiate under the bombs". This phrase echoes today, sadly, the strikes that Russia carried out on Kyiv and Kharkiv, just as it was taking part in talks with Ukrainian and American representatives.

With regard to American support for the peace process, the report also highlights a form of ambiguity, and I agree with what our colleague Mr Christophe LACROIX has said. Unfortunately, President Donald TRUMP's United States can no longer be regarded as an unfailing ally for Europe. The national defence strategy just adopted by the Pentagon clearly provides for a refocusing of the United States' commitment on its own soil and in the Indo-Pacific. Even if this is a genuine geostrategic shift, we Europeans cannot feign surprise. The Obama administration's "pivot" to the Indo-Pacific 15 years ago was already the beginning of a shift away from American concerns for our continent. Unfortunately, we did not draw sufficient conclusions from this at the time. Perhaps we thought it would go no further. But that was without counting on the election of Mr Donald TRUMP. His disregard for international law and multilateral cooperation has completely overturned the Atlantic partnership which, until now, has governed the continent's security.

It is vital that Europe responds firmly to the conflict in Ukraine, but also to all the other threats orchestrated by Russia, which this report does not forget to mention: the frozen conflicts in the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, and drone flights.

Clearly, ladies and gentlemen, the values and commitments of the whole of Europe are under threat today.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): [Spoken in French]

And the next speaker is Ms Olena KHOMENKO. You have the floor.

Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, ECPA): Dear colleagues,

I want to thank the rapporteur for this resolution and for clearly linking peace in Ukraine with the security of the entire European continent. These two cannot be separated.

In 2026 we are reaching the 12th year of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the fifth year of the full-scale invasion.

The start of 2026 turned out to be devastating for millions of Ukrainians. Right now, Ukraine is facing a humanitarian emergency. Millions of people are without electricity, heating water and basic services. It is the result of of Russia's targeted attacks on civilian and critical infrastructures.

This is happening in the middle of Europe in the 21st century.

We should also be very clear about legal facts. In Ukraine and the Netherlands versus Russia, the European Court of Human Rights recognises that Russia's systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure amounts to a deliberate policy of terror and inhuman treatment aimed at spreading fear among civilians.

What we see today is exactly that policy in action.

Earlier today, at the side event, we spoke about the territories of lawlessness.

For 12 years, people living under occupation have had no real rights, no access to justice and no protection from Russian violence. This brings us to a simple point: a just and lasting peace is impossible if people under occupation are left without justice.

The European Court of Human Rights also concluded that Russia's changes to the education system in the occupied territories were aimed at Russification, cutting these territories off from Ukraine and subjecting children and young people to political indoctrination and militarisation.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And I now give the floor to Mr Joseph O'REILLY. You have the floor. Thank you.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD): Thank you, President.

We must, at the start, we must maintain strong diplomatic efforts to achieve peace and an immediate ceasefire. And those diplomatic efforts should include the leadership of the Council of Europe, obviously. The diplomatic efforts must be paralleled by strict enforcement of the targeted sanctions already in place. We should constantly review the sanctions and increase and improve the sanctions. And we will have to make personal sacrifices where necessary to achieve that.

In Ireland, we have more than 100 000 Ukrainians living with us, very well-supported and well-integrated. We have supported all EU initiatives practically in financial terms as well, including the recent 90 billion loan. And we have contributed in various tangible financial ways. We also support the military effort because of our neutrality with non-lethal equipment. And we will support permanent stability forces and peacekeeping forces in the context of a settlement.

It is a horror, a tragedy and a travesty that Russia have targeted infrastructure and left a million homes without electricity, heat and water. It is a travesty that up to 20 000 children have been kidnapped for brainwashing. It is a travesty that Russia goes on in a relentless war and relentless murder in Ukraine. And it does behove us all to be united in this Assembly, to be united within our countries and, as a previous speaker said, to go back to our countries with a strong message of support for Ukraine.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much. And now the next speaker is Ms Louise MOREL. You have the floor.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to pay tribute to the rapporteur's work on this subject, and more generally to our institution's ongoing commitment to supporting a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. The Council of Europe has made history, notably with the creation of the Special Tribunal to judge the crime of aggression against Ukraine. This is a decisive step, clearly affirming that there can be no lasting peace without justice, and that international law cannot be negotiated.

But we must also be clear: we must move faster, and go further. Because while we are building the legal instruments – as essential as they may be – the war continues to affect the daily lives of Ukrainians.

I would like to share a few figures with you to give you an idea of the scale of the conflict. In 2025 alone, on top of several other years of war since 2022, more than 1 950 missiles and 54 600 drones have fallen on Ukraine.

One of their main targets has been energy, and since October, 8.5 gigawatts of electricity capacity have been damaged, with only 3.6 gigawatts restored. In Kyiv, after the strikes in January 2026, 81% of homes and infrastructure are now without electricity and heating, affecting 1.5 million people, during a harsh winter where temperatures are frequently around -20 degrees.

These figures illustrate the scale of the conflict for Ukrainians on a daily basis.

I would also like to say that in this debate, which aims to support a just and lasting peace in Ukraine, it is not just about the future and the post-war period that we must act; supporting Ukraine also means continuing to act now, so that the cold, darkness and exhaustion do not become weapons of submission.

I know that France, the European Union and many other countries in this Assembly are supporting Ukraine and providing generators, funding and technical co-ordination. I hope that when we return to our parliaments next week, we will continue to carry this message, because every donation and every support makes a difference.

Slava Ukraini.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And now I call on Lord Carwyn JONES to take the floor.

Lord Carwyn JONES (United Kingdom, SOC): The wonders of modern technology. Forgive me. Forgive me, Mr. Vice President.

When we talk of Ukraine, it's quite difficult to think of something new to say. So much has already been said, and I'm not going to try today to say something new, but to remind ourselves of what we face.

It's appalling that a war broke out in Europe. It's appalling that four years on, that war is still going on. It's appalling that thousands of children have been removed from their homes. It's appalling that civilians continue to be targeted. And it's appalling that even as we sit here, people are freezing because of Russian attacks on energy infrastructure.

Now, there are some who think, we hear voices within Europe sometimes, but certainly across the Atlantic, that somehow both sides are to blame. By that logic, when Mr Joseph STALIN invaded Finland, that was Finland's fault. When Mr Adolph HITLER invaded Poland, the Polish state must have borne some responsibility. When Mr Benito MUSSOLINI invaded Abyssinia, well, Mr Haile SELASSIE must share some of the blame.

We do know that in the 1930s, the world dithered. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr Neville CHAMBERLAIN, came back from Munich and said, "I have in my hand a piece of paper, peace in our time". Words that weren't worth the paper they were written on. And that's why today is so important. Because even when peace comes, we can't forget about it. We have to make sure that those who are responsible are held to account. Otherwise, it won't be what next, it'll be where next.

The people of Ukraine need our support. And so, today is a time for unity. Today is a time for strength. And today is a time for determination. And in supporting the principles of the report we see before us today, we will reaffirm those qualities and help to continue the support the people of Ukraine so richly deserve.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the next speaker is Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS. But I don't see Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS here. He is not present.

Then we will go to Ms Alicia KEARNS. You have the floor.

Ms Alicia KEARNS (United Kingdom, ECPA): Thank you, Mister President.

Freedom is never free. And yet the cost of our freedom has been borne by the people of Ukraine for the last 12 years.

They have defended us all so that we can be in this Chamber today.

Meanwhile, they have been underestimated time and time again.

Now, as a peace deal is being discussed, we must be clear.

Violence must never determine sovereignty. Every inch of Ukraine is home to a Ukrainian family which has a story that deserves to be told. Now for too many – for hundreds of thousands of those families – they have loved ones being held hostage. Children and adults, illegally, who could be released tomorrow if Russia chose to take action.

We in this Chamber must look at what more can be done to make sure that when civilians are taken hostage against illegal law, that they are brought home sooner, because some have been held in hostage since 2012 and since 2014.

That is an unacceptable thought.

We must sing out in this Chamber that civilians must never be bargaining chips.

We must also be clear that Ukraine determines how this end. The aggressor, the terrorist, imperialist, must not.

We should be ashamed that Ukraine is currently facing a terrible winter. Where is the international effort to turn back on the heating? Where is the international effort to give them energy again?

Europe's future and security is our responsibility. So we must not be distracted by promises of peace.

We must also make sure that we do not betray our Ukrainian allies by embracing the Chinese Communist Party ever closer, as sadly, too many seek to do.

We should be ashamed that Ukraine is freezing at this time, that they still have to fight for us.

We must show them that we still have the fight to stand by them.

"Glory to Ukraine!" [said in Ukrainian]

Thank you, Mister President.

[*Applause*]

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. And the next speaker is Mr Christophe BRICO. You have the floor.

Mr Namık TAN (Türkiye, SOC): Mister President,

Distinguished colleagues,

The challenges before us are not isolated crises, but interconnected tests of our collective resolve to safeguard peace.

For nearly four years, Ukrainian people have shown extraordinary courage in defending their sovereignty, democracy, and right to determine their future. Their struggle is not just national, but also a stand for the principles that underpin peace and security in Europe.

Supporting Ukraine means committing to comprehensive, just, and lasting peace, where borders cannot be redrawn by force, civilians are protected, and international law remains the foundation of global order.

However, we cannot ignore tragedies unfolding elsewhere. In Gaza, the humanitarian crisis continues to deepen with innocent civilians bearing the heaviest burden of violence. The risk of further escalation in the Middle East, particularly involving Iran, also poses a serious concern.

These crises remind us that instability in one region reverberates across others and call for a unified commitment to peace that transcends borders and conflicts.

And peace is built through choices. We must choose to defend the vulnerable, uphold the rule of law, resist the false inevitability of conflict, and invest in security through cooperation, diplomacy, and sustained humanitarian engagement.

As Europeans, and members of the global community, we must be clear-eyed about the stakes. Peace in Ukraine strengthens peace in Europe. Humanitarian relief and political progress in Gaza reduce the risk of regional destabilization. Preventing escalation with Iran protects not only the Middle East, but also global security and economic stability.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK. You have the floor.

Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK (Ukraine, ALDE): Sure. My mum is a big fan of this Assembly and she asked me to thank all of you, to all of the countries that are helping Ukraine with humanitarian aid right now, that are collecting money for generators, that are sending generators to different cities, to Kyiv, where I reside.

And I will come back after this week to my apartment that is completely dependent on the heat and power plant that is completely destroyed. Probably not repairable until the next heating season, but we will survive.

Although Ukrainians are so resilient — we get all of these compliments, how resilient we are — but we are the same people as you. We want to live a normal life. We want our kids to go and study in schools, not to go to the shelters because of the bombardment.

And when you come back to your constituencies, to your country, you can do something and you can have influence. You can ask your government whether they decide to increase their humanitarian aid so people would not freeze in their apartments, whether they will put more pressure on Russia. Not on us, on Russia. Those who violated the international law and all of the possible status of all possible international organisations.

And you know what is important? Today we commemorated the memory of those who perished during the Holocaust. They were alone. Ukrainians in 1933, during the Holodomor artificial famine, were alone. Right now we don't feel we are alone. And we need this feeling to go further. Thank you so much.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Armağan CANDAN. You have the floor... Not present.

Then we go to the next speaker, which is Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA. You have the floor.

Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA (Italy, ECPA): Thank you, Vice-President. I will speak in Italian.

It is impossible to vote for this document for at least three reasons, which go against the parliamentary majority resolution written and voted on in Rome by the Italian parliamentary majority.

Firstly, the absence of the defensive element as a central point of military aid. We repeat that military aid is needed, but to defend, not to attack.

Secondly, the absence of the need for the primacy of diplomacy before the military aspect.

And thirdly, the role of the United States in trying to achieve peace. Now, that is played down in this text and even pointed at as negative. On the contrary, it is Europe that is breaking the western axis, not aligning itself with the US.

And, in general, the idea that prevails in Rome is that any document that speaks of security should take into account not only the eastern front – which is very important or crucial to express solidarity with our Ukrainian friends – but also the southern front, i.e. the fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking, and Islamic radicalism. The two fronts are absolutely connected and are not watertight; they are not separate. Just think of Wagner's activities in the Sahel, the instability in that area and, therefore, the creation of new illegal immigration, which then crosses the desert and the Mediterranean, feeding the mafias throughout Europe and, above all, in my country.

Thank you, Vice-President. Thank you, colleagues.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

Now we move unfortunately to the last speaker, as I have to close the list after this.

But this is Ms Lise SELNES, you have the floor.

Ms Lise SELNES (Norway, SOC): President,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteur for a thorough and well-balanced report, and the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for its important work.

Russia bears full responsibility for this war of aggression against Ukraine. This must remain absolutely clear. Accountability for Russia's violations of international law is essential, not only for Ukraine, but for the credibility of the international rules-based order.

At the same time, we must be honest. Without an end to the war, without a just and lasting peace based on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, no sustainable political or democratic recovery is possible. Securing peace is therefore a prerequisite for everything that must follow.

Norway remains firmly committed to supporting Ukraine. Through the Nansen Support Programme, Norway provides long-term and predictable assistance, combining military support, humanitarian aid and civilian reconstruction. This reflects our belief that Ukraine's resilience today is inseparable from its future as a free and democratic European state.

The Council of Europe plays a crucial political role in this effort. This Assembly must continue to speak with clarity and unity: aggression must be condemned, accountability must be pursued, and Ukraine must be supported until peace is restored and the country is reconstructed.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And that completes the debate.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers... Ah, okay.

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA): Chairman, I would like to use our new rule and use the 'blue card'.

I have a question.

First of all, thank you very much, *Signore* rapporteur, for all you did. But I want to ask you about Russian drones in European skies.

In very general language, it is said that this escalation demands an unwavering commitment to ensuring the security of the European continent.

Don't you think there should be a much more concrete reaction to this Russian escalation, using Russian drones to disrupt air movement in Europe and in general, to disrupt life on the continent?

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): And I give the floor to our rapporteur, Mr Piero FASSINO, to answer.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): A clarification: only to answer or to intervene, to reply?

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Sorry, Piero.

It's a new thing with the 'blue card'. Thanks for doing that.

Yes, it's your final response, so you can take that into your final response.

You have three minutes, Piero.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): Since I saved two minutes in the introduction, I ask that they be used for this reply.

First of all, I would like to thank all those who spoke in the debate and said that most of the speeches were in absolute agreement with the report, and I also thank them for their appreciation, so I will not add things that I have already said in the report.

I would just like to say a few things instead by interjecting the interventions that I heard in dissent.

I want to say to Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA that we cannot lose the distinction between the aggressor and the aggrieved. Then we can do anything. But this war started in February 2000, four years ago, because Vladimir PUTIN attacked Ukraine. The aggression came from Moscow, you cannot confuse this.

I would add one thing that is often forgotten. Both Emmanuel MACRON and Olaf SCHOLZ, as well as Naftali BENNETT, the Israeli Prime Minister, and others, visited Mr PUTIN before the war, making a whole series of commitments to try to avoid it. Mr SCHOLZ came out of his talks with Mr PUTIN holding a press conference at which hundreds of journalists were present, because a SCHOLZ-PUTIN meeting was an event, and Mr SCHOLZ said that Germany had assured Mr PUTIN that it would not allow Ukraine to join NATO. I don't know if that was a right or wrong position, but that's what Mr SCHOLZ said to Mr PUTIN. And Mr PUTIN did not take that into account at all and attacked Ukraine, doing whatever he saw fit to do, without taking into account either what Mr SCHOLZ had said, or what Mr MACRON had said when he had been there, or the invitations that Mr BENNETT and so many others had made.

Second, when you say diplomatic solution: sure! But the diplomatic solution to date is frustrated by the Russian attitude. Because, at the moment when Mr PUTIN declares every day, he, Sergey LAVROV and Dmitry PESKOV, we are ready for peace, he then unleashes bombardments of terrifying violence on Ukrainian cities, with a progressive and constant and continuous intensification. He lays down humiliating conditions for any peace, because if the conditions are that Ukraine must lose a third of its territory, that it must not have an army, that it must not participate in any form of international alliance that is not to Russia's liking, this is called a simple thing: subjecting Ukraine to a regime of limited sovereignty, that is, we are going back to Brezhnev, and I believe this is unacceptable. So diplomacy is needed, but if diplomacy does not meet an interlocutor willing to discuss, it is very difficult to find a point of compromise and acceptance.

And thirdly, I think we have to be aware that something bigger is at stake in Ukraine, which is not just the security, stability, independence, sovereignty of Ukraine, which is the main thing. But it is clear that from the outcome of this war the sovereignty, the security of the continent is also at stake. Therefore, Europe...[the microphone is muted]

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Piero FASSINO.

Yeah, it's automatic, so we cannot... You used your minutes. I'm sorry about that.

So thank you very much.

Now I will ask whether the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to speak. You have 2 minutes.

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): Thank you, President,

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, I would first like to express my heartfelt thanks to our rapporteur, Mr Piero FASSINO, and to all the members who participated in the debate.

Your speeches have underlined the gravity of the moment, at the same time also the responsibility of our Assembly to support a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. It is also essential for the security of the entire continent.

Let us remember that this debate is taking place as Russia's war of aggression enters its fourth year. Negotiations appear to be making some progress, but nevertheless, there has been a tragic escalation of attacks, with missiles and drones, relentlessly targeting Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure.

Dear colleagues, our discussion confirmed the fundamental pillars that must underpin any peace agreement.

Firstly, Ukraine must be able to decide its own future.

Second, peace must be anchored on solid and reliable security guarantees for Ukraine, conceived as an integral part of a future peace agreement. Strengthening Ukraine's security is not a concession to Kyiv, it should be remembered, but an investment in European security.

Thirdly, a just peace requires accountability for the international wrongdoings of the Russian Federation. In this regard, the recent adoption of the Council of Europe Convention, establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine, is a historic achievement, together with the Register of Damage for Ukraine and the future compensation fund, which constitutes an articulated mechanism.

So I shall stop here, because time has run out, with a final appeal, and I ask my colleagues here: let us adopt this resolution as a strong and united message. This Assembly stands firmly with Ukraine.

Thank you.

Ms Jurgita ŠUKEVIČIENĖ (Lithuania, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Madame President,

Dear Colleagues,

Europe stands at a defining moment for its security and its values. The war of aggression launched by Russia against Ukraine is not only an assault on a sovereign nation; it is a direct challenge to the principles that underpin peace on our continent. For this reason, the draft resolution is both timely and necessary, as it sets

out a clear political line: any peace process must be based on international law, Ukraine's sovereignty, and full accountability for crimes committed by the aggressor. It reflects the changing geopolitical environment of 2025, including shifting transatlantic dynamics and the risks posed by calls for rapid negotiations that could come at Ukraine's expense.

It warns us against an unjust compromise. There can be no territorial concessions imposed on Ukraine, no negotiations about Ukraine without Ukraine, and no easing of sanctions without credible security guarantees and functioning accountability mechanisms. It also underlines that Ukraine's integration into the EU and the strengthening of democratic security are not peripheral issues — they are central to the future security architecture of Europe.

For Lithuania, these principles are not abstract. As a country of NATO and the EU eastern flank, and one that has long faced hybrid threats, disinformation campaigns and security pressure, we know that weakness invites further aggression. Our own history teaches us that lasting peace cannot be built on appeasement, but only on respect for sovereignty, the rule of law and firm collective resolve.

Lithuania therefore strongly supports this resolution. We believe it sends an essential message of unity: that Europe will stand with Ukraine, reject any settlement based on force, and work tirelessly for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that strengthens not only Ukraine, but also the security of the entire European continent.

Thank you.

Ms Kadri TALI (Estonia, ALDE): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Honourable President,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the Rapporteur Mr Piero FASSINO for his comprehensive and timely report on Ukraine and the prospects for a just and lasting peace.

The report makes one message unmistakably clear: peace cannot be built on aggression or forced concessions. Estonia strongly welcomes the rapporteur's firm conclusion that any peace process must be grounded in international law, the United Nations Charter, and full respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. There can be no "peace" that rewards the use of force or legitimises illegal occupation.

We particularly appreciate the report's emphasis that Ukraine alone has the right to define the terms of peace. Negotiations conducted without Ukraine, would undermine both Ukraine's security and Europe's collective security architecture.

The report rightly highlights the human dimension of Russia's aggression: the immense suffering of civilians, the deportation of children, widespread human rights violations, and attacks on democratic institutions. Estonia strongly supports the rapporteur's call for accountability, including continued work towards a special tribunal and full support for international justice mechanisms. Without justice, there can be no durable peace.

We also welcome the report's recognition of the Council of Europe's role—from documenting crimes and supporting victims, to strengthening democratic resilience and the rule of law in Ukraine.

Dear colleagues, this report is not only about Ukraine; it is about the future of Europe. Estonia fully supports its conclusions and recommendations. We must remain united and determined —because peace built on justice is not only possible, it is necessary.

Thank you.

Ms Lesia ZABURANNA (Ukraine, ALDE): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear colleagues,

We often use the phrase "comprehensive, just, and lasting peace" as if it were a goal for a distant future. But let us be honest: in the world we inhabit today, those words are not a luxury. They are a survival strategy.

If peace is not comprehensive, it is merely a pause. If it is not just, it is merely an insult. And if it is not lasting, it is simply the preparation for a larger, more devastating war. We must stop pretending that the security of Ukraine and the security of the European continent are two different things.

They are the same:

If a border can be moved by force in Ukraine, no border in Europe is permanent.

If international law can be ignored in Kyiv, it is useless in Paris, Berlin, or Warsaw.

What we are seeing and living through is not a local conflict; it is a direct assault on the mechanics of our world. When power grids are struck and civilians are frozen out, the target is the very idea of European resilience.

If we allow "peace" to be a transaction where Ukraine pays with its land and its people, we have effectively legalised aggression. We would be telling every dictator that if they are patient enough and brutal enough, we will eventually look for an exit. We cannot give them that exit.

Supporting Ukraine's commitment to peace is an act of cold, hard self-interest. Our security relies on deterrence. And deterrence only works when the law has teeth. The Special Tribunal and the peace formula are not "options." They are the tools. If we fail to use them, we are choosing a future where Europe has "spheres of influence" and constant, shadow-warfare.

We either stand behind a peace rooted in law, or we accept a continent ruled by force. There is no middle ground. Let us choose the peace that lasts because it is built on strength and the uncompromising application of justice.

Ukraine has done the fighting. We have to provide the legal and political backbone to ensure that the fight wasn't in vain.

Ms Saara-Sofia SIRÉN (Finland, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Ukraine's actions under exceptionally difficult circumstances are truly impressive. Even in the midst of Russia's war of aggression, reforms continue, and the Ukrainian people remain strongly committed to their country's future.

We stand firmly by Ukraine's side. We support Ukraine in defending itself against Russia's illegal war of aggression as well as in strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. These values are at the core of resilience and the foundation of a European future. While progress has been significant, challenges remain, including in combating corruption and strengthening decision-making. Exceptional circumstances strain governance, but shortcomings must be addressed decisively and transparently.

Peace must be comprehensive, just, and lasting, and it must be grounded in the UN Charter and international law. Nothing about Ukraine can be decided without Ukraine.

The war has placed civilians at its center. Attacks on civilian targets and critical infrastructure, particularly the energy system, are devastating. We support Ukraine both in addressing urgent humanitarian needs and in advancing long-term institutional reforms.

Ukraine's EU accession process is a key element of Ukraine's security and of Europe's security as a whole. We support Ukraine in war as well as in peace efforts, in reforms, and in building its European future.

Vote: Supporting the commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine and the security of the European continent

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much.

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy has presented a draft resolution, Document 16311, to which 23 amendments and four sub-amendments have been tabled. They will be now taken in the order in which they appear in the compendium. I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds.

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 6, 1, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 8, 3, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 2 to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved by the Committee, be declared as definitively approved. Is that so, Ms Elisabetta GARDINI? You are nodding. So, it is so. So, if no one objects, I will consider the amendments to be approved. Is there any objection to that?

That is not the case.

Amendments 6, 1, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 8, 3, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 2 to the draft resolutions are therefore approved and will not be called.

And I also understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 7 and 9 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared also definitively rejected. Is that so, Ms Elisabetta GARDINI? You are confirming. So, if no one objects, I'll consider the amendments to be rejected. Is there any objection to that?

That's not the case.

Amendments 4 and 11, which are also rejected with a two-thirds majority, are consequent on other amendments being accepted. Decisions on these amendments will be taken separately.

And, so we go to Amendment 12, and I call to the rapporteur to support Amendment 12 on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Piero FASSINO, you have 30 seconds.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): This amendment which, I would add, reminds us that the Ukrainian crisis began in 2014 with the invasion and annexation of Crimea.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Then I also call Mr Piero FASSINO to support the sub-amendment to Amendment 12.

Mr Piero FASSINO, you have also 30 seconds for that.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): This is what I just explained: the sub-amendment inserts the reference to 2014, which was not there in the original text.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anybody want to speak against the sub-amendment?

That is not the case. So I just have to remind you that the Committee unanimously accepted the sub-amendment. So I will now put the sub-amendment to a vote.

The vote is open.

And we close the vote, and we will see the results.

Yes, it is carried.

I have been informed that Ms Olena KHOMENKO and Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO wish to propose an oral sub-amendment to Amendment 12 as follows:

At the beginning of the third sentence, to insert the words "full-scale" before the words "war of aggression enters its fourth year". And the effect of this oral sub-amendment would therefore be to change the sentence to read as follows in full:

"As a full-scale war of aggression enters its fourth year, the Assembly renews its call for a comprehensive, just and lasting, dignified and stable peace, essential to the security and stability of Ukraine and the entire European continent".

And in my opinion this sub-amendment is in order under our rules.

However, do ten or more members object to the oral sub-amendment? They have to rise up. That is not the case, and therefore I call on Ms Olena KHOMENKO or Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO to support their oral sub-amendment.

You have 30 seconds.

Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, ECPA): Yes, Mr President.

This is the clarification that relates to the term indicated in the resolution – "fourth year".

"The fourth year of full-scale invasion", that the war has lasted for 12 years.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Would anyone like to support the Amendment?

And now, does anyone want to speak against the rapporteur Mr Piero FASSINO?

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): There is a misunderstanding, because my colleague Ms Olena KHOMENKO's intervention refers to another sub-amendment.

To say full-scale invasion, the one you mentioned, is perfectly fine, it is accepted. Between saying it is a war or it is a full-scale war, I don't think there is much difference, however it can be accepted.

Ms Olena KHOMENKO spoke in support of another sub-amendment, which I will now, if you like, say what my opinion is. But on the wording "At the dawn of the fourth year of this full-scale war of aggression" [spoken in French], that is fine.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): But we will come back to the other one later, Mr Piero FASSINO.

But what is the opinion of the Committee on the oral sub-amendment?

The Committee are in favour?

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): In favour. In favour.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): ...but I'm asking the Chairman of the Committee.

The Committee is in favour?

I'll now put the oral sub-amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

We will see the result.

The whole sub-amendment is carried.

Thank you.

Now we have to of course vote on the main amendment, as amended.

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

If not the case, I have to say that the Committee unanimously accepted this amendment as amended and I'll put it to the vote.

The vote is open.

I call for the vote to be closed and we can see the result.

Amendment 12 as amended is agreed to.

Amendment 4 as a consequence of that falls.

So we will go to Amendment number 13 and the sub-amendment.

I call on Mr Piero FASSINO to support Amendment 13 on behalf of the Committee.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): Yes, the final part is accepted, i.e. the entire amendment is accepted, replacing the original text.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): And please, also Mr Piero FASSINO, will you support the sub-amendment too? You have the amendment and the sub-amendment.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): President, can you remind me which sub-amendment? Because I don't see it.

Ah, yes.

All right, I have seen the sub-amendment, and we're in favour.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the sub-amendment?

That is not the case.

The Committee is obviously in favour of the sub-amendment... yes.

I will now put that to the vote.

The vote is open.

We will close the vote and will see the result.

This sub-amendment is agreed to.

So now we come to the main Amendment 13 as amended.

Does anyone want to speak against the amendment as amended?

That's not the case.

The Committee unanimously accepted this amendment as amended.

I will now put it to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results.

Amendment 13 is agreed to, and that means that Amendment 11 falls.

So we go to Amendment 5 and the sub-amendment.

I will now call on Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO to support Amendment 5.

You have 30 seconds.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Can you hear me? Yes.

Thank you dear President.

Amendment 5 is very clear and easy. We're talking about the instruments for the crime of aggression within the meaning of the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court, which has been supported in the previous resolutions as well. And we're talking about the officials of Russia who committed the crimes. And of course it also includes the servicemen of the defence forces and others. And it falls under the jurisdictions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. So the investigations should go on.

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And there is sub-amendment, and I call for Mr Piero FASSINO to support it on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): Yes, on behalf of the Committee, the sub-amendment introduces a different expression.

The original text says: "The Assembly condemns any actions of the Russian Federation that are regarded as a crime of genocide". The sub-amendment says that "which could be considered as crimes of genocide," and this caveat has to be put in, because, to date, a pronouncement has not been made by any Court of Justice on the existence of a crime of genocide. So that does raise the possibility that it would be its assessment.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Does anyone else wants to speak against the sub-amendment? Not the case.

What is the opinion of Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO on the sub-amendment?

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): So it's acceptable? Thank you. We accept it.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Ok. And what is the Committee's opinion on the sub-amendment?

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): It was approved. Yeah, it – just a moment – yes. *Approved unanimously.*

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): It was approved unanimously.

So the Committee supports the sub-amendment.

I will now put it to the vote.

The vote is open.

We will close the votes and see the results.

The sub-amendment is agreed to.

Now we come to the main amendment 5 as amended.

Does anyone wants to speak against the amendment as amended?

That is not the case.

The committee unanimously accepted this amendment as amended.

I will now put it to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

And we see the result.

Amendment 5 is agreed to.

So we go to Amendment number 10 and sub-amendment.

I call on Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO to support Amendment 10.

You have 30 seconds.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, President.

We're talking here in this amendment, as in the previous resolutions, about strengthening accountability mechanisms.

What is extremely important, colleague, in the second part, which the committee didn't take into account, is that we say that states should analyse and activate their capabilities in prosecution, investigations, sharing of the information for war crimes, etc. So it is already happening. I don't think the word "should" is very strong. We could have replaced it with "may" but maybe we can support it right now and try to vote in favour. Thank you, President.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And I call on Mr Piero FASSINO to support the sub-amendment on behalf of the Committee. Piero.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Rapporteur): There is a sub-amendment that deletes one word and replaces it with another, i.e. calling on the member states of the Council of Europe to take the necessary measures to enforce all measures against those responsible for war crimes. So this is the sub-amendment.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Does anyone want to speak against the sub-amendment? I don't see what is the Committee's opinion on the sub-amendment?

Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, ECPA, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy): *Approved unanimously.*

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): The Committee approved unanimously, and so is in favour.

I will now put it to the vote.

The vote is open.

We'll close the vote.

The sub-amendment is agreed to.

Now we come to the main Amendment 10 as amended.

Does anyone want to speak against the amendment as amended?

That is not the case.

The Committee unanimously accepted this amendment as amended.

I will now put it to the vote.

The vote is open.

We will close the vote and see the result.

Amendment 10 as amendment is agreed to.

That brings us to the vote on the draft resolution as a whole contained in Document 16311 as amended. Here, we need a simple majority.

The vote is open.

We will close the vote and will see the results.

The draft resolution in Document 16311 is adopted.

[Applause]

Thank you.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, President of the Assembly): And now I will present you with information on the challenge of still unratified credentials of the delegations of Austria and Poland on procedural grounds.

On 26 January, at the opening of the Assembly session, the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Austria were challenged on procedural grounds relating to the gender composition of the delegation. The still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Poland were also challenged on procedural grounds, on the ground that the name of the one member of the Sejm put forward by one of the political groups within the Sejm, Law and Order, to be part of the parliamentary delegation had been omitted from the list submitted by the Speaker of the Sejm, allegedly contrary to the internal procedure of the Sejm.

Under Rule 7.2. of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, the Assembly referred the credentials to the Committee on Rules, Ethics and Immunities at its meeting on 26 and 27 January respectively. The Rules Committee considered both challenges to credentials and, in accordance with Rule 7.2., if the Committee concludes that the credentials should be ratified, it may submit an opinion to the President of the Assembly, who shall read it out in the plenary.

With regard to the challenge of credentials of the Austrian parliamentary delegation, the Rules Committee adopted the following opinion. At its meeting on 26 January 2026, the Rules Committee examined the objections raised, it noted that the Austrian delegation is composed of 12 members with six seats, of which seven are women and five are men. Of the representatives, four are women and two are men. Rule 6.2.b. of the Rules of Procedure requires each national delegation to include both women and men among its representatives, as long as women are under-represented in the Assembly. Rule 6.2.b. requires delegations with six seats, 12 members, to have a minimum of four women, including at least two women as representatives. The Austrian delegation clearly meets the criteria on gender set out in Rule 6.2.b., having both men and women as representatives, having 58.33% of the delegation as women and having seven women members on its delegation, of which four are representatives.

It is further noted that the Assembly has, for the first year, reached equal representation of women and men amongst its members, given that 49.16% of members of the Assembly for 2026 are women. For 2026 women are thus not under-represented within the Assembly.

The Committee considers, in light of Rule 6, that the credentials of the Austrian parliamentary delegation should be ratified and there are no grounds for a challenge to those credentials. The Committee notes that the challenge was not based on the criteria currently set out in Rule 6.2.b. regarding gender representation, but on those that will apply from January 2027. A challenge to credentials must be based on the grounds set out in Rule 7.1. currently in force, and it was therefore not in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. Therefore, the credentials of the Austrian delegations are ratified.

With regard to the challenge of credentials of the Polish parliamentary delegation, the Rules Committee adopted the following opinion. At its meeting on 27 January, the Rules Committee examined the objections raised. It noted the explanations provided by the Chairperson of the Polish delegation, Ms Agnieszka POMASKA. It noted that in terms of fair representation, the composition of the Polish delegation reflects the various political currents present in the Polish Parliament. The Committee therefore examined the procedural question of whether the Speaker of Parliament can refuse to submit the name of a member of Parliament proposed by a political group.

In line with Rule 6.2.a., parliaments have a right to develop their own specific arrangements provided that the procedures are transparent and comply with democratic principles. In the case of the Sejm, it has well established procedures and reasons were provided to the Chairperson of the Law and Justice political group for the refusal to include the name of Mr Michał WOŚ in 2026, together with an invitation to select another member for that seat. Thus, the refusal was duly reasoned, transparent and communicated to the political group concerned. These circumstances were also communicated to the Assembly with the transmission of the credentials.

Nonetheless, the Committee recalls that national delegations are obliged to provide reasons for any vacant seats when submitting credentials in accordance with the Rules of Procedure and the principle of fair representation. It further stresses that any decision not to include a member proposed by a political group must be based on transparent institutional procedures so as to avoid perceptions of undue discretion or arbitrariness. And to uphold the Council of Europe's core values of the rule of law, human rights and pluralistic democracy.

There is nothing to indicate that the principles guaranteed by Rule 6.2. have not been respected by the Polish Parliament. The delegation reflects a fair representation of the main political currents in the Polish Parliament. Accordingly, in accordance with Rule 10.1., the Rules Committee concludes that the credentials of the Polish parliamentary delegations are in compliance with Rules 7.1. and 6.2.a. and should therefore be ratified by the Assembly. The credentials of the Polish delegations are therefore ratified.

Debate: The functioning of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Colleagues,

We resume our session. I have here a hammer and a bell to keep everything in order. But I'm sure everyone will behave!

The next item of business this afternoon is the debate – well, of the evening – is the debate on the report titled: The functioning of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Document 16310, presented by Mr Zsolt NÉMETH and Mr Pablo HISPÁN on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

In order to finish by 8 p.m. sharp, I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 7:50 p.m. to allow the time for the reply and the vote.

We will begin with Mr Zsolt NÉMETH and Mr Pablo HISPÁN as co-rapporteurs.

You have 5 minutes each, gentlemen, and 5 minutes in total to reply to the debate.

I call Mr Zsolt NÉMETH to start the debate.

Thank you.

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH (Hungary, ECPA, Co-rapporteur): Madam Chair,

Dear colleagues,

Twenty-four years ago, by joining the Council of Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina officially committed to honour the obligations placed on all member states under Article 3 of the Organisation's Statute, and consequently to revise, with the assistance of the Venice Commission, its institutional organisation and its electoral legislation in the light of the Council of Europe standards.

As mentioned in our report, the institutional framework of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina is renowned for its complexity. The most scathing analysis on this subject was couched from 2005 in a comprehensive and authoritative review of the Venice Commission. I quote: "To sum up, the decision-making mechanisms at Bosnia and Herzegovina level are not efficient and rational but cumbersome and with too many possibilities of blocking the taking of any decision. [...] Constitutional reform is indispensable since present arrangements are neither efficient nor rational and lack the appropriate democratic content."

In 2009, in the Sejdić and Finci case, the European Court of Human Rights found that the impossibility for candidates not belonging to a constituent people to stand for election to the House of Peoples and the presidency lacked an objective and reasonable justification. Therefore, it breached the prohibition of discrimination set out in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Recently also a very important decision was made by the ECHR which has given a counterbalance to this decision.

Resolution 2574 on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Bosnia and Herzegovina – the last one adopted by our Assembly, in October 2024 – still regretted the institutional inertia in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was therefore decided to pursue with the monitoring on Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a view on the elections in fall 2026, and we are looking forward to these very important elections coming up.

The Monitoring Committee discussed the latest developments in March and in May 2025, and held a hearing with Mr Elmedin KONAKOVIĆ, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in September 2025. In early November 2025, Mr Pablo HISPÁN and I, as co-rapporteurs, conducted a country visit in Sarajevo during which we met with the Chair of the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of

Human Rights, representatives of the most prominent political parties in parliament, as well as with the acting president of Republika Srpska. I would like to thank to the Bosnian and Herzegovinian delegations for their openness and the very professional organisation of our visit.

Based on our investigation, on 9 December last year, the Monitoring Committee considered a draft report and, after amending it, adopted unanimously a draft resolution on the functioning of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Again, in a couple of months, before Bosnia Herzegovina entered the campaign for this vote, we deemed it useful to provide the Assembly with an update of the latest developments and their consequences on the functioning of democratic institutions in the country.

Despite this structural disadvantage, we consider that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as explained in our report, now has an unprecedented opportunity to advance constitutional and electoral reforms, and strengthening the functioning of democratic institutions.

We noted with major relief that the authorities of Republika Srpska have annulled the entity-level laws adopted from 2023 to 2025 that had been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, including the separate election law for Republika Srpska; laws on immovable property used for the functioning of public authorities; on non-application of decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina; on banning the operation of "extra-constitutional institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina" in the Republika Srpska; amendments to the Criminal Code; and the law on a separate High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council for the entity.

Parallely, the United States lifted sanctions on key officials and actors in Republika Srpska. We welcome the creation of a working group for the preparation of amendments to the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina established by the Council of Ministers on 30 October 25. The administrative support of this body is supported by the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will follow its work with great interest.

Dear colleagues, I will respond at the end of the discussion, the elements which I haven't been able to say.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call now Mr Pablo HISPÁN, on behalf of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

Thank you.

Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD, Co-rapporteur): Thank you, Madam Chair,

Dear colleagues,

Even though the next November general elections will be crucial for the future of the entire country, the news is currently focused on the governance of the Republika Srpska.

I wish to remind you that the recent conflict escalated after the Republika Srpska adopted legislation asserting ownership and control over public assets, in defiance of the Constitutional Court and the Office of the High Representative. The ensuing confrontation led to legal proceedings against senior Republika Srpska officials, concluding last August by the revocation, conviction and disqualification of the then-president Republika Srpska, Mr Milorad DODIK. While these developments created deep political tensions, they ultimately triggered a re-engagement of Republika Srpska institutions within the constitutional framework, culminating in the calling of an early presidential election and the repeal of unconstitutional legislations.

What lessons can be drawn from this snap vote, which was held on 23 November?

First, despite a tense environment and unequal conditions, major political actors decided to participate in the process, and the vote was proceeded largely without incident, which suggests that support for hard-line and anti-institutional rhetoric is diminishing.

Second, the turnout was very low: 34.8%, compared to 57.7% and 54.9% in the 2018 and 2022 general elections. Voters did not show much interest in this intermediate poll, especially non-Serb citizens, since the two vice-presidential positions of the Republika Srpska, allocated to a Bosniak and a Croat, were not up for election.

Third, the gap between Mr Siniša KARAN, member of the ruling party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, and Mr Branko BLANUŠA, running for the Serb Democratic Party, turned out to be narrow: less than 10 000 votes and 2% of the ballots cast. On the one hand, this reflects healthy democratic competition; on the other, with general elections just a few months away, it creates a high degree of uncertainty.

All the more that, fourth, the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina identified regrettable irregularities and unlawful actions in a significant number of locations: manipulation of votes, invalid ballots and above all operational irregularities in the work of election boards led to an unusually high turnout, up to 75%, and overwhelming support exceeding 90% for a single candidate. The Central Election Commission therefore ordered a recount on these specific locations, prior to annulling voting results in no less than 136 polling stations across 17 territorial units. The annulment was upheld after the Appeals Chamber of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a last resort, rejected challenges from both major political parties against the decision, one requesting to maintain the result, the other seeking to rerun the vote in a higher number of polling stations. The repeat vote, scheduled for 8 February, will use the same candidate lists and voter registers as the annulled election.

Given the very close original scores and taking into account that the annulled polling stations represented a significant number of voters, the final result remains uncertain. The Central Election Commission decision complies with legal and procedural requirements aimed at ensuring electoral integrity. Whilst it imposes additional expenses and administrative constraints, the repeat elections are not an effort to correct manifest procedural violations and enhance voter confidence.

The coming year might also bring change with new electronic technology designed to shore up the integrity and credibility of the elections process.

Such reforms must address broader structural deficiencies of the Dayton framework and improve institutional efficiency to ensure effective governance and progress on the country's European path. The role of the Office of High Representative remains important until internal mechanisms can fully guarantee the implementation of state-level decisions.

Another matter of concern is the appointment of new judges from the Republika Srpska to the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This step remains essential to ensuring the Court's full institutional functioning and the effective exercising of its constitutional mandate. Persistent delays in judicial appointments continue to undermine the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitutional order and should be addressed as a matter of priority.

That does not alter the fact that the time seems right to open a new page of dialogue for mutual understanding, as said Mr Zsolt NÉMETH. The emerging cross-entity consensus among citizens in favour of a European future is indeed a key opportunity to strengthen the country's democratic institutions and overcome entrenched political divisions.

As Mr Zsolt NÉMETH comes to the end of his term this week, I would like to express my sincere thanks for the excellent collaboration, how much I have learned from him and we have enjoyed in the course of this touchy monitoring mission.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much. "Thank you" [spoken in Spanish].

Colleagues,

Now I call the first colleague to start the debate on behalf of the political groups and it's from the Group of the Unified European Left – Mr George LOUCAIDES from Cyprus.

Please if you're in the hall. Yes.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Ms. Chairperson.

Dear colleagues, on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, I reaffirm our full support for a sovereign, united and multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Of course we call on all Council of Europe member states to respect its constitutional order, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

This report covers a period of serious institutional crisis marked by direct challenges on the rule of law and on the Dayton Framework.

We acknowledge that some of the most dangerous developments have been reversed: the repeal of unconstitutional empty level legislation and the holding of elections, despite clear shortcomings, demonstrate a degree of institutional resilience.

At the same time, violent rhetoric, unequal campaigning conditions and low public trust underline just how fragile and reversible this progress remains.

At the head of these challenges lies the full implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the binding judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

Implementing the *Sejdić-Finci* ruling is long overdue.

The *Kovačević* judgement also provides important guidance in order to pursue reforms in a manner that respects Bosnia and Herzegovina's specific constitutional structure, while ending systemic discrimination and ensuring equal political participation for all citizens, including those classified as others.

Institutional functionality must be improved. Excessive veto powers are paralysing quorum rules, and paralysing quorum rules have turned power sharing from a safeguard into a mechanism of permanent political blockage.

The protection of constituent peoples cannot come at the expense of democratic decision-making and effective social progress.

The Office of the High Representative should not become a permanent substitute for democratic sovereignty. Its gradual closure must go hand-in-hand with constitutional reforms that strengthen domestic ownership, accountability and trust between political actors.

Finally, resolving the issue of state property is essential. Public assets must be managed transparently, protected from corruption and geopolitical capture, and used in a way that supports socially just and inclusive development for all citizens.

Bosnia and Herzegovina deserves institutions that serve democracy, equality and the social rights of its people.

Thank you, Ms Chair.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much. I call Mr Piero FASSINO on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you President.

I thank the rapporteurs. From the picture the rapporteurs have given us I think we have to draw, let us say, a great concern. A great concern because Bosnia is at risk. In fact, Bosnia has been at risk ever since its establishment, after the Dayton and Rambouillet agreements. It was determined, on the basis of an international agreement, the formation of this state, bringing together the different communities, a state with two state entities, Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation, and three communities, Bosnians, Serbs and Croats. And the coexistence of all this, throughout this period, has been extremely difficult, not least because in order to hold this state together, there has been an exaggerated tripartition of all responsibilities, all offices, all roles. The result was truly paralysing.

I remember once when I was in Bosnia, among the many times I visited that country, and talking to a member of the presidency of one of the three entities, he said to me: "Now I'm going to say some things; beware that my colleague whom you will meet shortly will tell you the opposite". So it is a very complicated and difficult situation.

So I think that we need the Council, our Parliamentary Assembly, to put in place a strong accompanying and assisting action, because there is no guarantee that the next elections will be able to make that qualitative leap that is hoped for. And if the next elections were again to be a critical step, the situation would become even more at risk.

We know that Mr Milorad DODIK is constantly and continually tempted to make separatist choices. We know that even in the Muslim-Croat Federation, among the Croatian minority, among the Croatian community, there are pushes of a separatist nature, so the risk is of a political framework that actually compromises the existence of Bosnia.

And beware: if Bosnia is blown, a balance in the Balkans is blown, with the consequences that this can have on the various states in the region.

So, from this point of view, I appreciate the reports, I think the recommendations of the reports should be accepted. I say that, over and above the recommendations we make, then there must be a constant and continuous activity on the part of the Council of Europe to accompany, to assist the Bosnian authorities, so that they really do make those reforms that allow the electoral transitions to positively consolidate the political-institutional set-up and not undermine it.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): "Thank you very much" [spoken in Italian]

I call next Mr Georgios STAMATIS from the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

First of all, I would like to thank our colleagues for this report and also it was very interesting in the speeches of Mr Piero FASSINO and Mr George LOUCAIDES, because they started to talk about what happened for the future of Bosnia Herzegovina. And I think that we have to commit here to help Bosnia Herzegovina to the road to the rules of the Council of Europe, and of course, in the direction of the European Union.

You know better than me, Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Council of Europe 24 years ago, with clear obligations and we have to respect the rule of law, democratic governance, and full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. This report is a sober assessment of where the country stands today, acknowledging progress, identifying risks, and setting out a realistic path forward.

From the perspective of the Group of the European People's Party, we welcome this report in a clear and consistent way.

The recent political and institutional crisis in the country was crucial, but it was addressed effectively.

The report underlines the importance of electoral integrity and representation. We welcome the gradual implementation of electoral reforms aimed at transparency and integrity.

At the same time, the Assembly is right to insist that electoral reform must also guarantee political representation for all three constituent peoples and "Others", in line with the judgments of both, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Court of Human Rights.

It is also of major importance, that the Assembly calls on the authorities of Republika Srpska to promptly initiate the procedure for appointing judges to the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Additionally, we consider it particularly encouraging that, the authorities of Republika Srpska have annulled the entry laws adopted from 2023 to 2025 that had been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.

Political parties are called on adopting a package of reforms that would improve the functionality of the State institutions, and to find a sustainable solution to the issue of state property.

Finally, it is of particular importance that Bosnia and Herzegovina complete the procedure, and submit to the Assembly the list of the three proposed judges, so that the judge from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Court of Human Rights may be appointed.

Overall, the report demonstrates that Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the serious crisis it has undergone, lies on the right path and should now intensify its efforts and deepen its systematic cooperation with the Council of Europe, with a view to further strengthening democratic institutions and the effective protection of human rights in the country.

In light of the above, we support this report, reaffirming our shared commitment for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): "Thank you" [spoken in Greek].

Now I call Ms Alicia KEARNS on behalf of European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates.

Ms Alicia KEARNS (United Kingdom, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President. Colleagues,

I congratulate Mr Zsolt NÉMETH and Mr Pablo HISPÁN on an excellent report and presentation.

2025 marked the 30th anniversary of the war in Bosnia and the Dayton Peace Agreement. Across Europe, we remembered those who lost their lives in the siege of Sarajevo, in concentration camps, as victims of the Srebreniča genocide and the massacres of innocents. And we must never take peace for granted.

Bosnia and Herzegovina have endured a difficult year due to the illegal laws that were passed and actions taken by former Republika Srpska President, Mr Milorad DODIK. Ultimately, the Bosnian state and judicial institutions triumphed and Mr Milorad DODIK is no longer in office. A Presidential election was held in Republika Srpska and the illegal laws finally revoked. But we cannot be complacent.

The victory against these immediate pressures must now act as a springboard for future reform. The Dayton settlement was never meant to be permanent. Yet we are settled in a rut. The the new political leadership in Republika Srpska must cease all legal and rhetorical attacks against the Bosnian state and peoples. And a solution must be found to the question of state property, which empowers the central state and opens the pathway to membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

The Venice Commission's findings must also be implemented and constitutional reforms enacted to democratise and improve the efficiency of the country's governance. The 2006 April package came just two weeks and two votes of meaningful reform. Let us now hope that 20 years later we finally have the courage to see meaningful reform.

I welcome that the Bosnian Council of Ministers' creation of a working group has focused on constitutional reform. But ultimately Bosnia cannot continue with its preoccupation with ethnicity as the basis for the division of power. It is not working and it cannot work. Bosnia and Herzegovina has many friends across Europe and it is a wonderful country that is rich in culture, history and hospitality. And the recommendations in this draft resolution would open the way for investment, development, democratisation and a better future, where the young people of Bosnia do not feel they have to leave their country to have a future free of ethnic divisions and opportunity.

But mark my words, we in this place must not allow the Balkans to slip from our gaze. The threat of conflict remains far too ever-present. But today I urge all members to support this report, and, working together, commit ourselves to a safe and stable Bosnia firmly rooted in the community of Europe, where it deserves to be and where it should be.

Thank you, Madam President.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call Ms Marijana PULJAK on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Ms Marijana PULJAK (Croatia, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), I would like to thank the co-rapporteurs for this thorough, balanced, and honest report. This document addresses one of the most serious institutional crises since the Dayton Peace Agreement, but its most important message is not only about crisis, but about resilience.

We have witnessed direct challenges to the constitutional order, the authority of the Constitutional Court, and the Office of the High Representative. Yet, the rule of law prevailed. Court decisions were implemented, unconstitutional laws were withdrawn, and elections were held. This demonstrates that the institutions can withstand severe political attacks when there is legal clarity and international support.

However, resilience alone is not enough. From a liberal perspective, no democratic system can be considered complete as long as discrimination is embedded in its constitutional framework. The continued non-implementation of the Sejdić-Finci judgment and related rulings of the European Court of Human Rights is not a technical issue; it is a fundamental question of equality and basic democratic principles. These judgments must be implemented without further delay.

At the same time, any reform must ensure that strengthening the equality of citizens does not undermine the legitimate representation of constituent peoples. As a representative from Croatia, a neighbouring country and a signatory of the Dayton Agreement, I want to stress this clearly: the protection of constituent peoples and the functionality of the state are not contradictory goals. On the contrary, only a functional, European Bosnia and Herzegovina can guarantee the rights, security and dignity of all its citizens.

Regarding the Office of the High Representative, it is not the cause of dysfunction, but a consequence of it. Its closure must be the result of successful constitutional reform, not a political shortcut. Furthermore, resolving the issue of state property remains a legal obligation and a prerequisite for economic stability.

In conclusion, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not need "less Europe". It needs more: more rule of law, more equality, and the courage to reform what no longer works.

ALDE group stands ready to support this path.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you [spoken in Bosnian].

Thank you so much.

I call now the list of speakers to be open.

The first speaker is Mr Saša MAGAZINOVIĆ.

Mr Saša MAGAZINOVIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina, SOC): Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteurs for clearly stating two very important facts.

First, the mandate of the High Representative is legitimate and cannot be questioned. Second, state property can only be managed by the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I also believe that today's debate should send some important messages that need serious attention in the next period.

First, neighbouring countries, Serbia and Croatia, must stop interfering in the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This interference creates instability and weakens the country's sovereignty and democratic progress.

Second, the public broadcasting system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the most difficult situation in its history. This is not because of a lack of money. It is because part of the political elite is trying to weaken it. The same actors who raise national and ethnic tensions are directly responsible for the crisis of the public broadcasting system. This is not a technical problem. It is a political one. Therefore, I call on the Council of Europe to actively help to resolve this issue.

Third, at the root of almost every major problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina is crime protected by some politicians. Crises do not happen by accident. They are created to hide serious criminal activities. The greatest help Bosnia and Herzegovina can receive today is strong, clear and consistent support in the fight against crime and corruption.

Finally, violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina is increasing, and this is deeply worrying. I expect stronger engagement from the Council of Europe so that, together, through concrete policies and protection measures, we can stop this violence.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Saša MAGAZINOVIĆ.

I call now Mr Branislav BORENOVIĆ to be the next speaker.

(Mr Branislav BORENOVIĆ, your microphone. You need to insert your badge and then press the mic button on the right. Your badge. Do you have your badge?)

Mr Branislav BORENOVIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina, EPP/CD): As an opposition representative who comes from the most western part of the Western Balkans, from Banjaluka, Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I want to stress again that we belong to the European civilisation. Besides the current, long-time presented ruling political elites, who are afraid of EU rules, the rule of law and organised society, we remain focus in achieving European perspectives, standards and procedure.

In that sense, we need good laws, especially those pro-EU judiciary laws, we have in parliamentary procedures these days, laws that are maybe too rigid, sharp and very serious, with permanent vetting in the judiciary, but needed one if we want the rule of law and a real fight against corruption.

I am convinced that we can make a major step in integration into the EU, which will benefit all citizens in Srpska, the Federation and all of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is a process in which there are many preconditions and obligations that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to fulfil, but this is also a process from which our citizens have high expectations, especially when it comes to the full freedom of movement for our people and easier flow of goods for our economy. This finally implies easier crossing of the EU borders, and in particular, there is a major problem that our transport community is currently facing, which has incredible, unnecessary and discriminatory restrictions on the work and business of our transport companies and carriers through European countries. I guess human rights, equality, fairness and non-discrimination are key European and civilisational values.

And finally, I am convinced that, by working dedicatedly to establish the rule of law and adopt EU standards and rules, while respecting our constitutional framework and Dayton Peace Agreement, we can close the Office of the High Representative, replace foreign judges with domestic ones in the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and fully assume the role of governing our country in fair and honest election process, strengthening domestic institutions, especially judicial ones, and creating an environment for a good life for all our citizens.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Colleagues,

Unfortunately, I must interrupt the list of speakers right now,.

The speeches of the members on the Speakers list which have been presented during the debate, but who have not been able to speak, may be given to the Table Office for publication, but please, no later than four hours after we close the debate electronically.

In a moment I will call Mr Zsolt NÉMETH and Mr Pablo HISPÁN, his co-rapporteur to reply.

I first call Mr Pablo HISPÁN for his reply.

I remind you, colleagues, you have up to 5 minutes. In terms of saving time, you can speak for fewer minutes.

Thank you.

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH (Hungary, ECPA, Co-rapporteur): Thank you very much, Madam.

And I have to express my dissatisfaction that we couldn't listen to more contributions to this very important discussion. Many interested members of Parliament should have been able. I would like to ask you to transmit it to the Office that if we are talking about a very serious monitoring of a country, we cannot allow that only two people can contribute. Okay? This is number one. I would like to ask you.

Colleagues,

Secondly, I would like to agree with all those who said that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a European country and Bosnia and Herzegovina is having a European future, and the Western Balkans will not have stability without giving full membership in the European Union. In this whole region, you can count on us, and I'm convinced that the Council of Europe will be assisting this process.

Thirdly, I would like to agree with Ms Marijana PULJAK. Yes. In the immediate future, the legitimate representation of constituent peoples is a very important challenge facing the country. And I hope that after the elections, the appropriate conditions will be found to achieve this.

I do agree with Mr Branislav BORENOVIĆ very much that hopefully the full sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina is going to be created, and the institution of the High Representative can be closed, and the Constitutional Court also can assume full sovereign character.

Colleagues, I had an extremely important, interesting five years when I was able to collaborate with all of you. And I would like to express to the members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina delegation my gratitude for this collaboration. Our intention was in the last five years not to make judgments about who is right and who is wrong, but that was my intention that in these reports I have been responsible for. We are able to demonstrate the position of all of you, and I think we have been able to do that. And I am very grateful to the Secretariat that they have also understood that in such a very sensitive environment, this is the only way how we can contribute to finding the appropriate compromises and creating a favourable environment for creating an environment to have good decisions.

The present situation, I believe, before the elections is obviously tense, and I think we should pay attention to all the media aspects. But I'm convinced that the Council of Europe may play an important role in assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina in having successful elections. And as a consequence of the elections, we can exploit the relatively good international atmosphere to find a way to agree on the open questions concerning the constitutional aspects and the election dimensions as well, and to move forward with the process of European integration.

Because I am convinced that only half of the responsibility lies in the Western Balkans, the other half is in Europe, for not having been able to move forward with the European integration of this region. And I do agree with Mr Piero FASSINO that until we are not there, until we haven't been able to pave the way to European integration, there is a potential which might worry all of us concerning the stability of the region.

So I had a very important and interesting five years, and I know that the rules don't allow me to continue my rapporteurship, but I'm convinced that my co-rapporteur, Mr Pablo HISPÁN, will do a good job. We have been able to collaborate very closely, and I think we have agreed on most of the questions. And if two different parties in the Council of Europe can agree, I think you will be able to find an appropriate agreement within the country.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, colleagues.

Dear Mr Pablo HISPÁN, the floor is yours.

If we can limit... No, we should not limit you. But if you could give the floor for more time for the dear Chairperson, Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, would you wish to do so? Okay, great.

Then we call Ms Elvira KOVÁCS.

Dear Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, you have 2 minutes.

Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Thank you.

Distinguished Chair, dear colleagues, I would like to express my really sincere gratitude to the two very experienced rapporteurs for the remarkable and substantial work they have carried out in monitoring the democratic institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As both of them have pointed out, there are many positive developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but still also some sensitive issues to be resolved in order to strengthen the institutional and political system and especially to bring it fully in line with the statutory and legal standards of the Council of Europe.

We are all aware that the challenges there in Bosnia are considerable. Nevertheless, the report highlights the interesting political dynamics emerging in the country, which are quite unexpected given the events in recent years.

Anyway, our Assembly must continue to play a central role in encouraging the political actors of three constituent peoples to achieve a change in the country's institutional architecture, ensuring balanced representation of each of them, as well as, we said, others. Therefore, I really encourage you, dear colleagues, to support the resolution tabled by our two distinguished colleagues.

And it is evident that we will have elections in Bosnia in October this year, so that's the period when the Monitoring Committee comes a little bit behind the scenes, but of course the colleagues will observe elections and continue the work.

And allow me to use in conclusion this possibility to highlight the tremendous emotions and efforts of Mr Zsolt NÉMETH, who really did his best and invested five years in this work of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I believe that he will be missed, but we wish him good luck in his next appointments in other countries.

Thank you for your attention.

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

Ms President,

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to commend the co-rapporteurs for their comprehensive report. I appreciate the careful assessment of both the progress achieved and the remaining challenges, as well as the constructive engagement with the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout this process.

Türkiye attaches utmost importance to the stability and prosperity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ties between our peoples are rooted in centuries of shared history and enduring human connections, and today they are strengthened by a forward-looking cooperation based on mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and democratic institutions.

We consistently support Bosnia and Herzegovina's unity and functionality as a state, and attach great importance to the country's Euro-Atlantic perspective and its place within the wider European family.

From our perspective, Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability is inseparable from regional stability. For this reason, Türkiye remains committed to constructive dialogue among all constituent peoples and political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, encouraging consensus, reconciliation, and a shared vision for the future.

As highlighted in the report, Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced a serious constitutional and institutional crisis over the past period, linked to challenges to state authority and the rule of law. Türkiye has followed these developments with great concern and has actively engaged, through bilateral contacts and regional diplomacy, to encourage dialogue, restraint and respect for constitutional mechanisms.

Türkiye also continues to support the High Representative (HR) and his office's work. Nevertheless, the High Representative's use of Bonn Powers should be entertained only as a last resort and in cases where there are fundamental threats to Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any step to that end should be taken after due and prior consultation with the Peace Implementation Council members.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratic resilience is real, and the country should continue to strive for progress through dialogue, compromise, and reforms. I therefore invite all colleagues to support this report and continue to respect the constitutional and legal order, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

Mr Vladimir ĐORĐEVIĆ (Serbia, ECPA): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

"Let's make everything clear under the law."

Bosnia and Herzegovina exists because of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Dayton ended the war. Dayton created the state. Without Dayton, there is no Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dayton did not create a unitary state.

It created a country with two Entities, one of them Republic of Srpska. This is not an opinion. This is the law.

The Council of Europe says it stands for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic processes. So I must ask a simple question: Why have these principles failed when it comes to Republic of Srpska?

Today, we are told that peace requires less Republic of Srpska, less Entities, and more central power. But removing the Entities is not reform. It is the destruction of Dayton.

At the same time, an unelected foreign official — the High Representative — imposes laws, cancels decisions, and overrules elected institutions. These powers are not written in Dayton. No democratic country in Europe would accept this.

Republic of Srpska does not reject peace. It rejects double standards and imposed rule. If Dayton applies only when it is convenient, then it does not apply at all. And if Dayton no longer applies, then the constitutional basis of Bosnia and Herzegovina no longer exists.

In that case, the future of Republic of Srpska cannot be silenced or ignored. Peace cannot be forced. Stability cannot be imposed.

Only respect for agreements, democracy, and equality can keep Bosnia and Herzegovina together. Europe must defend Dayton fully — or admit that it has abandoned it.

Ms Biljana PANTIĆ PILJA (Serbia, EPP/CD): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear colleagues,

At the outset, allow me to thank the rapporteurs Mr Zsolt NÉMETH and Mr Pablo HISPÁN for the excellent work they have done. They were entrusted with a task that was by no means an easy one - assessing the work of the institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A proper understanding of the functioning of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a challenge even for those of us from the region, and I therefore take this opportunity to congratulate the rapporteurs on the completion of their work.

I am convinced that the preservation of peace and stability in the Balkans in these challenging times is in the interest of Serbia and the entire region. It constitutes a fundamental precondition for economic growth and comprehensive social development, for bridging divisions, and for respecting and safeguarding the dignity as well as the civil, collective, and cultural rights of all peoples living in the region.

As a guarantor of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the Republic of Serbia remains firmly committed to its full observance, with due respect for the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the preservation of Republika Srpska as one of its fundamental pillars. We consider agreement among the three constituent peoples on the functioning and future of the state, on an equal footing and without outvoting, external interference or undue involvement, to be an essential principle. Any breach of this principle, or the imposition of a reorganisation of the internal structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, could be highly dangerous in these challenging times.

With regard to the draft resolution, we take the view that it is factual in character, as it sets out recent developments and recalls a number of outstanding issues from previous periods, which have yet to be resolved. I believe that these issues should be resolved exclusively through agreement among the three constituent peoples, and I welcome the fact that we can observe certain steps forward in that direction.

In conclusion, I wish to commend the rapporteurs once again for their thorough work.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Mike READER (United Kingdom, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

President, Chair,

I want to begin by acknowledging the United Kingdom's long-standing commitment to peace and stability in the Western Balkans, including the role played by the last Labour government in supporting the post-conflict settlement. That peace was essential. But this report is rightly focused on what must come next. The building of fully functioning, inclusive democratic institutions that command genuine public legitimacy.

At the heart of the report is a clear message about democratic inclusion, the rule of law, and institutional reform. Democracies cannot be considered legitimate if citizens are excluded from political participation on the basis of identity. Continued discrimination against those classified as “Others”, and the failure to implement long-standing European Court of Human Rights judgements, is incompatible with Council of Europe standards and must finally be addressed.

The report is also rightly unequivocal on the rule of law. Binding court judgements must be implemented, consistently and without exception. Recent developments show both how fragile and how vital judicial authority is in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Selective compliance undermines trust, weakens institutions, and fuels instability.

I also want to stress parliamentary ownership. Reform cannot be endlessly postponed, nor resolved through closed-door negotiations or external fixes. Parliaments must be central to constitutional and electoral reform if outcomes are to be durable, democratic, and legitimate.

Finally, the report rightly urges a move away from permanent crisis management. Reliance on emergency mechanisms may unblock institutions in the short term, but continued delay entrenches instability and erodes public confidence.

With general elections approaching in 2026, these recommendations offer a clear and realistic pathway towards stronger democratic legitimacy. Supporting this report helps move Bosnia and Herzegovina from post-conflict arrangements to durable democratic governance.

Thank you.

Ms Dunja SIMONOVIĆ BRATIĆ (Serbia, SOC): (Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)

Dear colleagues,

I want to thank to our respected rapporteur, dear Mr Zsolt NÉMETH, who is one of the few among us who understands the complexity of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Each of the three constituent nations has its own reasons and justifications for everything that happens. And everyone has their own truth.

The Republic of Serbia gives selfless support to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, it has special relations with Republic of Srpska, which is natural. Republic of Serbia is a guarantor of Dayton agreement that brought peace 30 years ago.

So, any attempt to abolish the original powers of Republic of Srpska by rejecting the Dayton agreement is unacceptable.

Any change concerning institutional arrangement, rights of the entities and constituent nations, can be legal and legitimate only if it is a deal of all sides.

Serbia is strongly opposed to any imposition of decisions – such as attempts to confiscate property of the Republic of Srpska.

We think that the issue of the functional state and the institutions within it, as a whole reform process and the EU path of Bosnia and Herzegovina, cannot be the excuse for centralisation of state abolishing the jurisdiction and rights of entities and constituent nations.

That's why it is the most important Serbian judges must return into the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Both for rights and for justice, and finally for reconciliation and normal coexistence.

I must remind you all that 10 years ago our President Aleksandar VUČIĆ was brutally attacked in Potočari, paying the respect to all victims. That was the attempt ritual assassination by stoning – what was the custom in the ancient times when fanatics dealt with nonbelievers.

Officials from Sarajevo did not give an answer or initiate an investigation, let alone lead to the conviction of the responsible individuals.

In spite of all Serbia is ready for advocating reconciliation, and due to that constantly invest in reconstruction and construction – new bridges, roads, hospitals and schools. And it will continue to do regardless of brutal and everyday lies that come from Sarajevo.

Being the largest country in region Serbia will always be a pillarstone and support to our people, as to all others – who in this challenging times want to preserve peace and security for their own citizens.

Živele Srbija! Srpska!

Vote: The functioning of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms. Chair.

[Applause]

The debate is closed, colleagues.

The Monitoring Committee has presented a draft resolution, Document 16310, to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 16310.

A simple majority is required.

Colleagues, the vote is open now.

The vote is closed, colleagues.

I call for the results to be displayed:

It's adopted: 63 in favour, 1 against and 2 abstentions.

Congratulations, colleagues.

[Applause]

Yes, applause, to all enthusiasts who are in the Hall as well.

The Assembly will hold its next public sitting tomorrow morning at 10:10 a.m. with the agenda approved on Monday.

Colleagues, the sitting is adjourned. I close the sitting.

I wish you a peaceful evening, with electricity, warm water and other great elements of European life.

The sitting is closed at 8:00 p.m.