



Provisional edition

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Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting No 6

Address: Communication from the Committee of Ministers

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Good afternoon, dear colleagues,

The sitting is open. I remind members that in order to be registered for this sitting, you should insert your badge when you take a 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 once, just once. It's important.

I also remind the Assembly that members who have not submitted an annual declaration, and the email, by the way, came yesterday evening, so from now on you all have the chance to make your declaration of interest, are required to start any intervention with an oral declaration of interest under paragraph 20 of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Our next business is to consider the changes proposed in the membership of committees, which are set out in Document Commissions (2026) 01 and Addendum 3.

Are these agreed to? I don't see anybody against. So they are agreed.

Then, our first item on the agenda now, this afternoon, is the communication from the Committee of Ministers to the Assembly presented by Mr Mihai POPȘOI.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome among us Mr Mihai POPȘOI, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova and President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Dear Mihai, yesterday you accompanied Ms Maia SANDU, your President, who presented us with the traumatic situation and pressure Moldova is facing as a result of a targeted campaign of disinformation pressure that was also seen across Europe.

The fight against disinformation, chosen as a priority of your Presidency, and also of mine, is therefore a timely priority for this organisation, as a co-ordinated and global response is indeed required.

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.

Dear Mihai, welcome once again to the hemicycle, which you know very well because you have experience both as a member of your national Parliament and also as President of the Committee of Ministers. And without any further ado, I will give you the floor.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): President of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Distinguished parliamentarians,

Excellencies,

I am honoured to have the opportunity to address the Parliamentary Assembly for the first time in my capacity as President of the Committee of Ministers.

Madam President,

Congratulations on your recent election. I wish you the best success in your important mandate in this highly consequential time.

Yesterday, in her address, President Maia Sandu spoke about the two wars Europe is facing today; how our democracies are being attacked; how those attacks are amplified by technology; and what we should do to protect our peace, our democratic choices and our freedom.

This echoes the crucial role of the Council of Europe in safeguarding and defending democracy, human rights and the rule of law at times of unprecedented challenges to the rules-based international order and repositioning of geopolitical configurations.

Today, after two months into our Presidency, these words carry particular significance at this juncture.

We are witnessing an ever-increasing fragmentation of the international environment, in which multilateralism is seen rather as a weakness, than a strength and in which the rules-based international order is depreciated by acts that defy its very essence.

Strengthening its core values, increasing the efficiency of its responses to emerging threats and remaining alert are meaningful and vital for the purposes that guide us both as an organisation, and as individual member states too.

The Republic of Moldova assumed the Presidency which we uphold with honour, and great feeling of responsibility.

In exercising its mandate, the Republic of Moldova endeavours under the motto “For a Europe of Peace and Resilience”, to facilitate the convergence of the Council of Europe’s activities towards reaching its objectives and enhancing its capacities and acquiring new tools to better adapt to shifting realities.

The Presidency is guided by three major axes: support for Ukraine and the accountability for the crime of aggression committed by the Russian Federation; support for the work on the New Democratic Pact, the New Pact for Democracy; and strengthening our response to disinformation.

I will refer briefly to some of the most relevant developments that took place since we assumed the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

Accountability and compensation for Ukraine:

Accountability, justice, and lasting peace remain at the core of our support for Ukraine, which continues to face a brutal war of aggression by the Russian Federation. The Committee of Ministers is transforming its commitments into institutional and legal structures to guarantee accountability and compensation for Ukrainian citizens.

Since last October, a new milestone regarding accountability has been accomplished. Thirty-five countries, including the Republic of Moldova and the European Union have signed a new convention establishing the International Claims Commission for Ukraine at a diplomatic conference co-hosted by the Council of Europe and the Netherlands on 16 December 2025. The convention will enter into force once ratified by 25 signatories.

The conference was attended by leaders and high-profile representatives from over 50 states. The President of Ukraine, Mr Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Ms Maia Sandu, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr Dick Schoof, and the Secretary General, Mr Alain Berset, were present.

It was a moment in which we took a decisive step towards ensuring justice. Not a symbolic justice, but real, efficient accountability for the immense suffering caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Last December, the Committee of Ministers' working party 'GT-TRIBUNAL' finalised the draft resolution establishing the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the management of the Special Tribunal. It is now working on the modalities for the resolution's adoption, as well as on issues such as the membership and budget of the Special Tribunal. Just last week, it was also decided that the Advance Team would begin preparatory work as of January 2026, thanks to a voluntary contribution by the European Union.

Beyond the compensation mechanism and accountability, the Committee of Ministers remains committed to Ukraine's long-term future through democratic reconstruction, in particular through the Action Plan 'Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction 2023 - 2026'. The Action Plan contributes substantially to Ukraine's reform agenda, helping the country move forward on the path toward European Union accession. The contributions from the member states for the Action Plan are very much welcome.

As a standard-setter and promoter of values, the Council of Europe contributes to maintaining a rules-based order and enhancing democratic security.

Execution of judgements:

In this context, a key role is played by the Court whose independence is a cornerstone and the guarantor of the legitimacy of the rules-based democratic societies.

The fourth quarterly meeting of the Committee of Ministers in its human rights formation was held between 2 and 4 December adopting 45 decisions concerning 24 states.

The Committee carried out its first examination of the landmark judgment 'Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia', concerning four interstate cases of unprecedented scope and exceptional impact.

Russia was held responsible by the Court regarding the human rights violations and downing of the civilian flight MH17 in July 2014; flagrant and unprecedented violations caused by the numerous administrative practices committed by Russia from 2014 to 2022. The Committee decided to continue its consideration of the case under separate thematic clusters.

In the case of 'Kavala v. Türkiye', the Committee expressed its profound concern that the applicant is still detained, strongly exhorting the authorities to take every possible step to ensure the applicant's immediate release.

The credibility of the Convention system hinges on the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. It is therefore imperative that all member states, without exception, abide by their obligations and execute the Court's judgments.

Under the Moldovan Presidency, on the 12 December 2025, in Chisinau, the International Conference on the European convention system and execution of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights was organised. The purpose of the Conference was to identify the specific challenges faced by domestic authorities and justice system actors in the execution of the Court's judgments, and to contribute to the development of a more effective and equitable approach to their implementation at the national level.

The event also tackled possible avenues under international law aimed at securing the payment by Russia of just satisfaction awarded by the Court in these cases, including in conflict related cases and interstate cases.

A number of possible mechanisms were under discussion, in order to connect broader co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, while ensuring that victims are compensated and the authority of the European Court is upheld.

Migration and the European Convention on Human Rights:

In recent years, issues relating to migration, including the relationship between the Convention and national measures to control migration, have become the subject of intense political debate within and between many Council of Europe member states.

The Conference on 10 December, organised at the initiative of the Secretary General has brought those discussions within the framework of the Council of Europe, which is the appropriate context.

Delegations and ministers from 46 member states reaffirmed their deep and abiding commitment to both the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, while acknowledging the challenges posed by irregular migration and the situation of foreigners convicted of serious offences.

They called for the preparation of a political declaration on issues related to migration and the European Convention on Human Rights. The political declaration is expected to be adopted at the next formal session of the Committee of Ministers in Chişinău in May this year.

In addition, the ministers supported the elaboration of a new recommendation on deterring and fighting the smuggling of migrants, with full respect for their human rights, as well as further efforts to address pressing migration issues and related policies.

Fight against environmental crime:

Speaking about the standard setting, I would like to highlight the opening as well for signature in December of the Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law, which represented another landmark contribution by the Council of Europe to global environmental protection. The Convention provides the foundation for a coherent criminal justice response by states to environmental crime, including across borders. The Republic of Moldova signed the Convention on that occasion. I invite you to encourage other respective authorities to swiftly follow suit.

The Convention forms part of the Council of Europe's comprehensive efforts in the field of the environment, as laid out notably in its Strategy on Environment, and reflects a collective effort to the "triple planetary crisis" of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

National perspective and local democracy:

Democratic resilience leads to a cohesive society. To this end, a cohesive society relies on strong local communities and sound local democracy. The respect for the Charter of Local Self-Government is essential for ensuring the resilience and sustainability of local democracy. The Moldovan Presidency therefore decided to highlight the importance of local democracy as one of its main priorities.

Last but not least, I would like to highlight the importance of the Secretary General's initiative to work on a New Democratic Pact for Europe, which the Moldovan Presidency will fully support.

Foreign malign Interference:

In the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and a wave of disinformation, security no longer means only weapons, but above all, solid institutions capable of protecting human rights and the rule of law are required.

Strengthening our response to disinformation has to be one of the first lines of defence of democracy.

The Council of Europe's long-standing expertise in identifying and designing efficient instruments to safeguard democracy and rule of law will endeavour in the next months to dwell on the best practices to respond to this crisis, that we can give to counteract malign foreign interference – our own experience.

Under the revised Programme and Budget for the next two years, a Committee of Experts on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (PC-FIMI) was established.

Its mandate is to complete a feasibility study on the possible elaboration of a Council of Europe legal instrument on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), including disinformation, exploring challenges in relation to election interference, media concentration and capture, media freedom and democratic and information literacy, organised crime, cybercrime, corruption and the malign use of AI and other technologies.

Violence and threats against journalists remain a serious concern, undermining their democratic role. The Council of Europe's Journalists Matter campaign promotes their safety and freedom, while upcoming events in Chişinău will focus on combating disinformation and strengthening public trust.

Disinformation and propaganda threaten democracy by undermining social cohesion. In Chişinău, a Conference on Media Literacy will explore ways to counter false narratives, promote critical thinking and launch upcoming Council of Europe guidelines for national media literacy strategies. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive media education to equip citizens against manipulation.

Social rights are a fundamental pillar of a just, inclusive and resilient democracy. Guided by the 2023 Reykjavík Declaration and with an unwavering commitment to advancing social justice and the implementation of the rights guaranteed by the European Social Charter, the Republic of Moldova will be honoured to host a High-Level Conference in Chişinău, underscoring our shared dedication to promoting human dignity, equality and ensuring the social well-being of all of our citizens.

Children's rights and combating violence against women are among the Moldovan Presidency's priorities, my country having already hosted a number of high profile events in the last month.

Integration of a youth perspective:

When a youth perspective is integrated in our decisions, it promotes democratic processes and helps reinforce the Council of Europe's values among youth.

The Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, held in Malta, adopted the Final Declaration and the Resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Participation. These documents set out the main actions for the next couple of years, including how to integrate a youth perspective in policy-making across the organisation and in member states. Work on the latter has already begun.

I would like to emphasise some of the youth dimension events organised under our Presidency in member states: the "Youth Forum" in Budapest in December, the "Workshop on Youth and Holocaust Remembrance" in February, the International youth research conference and round table "Youth Perspectives in Action: A new chapter for youth research in Europe", in March.

In the field of culture, the Committee adopted the Convention on the co-production of audiovisual works in the form of series, whose text had been previously examined by the Parliamentary Assembly.

At this pivotal moment, we remain fully committed to advancing our shared values and to contributing constructively to the organisation's agenda.

Our Presidency will continue to promote unity, resilience and a stronger Europe grounded in democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We can only do that and be successful in that if we can effectively stand by Ukraine.

Yesterday we commemorated the tragedy of the Holocaust. Today in the morning, we all condemned again yet another brutal attack by the Russian Federation on a civilian train. A number of civilians lost their lives at the hands of the Russian Federation. It is even more symbolic that the attack and the aggression of Nazi Germany against Russia lasted four years. And the attack and the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine lasted more than four years.

I remember back in 1992 when I was still very young, we had our own challenges with Russia, and not many came to our defence. Georgia had its own challenges with Russia in 2008, and not a lot of support was given. In 2014, with the annexation of Crimea and the first Russian attack against Ukraine, there was little support.

Now in 2022, it seems to have been a wake up call. But if we fail to respond time and time again, when the aggression comes to you, there will be very few to respond. So it is up to us to maintain this unity and solidarity.

When we say never again, we really mean it. And we're talking about any aggression and any senseless killing and destruction and human suffering.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Mihail POPSOI, for your real, relevant and timely speech.

We come to the questions now, and I want to remind colleagues that your questions must not be longer than 30 seconds.

Colleagues should really ask questions and not make any speeches. And we start with the round of the spokespeople on behalf of the political groups. And Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN is the first, on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN (Romania, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Minister,

Beyond the strong support that the Council of Europe, the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, and also my country Romania continue to provide to Ukraine, I want to ask you, as President of the Committee of Ministers, what actions do you intend to promote to ensure that European standards for the protection of national minorities, including the preservation of national culture and religious identity of the ethnic Romanians in Ukraine, are fully respected by the Ukrainian authorities (education, mother tongue, religious freedom)?

For instance, the closing on 1 February this year of 28 out of 32 Romanian so-called "academic high schools" in the Cernăuți region might generate a disaster for the ethnic Romanians in Ukraine. So the issue is urgent. Thank you.

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

Mr Mihail POPSOI please.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): Thank you.

The upheavals of European history have shown that the protection of national minorities is essential to stability, democratic security, as well as peace.

Action by the Council of Europe regarding national minorities includes standard-setting, intergovernmental co-operation, activities for the development and consolidation of democratic stability and confidence-building measures in civil society. Most importantly in this domain, the Council of Europe Framework Convention, with 38 member states, is the first legally binding multilateral instrument devoted to the protection of national minorities worldwide. And its implementation is monitored by the only international committee dedicated exclusively to minority rights: the Advisory Committee, which is a recognised and highly respected body in the international sphere on minority protection. Its monitoring system has contributed to improving dialogue between governmental agencies and national minorities. It has also prompted the adoption of new laws devoted to the protection of national minorities and encourages states to improve their non-discriminatory legislation and practice.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of the Group of the European People's Party, we hear the question of Mr Gustaf GÖTHBERG now.

Mr Gustaf GÖTHBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, my dear colleague.

Madam President, Minister Mihail POPSOI,

Dear colleagues,

Welcome back to the Parliamentary Assembly.

My belief is that what is going on in the Republic of Moldova is really astonishing.

Your resilience, your European determination, your resistance to Russian attempts to interfere in your country.

Sweden stands with you all the way; and you have shown, really, what leadership is about.

I can tell you also that you have the full support of the Group of the European People's Party here.

My question: What more can be done to support your European integration from us as the Council of Europe, but also as national parliaments?

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Mister Deputy Prime Minister, please.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): We count on the Council of Europe's continuous support and all of its institutions that have been working to help us. We hope that all the EU member states will continue to be committed to the enlargement process.

In the last year, in the report of the European Commission, Moldova was evaluated with very high progress. In this current environment, when, especially in small countries, the environment looks very dangerous, it is this urgency to move, both on the part of the candidate countries but also on the part of the institutions, to make sure that the new enlargement process is a credible one. And we can only thank the Council of Europe as an institution for helping Moldova consolidate its democracy throughout the years, to be now in a position to be a candidate country that progresses and makes significant steps towards its ambition to be a member of the European family of nations. So there is a very productive, synergetic co-operation and we are thankful for this support throughout the years.

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

Next is Mr Armen GEVORGYAN on behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates.

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN (Armenia, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Minister,

It's becoming a bad tradition for some senior officials of the organisation to avoid meetings with the opposition of the member states to discuss human rights violations.

When rare meetings took place, they have typically begun promoting narratives of necessary compromises and advising that political prosecution cases be addressed in the Strasbourg Court.

The Court, however, takes years to consider issues when immediate actions are required.

In this regard, how will the Committee of Ministers ensure that the Council of Europe remains a human rights organisation, but not a shield for governments to avoid accountability?

Thank you.

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

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): This particular question has not been discussed within the Committee of Ministers. Therefore, I cannot comment or express any position or opinion on behalf of the Committee at this point.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Now, on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Ms Liliana TANGUY. Liliana, please.

Ms Liliana TANGUY (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

Minister,

In a context marked by the intensification of foreign interference and manipulation of information that endanger European democracies, how does the Moldovan Presidency intend, through regional exercises and media education initiatives, to support the strengthening of the democratic resilience of Member States?

Thank you.

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

Mr Mihail POPSOI.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): Thank you.

Indeed. As you have heard yesterday from President Maia SANDU, and I'm sure that you know that information manipulation is not an abstract threat, particularly in the country where I come from, unprecedented foreign information manipulation interference designed to weaken social unity, sow distrust,

divide and influence people's choices is a dangerous weapon in a hybrid war waged against all of our democracies. It is used in all domains, including in the context of elections. We must together find solutions to prevent information abuse and manipulation and thus strengthen our resilience.

To respond to this emerging threat, the Committee of Ministers has just set up a Committee of Experts on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference. This Committee is tasked with preparing by 15 April a feasibility study on the possible elaboration of a Council of Europe legal instrument on foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), including disinformation, exploring challenges in relation to election interference, media concentration and so forth. The study will examine legal challenges and gaps regarding the criminalisation of certain conduct related to FIMI and identify potential approaches regarding prevention, awareness-raising and educational measures.

Under the Moldovan Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe will convene a high-level conference on media literacy and information integrity, building resilience to disinformation in Europe. This event responds to the increasingly complex information landscape in which disinformation, hate speech, and manipulative online content threaten public trust, democratic participation and the protection of fundamental rights.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Once more, the round of spokespersons on behalf of political groups is concluded by Ms Laura CASTEL on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Ms Laura CASTEL (Spain, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Chair.

Mr Mihail POPSOI,

Two years ago I requested to the Committee of Ministers at what stage of compliance was the resolution regarding Pegasus spyware that urged Poland, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Greece and Spain to provide information, investigate all cases, apply sanctions and provide redress to victims. The answer was that due to a lack of consensus, there was no reply. You will agree with me that this is unacceptable and shows disdain for the victims and disdain for the work of this Assembly. So again, I ask the Committee of Ministers, your Presidency, whether those member states have provided information, investigated all cases, applied sanctions and provide redress to victims.

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Mr Mihail POPSOI.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): The Committee of Ministers adopted this reply to your Assembly recommendations on Pegasus and similar spyware and state surveillance in September 2024:

"The Committee of Ministers shares the Assembly's concern at the deeply intrusive nature of Pegasus and similar spyware tools, which turn targeted smartphones into 24-hour surveillance devices. Given the role played by mobile phones in collecting, storing and processing large amounts of highly sensitive personal data, there is a resulting risk of serious violations of the right to private and family life, as protected by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights."

The view was reinforced by the Venice Commission in its report in December 2024 on rule of law and human rights compliance regulations in spyware. The report concluded that the use and development of intrusive surveillance software such as spyware should only be possible if the relevant legal framework meets certain strict requirements.

In view of the gravity of this threat, the Committee of Ministers invited its Steering Committee for Human Rights to consider the Assembly's recommendation on preparing a non-binding instrument on secret surveillance and human rights. This was not taken up in the revision of the terms of reference last autumn, but it may be examined next year. The same applies to the Assembly's proposal to examine the feasibility of the Council of Europe Convention on the acquisition, use, sale and export of spyware, which may be considered following any work on a non-binding instrument.

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

We now come to the list of all the other speakers.

I also want to remind you that you have a maximum of 30 seconds for your questions.

The list starts with Mr Christophe LACROIX.

Mr Christophe LACROIX (Belgium, SOC): Madam President, Mr Mihail POPSOI,

Following the informal meeting of the Committee of Ministers on 10 December, can you assure me that the intention of the Committee of Ministers is not to interfere in the workings and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, in defiance of the separation of powers, nor to challenge respect for the rule of law, which is the only guarantee of living in safe states where national security and public safety are guaranteed, nor to equate migrants with criminals, nor to rank human rights in order of who benefits from them?

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

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN is next.

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN (Türkiye, SOC): Mister Deputy Prime Minister,

Considering the joint statement issued last month by the Ministers of Justice regarding the interpretation of the European Commission on Human Rights, given that global security concerns are overshadowing the ideals of human rights and democracy, and bearing in mind the European Court of Human Rights judgements regarding violations of Article 18, such as Mr Osman Kavala's and Mr Selahattin Demirtaş' cases – you mentioned them too in your speech – my question is, are you worried about the future of the Convention?

Thank you.

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

The third in this round, Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA.

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

Respected Minister, what are your expectations of the Chişinău ministerial conference in the context of Moldova's priorities for the Presidency?

Thank you.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): Mister Mihail POPSOI.

It's up to you if you would like to reply.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): In the Reykjavík Declaration adopted in May 2023, our Heads of State and Government reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to the Convention system.

The Declaration recalled the extraordinary contribution of the Convention system to the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Europe, as well as its central role in the maintenance and promotion of democratic security and peace throughout the continent.

This should be our compass in future consideration of this matter.

On 22 May 2025, at the initiative of Denmark and Italy, the leaders of nine member states of the Council of Europe published an open letter to launch an "open-minded conversation about the interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights".

The letter, without mentioning the Council of Europe, focused on the issue of irregular migration. It expressed concern that the Court has extended the scope of the Convention too far, thus affecting states' ability to protect their societies.

To bring the issue back to the Council of Europe where it belongs, and to engage in an open political discussion on a matter of importance to member states, the Secretary General invited our Ministers of Justice to an informal Ministerial Conference in Strasbourg on 10 December on the European Court of Human Rights and the question of migration.

The Conference adopted conclusions in which the Ministers present pronounced their intention to pursue the political dialogue on this matter within the institutional framework of the Council of Europe.

With this in mind, they invited the Committee of Ministers in particular to prepare a draft political declaration reaffirming the obligations under the Convention in the context of the challenges posed by irregular migration.

On the same day, the Committee of Ministers invited its specialised group of experts on human rights to work on elements to be included in such a declaration.

The Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) will report back before 22 March 2026, to allow for the Ministers' Deputies to finalise the declaration to be submitted, together with the other relevant documents, for adoption in the next session of the Committee of Ministers in Chişinău, in May.

Tomorrow, in the Joint Committee, we will discuss these issues with members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

It is important that both statutory organs participate in a debate of such importance to the Council of Europe and its member states. The system of the European Convention on Human Rights is the basis for all our work, at the centre of the values we stand for and protect.

In a series of declarations adopted by member states between 2010 and 2018, and the conclusion of the high-level conferences, we expressed our commitment to the Convention system.

In the Reykjavík Declaration of May, our Heads of State and Government reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to the Convention system. The Declaration recalled that the extraordinary contribution of the Convention system to the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Europe, as well as its central role in maintaining and promoting of democratic security and peace.

This should be our compass again, going forward.

The Presidency strongly respects the independence, impartiality and authority of the Court and reaffirming the unconditional obligation of states to abide by the final judgements of the Court.

Along the lines of our priorities, we expect that the road towards the ministerial session in Chişinău will mean more progress in ensuring accountability for Ukraine. We had a good start with the signature of the Convention establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine. Work continues on the establishment of Special Tribunal for Ukraine.

We will be looking forward to the conclusion of the Committee of Experts on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (PC-FIMI) work, strengthening our purpose. Our response to this information, including foreign information manipulation, interference being another priority of Moldova's Presidency.

Of particular importance will be the outcome of the High Level Conference on the Social Charter that will take place in March in Chişinău, which we see as an important step in reaffirming the importance of embedding social rights, not only in the fabric of our organisation activity to protect human rights, but also highlighting the relevance in the response of rising populism, radicalisation of our society. We'll be working as well on some other possible achievements.

Last but not least, I would like to ask distinguished members of parliament to encourage their foreign affairs ministers to participate in the ministerial session in Chişinău.

I cannot emphasise this request enough.

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

We now come to the question of Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

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

Dear Minister Mihail POPSOI,

First of all, thank you very much for all of your support for Ukraine.

As you know, I represent Odessa, the biggest city on the Black Sea shore. By the way, we were happy to have you at our Black Sea Security Forum, and I hope to have you again this year.

My question is that Russia restarted its attacks against commercial navigation in the Black Sea.

What can be done by the Council of Ministers to tackle this very serious challenge which threatens the food security of the world, which threatens the whole region?

Thank you very much.

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

The next on my speaking list is Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU, but I don't think that he is in the room...

I will proceed to Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE): Dear Minister Mihail POPSOI,

I have a very practical question and really hope for your support and understanding.

Recently, Ukrainian citizens are facing certain problems on the Moldovan border.

This includes requirements for additional documents, restrictions on children travelling with relatives.

I think these practices rely on excessive discretion of border officers and create legal uncertainty.

So what concrete steps will Moldova take to bring border procedures fully in line with common European standards?

Thank you.

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

The third in this round is Ms Cristina Gabriella DUMITRESCU.

Ms Cristina Gabriella DUMITRESCU (Romania, ECPA): Thank you.

Mister President,

I would like to ask you what concrete measures the Albanian government has taken in response to the requirements of Recommendation 1333 from 1997?

In particular, with regard to bringing the data from the 2023 census in line with the reality on the ground, as regards the number of persons belonging to national minorities, including the Aromanian minority and facilitating access for Aromanians living in Albania to education, media and public administration in their modern dialect and the literary Aromanian language.

Thank you very much.

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

Mister Mihail POPSOI, if you would like to respond, then the floor is yours.

Please.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): Thank you.

As you know, supporting Ukraine and accountability for Ukraine is an overarching priority of our presidency. I do understand the importance of this question for Ukraine. However, given its nature, I'm not in a position to provide you with an immediate answer. So with your permission, we'll provide you with an answer in the written form at a later date.

Regarding the challenges that may happen at the border crossings, I will mention that the Republic of Moldova has welcomed the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita – over a million, since the beginning of the full scale aggression. We are hosting constantly, around 100 000. We have provided full access to education, the labour market, healthcare. We are one of the main airports of travel for Ukrainians from southwestern Ukraine.

At the same time, we need to make sure that in order to be able to protect Ukraine and to protect the security of the Republic of Moldova, we need to ensure border security. Some sensitivities may happen, but we are always committed to making sure that we resolve them in a working fashion. Any sort of challenges can and should be resolved at the working level.

We can only emphasise that we have always been incredibly welcoming of our Ukrainian friends and we will continue to do so. Just like we have shown in the case of providing assistance even in these challenging moments. Just the other day we provided several generators in order to provide our small but important contribution in this time of great need.

We are confident that we'll be able to continuously provide this support while also making sure that we safely control the border for the sake of Ukraine, but also for the sake of the Republic of Moldova.

On the last question, it is rather technical and therefore calls for a precise answer, which I'm not in a position to provide right now. With your permission, we will provide you with the written answer at a later date.

Thank you.

Written reply of Mr Mihail Popsoi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers, to the oral question put by Mr Oleksii Goncharenko (Ukraine, ECPA)

“The Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, established by the Committee of Ministers, plays a vital role in systematically documenting losses resulting from Russia’s aggression. By actively supporting the Register and encouraging affected parties, including commercial shipping operators and those impacted by disruptions in the Black Sea, to submit claims, the Committee of Ministers can help ensure that these unlawful acts are comprehensively recorded. This robust documentation will be instrumental in facilitating future processes for compensation.

It should be noted, however, that the Register’s mandate is specifically limited: it covers damage, loss, or injury sustained by natural and legal persons, as well as the State of Ukraine, caused on or after 24 February 2022 within the territory of Ukraine as internationally recognised, including its territorial waters, and resulting from the Russian Federation’s internationally wrongful acts in or against Ukraine.

Given the context of Russian attacks targeting commercial navigation in the Black Sea, which may involve damage or destruction of shipping infrastructure (such as ports, docks, and storage facilities), non-residential vessels, and other related immovable property, the following categories from the Register of Damage for Ukraine may be particularly relevant:

- Categories B1.1, B1.2, C1.1, C1.2 – Damage or Destruction of Critical and Non-Critical Infrastructure
- Category C1.5 – Damage or Destruction of Non-Residential Immovable Property (Not Related to Business Losses)
- Category C3.1 – Damage, Destruction or Loss of Assets
- Category C3.4 – Other Economic Losses.”

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

The last round of questions will start with the question of Mr Sam RUSHWORTH.

Mr Sam RUSHWORTH (United Kingdom, SOC): It's never been clearer that the powerful states who do not share our values are trying to break up the international rules-based order.

They're doing this by destroying us from within through interference in our democracies.

Well-funded and foreign-owned media is pumping out propaganda.

Social media algorithms are calibrated to stoke anger and division.

So how will members of the Council of Ministers work together in the face of this threat to safeguard our citizens' ability to make informed democratic decisions?

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

Next is to Ms Dumitrina MITREA.

Ms Dumitrina MITREA (Romania, ECPA): Thank you.

I am concerned about the ongoing Russification of the non-Russian minorities in the Republic of Moldova.

As the Russian minority has a privileged status compared to the Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian and Romanian minorities, I'd like to ask the Chair of the Committee of Ministers to inform me whether the Republic of Moldova provided the Committee of Ministers with a tangible time frame for the introduction of the European Charter for regional or minority languages for ratification in Parliament?

Thank you.

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

Mr Tony VAUGHAN is last on the list.

Mr Tony VAUGHAN (United Kingdom, SOC): Mister President,

The December joint statement by 27 member states of the Council of Europe explicitly calls for innovative solutions to the irregular migration challenges that we face.

So, given that several signatories interpret this as a mandate for upstream or pre-arrival asylum processing and return hubs, can you confirm if the Committee of Ministers has authorised or tasked the Steering Committee for Human Rights to draft legal guidelines on these possible mechanisms?

Or does the Chair consider that these innovative solutions are merely political aspirations without a current roadmap?

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): I thank you all for the questions and now pass over to the Deputy Prime Minister for his answers.

Mr Mihail POPSOI (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, President of the Committee of Ministers): Disinformation is one of the biggest challenges for the Council of Europe member states and beyond.

As you have heard yesterday from President Maia Sandu, also today, information manipulation is not abstract for us, as it is not for you either.

Unprecedented disinformation designed to weaken social unity and distrust and divide our citizens is very much present.

One of our major axes guiding Moldova's Presidency is strengthening our response to disinformation, including Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference. We are organising, on 20 March in Chişinău, a conference on media literacy, restrictive measures and blocking, what the best ways of countering disinformation are, and certainly all those interested are very much invited.

In line with the provisions of the Strategy for Strengthening Interethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova for 2017-2027 approved by the Government Decision 1464, the national authorities have undertaken a number of actions for creating the prerequisites for this commitment.

However, the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the unprecedented refugee crisis and its consequences for the Republic of Moldova, the migration flows and new challenges for both external and internal influence, have led to the need to reassess the preparedness for ratification of the Charter. In this

context, the authorities consider it necessary to conduct a study to assess the institutional capacities and mechanisms for implementing the provisions of the Charter, both at the central and local levels, as well as the costs related to those actions.

Migration and the Council of Europe certainly has a long history.

I will not go into too many details, but I will emphasise that on 22 May 2025, the initiative of Denmark and Italy, as we discussed earlier, was put forward and now the topic is being discussed through the institutional channels of the Council of Europe. As the issue was brought back, as I mentioned earlier, by the Secretary General in the institutional framework and the discussion was held here in Strasbourg on 10 December.

The Declaration of the 27 states that you mentioned expressed the position of those countries on the issue discussed in the informal conference. In my capacity as President of the Committee of Ministers, I will refer to the conclusions adopted by the conference in which the Ministers present and pronounce their intention to pursue the political dialogue on this matter within the institutional framework of the Council of Europe.

With this in mind, they invited the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to do the following: prepare a draft political declaration reaffirming the obligation on the Convention in the context of the contemporary challenges posed by irregular migration. Later the same day, the Committee of Ministers met and adopted follow-up decisions to the conference. In particular, it instructed the Steering Committee of Human Rights (CDDH) to prepare elements for political dialogue along the above lines for the draft declaration that will be presented for adoption in the ministerial session in Chişinău.

Later this week, in the Joint Committee, we will discuss the issue with members of the Parliamentary Assembly. It is important that both statutory organs participate in the debate of such importance for the Council and its member states.

The system of the European Convention of Human Rights is the basis for our work and the centre of the values that we all stand here to protect.

As to the specific issues mentioned in the question, I would not be able to delve much deeper and prejudge the work ahead of us.

Thank you.

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

And with this, we conclude the exchange with Mr Mihail POPSOI.

Thank you very much for your answers and for being with us, and all the best.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Current affairs debate: Ensuring accountability, humanitarian protection and respect for international law in Gaza and the West Bank after the ceasefire

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, President of the Assembly): The next item of business this afternoon is the current affairs debate: 'Ensuring accountability, humanitarian protection and respect for international law in Gaza and the West Bank after the ceasefire'.

The debate is limited to one hour from now.

Speaking time is limited to 3 minutes for all members, except for the first speaker, chosen by the Bureau of the Assembly, who is allowed to speak for 7 minutes at the beginning.

In the debate, I call first Ms Saskia KLUIT.

You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes at the end of the debate to respond.

Ms Saskia KLUIT, the floor is yours.

(You can come as you wish, but you have a space down there as well.)

Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC): Yes, I think this is better.

Thank you very much.

No one will be free until everyone is free. We have all heard this cold echo to our streets this summer, voiced by people who refuse to remain silent in the face of the injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people.

Today, I want to add one essential truth to that. There can be no freedom and no peace without justice. Whether we help to bring now peace to the region is therefore deeply rooted in our willingness to ensure justice and accountability for all crimes that are committed. Just one year ago, in this very hemicycle, we stood to adopt a resolution calling for an urgent and unconditional ceasefire in response to the terrible Hamas attack and the horrific humanitarian crisis that started in Gaza. Ten months later, a ceasefire was finally announced. The number of attacks have decreased immeasurably, and this week, the body of the last hostage was finally brought home. And these things do matter. This must be acknowledged.

But, after the first weeks of relief, the so-called peace deal revealed its serious and dangerous flaws. A so-called "peace board" and reconstruction plans are being presented. Plans without meaningful involvement of Palestinian civilians, without reference to Palestinian culture, heritage or rights. Such a plan, devoid of the human values that we Europeans hold dear, will not bring a lasting peace. Because it's the normalisation of the very processes of exclusion and domination that brought the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians to this boiling point. If we do not speak now about the lack of human rights and respect for international law in the process, this will just prove to be the next phase in an ongoing ethnic cleansing in Palestine.

What has struck me deeply in our debate so far, now, is how we look at Palestinians. They are collectively so easily and collectively associated with the war crimes of Hamas, rather than that we see them as the normal people who have endured decades of dispossession, of occupation and of structural discrimination.

The suffering of the Palestinians is not accidental, nor did the violence of Hamas emerge in a vacuum. It is the result of a deliberate, long-standing policy of oppression, occupation and dehumanisation by Israel, combined with years of international inaction. And this is why the United Nations had to recently label the living conditions of the Palestinians as apartheid. And that is why South Africa is the country that has referred the matter to the International Court of Justice.

So what do these matters mean for us? I feel we should shift our focus. Not away from the people of Gaza, of the West Bank, but deeper into our own responsibilities as members of this Assembly. From the urgent calls to stop the genocide and free the hostages, to the long-term necessity of restoring liveable and human conditions in Gaza and the West Bank, to ensuring accountability for perpetrators of war crimes so conciliation in the long-term can succeed, and, most importantly, in supporting the Palestinian people in the fulfilment of their right to self-determination. In other words, helping them to find freedom and justice and helping them on their feet in the realm of independent nations.

So what must be done? First, the genocide of violence by Israel must fully and unequivocally end in Gaza and in the West Bank. Collective punishment of Palestinian civilians must stop. Humanitarian access must be restored without obstruction and allowed by Israel to work in a neutral and impartial way. Repressive legislation targeting multilateral humanitarian organisations must immediately be repealed. The number of medical evacuations must be expanded.

And these are not abstract demands. We can all arrange that in our own countries we take in 500 people who are sick and wounded in Gaza and we bring them home. And when we do so, we will save 23 000 people when we meet next time.

More than 11 000 Palestinians are still missing since October. Their unidentified bodies are buried in mass graves under numbers in the cemetery of the unknown in Deir al-Balah. We should support Palestinians to ease the identification, because it's a human right to have dignity even after death. Just like it was for the hostages of Israel.

The freedom of speech and the freedom of press must be restored in the Palestinian territories. No more attacks by Israel or others on journalists or their equipment. No more obstruction of the internet to keep unwanted information from reaching the eyes of the world. Let's remember that press freedom is a highly-guarded foundation under human rights, especially because it ensures war crimes are brought to justice.

And this brings me to the second point. Accountability. Accountability for the crimes against Palestinians and Israelis must follow. Suspects must be investigated and tried. Those responsible must be brought to justice. Especially when they are considered friends or special relations from our countries. Because justice, this is our belief, is not revenge. Justice is a prerequisite for peace.

And thirdly, our Assembly and national parliaments should, from now on, stand firmly to support the Palestinians in the fulfilment of their right to self-determination. By freeing them from the systems of apartheid, not by trying to determine their fate, we should be supporting the Palestinians in finding their own destiny. And I really don't know what the future should be. But it is clear that neither the Peace Council, nor Israel and nor our demands on democracy should determine the future of the Palestinian people. Because it is their right for them to decide.

Will this be difficult? Yes. Is it impossible? No. Because 85 years ago, much of Europe lay in ruins. Millions were murdered. And from those ruins we built our system of human rights, including the right to self-determination. That system was grounded by one promise. Never again would a vulnerable group be under so much attack from any state. We're talking about state violence. If, at that time, we could build something so beautiful and strong between the people of so many countries, we are 46 today, for sure we will be able to broker a long-lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. We just have to make sure that we follow the signpost of our own system.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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

We now start with the list of speakers on behalf of the political groups. And I first call Ms Boriana ÅBERG on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Ms Boriana ÅBERG (Sweden, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Ms. President,

Dear colleagues,

I hope that this debate will focus on how our countries can contribute to the stabilisation of Gaza, a transitional governance framework and its reconstruction, rather than becoming an opportunity to demonise Israel and to fuel anti-Semitism.

The people of Gaza have suffered enough. Over the past decades, millions of euros intended for humanitarian assistance have instead been diverted directly into the hands of Hamas. Rather than investing in water and electricity infrastructure, Hamas has built kilometres of tunnels and stockpiled weapons. Since 2007, Hamas has deliberately embedded its military infrastructure, including rocket launchers, weapon depots and command centres within civilian facilities such as hospitals, schools and UN premises.

Hamas initiated the war against Israel on 7 October without any regard for the welfare of the people of Gaza. Indeed, it did so with the intention of using the civilian population as human shields and systematically exploiting their suffering. Hamas has weaponised that suffering in a propaganda campaign that has proven more effective than any missile.

For the suffering of the civilian population to end and for a sustainable peace to be achieved, Hamas must be disarmed. Hamas can have no role in the future governance of Gaza. The international community must therefore work to impose further sanctions on those who support, enable and facilitate the actions of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Humanitarian needs among Gaza's civilian population remain immense, and significant obstacles continue to prevent aid from reaching those in need.

The ceasefire in Gaza is fragile, and the international community has an important responsibility to support further steps toward a durable and sustainable peace. I hope that today's debate can contribute meaningfully to that goal.

Thank you, Ms. President.

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

Next is Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO on behalf of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates.

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

Now we have a ceasefire in Gaza and this is a great result. And our aim should be to support our efforts for peace. But the best thing to preserve peace in Gaza is not to let terrorists and Hamas again run the Gaza Strip. That's the most important, because they will start a new war. There is no question of that. And we need to think about this.

But I want to also raise your attention to what's going on very close to Gaza, in Iran, where this Ayatollah's regime is killing people in many, many thousands. Including women, who are fighting for their rights. By the way, I am here and we in this organisation, I don't know, I think we invested the biggest energy possible in protecting and supporting women's rights. And I am absolutely behind this. But I think it's hypocrisy when we are so concerned about women's rights in Europe and we are not interested in women's rights in the Middle East.

The only country in the Middle East which respects women's rights is Israel. And then many of you still attack Israel on any possible occasion. When we are speaking about what Hamas did to women in Gaza, not respecting any of their rights, what the Ayatollah's regime did against the women of Iran. And now the question is, why are we so silent about this? Why we are not supporting them? Where is Greta THUNBERG? On the boat. She is not on the border with Iran, I think. Where is she?

May I question why she's not protecting the women of Iran and the human rights there. Because possibly it's clear what they will do with everybody who will try to do this. And I want to remind you, I spoke in this Assembly last year and I said today Israel is destroying the Ayatollah's regime in Iran. And instead of accusations, of any accusations against Israel, let us all support them. Because this is an awful regime which is dangerous, both for Iranians and all people around, including if they will use nuclear weapons on all of us, because it's not so far.

And now we were again silent, now silent. What do we see now? We see awful violence in Iran where people are killed in the tens of thousands. We can like President Donald TRUMP or not, but he is the only person today who at least threatens Iran. I don't know whether he will do something in reality, but at least he says to them, "I can punish you, stop doing this".

What are we doing? Where is the European response to what this crazy regime is doing to its people, destroying all possible values? We are here to protect human rights, rule of law and democracy. I think we should forget about all this hypocrisy. We need to support the countries and the actors in the world who are of the same values as us. We need to support the values, no matter where they are, in Europe or in the Middle East. Because hypocrisy is not fair.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, we will now listen to Lord Michael GERMAN.

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you. I think I just want to return to the Gaza issue.

First of all, of course it goes without saying that the America-brokered ceasefire is very welcome indeed. But, as has already been said, it's very fragile. And I do hope that the Rafah crossing will be opened next Sunday, as promised by the Israeli government, because that is one way to be sure there will be more humanitarian aid. So we must now look to the future, the future of this disaster-hit place. And it would not be acceptable if its future was not to be based on the rules and laws of international order.

So we must be concerned, in fact, I would say very concerned, that the plan that has been put on the table by President Trump seeks to bypass the United Nations.

The Board of Peace's proposed charter describes it as "an international organisation that seeks to promote stability, restore dependable and lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict."

All very worthy. But the charter does not mention human rights once. And I say that that is music to the ears of the Russian and Chinese governments, which have worked for years to de-emphasise human rights at the United Nations.

And, of course, President Vladimir PUTIN has been offered a place on the board.

I think this board sounds rather like an exclusive golf club where the membership fee is 1 billion dollars in order to become a full playing member. But let's be clear: money does not buy peace. Peace has to come through hard work, including valuing human rights.

It is hard to imagine this process giving priority to ending suffering, hatred and bloodshed.

It is hard to see it setting out to protect the human rights of the millions of adults and children caught up in this disaster zone.

Misery is everywhere in Gaza. Thousands of children have lost their schooling.

And the resolution passed by our Assembly at our last plenary said Gaza needs food, water, medicine, fuel and shelter. And the ceasefire has to create space for political dialogue and reconciliation.

So it is up to us here, in this parliament and also across Europe and globally, to speak up for these human rights. The people of Gaza deserve support now for the basics of life. The people of Gaza deserve a response which respects the value of human life. And above all, the people of Gaza deserve respect, not subjugation.

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

And representing the Group of the Unified European Left, I give the floor to Ms Ann GRAVES.

Ms Ann GRAVES (Ireland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): I'm honoured to speak on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left today, who stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine.

Like Sinn Féin in Ireland, we have supported the people of Palestine and their oppression by Israel long before 23 October and the genocide that followed. Ireland knows only too well about occupation, partition and conflict. International solidarity is in our DNA.

We also know the value of peace and how it can only be delivered to a genuinely inclusive process. The announcement of the ceasefire gave Palestine and the justice-loving people of the world real hope. But while genocide may have slowed down, there's still a genocide. The establishment of Mr Donald TRUMP's so-called Board of Peace is about empire-building. It is the most exclusive boys' club in history. The Board has more to do with bolstering Trump's portfolio and ego than it has to do with establishing a genuine peace process. It's abhorrent that there is nobody representing Palestinians on the Board. The basis for any peace process, as we in Ireland know, must have Palestinians at the very core. To exclude them is to ensure that the process is doomed to fail.

The situation on the ground in Palestine remains very serious. Since the supposed ceasefire, hundreds of people have been killed in Gaza and attacks on Palestinian farmers by settlers in the West Bank continues. We need to call out the record levels of settlement expansion, settler violence and displacement of Palestinian communities in the West Bank. The ongoing illegal land grab is going unchallenged. The Israeli settlements are in breach of numerous UN resolutions and of international law. Israel must be held to account for this slow annexation of the entire West Bank.

Only today, Palestinians desperately seeking food were fired upon by Israeli forces. The Rafah crossing has to open now, to allow in food and humanitarian aid.

It is time for the international solidarity campaign to become more strategically focused and united in bringing an end to Israel's oppression. In Ireland, that means the Occupied Territories Bill. It means pushing the suspension of EU-Israeli trade agreements and more.

But for members here, it means that those with a common interest in supporting the Palestinian people must unite and work together to ensure that the eyes of the world do not come off Palestine. Today we must send out a clear, united message. We stand with Palestine. We support justice. We support peace and freedom for a united Palestine. And we call on Europe to use its influence to ensure that there is a genuine, inclusive peace process supported and underpinned by the international community.

[Applause]

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

And the round of speakers on behalf of the political groups is concluded, with Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President, and congratulations. I am really proud of you.

And thank you, Ms Saskia KLUIT for your statement.

Now, I am going to speak in Spanish.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, Spokesperson for the group)*: Dear colleagues,

We ought to be saying Palestine rather than Gaza. Because to say Gaza is to fragment and to depoliticise, whereas saying Palestine recognises a people with rights. Gaza is a territory, Palestine is a political subject. Palestine is no longer in the media as much these days as it was a few months ago, but the plight of Palestinians continues to be intolerable and unbearable.

We have a situation in which peace cannot be a parenthesis in a land that is plagued by war. Peace requires a two-state solution once and for all, access to humanitarian relief and a real reconstruction plan. We cannot agree with a Board of Peace outside the framework of the United Nations, in which the tormentors and not the victims are represented. And in which there is no representation of the Palestinian people.

The Council of Europe has to stand firm in its defence of our values and principles, with confidence and commitment. At the same time, we need to be consistent and that means that we cannot operate with double standards and we have to have the same consistency in Palestine, Ukraine, Iran, Venezuela and Afghanistan. We have to do so by co-operating, because Europe is only strong when it stands united.

Yesterday, 27 January, we were celebrating the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. One of the survivors of Auschwitz, Elie WIESEL, a Nobel Peace laureate, used to say that the opposite of love is not hate, but rather indifference. Because indifference, neutrality, silence, only helps the aggressor, never the victim.

Children who are terrified by the bombs in Palestine and Ukraine, women in Afghanistan, young people out on the streets in Iran, political prisoners in Venezuela, the last thing they should be thinking is that their pain and suffering is a matter of indifference to their fellow men. Because if we deny them a glimmer of hope, it means that we banish them from the memory of humanity, and in denying them their humanity, we are denying our humanity.

Therefore, we cannot remain impassive when we see people all around us who do not have the very basic minimum required to live in dignity. And we want the same for the Palestinians, as well as the Jewish people: to be able to choose to live freely in peace and co-existence.

[Applause]

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

We continue with our Speakers list with Mr Michael FARRUGIA.

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

I rejoiced at the news of the ceasefire in Gaza. So did we all.

Hmm, ceasefire?

Since the agreement, around 450 – mainly innocent Palestinians – have been reportedly killed in Gaza.

The West Bank has since witnessed the killing of Palestinians by Israeli settlers while grabbing land and eventually building illegal settlements with no intervention to be stopped by the authorities.

Impunity at its best.

Not to mention Lebanon where, according to media reports, the ceasefire is breached by the IDF every hour.

There is no peace without justice.

Justice.

The immediate opening of routes in and out of Gaza, especially for the provision of much-needed food and medicines.

The return of Gaza and the West Bank to the Palestinians.

Gaza and the West Bank run by Palestinians, for Palestinians.

The implementation of these two-state solutions, Israel and Palestine, in line with the UN resolution.

Allow me to conclude by stressing the importance of the reconstruction of Gaza with financial and expert support from the international community.

And no third country is to take advantage for its own benefits of this peace process, to meddle with Palestinian land and needs.

Thank you very much.

[Light applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Next is Ms Alicia KEARNS. You have the floor.

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

In the three months since the ceasefire was established, there has sadly been little progress. It is urgent that it now moves to phase two.

Thankfully, the body of Mr Ran GVILI was returned this week to his family and may his memory be a blessing on all those who knew him.

In January, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza was rightfully established. But sadly Mr Benjamin Netanyahu's government has not allowed them to enter Gaza, let alone govern or work towards any plan for reconstruction. And this must urgently change.

Little progress has also been made on Hamas de-arming, let alone relinquishing power. I'm concerned that we continue to see weapons being moved along the Syrian border, and an increase once again of Captagon on the move across the Middle East.

We should be very clear that this industry is solely there to arm and finance terrorists across the region.

Progress on food and medicine is still inadequate. Two million Gazans need that support urgently if they are to rebuild their lives and rebuild the health they once had.

But what is often forgotten from the debate is the state of the West Bank. More illegal settlements are being established. Efforts to split the West Bank in two persist. 50 000 Palestinians have recently been displaced. There's an increase in settler attacks. The antagonism towards the Al-Aqsa mosque must end immediately.

The West Bank should continue to be a priority for all of us.

Looking at the border peace, its expertise in remit should be state-building and peacekeeping, not about chequebooks.

I'm concerned that there must be a sole focus on peace and stability and making sure the right remit has been put in place.

When we look at the executive board, I am concerned by the lack of Palestinian voices. If we are truly to believe in a solution where two peoples can live alongside each other, all voices must be represented at a table. When we look at those voices, it also means women's voices, because peace processes and peace agreements are far, far more likely to last and be sustainable if women are at the heart of them. If we have not learned that by now, especially when it comes to the Middle East, then we are really lost.

The ceasefire should have been the start and not the end point. Yet we have stalled and we see too little progress moving forward. So we must all keep our focus on this, ensure that we push for our governments to make sure that distractions across the world, threats of imperialist ambitions, do not distract us from making sure that we ensure that this peace happens now – because it would be wrong for our children to witness the same horrors that we have.

I hope that as countries, we will make sure that that focus remains as it should be.

Thank you, Mister President.

[Light applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Next is Ms Manuela PERTEGHELLA.

Ms Manuela PERTEGHELLA (United Kingdom, ALDE): Thank you, Chair,

Dear colleagues,

The agreement of a ceasefire in Gaza in October should have been a first step forward, creating the conditions for long-term peace, and relief for both the families of the hostages still held by the Hamas terror group, and for the millions of Gazans whose lives, homes and communities were devastated by the Israeli Government's military campaign.

And yet, Gaza effectively remains under siege, under occupation, with aid restricted. Starvation continues. Disease spreads. The Israeli Government continues to block essential food, fuel, shelter and medical supplies despite repeated rulings by the International Court of Justice, and has banned many humanitarian organisations from entering the Gaza Strip.

Only the full flow of aid into Gaza can begin to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Most distressingly, Israel's ongoing ceasefire violations include attacks on civilians, culminating in the October air strikes which killed at least 104 people. Hundreds more have died since, and thousands are injured.

In the West Bank, settler violence against Palestinian communities is escalating. Land is seized and fragmented, further destroying any hope of a two state-solution.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution fails to address some of the obstacles to securing a long-term peace: the lack of a plan on how to disarm Hamas, the timeline for the IDF's withdrawal from Gaza, an unwillingness to address the need to roll back the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and a clear road map to a two-state solution is also lacking. And this is the only way to provide the security and dignity which Israelis and Palestinians deserve.

Finally, peace without accountability is meaningless. And accountability includes allowing journalists and organisations access to Gaza to collect evidence of war crimes and genocide.

Why does accountability matter? Because of children like Ms Hind RAJAB.

Hind was a 5 year old girl left stranded for hours with the dead bodies of her relatives, after their car was shelled by an Israeli tank in January last year. The ambulance which was sent to get her was also bombed, killing the medics within. Hind was later found dead.

It is important to remember the names of the dead. Those responsible should be held to account.

Only then can peace and reconciliation fully happen.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Didier MARIE, you have the floor.

Mr Didier MARIE (France, SOC): Mister President,

The scheduling of this debate on respect for international law and humanitarian protection in Palestine is an excellent initiative and I would like to thank the people behind this.

The news moves from one subject to another, the latest eclipsing the previous. With the excesses of Mr Donald TRUMP accelerating this phenomenon, Gaza has unfortunately fallen off the media radar.

But while the news changes, the suffering remains. And while the conclusion of the ceasefire has sparked tiny glimmers of hope, the reality remains tragic, and we only know part of it, so difficult is it for information to leave the territory.

In this respect, we can only deplore the attitude of the Israeli government, which bans all foreign media, threatens journalists and puts their lives at risk. Since the start of the Tzahal operations, almost 300 journalists have lost their lives, and last week three more were shot dead. Our organisation must demand that Israel respect press freedom and protect journalists, which are essential if we are to have transparent knowledge of what is happening in Palestine.

The reality is also cold, disease and hunger. Humanitarian aid is only distributed in dribs and drabs because the Israeli authorities regularly block it, claiming that it is being hijacked by Hamas. Fellow French senators who visited the region last September found this to be the case when they visited entire warehouses where stocks of supplies were piling up but could not be distributed. These blockades violate the basic principles of international humanitarian law and are intolerable.

With the body of the last Israeli hostage finally recovered and identified, we can now move on to phase two of the plan to end the conflict. Let us hope that the situation improves, particularly with the disarmament of Hamas. However, we can only be cautious about the attitude of the Americans and the latest invention of Mr Donald TRUMP with his Board of Peace, where all the world's autocrats sit for a fee.

Our organisation cannot allow such a circumvention of UN conventions and institutions, which can certainly be improved upon, but remain the foundation of the collective security that our predecessors gradually built up.

Europe has a duty to resist this personal initiative by President Donald TRUMP, because if we give in on this point, we will be leaving the door open to a new method of conflict resolution that will go beyond the Palestinian question alone, and which will be governed by financial interests, the law of the strongest, far removed from the values of the rule of law and democracy that we defend in this House.

In this respect, I think it would be a good idea for the House to take a stand on this issue, as a reminder of our commitment to the United Nations Charter and to the international community.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Christophe LACROIX, you have the floor.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wonder how some people here can still claim that the Palestinians deserved the disastrous fate that Israel's extreme right-wing government has meted out to them. How is it possible to deny the reality of 70 thousand deaths, most of them civilians. And these civilians include women, the elderly and children.

Since the ceasefire, according to UNICEF, two Palestinian children are still dying every day. Every single day. And to say that is to be anti-Semitic. I am not anti-Semitic. The UN is not anti-Semitic. The International Criminal Court is not anti-Semitic. The International Court of Justice is not anti-Semitic. NGOs are not anti-Semitic. Journalists, insofar as they can go to Israel, are not anti-Semitic. No!

But they are! But we are! We are criticising the Israeli government! The government of Israel! An extreme right-wing government, a government made up of nationalists and religious extremists who are guilty of the most despicable crimes. This is not anti-Semitism. I love Israel and the Israeli people, but this government is a disgrace. And I would like people to stop putting on trial those who denounce the crimes of this Israeli government.

Crimes that have led to the destruction of 83% of buildings in Gaza, 81 000 housing units and famine. Even today, water that cannot be distributed, the collapse of essential infrastructures, hospitals, 370 UNRWA employees killed since the start of the war, in the West Bank where there is no Hamas, an intensification of military operations, murderous raids in the refugee camps, as well as an alarming increase in settler violence with the complicity and even the encouragement of certain ministers in the government of Mr Benjamin NETANYAHOU.

So yes, these facts are serious violations of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. We must therefore demand accountability, support independent investigation mechanisms and call for full and secure humanitarian access in Gaza and the West Bank. Respect for international law is non-negotiable and the war criminals and those responsible for genocide will one day be punished.

[Applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Next.

[The Chair is interrupted]

Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA): 'Blue card!' 'Blue card!'

Dear colleagues,

I want to remind you that now we can have a small debate here. I think that's very good.

I was listening to the speech of Mr Christophe LACROIX; my question is very simple.

In your speech, you haven't even said even one word, even one word, about how this war – awful war – in Gaza started.

You haven't said anything about this at all.

You haven't said one word about 7 October.

You haven't said a single word about who started this war.

It's hypocrisy.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Yes.

Yes.

Please.

Mr Christophe LACROIX (Belgium, SOC): Yes, 7 October was a crime committed by Hamas.

And I've said it in every debate, every time I've spoken, but you weren't there to hear it.

You only hear what you want to hear and your hateful far-right ideology prevents you from having the slightest heart for Palestinian suffering, and the Israeli suffering and the Israeli victims – it's deplorable that Hamas behaved like that.

And here too, I firmly condemn Hamas.

[Applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Abdurrahman BABACAN.

Mr Abdurrahman BABACAN (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Mister President.

Gaza is unfortunately still grappling with a tragedy that lasted for nearly two and a half years.

The binding provisions of the peace agreement signed on 13 October continue to be systematically violated by the state of Israel.

Despite the binding nature of this agreement being confirmed with the participation of 30 states, Israel is not complying with the agreement on fundamental points, and continues to do so by concealing and manipulating the world.

Some points to be discussed.

First, direct targeting and killing of civilians. During the period covered by the agreement, the death toll has reached 483, of which 92% were civilians.

Of these civilian deaths, 45% were children and women.

97% of the deaths were targeted within the yellow line area which should be under protection, according to the ceasefire agreement.

This demonstrates that these crimes are not the result of individual incidents or field errors. Rather, they are the product of a systematic and deliberate policy directly targeting civilians.

Second, injuries and the continued targeting of civilians: the number of injured has reached a total of 1 294, averaging 13 people per day, of which 60% are children and women.

Third, suffocation of the health sector and the collapse of the medical system: to cripple the health sector in the Gaza Strip, Israel imposed a siege that almost completely paralysed the operational capacity of health facilities.

Fourth, Israel's blocking the aid entry conditions stipulated in the agreement. Although the agreement explicitly states the entry of 608 trucks daily, Israel violated this clause from the very first day it came into effect, obstructing direct international control over border crossings. Field documents show that average daily entry amounted only to 40% of the agreed upon amount.

This situation led to widespread paralysis in essential services, particularly hospitals, bakeries, the transportation and energy sector, and preventing even a minimal return to normality.

Fifth, the suffocation of infrastructure and deepening humanitarian crisis. Israel is pursuing a systematic policy aimed at paralysing civilian life and preventing humanitarian recovery by preventing the operation of the only power plant in the Gaza Strip; banning the entry of solar panels, oven equipment, rescue and ambulances. And not allowing the entry of prefabricated structures, temporary homes and sufficient tents.

Sixth, the closure of the Rafah border crossing and restriction of humanitarian movements. Since the agreement came into effect, Israel is directly violating the terms and spirit of the agreement by keeping the Rafah border crossing closed in both directions.

In conclusion, it's a must for the international community to put systematic pressure on Israel regarding these vital matters.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Next, Mr Fabian MOLINA, you have the floor.

Thank you.

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

Dear colleagues,

In Gaza, civilians remain trapped in a humanitarian catastrophe. Entire cities are destroyed, basic services have collapsed, food insecurity is widespread, and humanitarian assistance is repeatedly obstructed.

While the release of the remaining Israeli hostages is welcome news to open the way for the next steps of the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, endorsed in UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025), many urgent issues remain unresolved.

The governance and militarisation of Gaza by Hamas are not compatible with lasting peace. At the same time, collective punishment, settler violence, forced displacement and the suspension of several international non-governmental organisations by Israeli authorities are unacceptable.

NGOs are indispensable for life-saving humanitarian assistance, and any obstruction – or destruction – of UN premises is inexcusable.

These actions undermine the fragile progress of the ceasefire and threaten multilateralism itself.

As members of this Assembly, we cannot ignore these obstructions.

The same applies to the setup of the so-called "Board of Peace". Peace cannot be outsourced to informal bodies without democratic legitimacy, accountability, transparency or international consensus.

Such approaches risk weakening multilateral institutions and marginalising international law, instead of strengthening them.

Sustainable peace is built through inclusive, rules-based processes.

I am grateful that Secretary-General Alain Berset in his remarks to this Assembly emphasised that the UN, multilateralism and the rule of law must not be replaced by power politics.

So, what do we urgently need?

First, an immediate and lasting ceasefire.

Second, unrestricted humanitarian access and the effective protection of civilians, including journalists, fully compliant with international humanitarian law.

Third, a strong and central role of the United Nations as the legitimate framework for humanitarian coordination.

Fourthly, strengthening international criminal justice in order to deal with the most serious crimes committed, and to prevent impunity.

Fifth, a renewed commitment to a credible peace process, based on international law and a two-state solution, ensuring security, freedom and self-determination for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Europe bears a historic responsibility to uphold international law and human rights in Israel and Palestine, and a strong interest in justice, peace and stability.

All member states of the Council of Europe must commit themselves more decisively to this cause.

[Light applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Now, Mr George LOUCAIDES, you have the floor.

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

I don't know if I'm doing well, but I will start with hypocrisy and double standards, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO and the far right, Mr Christophe LACROIX.

Yesterday, we commemorated the Holocaust, but almost nobody from the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates was here. But you have no problem defending the genocide until now? No problem.

Secondly, speaking of double standards. In this Assembly, we have condemned so many times Hamas' attacks, terrorist attacks – but you have never condemned the genocide that was taking place.

Human lives of Israelis are precious, and they should be. But Palestinian lives, as they are human animals, do not deserve dignity – according to you.

Double standards, yes. Women – Israeli women in Israel – have rights. What about Palestinian women? What about the tens of thousands of Palestinian women, of children? Thirty children every day for two years were murdered by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)? You said nothing, and you are still saying nothing. What about the women under apartheid?

I left my speech. I was covered by a beautiful speech by Ms Saskia KLUIT, by Ms Ann GRAVES, Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES and many other friends here.

There is a dark page in the history of this organisation. One of the darkest, because it took us two years to speak about the genocide. The first resolution – I will insist on saying that – the first resolution was calling on Israel to continue the genocide until it would fully dismantle Hamas. That was the first resolution we had. But you insist. Some of you insist.

It's a shame.

Yes, we should be consistent when we defend human rights, when we defend international law and international humanitarian law, all lives are equal, and all lives – all citizens – deserve their rights to be respected. This is why we are here. And we, at least, will continue to do the same thing in consistency with no double standards.

Thank you very much, dear colleagues.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Bernard SABELLA, you have the floor.

You will have to put your badge in and press the button...

Mr Bernard SABELLA (Palestine): Thank you, Chair.

I'm sorry it took me some time, but let me say this. If we are to ask ordinary, average Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, 'What do you want' – ordinary Palestinians – the answer will be 'We want to be treated as human beings, period'.

I am inspired in this by nothing other than the Jewish Torah, which was the first to say that all people are created in God's image. All people, not only Jewish people, but all Muslims, Christians, atheists, whoever.

So today, being treated like an ordinary human being is not going on in the Gaza Strip, and it's not going on in the West Bank.

I have heard here in the Council of Europe accounts about so many difficult conditions – I can repeat them, but I don't want to repeat them – of hospitals needed, of universities destroyed, of all kinds of care-giving activities denied.

In the West Bank, you have the unlawful and illegal activities of settlers with, unfortunately, the protection of the Israeli army, which renders normal daily life impossible for thousands of Palestinians.

I can assure you that we do condemn the horrible attack of Hamas on 7 October 2023.

I stand here and I take pride in condemning that attack.

But that attack should not be used by anyone, including Israel, to really punish all Palestinians and to proceed with all kinds of activities in the West Bank and elsewhere, in order to negate the presence of Palestinians and to completely erase the Palestinian narrative.

With this report on accountability, responsibility, the protection of human life – these are not simple ideals. These are needed structural realities that need to be applied in order for Palestinians and Israelis to go forward, and eventually to reconcile, and to work out a just and lasting peace for the benefit of Israelis and Palestinians.

Otherwise, if this continues, if these present conditions continue in the Palestinian occupied territories, we are into an enormous slide into chaos and nowhere.

So, Council of Europe, stand firm and call for the protection of human life in the occupied territories.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

[Applause]

Ms Sandra REGOL, you have the floor.

Ms Sandra REGOL (France, SOC): Thank you. Mister President,

This Assembly has always been the guarantor of respect for the rights and values on which it is founded, the values of humanity and respect, which take concrete form in respect for international law. And so we have never, ever accepted that a people, that civilians, could be bombarded, deprived of food, deprived of healthcare, whoever they may be. Our countries have a duty to ensure that these rights are respected. So no, we cannot allow Mr Benyamin NETANYAHU to continue to act outside international law. His government and its supporters must be held to account.

I wish to emphasise the difference, which is sometimes forgotten, between the government and the Israeli people, who are contesting some of their government's decisions. I am thinking in particular of the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks of 7 October. The failure to respect ceasefires, the refusal to let international aid through, the camps, the threats to countries that recognise the State of Palestine. None of this is acceptable, none of it should be part of our institutions.

Colonisation, which is still being used as a tool to weaken the Palestinian people, cannot be ignored. And yes, as our Palestinian colleague pointed out, the peoples of Israel and Palestine, like most of the peoples of our countries represented here, have the right to live in peace. They have the right to live without the fear of terrorism, without the fear of dying of hunger, of a simple untreated wound, without the fear of seeing these lands disappear forever.

So yes, our countries must make a difference. Some of us have recognised the State of Palestine. Some of us have stood up and called for the Israeli government to be held accountable. Joining the demands, once again, of a section of the population, it is time to hold accountable this government that has overstepped all the boundaries that we are trying here, collectively, to keep alive, maintain and respect, those, once again, of humanism, respect and the values of international law.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA.

You have the floor.

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

To retrieve one body, the Israeli military mobilised a fleet of tanks, drones and what locals described as 'explosive robots'. They turned the neighbourhood into a kill zone, dug up approximately 200 Palestinian graves and left four civilians dead in their wake.

According to the National Committee for Missing Persons, more than 10 000 Palestinians remain entombed under the rubble of Gaza, decomposing in silence, lost and without identity.

Families grieved without closure for their missing, presumed dead, loved ones.

There are no 'explosive robots' clearing the way for them, no forensic teams flying in to identify them and no global outcry demanding their recovery.

International media do not rush to break news about them.

The digging up of the Al Batsch cemetery in Gaza City's Tuffah neighbourhood became a visceral symbol of a deadly double standard. A world where one Israeli corpse commands the attention of an army while thousands of Palestinian bodies are treated as part of the decimated apocalyptic landscape.

While Israel used satellite technology and DNA labs to close the chapter on its missing policemen, Palestinian families are denied even the basic machinery to dig.

Since 7 October 2023, at least 71 660 Palestinians have been killed and 171 419 Palestinians injured.

That is one in every 33 people in Gaza and one in 14 people in Gaza respectively.

Since the ceasefire, 486 Palestinians have been killed and 1 341 are injured.

Instead of presenting a plan for allowing journalists into Gaza independently and letting them work alongside their brave Palestinian colleagues, the government has decided once again to lock journalists out.

Universities are being attacked, students are being shot, babies freeze to death and starvation is at its full scale.

Israel keeps blocking aid and this must stop.

Humanitarian organisations must do their work. Humanitarian aid cannot be cut and declined. The need for dignity is urgent, and the need for justice even more.

Like we said, there is no peace without accountability.

All of us here are obliged to make this happen.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Tony VAUGHAN. You have the floor.

Mr Tony VAUGHAN (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you.

Accountability is when you must explain and justify your actions. If you fall short and you fall short of your duties, then you face consequences.

Hamas must be held accountable for 7 October and the Israeli government must be held accountable for what happened next.

When the rules-based international order collapses in one region, it threatens the framework of justice everywhere. If we accept impunity in Palestine, we undermine every human rights convention that this institution has ever produced.

There are at least three things that we must have our governments do.

First, there must be consequences for the defiance of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The deadline set by the General Assembly for Israel to end its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory passed in September. We cannot simply note this non-compliance. Our governments must ensure that our trade agreements and our diplomatic relations do not recognise or aid this unlawful presence, particularly regarding settlements in the West Bank. If the highest court of the world declares an occupation illegal, there must be concrete consequences and downsides to change the calculus for Israel.

Second, we must defend the humanitarian lifeline.

Right now, a new administrative framework threatens to deregister dozens of international NGOs, effectively banning them from operating in Gaza. This isn't just red tape. It's contrary to the provisional measures ordered by the ICJ to prevent genocide. We must collectively demand the immediate reversal of these deregistration threats and open the Rafah crossing.

Humanitarian access is a legal obligation under the Geneva Conventions, not a bureaucratic privilege that can be revoked at will.

Third, we must stop the creeping annexation of the West Bank.

While eyes were on Gaza, the demolition of structures in Area C in East Jerusalem accelerated. We must demand an immediate moratorium on these demolitions. We cannot speak of a two-state solution while physically erasing the possibility of one on the ground.

Some will argue that the new geopolitics that we face makes these demands unrealistic. But international law and international justice are what we stand for, not the politics of "might is right".

The rules-based order is not self-sustaining. It requires our active defence.

As parliamentarians, we must be clear. The ICJ's provisional measures are binding. Humanitarian access is non-negotiable. Annexation is illegal.

But most important of all, the law applies to everybody.

[Applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Our next speaker is Ms Zeynep YILDIZ. You have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

I would like to express once again my disappointment that our Assembly is holding a current affairs debate once again on Gaza, instead of a debate under urgent procedure.

Since the announcement of the ceasefire, violence has not ended. A night free from bombardment, a morning spared from fear, a seat in a classroom and a home over their heads. This is the modest hope Gazan children hold for this year.

Dear colleagues, as Mr Alija IZETBEGOVIĆ wisely said, "history is written by Allah. We only decide where we stand". Today, standing on the right side of history means acknowledging that a ceasefire, which allows starvation and collective punishment, is not peace. It is continuing a siege by other means.

The data is undeniable. Reports of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) confirm that hundreds have been killed since the ceasefire began.

The World Health Organization warns that Gaza's health system has collapsed, not just from bombs, but from the systematic obstruction of medical access. They do not need smartphones, dear colleagues. They need medical supplies and construction materials first. We find ourselves in a tragic position of having to prove a nation is hurting when the evidence is buried under the rubble.

Driven by a paranoia of chosenness, Israel acts as if it is above international law, yet it is irrevocably bound by the Fourth Geneva Convention. Human rights are not conditional, and Palestinian lives are not negotiable. Therefore, we must demand, firstly, strict adherence to ceasefire agreements, moving beyond the paper truce to a verified cessation of all military operations.

Secondly, unrestricted access to medical supplies, ensuring at least 600 aid trucks daily, monitored by independent bodies.

Thirdly, accountability: supporting international investigations into grave violations of humanitarian law by Israel.

Fourthly, sovereignty: the reconstruction of Gaza for only Gazans, funded by those who destroyed it, and the full recognition of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital by preventing all illegal settlements and any kind of annexation, both in Gaza and the West Bank.

We must not permit Israel's proxies and its instruments to distract us from the reality in Gaza.

I salute once again the honourable and resilient people of Palestine. Our eyes remain on Gaza until the olive trees provide shade for a free and peaceful Palestine.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Our next speaker is Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD.

You have the floor.

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

The ceasefire is an essential step, but it cannot be an end in itself.

In Gaza as in the West Bank, it must open a time of collective responsibility: to protect civilians, to respond to the humanitarian emergency and to guarantee respect for international humanitarian law and human rights.

In Gaza, the needs remain immense, despite the fighting. Access to drinking water, medical care, food, electricity and decent shelter: these vital needs are still largely dependent on the action of international NGOs. They provide more than half of the food aid, support most of the field hospitals, carry out most of the shelter activities and care for children suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

But this humanitarian architecture is now under serious threat. New registration rules imposed on international NGOs could force 37 essential organisations to cease their activities in Gaza and the West Bank from as early as March. These measures, which make humanitarian access conditional on administrative requirements and the sharing of sensitive staff data, undermine the independence, impartiality and security of humanitarian action.

Depriving a civilian population of essential NGOs is not a technical measure. It is a disgrace, and an underhand way of obstructing humanitarian aid.

It is a decision with direct humanitarian consequences, in a context where more than a million people are still in urgent need of shelter, and where one family in four has only one meal a day. Yet international humanitarian law is clear: humanitarian assistance must be facilitated, protected and not hindered.

Many of these humanitarian organisations have their headquarters in our countries. This gives us a particular responsibility. It is up to us to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected and to mobilise all the means at our disposal – diplomatic, political and economic – to obtain a change of course from the Israeli authorities and the removal of obstacles to humanitarian action.

This demand also applies to the West Bank. The ceasefire in Gaza cannot be used to justify further violence, additional restrictions or attacks on the fundamental rights of the civilian population. Respect for international law cannot be selective.

Ensuring humanitarian protection and respect for international law in Gaza and the West Bank means affirming that the lives of civilians are non-negotiable. It is a reminder that the law does not end with war. And it means laying the essential foundations for a lasting peace.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES.

Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES (France, UEL): Thank you, President.

At present, Israel is not respecting the ceasefire. Military incursions are continuing, civilians continue to be killed and the humanitarian blockade of Gaza continues. A ceasefire that is violated on a daily basis, without control mechanisms or sanctions, is nothing more than a diplomatic illusion. We still have full political responsibility. We must ensure the immediate protection of civilians and the strict application of international law in Gaza and the West Bank.

Because what we have seen for more than two years can neither be relativised nor erased. Tens of thousands of civilians killed, massive forced displacements, the deliberate use of famine as a weapon of war, the systematic destruction of medical, educational and humanitarian infrastructures, in particular those of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, again a few days ago, with the scandalous demolition of its headquarters by Israel in East Jerusalem. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the government of Benjamin NETANYAHU, who is also being prosecuted for these crimes by the International Criminal Court. As, moreover, is, or was, since he was killed, Mohammed DEÏF, designated as the instigator of the war crimes of 7 October, which we denounced, of course, and which led to the massacre of 1 200 Israelis. We have obviously endorsed and validated the prosecution of Mohammed DEÏF by the International Criminal Court, just as we must endorse the prosecution of Benjamin NETANYAHU.

As I said, these acts are war crimes and must be punished. Reconstruction cannot be carried out under bombardment or blockade. In the West Bank too, the violations are continuing and getting worse every day. Occupation, colonisation and apartheid. More than a thousand people have been murdered in two years by Israeli settlers with the active or tacit support of Tzahal.

And yet, France and the European Union continue to treat Israel as a privileged partner, without any sanctions. I therefore welcome the European citizens' initiative demanding the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which has already received more than 385 000 signatures in a fortnight. I invite all those who are watching or listening to us to go and sign this European citizens' initiative online on the European Union website, because we cannot demand international justice while turning a blind eye to genocide. Enough of double standards, enough of this criminal benevolence towards Israel.

Palestine will live!

[Applause]

Mr Perran MOON (United Kingdom, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Meur ras. [Thank you.]

Thank you, Mister Vice President,

This month, President Trump set out his so-called "Board for Peace".

The Board was initially presented as a mechanism to end war in Gaza, but its mandate has already expanded through what President Trump described as "Phase Two".

We now see a multilayered structure emerging: a Board for Peace, an executive board, a Gaza-specific executive board, and an associated technocratic committee.

My concern is not only with the architecture but also with the political accountability that underpins it. What authority will it have? To whom will it be answerable? How does this new structure interact with international law and existing multilateral mechanisms? And where are the Palestinian voices in this process?

All of this, proposed while the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains desperate. Key crossings remain closed to supplies, and non-governmental organisations are still unable to operate freely.

Despite the ceasefire, violence has continued. According to Chatham House, more than 450 Gazans have been killed since the ceasefire began, Hamas terrorists remain armed, and humanitarian conditions are dire. Let me reiterate what others have said: the only solution is a two-state solution, where Palestinians and Israelis can live in peace, side by side, and treated equally.

Meanwhile, while global attention is fixed on Gaza, the Israeli Government's illegal settlement campaign in the West Bank continues. Settlements have expanded at pace. And settler attacks are increasing.

With Israeli parliamentary elections expected this year, the future political direction of Israel will have profound implications for both Gaza and the West Bank.

Justice for what has happened and is still happening to the Palestinian people, must remain at the forefront of our minds.

And, let me be clear. No election, no changes in political direction, must dilute the international community's determination, indeed responsibility, to hunt down anyone that is found guilty of war crimes or to have breached international law.

Thank you.

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

Dear President and Colleagues,

We hear the word "ceasefire" repeated frequently. Can there truly be a ceasefire when children continue to die? Not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank violence continues and humanitarian access is systematically restricted.

As winter sets in infants freeze to death, families are left without shelter, and life-saving assistance including emergency support from Türkiye is deliberately blocked. This is beyond horrifying! More than 71,000 Palestinians have been killed most of them women and children. More than 1 million civilians remain in urgent need of emergency shelter. Gaza is not merely a tragedy; it is genocide and a profound legal and moral collapse.

"Never Again" was the world's promise yet today we witness scenes, echoing history's darkest chapters! Instead of learning from the lessons of the Holocaust antisemitism is being weaponized to shield Israel dehumanizing Palestinians and eroding global values.

Israel's far-right fundamentalist government has unleashed hell and destruction with total impunity. Gaza has shown that human rights lose all meaning when those who violate them most claim moral authority. Those responsible for genocide in Gaza continue to travel freely and engage diplomatically despite ongoing international judicial processes.

This sends a devastating message: even genocide may go unpunished if the perpetrators are politically protected.

Colleagues,

The Palestinian cause is not simply a matter of conscience. It is a bleeding wound in the moral and strategic fabric of the international system. Those who constantly lecture others on values have long undermined the very values-based international system they claim to defend. Hypocrisy plain and simple.

As Türkiye, we state there can be no peace without justice and no justice without a sovereign, free, and viable State of Palestine. The path forward is clear: advancing the ceasefire to its next phase with the full withdrawal of Israeli forces, the start of reconstruction, and a credible international monitoring framework to ensure lasting peace.

A two-state solution on the 1967 borders is a legal obligation. The international community now owes the Palestinian people: justice, accountability, and protection.

As President Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN has consistently emphasized for years: "It is not the strong who must be right, but the right who must be strong."

Until this injustice ends... Palestine will not be forgotten and it will not be silenced.

Thank you.

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

Mister President,

Dear Colleagues,

Three months on from the ceasefire, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains extremely dire. Despite the pause in large-scale operations, Israel continues to carry out airstrikes, drone attacks and bombardments, resulting in an ongoing loss of civilian lives. Israel is also imposing severe restrictions on international organisations, hindering the delivery of aid and obstructing humanitarian operations.

Palestinians who survived the initial two-year Israeli military assault are now struggling to survive the harsh winter conditions in cities reduced to rubble. They also face severe food insecurity, widespread malnutrition, and the total collapse of both the healthcare and education systems. The destruction is omnipresent. As UN experts have stated: "There are no words left to describe what Gaza has become."

Meanwhile, offering a path toward peace for the Palestinian people and the wider region, the second phase of the Gaza peace plan is now getting underway. Yet, peace cannot be achieved through political agreements alone, their terms must be actively implemented.

Flagrant violations of the ceasefire are worsening the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, undermining prospects for peace and crushing the Palestinian people's hope for survival, safety and a peaceful daily life. Therefore, our immediate priority must be to ensure that Palestinians receive urgent humanitarian assistance. We must secure a definitive end to all human rights violations and ceasefire breaches. We must also help create the conditions necessary for reconstruction.

Finally, true peace requires justice, Israel must be held accountable for its actions that have led to this unprecedented scale of death and destruction.

Thank you.

Mr Murat Cahid CINGI (Türkiye, NR): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Honourable President,

Dear Colleagues,

The announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza should have marked the beginning of protection and recovery for the people of Gaza and the West Bank.

Yet, the reality on the ground reveals a far more heart-breaking picture.

Despite the ceasefire, Palestinian civilians, particularly women and children, continue to lose their lives through military operations, raids, and settler violence. These deaths are not isolated incidents. This shows that Israeli forces continue their systemic persecution over the Palestinians.

Member States and international organizations including this Assembly persistently call for the unhindered passage of humanitarian aid. But humanitarian aid remains obstructed.

Another worrying development that escape attention is the persistence of expansion of illegal settlement.

Gaza now lies in ruins. Homes, hospitals, schools, and infrastructure have been intentionally destroyed by the Israeli forces. But there is no comprehensive, internationally supported plan for the reconstruction.

Sadly, international community and this Organization have no response to the ongoing agony and suffering in Gaza and West Bank.

While we all acknowledge the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and immense suffering of Palestinian population, one question demands an answer. How do we hold Israel accountable for its aggression and illegal actions that clearly amounted to war crimes and genocide?

International community have been largely deaf to the suffering in Palestine over the decades and unable to produce a concerted response with a view to putting an end to the Israeli aggression over Palestine.

I should like to emphasize that without genuine enforcement of international law and consequences for those who violate it, civilian suffering will persist in Gaza and elsewhere. Impunity will prevail. Sadly, this is what happens in Palestine.

Thank you!

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

Honorable President,

Dear Colleagues,

The ceasefire in Gaza should not be seen as an end in itself; it marks the beginning of a long-overdue path toward accountability, protection, and justice. For many years, the people of Gaza have faced severe hardships, including shortages of food, water, medicine, and electricity, creating a humanitarian crisis that requires immediate attention.

However, even with a ceasefire in place, civilians continue to face immense suffering: hospitals remain overwhelmed, children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable, and fundamental needs are still unmet. Unhindered humanitarian access, including through the Rafah Border Crossing, is urgently required. Aid must reach those who need it most, and Israel must immediately halt all actions that put civilian lives at risk and must ensure that lifesaving assistance can reach those in need without obstruction.

International efforts aimed at peace, encompassing diplomatic engagement, humanitarian support, and reconstruction initiatives, seek to stabilize Gaza and ease suffering. These endeavors can only succeed if restrictions are lifted, aid flows freely, and accountability for violations of international law is rigorously upheld.

Equally concerning are the limitations imposed on international non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies operating in Gaza. Such restrictions impede the delivery of essential assistance, compromise civilian safety, and undermine broader regional stability.

The hardships faced by Gaza are mirrored in the West Bank, where families also experience displacement, home destruction, restricted access to basic services, settlement expansion, and mobility constraints, all of which undermine daily life and community resilience.

Lasting peace can only be achieved through justice, accountability, and respect for fundamental rights. A sustainable resolution requires full recognition of the rights and self-determination of the Palestinian people. Only by addressing these core issues can the cycles of suffering be broken, paving the way for a future grounded in dignity, stability, and hope.

Thank you.

Ms Seda GÖREN (Türkiye, NR): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers.

The speeches of members on the Speaker's list who have been present during the debate, but have not been able to speak, may be given to the Table Office for publication in the Official Report.

Speeches must not exceed 400 words. I remind colleagues that type-written texts can be submitted, electronically if possible, no later than four hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

I call Ms Saskia KLUIT to reply.

You have 3 minutes.

Ms Saskia KLUIT (Netherlands, SOC): Thank you very much. I am very happy with this debate and I'm very enthusiastic about the 'blue card', to be honest. Because finally, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, we are debating things in a very honest way. And I'm very happy with that.

Having said that, the people in Palestine are not safe. They are very unsafe. And we heard the words on the Holocaust, we heard the words that indifference is what makes a genocide succeed. Indifference is what makes an ethnic cleansing succeed. Indifference is also what makes cruelty go on on a daily basis.

When I read the article about the last hostage being returned home, I was extremely happy. But when I heard the type of actions and the situation that was created to bring this body of the hostage home, this is cruelty.

So, I feel our next debate should be very honest. And our next debate should be about our responsibilities. Our responsibilities in upholding international law, our responsibilities in bringing perpetrators of war crimes to justice, our responsibilities to bring the sick and wounded out of conflict zones and to a hospital to save them.

And I still feel that we fall short, and not in a short way, we fall short immensely. I feel very sad, thinking about the future, that we will look back on this time and we will know that this kind of cruelty, this kind of humanity has been going on on our watch.

So I really hope, colleagues, that this very, very good debate will be followed by very good concrete actions in your national parliaments and will be followed by very strong reports on upholding international law for the most vulnerable group in our community, and in my opinion, that is the Palestinians at this time.

So we should focus on them. We should focus on their right to self-determination, and we should focus on bringing them a better future.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The debate is closed.

I remind you that at the end of the current affairs debate, the Assembly is not asked to decide upon a text; but the matter may be referred by the Bureau of the Assembly to the responsible committee for a report.

Debate: Draft additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning the protection of human rights and dignity of persons with regard to involuntary placement and involuntary treatment within mental healthcare services

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

We will resume our session with the next item of business this evening and the debate on the report titled “Draft additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning the protection of human rights and dignity of persons with regard to involuntary placement and involuntary treatment within mental healthcare services”, Document 16309. It is presented by Ms Carmen LEYTE on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

Colleagues, in order to finish by 6:30 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 6:25 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call Ms LEYTE, rapporteur. Please, madam, you have 7 minutes now, and 3 minutes at the end to reply to the questions.

Ms Carmen LEYTE (Spain, EPP/CD, Rapporteur)*: Thank you very much, Ms President.

Honourable colleagues,

I am going to speak in the language of Cervantes.

Today, I appear before you in the chamber that defends human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to present the report on the draft additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention, on the question of involuntary placement and involuntary treatment for persons within mental healthcare services.

I do this with a profound sense of responsibility. I am aware of the fact that we are here facing a debate which directly affects the rights, dignity and autonomy of thousands of people across Europe.

I would like to remind you that the idea of a draft additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention arose two decades ago, in 2004, when the bioethics steering committee warned that in some member states, involuntary measures were being applied without sufficient legal guarantees.

Their concern was clear. They feared these practices carried the risk of abuse and undermined the rights of the persons affected.

This is why, in 2012, the Committee of Ministers decided to entrust the bioethics committee with the creation of a tool to strengthen the rights and guarantee that involuntary measures would only be used in exceptional circumstances, and only as a last resort.

This work came to an end in 2020. It was then referred to the Committee of Ministers. And today, finally, we have a formal opinion before us.

Meanwhile, allow me also to remind you that, over the last 15 years, this Assembly has spoken three times on this topic:

The 2016 recommendation urged the withdrawal of this proposal and called for alternatives to psychiatric coercion;

The 2019 recommendation reaffirmed the paradigm shift, introduced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and we called for an immediate transition to the abolition of these coercive practices;

The 2022 recommendation, on deinstitutionalisation, warned against the adoption of texts which hindered the abolition of coercion in mental health institutions.

To sum up, the Assembly has systematically opposed protocols on involuntary measures. We've done so repeatedly. At the same time we have supported instruments that promote the abolition of coercion and advocate for autonomy for people with mental health problems.

Despite these recommendations, the Committee of Ministers has continued working on the draft protocol.

A number of prominent human rights bodies such as the former Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the monitoring committee of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned of its incompatibility with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Our Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development held two hearings this year, 8 April and 10 May in Helsinki. What we heard was revealing. On one hand the bioethics committee argued that a binding instrument would strengthen the protection of rights, based on the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.

The European Psychiatric Association (EPA) also supported the protocol, considering it an essential tool for establishing a uniform rule for the whole of Europe, providing guidance on how to improve current practices. In particular, they highlighted the importance of only using coercion as a last resort, guaranteed the access to lawyers and promoted the development of alternative solutions to coercive care.

But, on the other hand, we heard from the committee of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and civil society organisations who warned us that the additional protocol blatantly contradicted the international obligations of the member states, and ran the risk of actually legitimising practices that should be phased out. They pointed towards good practices in some states that have managed to reduce coercion.

I welcome that the draft protocol will be accompanied by texts which highlight the spirit in which it has been written.

Nevertheless, I think the protocol should be understood as a standalone document with a clear objective, and shouldn't need additional texts to explain it.

Having covered the origins of the draft protocol, I would like to present my conclusions.

My conclusions come from many meetings, the exchange of emails with organisations representing people with mental health problems.

I'm a doctor and so I know well the reality of clinical practice. I know it isn't possible to eliminate coercive practices overnight. It will take time and we need appropriate public policies.

But I also know that we can't have a regulation that is a break on progress or is used as an excuse to maintain that which should be an exception. Autonomy should be the guiding principal, not an afterthought.

I think our common objective is not to encourage involuntary treatment, but to promote the autonomy of people with mental health problems. Coercive practices should be the exception and they should only ever be the last resort.

There are countries around us that are implementing real and effective measures, that respect human rights, which follow the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and which have significantly reduced coercion.

How have they done this?

Through early detection, sufficient resources, adequate training, the participation of those affected and also a sustained political commitment.

These are the types of measures we have to promote.

I recommend that any update of the protocol by the Committee of Ministers should guarantee the legal certainty and the full compatibility of any tool with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It has been ratified as we know by all of the members of the Council of Europe. We must comply.

Finally, I would hold that the Parliamentary Assembly cannot support the draft additional protocol of the Oviedo Convention, so I ask everyone to please support my report in which we defend the human rights of persons with disabilities.

Dear colleagues,

The Council of Europe must rise to meet this challenge.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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

Now, colleagues, I open the floor to the speakers on behalf of the political groups and first, I call to this debate the representative of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Ms Bianca-Eugenia GAVRILĂ.

Ms Bianca-Eugenia GAVRILĂ (Romania, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We would like to explain why we support this opinion and therefore cannot support the draft additional protocol of the Committee of Ministers on involuntary placement and involuntary treatment in mental healthcare.

First, we remain concerned that the draft protocol assumes that coercive measures can be rendered acceptable through regulation. In our view, coercion should not be normalised but progressively reduced and replaced with more humane and effective forms of support.

Second, all member states of the Council of Europe have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention makes clear that disability, including psychosocial disability, must not justify deprivation of liberty or forced treatment. We therefore believe that the compatibility of the draft protocol with existing international human rights obligations requires careful reconsideration.

Third, mental health conditions are highly individual and complex. Standardised rules and involuntary measures often fail to reflect this reality. We note with concern that coercive practices can cause lasting harm, including trauma and a loss of trust in mental health services, as reported by many people with lived experiences.

Fourth, we wish to recall the consistent position of this Assembly. Over recent years, we have promoted autonomy and the modernisation of mental health services, with a strong emphasis on voluntary, community-based support. In our assessment, the draft protocol does not sufficiently reflect this direction and may risk slowing ongoing reform efforts.

Fifth, we believe that more constructive alternatives are available. These include strengthening community-based mental health services, developing supported decision-making mechanisms, and investing in prevention and de-escalation strategies that can effectively reduce the use of coercive measures.

Protecting human rights requires careful consideration, but it must remain firmly grounded in respect for dignity, autonomy, and the expressed will of the individual.

For these reasons and in agreement with the draft opinion, we are unable to support the draft protocol of the Committee of Ministers in its current form, and encourage continued dialogue towards a more rights-based and person-centred approach to mental healthcare in Europe.

Thank you.

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

I call now the representative of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Madam BOUYX. "Apologies, Mister Bertrand, Mister Bertrand BOUYX" [spoken in French].

Are you here?

"Please" [spoken in French].

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Ms. President,

Dear colleagues,

When it comes to involuntary admission to mental healthcare services, more than in any other area, freedom must be the rule and coercion the exception.

In any event, coercion must be essential not only for the physical integrity of the person and those around them, but also for society.

It must be strictly proportionate and, of course, limited in time.

At the same time, the care services must be sufficiently effective to enable the person in question to regain their prerogatives as an independent person as quickly as possible.

The additional draft that has been presented is eminently important in the international context of the generalised stiffening of attitudes that we are experiencing. Many countries tend to resort to psychiatric internment to deal with political opposition. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe has therefore read it carefully.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe fully endorses the rapporteur's vigilance regarding respect for autonomy in mental healthcare. The opinion sets the objective of eliminating involuntary measures. The disappearance of involuntary measures would probably be over-optimistic, but reducing them to cases of extreme necessity would already be a satisfactory result.

This brings me to the hard point of the draft opinion, which is to issue an unfavourable opinion on the draft protocol as it stands, and which recommends that the Committee of Ministers carry out a study of the compatibility of this draft with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by all the member states of the Council of Europe.

In other words, international law. At a time when international law is being called into question, particularly that derived from UN bodies, it remains absolutely essential to respect our international commitments and not to adopt orthogonal texts.

The work leading to the additional protocol was initiated in 2012, 14 years ago. Asking for a few more months to ensure that the result is legally secure under international law does not seem excessive to me, which is why we support this text.

On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, we support the draft opinion presented by the rapporteur.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe will therefore vote in favour of this report.

Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): "Thank you" [in French], Mr Bertrand BOUYX.

I call now Ms Laura CASTEL, representing the Group of the Unified European Left.

Ms Laura CASTEL (Spain, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Chair.

First of all, let me congratulate the Rapporteur.

As it is stated in this report, the draft Additional Protocol to the Oviedo Convention is not a step forward; it is a regressive attempt to regulate what should be an absolute exception: the loss of liberty and the imposition of involuntary treatment. From a progressive perspective, we cannot accept this text.

All 46 member states of the Council of Europe have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This protocol contradicts the core principles of equality, personal security, and the right to live free from torture.

For too long, we have viewed disability through an obsolete medical model that treats human beings as objects of treatment, rather than subjects of rights. This protocol seeks to legally shield the use of force, allowing medical decisions to override human will.

We believe that involuntary placement is a denial of legal capacity, ignores the fundamental requirement of free and informed consent, and creates a discriminatory legal system that offers fewer guarantees to people with disabilities.

We are told that coercion is "necessary", but the evidence says otherwise. There is no clinical evidence supporting the therapeutic benefits of involuntary institutionalisation. On the contrary, the risks are devastating. Research shows that the risk of suicide for those interned involuntarily is 55 times higher than in the general population. And further, coercion does not heal; it traumatises.

Besides, we must invest in early detection and in systems that respect the dignity and choices of the individual, and end the dehumanising language and stigma that treats psychic suffering as a reason for exclusion.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been very clear: this protocol must be withdrawn. And the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development voted unanimously to reject it.

So, on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, we must issue a negative opinion. Let us stand for a Europe that empowers its citizens, rather than locking them away.

It is for that reason that we vote in favour of this report.

Thank you.

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

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

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

First and foremost, allow me to pay tribute to the work done by Ms Carmen LEYTE, who has managed to bring positions closer together on a report that is complicated and controversial. I think evidence to that effect is the fact that she's had so much contact with organisations that work day in, day out with disabilities, and has conveyed to us their rejection of the protocol. None supported it.

I also want to add that this dossier has an ethical dimension to it, which I think raises questions that we must address. This is precisely where we, as politicians, need to act. Having listened to the different parts, I would like to express my clear position, which is against the additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention, as we are talking about involuntary placement and involuntary treatment in the mental healthcare sector.

I want to make it quite clear that this debate is neither technical nor medical nor procedural – it is a human rights debate.

The protocol is based upon an erroneous premise, fundamentally erroneous, the idea that coercion in mental health could be compatible with a modern system of human rights, provided it is adequately regulated. But regulating coercion doesn't make it legitimate. It just makes it more acceptable, if you like, from an institutional vantage point.

All the states around this Chamber have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the CRPD Convention. This Convention really introduced a paradigm shift. It is clear and binding. People with a disability, and we include in that people with a psycho-social disability, have the right to decide over their own lives, their own bodies, their own healthcare with the necessary support and they must do so on an equal footing with everybody else – same conditions, no exceptions, no parallel systems or regimes, no so-called protection – protection essentially being a deprivation of rights.

Having said that, the protocol actually seems to legitimise involuntary placement and involuntary treatment, particularly in an area where we're really looking at specific discriminatory practices. In addition to that, it is doing so in open contradiction to the constant interpretation of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which, as I said, quite clearly – unequivocally – that no deprivation of liberty, no forced treatment could be justified just because of a disability, whether it is real or perceived.

So what I want to say is very, very clear. This protocol actually represents a real risk of normative backsliding in Europe, which would seriously weaken the credibility of the Council of Europe as a beacon in defence of human rights.

We're told that the text has been neutralised; they talk about persons rather than persons with a disability, but the change of language does not change the material reality that underpins it. Nor does it change stigma, nor does it guarantee equality.

So the right way forward is to strengthen autonomy, support and the free will of individuals. That is the kind of instrument that we should be promoting.

Thank you.

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

I call now on Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI (Poland, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Ms. Chair.

Ms. Chair, dear colleagues,

At the outset, I would like to warmly thank Ms Carmen LEYTE for her thorough, courageous and responsible work as rapporteur. I thank her not only for the report itself, but above all for her clear and unambiguous call to reject the draft additional protocol in its current form.

This position reflects genuine concern for human rights understood in a coherent manner and in full compliance with the international obligations of the Council of Europe.

I take the floor on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party. Let me state this clearly. Our entire group supports the rapporteur's conclusions and thanks her for her consistency and for her fidelity to the values on which the Council of Europe is founded.

The core of the matter is very simple and must be stated plainly. The absolute foundation of all action in the field of mental health must be the rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is not a reference point among many. It is the primary, overriding and binding standard.

Only after full respect for the autonomy, dignity, legal capacity and equality of persons with disabilities has been ensured, can there be any discussion of last-resort measures.

Coercive measures, if they are ever to be considered at all, must remain exceptional and strictly a last resort, not something to be systematised through a separate binding protocol at the risk of weakening the standards of the United Nations Convention.

The draft before us today unfortunately fails to respect this principle to a sufficient degree. For this reason, it must be rejected.

First, comes human rights as defined by the United Nations Convention.

First, autonomy.

First, dignity.

Only then, and only in the most extreme circumstances, last-resort measures.

This is not a technical matter. It is a question of the axiological foundation of the Council of Europe.

Thank you very much, Ms. Chair.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI. Now I open the speakers list. And first on my list is Ms Nerea AHEDO. Please, Ms Nerea, the floor is yours.

Ms Nerea AHEDO (Spain, ALDE)*: Thank you Chair, and good afternoon.

The Additional Protocol to the Oviedo Convention relates to the rights and dignity of people with mental disorders when it comes to involuntary placement and, over the many years that it has been doing the rounds, it has generated a great deal of opposition. Opposition from various organisations, among representatives of people with disabilities, and in this Assembly, including in some member states that have made their positions very clear.

Now, it is true that we have a vast diversity of situations in different countries, and that all the necessary safeguards are not always complied with, but I think we must be clear that we must never legislate to give the appearance of legitimising any human rights violations. It would appear that this draft is not entirely in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which many of the Council of Europe member states have signed up to, and which already covers what is set out in the draft Protocol.

This Protocol falls well short of those standards and I wonder whether the two can ever truly be compatible. What we should be doing is promoting alternatives and trying to reduce or get rid of involuntary measures, and making it clear that all people enjoy the same legal capacity – some people require support, that's all they need, they require assistance or support – but people must be able to take free decisions with regard to their personal autonomy.

That is why we have to look at the way the system operates and also look at shifting the mindset, because up until now it seems to have generally been based on prejudice. And that leads us to think, if someone has mental health problems, then at any point in time they may become dangerous and then the only solution on offer is to limit their freedom, whereas in actual fact, this is all about rights.

And so we are going to support the opinion of the Committee, which I think is going to be unanimous in this Parliamentary Assembly, and I would like to conclude by thanking the rapporteur for this work, which can't have been easy. And I thought I had three minutes, so you have been spared from listening to me for another minute.

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

Next on my list is Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar BALDURSDÓTTIR.

Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar BALDURSDÓTTIR (Iceland, SOC): Ms. President,

We are debating the draft additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning involuntary placement and involuntary treatment in mental health care services.

This is a highly sensitive issue. Any use of coercion against another human being must always be treated as an exceptional and last-resort measure. For that reason, the legal framework we adopt matters enormously.

I wish to recall that Iceland has incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into domestic law. This reflects a clear commitment to the paradigm shift established by the Convention: respect for autonomy, legal capacity and equal recognition before the law.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has expressed serious concern about this draft additional protocol. It concludes that the text is incompatible with multiple provisions of the Convention, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, liberty and security, physical and mental integrity and the right to health. The Committee has therefore urged states' parties to oppose the draft.

I have discussed this draft with the organisations of persons with disabilities in Iceland and with the Icelandic Human Rights Institute. Their assessment echoes these concerns: the draft does not provide sufficient safeguards against coercion and continues to rely on substitute decision-making, rather than supported decision-making.

Applying coercion can never be a starting point. As the Assembly's draft opinion rightly states, an appropriate legal framework must first and foremost uphold the principle of autonomy. Only once this is secured can exceptional, temporary measures be discussed, and only as a last resort.

In this context, I strongly support the Assembly's conclusion that a recommendation, rather than a binding protocol, would be a more appropriate instrument, with the clear long-term objective of phasing out involuntary measures altogether.

Our responsibility is to ensure that Council of Europe standards fully comply with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and strengthen, rather than undermine, the international human rights system.

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

I now call Mr Georgios STAMATIS. Please.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD)*: Thank you, Madam President.

After English, French and Spanish, I will speak in Greek.

Thank you.

First and foremost, allow me to congratulate our rapporteur.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What we have before us is a very important document. We're talking about a UN Convention, we're talking about a Recommendation, the recommendation made by the World Health Organization as well.

Today, what they tell us is that really this subject matter, which we are addressing here today in the Chamber, is very important because we are talking about the direction of travel, where we are heading for here. Are we heading for a society that will protect all the rights of vulnerable individuals, a genuinely inclusive society that includes all our fellow citizens?

So we are here in this Chamber today. We have a number of individuals, as we know, who suffer from health care problems, psychiatric problems, and they are involuntarily placed, or interned, in public hospitals, psychiatric establishments, institutions. We don't necessarily know what different measures are used within these institutions, what kind of health care they are being provided with, what the patients are receiving. I am referring in particular to private clinics.

Therefore, it seems to be that what we really need to talk about here is autonomy – a person's autonomy.

People should be entitled to decide over their own bodies. Every citizen, even a citizen who might be living with psychiatric problems or mental health care issues, every individual should be free to make a choice as to what kind of treatment they wish to receive.

Now today, I think, is a very important step forward.

We are talking here about individuals who are living with a disability. I think that's important and it's a step going forward. A step towards a message that we need to send to the whole of society. Any kind of change of this order, we know, will require a lot of effort. Effort is required, and therefore, we need to reach out and say to these vulnerable people, "You are not alone", even if they happen to be in a country that doesn't necessarily have a legal framework yet.

Even so, we are reaching out to these people, and we are saying to them, "You are not alone. We stand by your side, and we are there in order to put an end to a type of treatment that is tantamount to torture often".

Thank you very much.

Congratulations to the rapporteur.

Ms Mónica BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Thank you very much for the work of the rapporteurs. I know that you have worked very hard and I also know that this very sensitive topic raises many questions. Thank You for your efforts.

Hungary expresses its gratitude to the Council of Europe's Committee on Bioethics for its work over the past decade. We appreciate the devoted work that has gone into drafting the Additional Protocol, which emphasized the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and ensured consistency with the obligations set out in existing international conventions.

Hungary has supported the prospects for adopting a new regulation focusing on the respect for human rights and human dignity and has consistently agreed with its primary objective. However, our support cannot be unconditional, in light of our international obligations and the Hungarian government's policy commitment regarding persons with disabilities.

The Hungarian Government is committed to consistently upholding the principle of "Nothing about us without us". We are convinced that involving persons with disabilities in all decision-making processes and decisions that affect them is not only a right, but also a shared responsibility. In Hungary, the National Disability Council serves as the primary forum for this partnership.

Hungary was among the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007, which has since become a cornerstone of Hungarian disability policy. The National Disability Program for years 2026–2036, adopted by the National Assembly, was also developed in line with these principles. The successful implementation of the Program relies on the trust of our fellow citizens with disabilities, which we shall safeguard in all decision-making processes.

With respect to the principles laid down in the UNCRPD and in light of the stance of the Hungarian National Disability Council, I personally can't support the adoption of the Additional Protocol, and my country, Hungary abstains from adopting it.

Mr Richard BAKER (United Kingdom, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear colleagues,

Today 1.5 million people with learning disabilities across Europe live not in their own homes but in institutions. The draft additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention threatens to compound this problem and does not set us on the path to mental health laws which actually protect the rights of disabled people.

Before I was elected to Parliament I provided advocacy for the family of a young man with a learning disability who has been in a secure institution for more than 15 years, over a hundred miles from his home in Scotland. This is devastating for his family and reflects the experiences of too many disabled people across Europe. In the United Kingdom, our government has recently changed mental health legislation for England which stated that having a learning disability or autism was a reason for losing your liberty but those laws have not yet been changed in Scotland, and I am sure it will remain the case in other European jurisdictions. You can lose your liberty on the basis of your disability. So mental health laws which we are told are intended to protect the rights of disabled people in the mental health system, as the Oviedo Convention seeks to do, in reality allow fundamental breaches of human rights to continue.

Again and again, the United Nations find states are not in compliance with the the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with mental health laws a key area of concern.

Inclusion Europe and many human rights organisations are very clear, the draft Additional Protocol is also not compliant with the UN convention and risks legitimising or reinforcing the practices it seeks to end.

I support the finding of the rapporteur that the objections to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine are not resolved by the draft Additional Protocol and that Ministers should instead study its compatibility with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In 2022 this Assembly resolved to call for the deinstitutionalisation of support for disabled people. We should be impatient for the change we need across Europe so all disabled people, always have the support they need in their own home, in their own community, close to the people they love, because this is their right.

Ms Marijana PULJAK (Croatia, ALDE): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Madam President, dear colleagues,

Allow me to speak about this issue from personal experience.

Nine years ago, my brother began to show clear signs of severe mental illness. He resigned from his job without any reason. He became convinced that he was being followed, by people, by the FBI, by aliens. He became increasingly paranoid and aggressive. He ended up in the emergency department and was advised to take antipsychotic medication, which he refused, because he firmly believed he was not ill.

He was living with my mother. His behaviour became so threatening that I had to remove her from her own home, because I was genuinely afraid for her life. He was in a psychotic state.

Three doctors told me that he urgently needed hospital treatment but that he has to agree on hospitalisation. But he could not consent, because he lacked insight into his illness.

It was only the fourth doctor who explained that a protocol for involuntary hospitalisation existed. With the support of medical staff and the police, my brother was taken to hospital, where he remained for three weeks and later continued regular treatment.

Today, my brother is doing well, working, and able to live a functional, dignified life. Without that intervention, he would not be alive today.

This is why I want to be very clear. The objective of phasing out involuntary measures must go along with effective and accessible crisis support mechanisms for situations in which a person temporarily lacks decision-making capacity and faces a serious and immediate risk to their own life or the life of others.

Coercion must never be the rule. But a complete prohibition, without real alternatives in place, risks abandoning people at the very moment when their rights and lives are most at risk.

Ms Joanne COLLINS (Ireland, UEL): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Madam President, colleagues,

As a member of Sinn Féin in Ireland, I welcome this debate on the draft additional protocol concerning involuntary placement and involuntary treatment in mental healthcare services.

I stand here today conscious of our own history in Ireland and the lessons learned from institutionalisation, coercion, and systems that too often prioritised control over care. That experience has shaped our strong commitment to human-rights-based mental health reform.

Ireland has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and we are currently reforming our mental health legislation to better reflect its principles. From that perspective, it is essential that this draft protocol is fully aligned with the CRPD, particularly its emphasis on autonomy, supported decision-making, and the reduction of coercive practices.

Safeguards alone are not sufficient. They must be accompanied by a clear direction towards reducing involuntary placement and treatment, not merely regulating them.

We increasingly recognise that coercion, even when lawful, can cause profound and lasting harm. It can undermine trust in services, delay help-seeking, and worsen long-term outcomes. What has proven more effective is early intervention, strong community-based mental health services, crisis supports outside institutional settings, and genuine engagement with a person's will and preferences. These approaches are evidence-based, not idealistic.

We recognise that there are rare and complex situations where immediate intervention may be required to protect life or safety. However, these must be exceptional, tightly defined, independently reviewed, and matched by a clear obligation on states to invest in alternatives that prevent crises from escalating.

If this protocol is to command confidence, it must send a clear signal that the future of mental healthcare lies not in refining systems of involuntary control, but in building systems that make coercion increasingly unnecessary.

In that spirit, we encourage stronger alignment with the CRPD, greater prioritisation of supported decision-making, explicit commitment to community-based alternatives, and a clear trajectory towards reducing coercive practices across member states.

Mental healthcare must be rooted in dignity, autonomy, and respect. We look forward to working constructively with colleagues to ensure this protocol reflects those shared values.

Thank you.

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

Thank you.

Colleagues, I must now interrupt the list of speakers.

The speeches of the members on the speakers list who haven't managed to speak today can be given to the Table Office no later than four hours from the moment the list has been interrupted. So from now onwards, after four hours.

Your speeches must not exceed 400 words and have to be typewritten text submitted to the Table Office electronically if possible. Again, not later than four hours from now.

Thank you, colleagues. That concludes the list of speakers.

Now I call MS Carmen LEYTE, the rapporteur, to reply.

Dear MS Carmen LEYTE, you have up to 3 minutes.

Ms Carmen LEYTE (Spain, EPP/CD, Rapporteur)*: Thank you very much Ms. President.

Well, allow me to thank the political groups, thank all of the speakers in this debate, thank you for your support.

Thank you for supporting the report that I've drafted for the House.

I'm really delighted to see that this Parliamentary Assembly is united when it comes to defending an issue that is so important for so many people, impacts on so many lives. It seems to be that it's important that we've had a clear and united position on this.

I've listened to you carefully and I think that we all have the same will. We want to protect human rights, we want to improve mental healthcare.

We also are cognisant of the fact that the Protocol before us doesn't necessarily fully guarantee that objective, hence the measures required.

The warnings regarding this Protocol have come from a number of international organisations. They've also come from organisations who work with people living with a disability. And they've come from many experts as well, and their warnings are crystal clear.

The wording of the Protocol, such as it stands today, runs the risk of consolidating coercive practices that we should actually be phasing out, not strengthening. And this Assembly, which so often has been in the vanguard when it comes to defending human rights, cannot afford to ignore these warnings.

We know, of course, that a transition towards a model without coercion will require time, it's not overnight. We need resources, we need political commitment to this. But we also know that the norms that we support today must promote this change, not act as a brake on this change.

We want to put the autonomy and the dignity of these individuals at the heart of all these discussions.

So, I'd like to thank you all for your support, because it is important to send out a clear message.

Europe needs to move forward towards practices which are respectful, which are modern, and which are fully compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Allow me also to take this opportunity to thank everyone and, in particular, the Committee's Secretariat, Ms Jannick DEVAUX and Ms Catherine DU-BERNARD ROCHY in particular. Thank you so much for your help and support. I'd also like to thank all those of you who unanimously supported the report, or the members of the Committee in other words, who are also represented here by the President of the Committee.

And, of course, I'd like to thank the interpreters and translators who have facilitated our understanding of all of this.

Thank you to all of you for listening.

[Applause]

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): 'Thank you', MS Carmen LEYTE [spoken in Spanish].

Now I must ask if the Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Saskia KLUIT, wishes to speak?

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

I first of all want to thank Ms Carmen LEYTE for a wonderful, wonderful work, her commitment and to tackling this very difficult and sensitive issue.

And as you heard, Chair today or Ms President today, my committee is a wonderful group of people. They really work for human rights and they really, all over the aisles, they think.

This debate was not easy in the Committee. It was very sensitive. We had different perspectives. We decided to take time to find a solution and a common ground where we wanted to position ourselves. We had very good in-depth exchanges with experts during the hearings. I can thank them also.

As a result, MS Carmen LEYTE managed to get us a unanimously approved resolution, the draft resolution, I have to say.

We also accepted unanimously the amendment proposed in the report. This means that despite our sometimes heated debates, the Committee's opinion is very clear. The draft protocol should not be adopted by the Committee of Ministers.

Having said that, member states' efforts should focus on autonomy and make it a reality for people who suffer mental troubles. This is the aim of another piece of work from the Committee, and it's a draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the respect for autonomy and mental health care.

We should all support that work and allow for its implementation at a national level.

Member states should respect their commitments regarding the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It's better now that we keep firm on the ground of human rights, even though in this topic you might find some practical issues that then remain unclear.

Thank you.

Vote: Draft additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning the protection of human rights and dignity of persons with regard to involuntary placement and involuntary treatment within mental healthcare services

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): 'Thank you very much', Ms Saskia KLUIT [spoken in Dutch].

Colleagues,

Now the debate is finally closed.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has presented the draft opinion to the Document 16309, to which one amendment has been tabled.

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

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendment one to the Draft Opinion Document 16309 which was, as mentioned, unanimously approved by the Committee, to be declared as definitely approved.

Is it so, Ms Saskia KLUIT?

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

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

Thank you.

If there are no objections – I see none – I will consider the amendment to be approved.

Oh yes, I will have to ask again.

Is there any objection, colleagues, in the Hall? I see none.

Amendment one to the draft opinion is therefore approved and will not be called.

We will now proceed to the vote, colleagues, on the Draft Opinion contained in Document 16309, and a two-thirds majority is required.

The vote is open, colleagues.

Colleagues, the vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

63 in favour, 0 against and 3 abstentions.

[Applause]

Congratulations.

The Draft Resolution Document 16309 is adopted, regardless of its challenges.

Thank you, colleagues.

Debate: Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled 'Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values', Document 16314, presented by Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education and Media.

In order to be finished by 8 p.m., we shall interrupt the list of speakers at about 20 minutes to 8 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, the rapporteur.

You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes at the end to reply to the debate.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Thank you Mister President.

Today we are debating an issue that lies at the very heart of our democracies: the roles of schools as spaces for socialisation, inclusion and the learning of democratic values.

Education is not merely a public service aimed at academic performance. Above all, it is a fundamental pillar of democracy and social cohesion.

Educational institutions are among the few spaces where people from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds interact on a daily basis. Children and young people not only acquire knowledge, but they also learn how to relate to one another, how to co-operate and how to develop critical thinking, empathy and respect for diversity.

It is through the school experience that many of the attitudes shaping future participation in democratic life are formed. However, we must acknowledge that schools today face new challenges in fully fulfilling this role. Social and cultural diversity, while enriching, also require educational policies and practices capable of fostering shared values and mutual understanding.

Discrimination, racism, school bullying and exclusion remain all-too-present realities in many schools. These dynamics hinder students' ability to form meaningful relationships and to develop a genuine sense of belonging.

Added to this is the impact of digitalisation and, in particular, excessive exposure to social media, reduced face-to-face interaction, the spread of disinformation, the reinforcement of stereotypes and the increase in anxiety and personal insecurity affect children and adolescents, in particular.

The digital environment has become a new space for socialisation, but without proper education in digital citizenship, it can also become a space of exclusion, violence and manipulation.

I would also like to highlight our deep concern about the situation of teachers across Europe. Educators are facing budget cuts, a lack of human resources, excessive workloads, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate salaries and limited social recognition. Many also lack the professional and psychological support needed to cope with increasingly complex educational contexts. These conditions directly affect their well-being and consequently the quality of education and the ability of schools to fulfil their social and democratic mission.

There is also a troubling gap between the democratic values promoted in curricula and the real experiences students have in schools. Too often, school cultures continue to be shaped by authoritarian, hierarchical or exclusionary dynamics, yet democracy is not learned solely through theoretical content; it is learned by living it. The deepest and most lasting learning occurs through everyday experiences, real participation, deliberation and shared responsibility.

And for this reason, it is essential to move towards a transformation of school culture. Schools must clearly articulate the values they seek to convey so that every space, every relationship and every decision becomes an opportunity to practice democracy, social justice and mutual respect. It is not enough to teach democracy; it must be experienced within the educational community.

In the context of global democratic decline – marked by the rise of authoritarianism, polarisation and distrust in institutions – learning and practising democracy must become a central political priority of our education systems.

The Council of Europe's Education Strategy 2024–2030 and the initiative of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, provide a clear framework for action. However, these commitments will only be effective if they are accompanied by political will, sufficient investment and coherent reforms.

We need educational policies that integrate socialisation, inclusion and well-being as core objectives, alongside academic learning. This entails flexible curricula, student-centred methodologies and genuine opportunities for student participation in school governance and community life. It also means adopting a human rights-based education approach, with particular attention to the most vulnerable students, including migrant children and those with special educational needs.

Education for democratic citizenship must occupy a central and explicit place at all levels of education, complemented by the multilevel integration of competences for a culture of democracy across other subjects.

Similarly, we must also promote co-operative, interactive and participatory pedagogies, as well as socio-emotional education programmes that strengthen well-being, social cohesion and conflict prevention.

The fight against bullying must also be addressed through a zero-tolerance policy based on prevention, mediation, peer support and restorative justice. Likewise, it is essential to offer students extracurricular activities – artistic, sporting, environmental or social pastimes that foster positive socialisation and community engagement.

Digital citizenship is another major challenge of our time. And we must promote media and information literacy, digital responsibility and critical thinking so that young people can navigate the digital environment safely, ethically and democratically. Regulating the use of devices in schools may be necessary, but it can never replace a solid education in values and digital competencies.

None of this could be possible without strong support for teachers. It is imperative to strengthen both initial and continuous teacher training in inclusion, socio-emotional education, democratic participation, conflict resolution and co-operative learning. Teachers must be provided with resources, opportunities for professional exchange and decent working conditions that allow them to fully carry out their educational and social role.

Investing in democratic socialisation in schools is to invest in the future, our societies. It strengthens democratic resilience, combats exclusion and prepares new generations not only for the labour market but for life in a community. This is our collective responsibility. We cannot afford to postpone it.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

I remind members that the speaking time limit is 3 minutes in debate.

I call the first speakers on behalf of the political groups, for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Ms Carla MOONEN.

Ms Carla MOONEN (Netherlands, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Dear President,

Dear members of the Assembly,

On behalf of ALDE, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, for this excellent report.

As any parent knows, children are our mirrors. Of the good, the bad and the ugly. And schools are mirrors of our societies. And as the report states: "Schools bring together people of different ages, backgrounds and disciplines to a degree that is only found in a few other [...] spaces." So, it's a unique space.

Schools show the value and the diversity of our societies. But also the problems: discrimination, racism and exclusion. It is at school that children and young people must learn to deal with these differences, to listen and understand each other, and forge opinions, disagree, discuss and develop shared solutions.

In the words of the rapporteur: "schools must serve as [...] a space where democracy is not only taught but lived".

We warmly welcome all the recommendations in this report to strengthen our children, teachers and institutions. To protect our youth against the harmful effects of social media, we support regulations such as an age limit, as adopted in France and proposed by my own party in the Netherlands.

To enable all children to learn in a way that fits them, we believe in flexible curricula and education that matches individual needs. And to give equal opportunities to all, we should create rich schooldays with teaching, care, sports, culture, arts, nature and, of course, a warm meal for every child.

Democracies can provide solutions to these current and future problems; they can provide a better life for current and future generations. Rather than trying to restore the old order, we should build something better, stronger, more democratic and more just.

Schools are at the foundation of this new order. We wholly agree with the rapporteur that education should be a political priority at this time. The young people in classrooms today are the workers and teachers of tomorrow.

We should invest in them, and in our future, now.

Thank you all.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

On behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left, Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES.

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

This report reminds us of something that is fundamentally true, and my group thanks the rapporteur for her work: democracy does not fall from the sky, it is learned, practised and taught. Schools are one of the first places where this experience is possible.

We fully agree with this observation. Schools are not just places where knowledge is imparted; they are also places where people socialise, build social links and learn to live together. Yet all over Europe, this democratic mission of schools is being undermined. Weakened by social inequalities, by school segregation, by the rise of discrimination and racism, but also by the exhaustion of teaching staff, subjected to austerity policies and a chronic lack of resources.

In France, the government plans to cut 4 018 teaching posts for the start of the school year in September 2026. In the Strasbourg education authority, 85 posts are expected to be lost at the start of the new school year. And yet, France is already one of the European countries with the largest class sizes.

How can we expect to train free and enlightened citizens in overcrowded schools where pupils rarely have a say?

Democracy cannot be taught in structures that contradict it on a daily basis.

This report is valuable as it states quite clearly that it is not enough to teach democracy, it has to be brought to life in schools. This requires real participation by pupils in the governance of schools, co-operative teaching practices, and the recognition of diversity as an asset and not as a problem to be managed.

I would like to stress one central point. Inclusive education goes hand in hand with social justice. Discrimination, racism, harassment and socio-economic exclusion are still widespread in many schools throughout Europe. That is a reality, these are not isolated incidents. They are a direct reflection of the social inequalities and discrimination in our societies, which schools all too often reproduce instead of combating.

Inclusion cannot be just a slogan, or a simple statement in the curriculum. Inclusion has to be built. And it starts with clear political choices. This presupposes human resources commensurate with the issues at stake: smaller class sizes to allow for individualised support, solid initial and in-service training for teachers on inclusion, the fight against discrimination and conflict management, as well as the presence of sufficient numbers of specialised staff.

So, yes, this report is a step in the right direction and my group and I will obviously support it. But it commits us collectively: without massive public investment in education, without a break with the logic of austerity, these fine intentions will remain a dead letter.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

On behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, Ms Claudia ARPA.

You have the floor.

Ms Claudia ARPA (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you Mister President.

Dear colleagues,

First we would like to thank the rapporteur Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for her excellent report and its clear message that a good education is key to our democracy.

The report illustrates the challenges that many schools face today. While diversity can be a great strength, it can also make tension more visible. We heard about it. Many schools still experience discrimination, racism, bullying and exclusion.

At the same time, excessive social media use reduces real face-to-face interaction and increases disinformation and pressure.

For many young people this can lead to anxiety, isolation and the loss of self-confidence.

The report also highlights the urgent need for action regarding the situation of teachers: staff shortages; heavy workloads; oversized classes; a lack of support and insufficient regulation harm teachers' well-being and undermine quality education. If we want democratic values at school, teachers need time, resources, money – we heard about it – and real support.

Most importantly, the report calls for changes beyond the curriculum. It also calls for a democratic school culture based on participation, respect, inclusion and conflict resolution.

Democracy is not learned about, it is learned by practising in decisions, relationships and, of course, in daily school life.

Participation has great potential for effective learning, yet this potential is rarely realised.

Students gain confidence, experience self-efficiency and develop a sense of belonging only when they are encouraged to help shape lessons and their own learning.

It is crucial that the strengths, interests and individual needs are taken seriously. Well-designed participation improves motivation and well-being at school. For schools to become real places of democratic participation, participation must be structurally anchored and treated seriously.

This requires a culture of trust in young people's views. Without passionate experiences and democracy, young people cannot develop political maturity. This maturity is a prerequisite for independent participation in social and political debates.

Today, we are discussing schools where democracy is not only taught, but also lived and where a good education provides every young person with real opportunities.

We support all of the measures for the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy.

Thanks a lot.

[Light applause]

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

On behalf of the Group of the European People's Party, Mr Georgios STAMATIS.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group)*: Thank you Mister President. I'll speak in Greek again.

This is a very interesting report, which provides guidance. As member states, we really need to include education in all of our policies.

How can we achieve this? Well, I think that the training of teachers is extremely important, in a society free from exclusion, if that's what we want to achieve.

But today, we are seeing racism and anti-Semitism gaining ground. We really need teaching staff who will be, if you like, the second parents of our children. We entrust our children to them over periods of several hours. We want our children to become fully-fledged citizens in a democratic society.

We should not forget – and this is not mentioned in the report – the role of the parents. Because our children spend a lot of time at home and, therefore, we also have to take a fresh look at the role of parents.

How can we support parents in their role? Parents come from different social backgrounds. Some parents live in camps for Roma people, other parents suffer from social exclusion themselves, and they send their children to a school where they're taught about differences, a society with different categories of citizens. They're told about inclusive societies, societies without exclusion, but at the same time, parents have to be in contact with the teachers. The teachers are mentors, not only for the students, but for the whole family, as well.

We need to create small societies in order to foster these democratic values. I think that's the kind of guidance we should be following if we want to develop our educational system in such a way as to help pupils and students to become fully-fledged citizens. Citizens who believe in democratic values.

At a time when we have to deal with social media, when parents are often absent, the role of teachers becomes all the more important.

Of course the Group of the European People's Party will be fully supporting this report, but I think that the role of parents is fundamental.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Alexandra SCHOOS, you have the floor.

Ms Alexandra SCHOOS (Luxembourg, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues,

Yes indeed, nowadays, schools shape citizens.

That is why this report on socialising at schools deserves serious attention, especially at a time when children face bullying, loneliness and the daily pressure of an online world that too often rewards aggression and misinformation.

As European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, we support the core intention: safer schools, stronger teachers and real protection of children. Online and offline. But we also insist on one principle: education must strengthen democracy through pluralism and responsibility, not through uniform political messaging, and it must respect the natural partnership between school and family.

Yes, we need to take digital harm seriously. Regulating smartphone use at school and considering age-appropriate limits for social media can be part of child protection, if rules are realistic and if parents are involved. Digital literacy must mean critical thinking, responsibility, and resilience against manipulation.

We need to strengthen cohesion beyond the classroom. Inclusion is not only built through policies, but also through belonging. That is why we should also support what connects young people in real life: sports clubs, music schools, youth associations and other local activities. These communities teach discipline, teamwork and respect, and they can prevent isolation long before problems escalate.

We need, as we just heard as well, to recognise the decisive role of the family. Parents are not spectators. The family is the first place where values, principles, language and responsibility are transmitted. Schools can support, but they cannot replace what families should provide. And with rights come duties: parents also carry responsibilities, especially in setting boundaries, including in the digital world.

A last point, we need to be careful with mandatory democracy curricula. Yes, democracy must be learned. But it should be learned in the spirit of pluralism: students must understand that it is legitimate to hold different opinions, to debate respectfully and sometimes to agree on not agreeing. That is how you build democratic maturity: we must teach young people how to think, never what to think.

Some may say this caution means we oppose democratic values. The opposite is true. We defend democracy by defending freedom of conscience, parental trust and pluralism, while giving schools the tools to keep children safe and teachers supported.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

In debate, I call first Ms Zita GURMAI. You have the floor.

Ms Zita GURMAI (Hungary, SOC): Thank you very much, President.

Dear colleagues,

How we educate our children will shape the future of our democracies. Education is not only about knowledge, it is where democratic habits are formed. Schools are the first places where young people learn participation, empathy, critical thinking and respect for diversity. In everyday school life, democracy is either practised or quietly undermined.

That is why education lies at the heart of the Council of Europe's mission. That's why I am so pleased my colleague Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO made an excellent report.

As a Hungarian member of this Assembly, I want to speak frankly about both challenges and lessons. In Hungary, many Romani children still face segregation in education. This is not only unjust, it is ineffective. Segregation leads to lower standards and poorer outcomes. Inclusive education is not an ideological preference, but the only sustainable solution, as our Minority Rights Commissioner has clearly stated.

Across Europe, another worrying trend is taking hold: the reinforcement of rigid gender roles in schools. These roles limit participation and weaken democracy long before anyone casts their first vote. Democracy suffers when young people learn that leadership belongs to some, while others are expected to remain silent or supportive.

The messages children absorb matter. Research shows that the gender gap in political ambition begins early. By the age of 12 or 13, girls are already less likely to engage in student leadership, not because they care less, but because they are encouraged less and taken less seriously.

The consequences are visible today. Across the European Union, women still hold only about one third of parliamentary seats. Luckily, here in this house, we reach fifty-fifty. In Hungary, the number of women in parliament and government continues to decline. This democratic deficit does not appear overnight, it grows from the norms children internalise at school.

This is not only about women. When young men are taught that empathy or civic engagement is "unmanly", disengagement follows. Studies show that traditional gender attitudes often go hand in hand with political apathy. A democracy that discourages participation becomes weaker and more fragile.

There is, however, reason for hope. In a Debrecen high school, the second biggest city in Hungary, a participatory budgeting pilot allowed students to propose and vote on improvements to their school. Hundreds took part and chose inclusive, practical tools. They learned a simple lesson: their voice matters.

That is the choice before us. Schools can teach exclusion or they can teach democracy.

Thank you very much Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for your excellent contribution and for making this report.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Pavlo BAKUNETS, you have the floor.

Mr Pavlo BAKUNETS (Ukraine, ECPA): Thank you very much, Mister President.

Dear members of the Assembly, dear rapporteur, thank you for this report.

Education is a fundamental pillar of democracy. Schools are places for academic knowledge, and, what is more important, schools are places where young people can become members of community. Children learn subjects and improve their social skills, and it's very important.

To tell the truth, the situation in my country, Ukraine, which I represent here, is unfortunately the opposite. The fact is that from the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, many Ukrainian children study online, unfortunately. They cannot see each other for months. It's because of Russian missiles and drones which they target at cities, at our towns and our infrastructure, every day, every night.

This winter, because of cold weather and terrorist Russian attacks, many kindergartens, schools, hospitals, are without electricity and, which is worse, without heat. Many children are freezing at home and they go every day to special stations to warm themselves and just to charge their gadgets, to have classes online from these gadgets.

Our government, our people, try to help each other in this difficult situation. And our Ukrainian specialists are renovating the destroyed infrastructure to keep warmth and heating in houses of Ukrainian school children. And we're doing so with the help of your governments, with your help. Thank you very much for your support, for supporting us with money, for supporting us with a special infrastructure for our Ukrainians and for our children.

And, you know, our and your enemy is Russia. And I say to every one of you, Europe should help with the international tribunal on the crime of Russian aggression. And please also support the compensation mechanism for Ukraine.

And I, more and more, thank everyone and your people and your governments for supporting Ukraine.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA, you have the floor.

Ms Yuliia OVCHYNNYKOVA (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you very much, Mister President.

First of all, thank you very much, Madam rapporteur, for your excellent work.

Dear colleagues,

Today's report reminds us that schools are not only places of academic learning, they are pillars of democratic life, where young people learn co-operation, empathy, critical thinking and respect for diversity.

When we say that schools must be places where democracies live, I think of more than 1 600 damaged or destroyed schools in Ukraine. Classrooms, some reduced to rubble, others moved to basements or across borders. All of them struggling to keep a circle of trust around children who have lost the ordinary rhythm of childhood because of the terroristic aggressive State of Russia.

I think of children waking up in freezing apartments, without electricity, unable to connect to online lessons, unable to study after sunset, sometimes unable even to sleep without fear as sirens pierce the dark.

This is not abstract. This is our reality in Ukraine. So the Russian war not only destroyed buildings, it has torn at the threads that hold a young person's world together. Safety, friendships, routine, a sense of tomorrow. In this darkness, schools became more than educational institutions. They became the symbols of stability, humanity and democratic hope.

Every warm classroom, every restored lesson, every moment of our normality is a quiet act of resistance against despair. The social heart of education, emotional support, inclusion, participation, dignity, it's not a luxury. It is how we protect the democratic spirit in a child's life and help them believe that community, truth and justice are stronger than violence.

So, as members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, we must make sure that strengthening the democratic mission of education is not treated simply as a goal of education, but as an investment in Europe's peace, security and democratic future. If every school of Europe becomes a place where children learn to live together in respect and truth, then democracy has already won its most important battle.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Baroness Ruth HUNT, you have the floor.

Baroness Ruth HUNT (United Kingdom, SOC): Many thanks.

I'd like to begin by thanking the rapporteur for an extraordinary piece of work that has had a huge amount of thought and effort and consideration put into it.

Education has never been neutral. For as long as there have been schools, faith leaders in the UK, monks and nuns and parents, politicians have argued about what should be taught, what should be left out, and whose values should prevail.

This is not new.

In the UK, I grew up under a law that tried to erase LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people, people like me, and our experiences.

These words were not allowed to be mentioned in the classrooms, in our books, in our materials or in our libraries.

My parents, to be frank, didn't know what to do with me. But it didn't protect anyone and it didn't protect me.

It created fear, confusion and harm.

Suppressing information does not make societies or individuals stronger; it makes them brittle.

What is new now, however, is that we no longer control the flow of information. There is no realistic way to protect young people from ideas, identities or arguments we wish they did not encounter. We cannot decide who influences them. Pretending otherwise only leaves them alone with it.

So we have a choice. We can try to suppress knowledge by banning social media or flooding it with fake news or we can help young people learn how to engage with it critically. We can hope disagreement disappears or we can teach them how to manage conflict, repair relationships and, crucially, live with difference.

But this does not happen by accident. If we want schools to do this well, we have to give them the time, the space and the resources. Teachers cannot carry these tensions alone, on top of overcrowded classrooms and impossible workloads. Supporting democratic education means investing in the people who make it real.

Young people will always form their own views. Rebellion is an essential prerequisite to being a teenager. They will want to do things differently.

This is not a failure of education, it is a strength of democracy.

Our task is not to control what they think, but to help them learn how to think, how to disagree and how to still belong.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Rónán MULLEN, you have the floor.

Mr Rónán MULLEN (Ireland, EPP/CD): Thank you very much, Chairperson.

Some constructive criticism: a resolution on education which mentioned schools 150 times, democracy 20 times and the word inclusive 34 times, but fails to mention parents, is inadequate, and no mention of the partnership with families so essential for socialisation in schools.

A resolution that mentions up to 30 threats to young people mostly related to internet access and fails to mention pornography has its head in the sand. The total ignoring of the foremost challenge facing our young people is hard to fathom.

A resolution that places weight on emotional education as providing much of the solution for the travails of young people, but has little regard for academics and using such disparaging throwaway remarks such as 'must go beyond academic instruction', 'not merely spaces for academic instruction', et cetera, has got its priorities wrong, because academic instruction is what schools are about.

Parents send children to school to raise their academic level so that they can be able participants in society. We live in a plural society. We should encourage schools to work on improving the quality of academic instruction in whatever way they see fit, according to their lights, free from top-down, one-size-fits-all ideology, and then we will have fewer problems in society as children grow up.

The vast majority of children just want to learn. Let them, by giving them real academic meat to chew on. Why don't we ask schools to do what teachers have been trained for instead of having the pie-in-the-sky idea that schools are the key to mental health problems in society? They are not.

Support families properly and most of the problems will disappear. Empower parents within the school system rather than ignore them or treat them as an obstacle to the spreading of whatever ideology is current, as this resolution, it seems to me, does.

If we want to grow respect for democracy, why don't we present the challenge directly to parents instead of seeking to indoctrinate the school system with sometimes dubious rights? There's a lot of talk about diversity and encouraging open conversations and different points of view, and all of that is very good. But in one of the most challenging areas today, certainly in my country, in education, we see a gender ideology that seeks to suppress dissent, that would oppress parents, for example, who want to come to the aid of their children with appropriate professional support where they suffer from gender dysphoria.

Tomorrow we will discuss a report that is aiming to suppress parents and professionals from being able to help children. So we need to ask, what are we really about? Do we see children as the tools or the playthings of the state, to be manipulated and formed according to the state? Or do we recognise that parents are the first educators and no document which talks about socialising of children at school but fails to mention the central role of parents or of families has done its work properly, in my respectful opinion.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Victoria TIBLOM, you now have the floor.

Ms Victoria TIBLOM (Sweden, ECPA): Mister President,

Schools play a decisive role in shaping future citizens. They are places where knowledge is transmitted, but also where respect, responsibility and democratic habits are learned. This report correctly recognises that socialisation in school matters. Participation, dialogue and mutual respect help young people understand how democratic societies function.

At the same time, we must be cautious. Schools must not become spaces for political or ideological activism. Education should unite pupils around shared civic values, not divide them through contested social agendas. Let me be very clear on one red line: schools must never be used to impose ideological views on children, including theories about identity or social norms, that rightly belong in political debates, not in compulsory education.

Such matters must remain the responsibility of parents and democratic institutions. Inclusion means equal dignity and equal rules for all, not special treatment and not lowering academic or behavioural standards. Teachers must be empowered to maintain order and authority in the classroom, and parents must remain central partners in their children's education.

Education systems reflect national traditions and democratic choices. For that reason, education policy must remain primarily a national responsibility. European co-operation can support, but should never replace, national decision-making. If socialisation in schools strengthens cohesion, responsibility and respect for democracy, then it serves as a valuable purpose. That is the balance we must uphold.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Gökçe GÖKÇEN, you now have the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

I would like to congratulate the rapporteur, dear Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO. Like her previous report on history education, this is a significant piece of work that develops new proposals to support the role of education in creating a democratic society. I hope that it is not only adopted here, but also taken into account when developing new policies and that it paves the way for new projects in member states.

Dear colleagues,

Since we have an agenda regarding education, I would like to take this opportunity to tell you an interesting story about an educational journey.

35 years ago, a 19-year-old youth was a student in Northern Cyprus. İstanbul University placed an advertisement in the newspapers stating that applications for undergraduate transfers had begun. The required documents were listed in the advertisement. The young student gathered all the documents and applied. His application was accepted. He began his studies at İstanbul University. He graduated. Following that, he completed his master's degree, too. For 35 years, there was never an issue regarding this diploma. Then, 35 years later, this student, Mr Ekrem İMAMOĞLU, became a presidential candidate through the primary election votes of 15.5 million Turkish citizens.

It was at that exact moment that his diploma was annulled.

Why?

Because according to the Turkish constitution, a university diploma is required to become a presidential candidate.

And it wasn't just Mr Ekrem İMAMOĞLU. There was another student in the same class. She pursued her academic career later at the University of Sorbonne in France and then at the University of Galatasaray in İstanbul. Simply because of this coincidence, her diploma was also cancelled 35 years later.

A lawsuit was filed in the Administrative Court to annul this action. However, the panel of judges assigned to this case was changed by a decision of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) right before the trial. The newly appointed judges ruled that the cancellation of the diploma was not unlawful.

Dear colleagues,

What happens in education is never independent of politics; whether students are given the opportunity to encounter different ideas; whether a student is hungry; whether a teacher has job security; whether bullying is tolerated in schools; whether educational institutions uphold acquired rights and the rule of law; these are all political choices.

The future of Europe depends on how these political choices are made.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Alice MINA, you have the floor.

Ms Alice MINA (San Marino, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President.

This report reminds us of a truth: democracy is not inherited, it is built every day, also and above all with the new generations.

Today we are discussing how our young people learn to live together, how they develop trust in institutions, respect for others, a sense of belonging, a journey that begins in the family environment.

Schools are unique spaces, places of learning, places where differences, cultures, histories meet. Schools are spaces of active citizenship, where co-existence, respect, dialogue are experienced. But, as the text reminds us, they are also increasingly exposed to deep tensions, discrimination, isolation, anxiety, bullying and cyberbullying.

The document speaks clearly of an education that is inclusive, that values participation, that promotes awareness and active citizenship, that teaches how to manage conflicts in a non-violent manner, even in the digital space.

An inclusive and participatory education is the foundation of a living democracy, capable of forming citizens who are aware, supportive and ready to contribute for the common good.

For San Marino, the country I represent and one of the oldest Republics in the world, school has always been a space of community and participation. It is there that the idea that freedom is responsibility is transmitted and that democratic co-existence must be cultivated every day.

In the historical moment we are living in, marked by wars, polarisation and disinformation, this responsibility is even greater.

If we allow hatred, fear and violence to become normalised among young people, we cannot be surprised if they find their way into our institutions tomorrow.

We have a duty to invest in schools as democratic infrastructure, to support teachers, to give students a voice, to build environments where every young person can feel seen, heard, respected.

Only in this way can we form generations capable of inhabiting the present and building a fairer, more inclusive, more human future.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, you now have the floor.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA)*: Mister President,

I think that the speech made by Baroness Ruth HUNT from the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group has illustrated perfectly the reason why it is a mistake to ignore the role of families in educating children. Baroness Ruth HUNT says that education has never been neutral, and is never neutral. I would like to know, in that case, how an education could be neutral if its content were only to depend on the State? As far as I know, the State is not a rational being, it is a social reality which has a government, in other words it is the government that has power at any given moment.

And, therefore, when it comes to pluralism in the schools, then it cannot exclude parents from the school, but that is often what we tend to see. That the parents are not taken on board. How can this exclusion of parents be considered pluralistic? It's precisely the opposite of inclusive, it's exclusive. So I think we need to wonder, if we look at the principles, why education has to be a matter for the State, and not a matter for parents, or at least allow parents to decide what education they want for their children.

If somebody can explain to me what the basis might be whereby the State would have more power than parents in educating children then I will listen, but nobody has explained this to me. But if they were to explain it, they would have to put forward a picture of a totalitarian State, where it would have more of a right to educate and shape their personalities. And, in particular, to shape their personality while they're still children.

Nobody has put forward the terms of such a debate, because this brings us close to past ideologies that we have happily moved on from. We absolutely have to recognise the role of families in educating children, especially when we're talking about socialisation in schools.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Murat Cahid CINGI, you have the floor.

Mr Murat Cahid CINGI (Türkiye, NR): Thank you Chair,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking the rapporteur for her thorough and forward-looking work. By placing socialisation at the heart of education, it reminds us that schools are not only spaces for academic achievement, but fundamental pillars of democracy, inclusion and social cohesion.

When we speak about socialising at schools, we must recognise that the classroom is often the first democratic space a child encounters. For children with disabilities, special educational needs, migrant backgrounds, or from economically disadvantaged families, school may be the only place where they can participate on an equal footing, build friendships and experience a sense of belonging. Yet, as the report clearly underlines, these same children remain disproportionately exposed to bullying, discrimination and exclusion if schools are not equipped to protect them.

This is why the Assembly's call for concrete measures is so crucial. Zero tolerance for bullying must be translated into effective prevention strategies, peer-support systems, restorative approaches to conflict and strong legislation where appropriate.

Implementing these measures in a meaningful and sustainable way inevitably places a heavy responsibility on teachers, whose well-being and professional support are rightly highlighted in the report. Without adequate training, resources and recognition, educators cannot be expected to sustain inclusive, participatory and empathetic learning environments.

Moreover, democratic values cannot be taught solely through curricula; they must be lived daily within a whole-school democratic culture. Participation, mutual respect, empathy and solidarity should be embedded in every relationship within the school community, engaging students, educators, parents and civil society.

Ultimately, ensuring that every child can socialise at school without fear is not merely an educational objective. It is a matter of justice, equality and democratic responsibility.

By fully implementing the principles set out in this report, we reaffirm our collective commitment to a more inclusive, resilient and democratic Europe.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Meritxell ALCOBÉ, you now have the floor.

Ms Meritxell ALCOBÉ (Andorra, ALDE): Thank you, Mister Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

School is the first place where children experience life in society. It is there that they learn to live together, to respect others, to listen to different opinions and to recognise the dignity of each person. Before becoming voting citizens, they are pupils discovering what it means to belong to a pluralist society. In this sense, school is much more than a place where knowledge is passed on. It is the first place to learn about democracy.

Socialisation at school helps us to understand that diversity is not a weakness, but an asset. When pupils share the classroom with classmates from different cultural, linguistic or social backgrounds, or with different abilities, they learn that equality does not mean uniformity, but fairness. They learn that rights are the same for everyone, even if the realities are different.

In Andorra, socialisation is a central element in the development of children and young people. It is encouraged through school life, group work, co-operative projects and the active participation of pupils. These practices encourage dialogue, listening, shared responsibility and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Our country is also an example of cultural and linguistic diversity. Three high-quality public education systems – Andorran, French and Spanish – co-exist and reflect the multicultural richness of our society. This plurality is a strength and an asset for the education of our young people.

During Andorra's presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2012, our main priority focused on education.

We successfully promoted the adoption of a reference framework of competences for democratic citizenship and human rights.

In keeping with this priority, the Andorran government supports the adoption of a European Area of Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, which should be adopted at the Council of Europe's Conference of Ministers of Education to be held in Montenegro on 3 and 4 December 2026.

Inclusive education is education that leaves no one behind. It does not stigmatise, it does not segregate, but it creates opportunities and enables every pupil to develop their full potential.

I would like to pay tribute to the rigorous and in-depth work carried out by Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO. Her analysis highlights an essential reality: investing in socialisation at school means investing in free, critical and committed citizens.

It means ensuring that democracy is not just an institutional structure, but a living culture.

For all these reasons, defending inclusive and participatory education means defending the fundamental values of the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It means working for a fairer, more united and more humane Europe.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Homero DAVIS CASTRO, you now have the floor.

Mr Homero DAVIS CASTRO (Mexico)*: President,

It's an honour to address you on behalf of the Central Republic of Mexico and from the deep conviction that education is one of the fundamental pillars of democracy.

From the experience in my country, we have found that schools are not merely spaces for academic learning, but they are the first arena for democratic socialisation.

It's in the classrooms that children, young people, learn to co-exist, to engage in dialogue, to respect diversity and to recognise others as equals in dignity and rights.

We're a pluralistic nation with deep cultural roots and great social diversity. However, we also bear historical inequalities. For this reason, from the movement for democratic transformation promoted by our government, we have found that there can be no social justice without inclusive education. Nor strong democracy without participation from early childhood. School socialisation is a key tool for building educational communities based on solidarity, respect and co-operation.

Education for democracy means recognising students as active subjects, capable of influencing their environment and exercising their rights with social awareness. It also means combatting all forms of exclusion, discrimination or violence.

So, we fully share the principles promoted by the Council of Europe in education, democratic citizenship and human rights.

These universal values call on us to strengthen international co-operation, exchange best practices and reaffirm that education is a public good, at the service of collective well-being.

I'll conclude by pointing out that the Mexican government recognises education as a human right and a responsibility of the state, aimed at reducing inequalities, promoting substantive equality and strengthening social cohesion.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Aurora FLORIDIA, you now have the floor.

Ms Aurora FLORIDIA (Italy, SOC): Thank you.

Thank you Mister President, dear colleagues. I will speak in Italian.

I would like to thank my colleague Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO for her invaluable report on schools, a pillar of our democracies, whose role is central not only in the transmission of content and knowledge, but also in the formation of responsible, inclusive citizens who are attentive to democratic values.

The report highlights the critical aspects of our education systems, which hinder social cohesion and limit democratic learning.

Discrimination and bullying persist. Growing inequalities fuel isolation and disengagement, generating a significant gap between the democratic values taught and the daily experience of students.

But that is not all. Continued cuts in resources to schools feed and accentuate this criticism.

The impact of these cuts is evident and worrying and, in my opinion, morally serious, because the consequences have been known for some time.

In Italy, in my country, for example, the continuous structural cuts to schools, the constant precariousness and insufficient salaries for teaching staff are putting schools in serious difficulty in facing the educational challenges to which they are called.

It is clear that there can be no modern and resilient democracy without a serious and lasting investment in schools and in the training of all the people working there.

In this sense, the proposals contained in the report are particularly relevant. I am thinking in particular of the promotion of participative and co-operative teaching methods, of socio-emotional education as a tool for preventing hardship and strengthening social cohesion, and of the consolidation of the active participation of students through student councils and community projects.

I would like to end on a personal note, because in my experience as a teacher trainer, I have been able to observe at first hand the power that is unleashed when one truly invests in training, in socialisation, in the quality of relationships, that is unleashed when in an encounter, looking into each other's eyes, one grows, one grows reciprocally.

And so this is never time wasted, it is never time stolen from the curriculum but, on the contrary, contributes decisively to creating more effective learning environments.

Building healthy relationships is therefore not a detail. It is a prerequisite both for imparting sound skills and knowledge and for strengthening the democratic principles of our society.

Thank you, Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, for bringing back the topic of schools to the debate in our Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA-FEDORENKO, you now have the floor.

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

I would like to thank the rapporteur.

I would like to start with citing the report:

"In a global context, marked by ongoing wars and other major crises, it may seem that enhancing the socialising role of schools is not an immediate priority. Yet we must recognise that today's schools shape tomorrow's society".

Indeed, colleagues, today's schools are shaping tomorrow's leaders.

I would also like to take your attention outside of the Hemicycle. It is not a coincidence that this week we presented together with the office of the First Lady of Ukraine, Ms Olena Zelenska, the newly-elected President Petra BAYR, the exhibition called "One Desk. Two Marks". And you see a desk, one very nice, usual desk, another one ruined and burned by shellings, rockets and everything that our children in Ukraine are experiencing on a daily basis.

Ms. President and other colleagues who have travelled to my home city, Kharkiv, saw that the metro – the underground – is currently used as a place to teach, that underground schools are being financed and built massively, where children can really continue to learn what democracy is, what values are, how to promote better practices and become better citizens of their homeland.

Colleagues,

I want to say thank you for underlining the promotion of an approach to stop bullying, to stop these terrible practices and continue with this fight in our society.

Social exclusion is also not acceptable. We have different types of children, and social inclusion matters.

In my constituency, I have a school of children with hearing difficulties, and they still do their best. They get into universities, not only in Ukraine, but in your home countries in Europe.

On my behalf, I also want to thank you, dear colleagues, from every member state of the Council of Europe that hosts our children as temporarily displaced ones. We do hope that they will come back.

Just imagine, that the brutal Russian war of aggression were to last for more than 12 years. Those who graduated from school 12 years ago are now fighting on the ground against the Russian aggression, using drones and other means.

They shouldn't be doing that. They should be creating families, celebrating lives and getting new professions in academia.

But not this.

The report says we can't do much about fighting back against the wars. Yes, we can. With the help of education, with the help of strong support, military, societal and others. But democracy has to flourish as much as education as well.

Thank you so much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Iryna KONSTANKEVYCH, you now have the floor.

Ms Iryna KONSTANKEVYCH (Ukraine, ECPA): Thank you, Mister President.

Thank you to the rapporteur and to everyone who worked on this report.

It addresses a very important and timely issue. Education today needs transformation. More democracy in schools, stronger citizenship education, more inclusion, more participation. As the report rightly says, schools reflect our societies, but they also shape our future societies.

As a politician and as someone who has worked in schools and universities, I strongly believe in one thing. If we speak about democracy, it must be present at all levels of education. Not as a slogan, not as a separate subject, but as a daily practice.

First, we must teach children not only how to live with democratic values, but also how to defend them. Recent years have shown this very clearly. Democracy without resilience is fragile. Very few democracies could resist terror and aggression by Vladimir PUTIN the way Ukraine has been doing for years now.

Second, education works only when teachers are strong, when teachers are leaders, motivators, moral authorities. For this, teachers must have a respected place in society, and decent social and financial conditions. Low salaries undermine education, and they undermine democracy itself. Respect for teachers is a matter of democratic security.

And finally, this report gives us a reason to speak about Ukrainian children abroad. Today, around half a million Ukrainian children study in other countries. Many of them attend two schools at the same time: a local school and a Ukrainian school. This is very difficult for them. There are language barriers, education challenges, psychological stress. I call on member states to pay special attention to this issue. It is also about democracy in education. There are good examples already. Ukrainian schools and classes in Estonia, in Poland, in Austria.

We are grateful for the care shown to every child and we encourage all countries hosting Ukrainian children to introduce similar practices.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO, you now have the floor.

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE): Thank you, Mister President,

School is not just a place of instruction, it is a fundamental space for socialisation. It is where every pupil learns to live together, to adopt rules, to cooperate, to manage conflict and to develop essential social skills.

Inclusive education completes this mission. It ensures that all children, whatever their differences, find their place in a respectful and equitable environment. And participatory education goes further. Pupils become active players in their learning and school life, expressing their opinions, taking part in decision-making and helping to build their school.

All this brings us back to democratic values: the sovereignty of the people, freedom, equality, the rule of law, the separation of powers, political pluralism, citizen participation and respect for human rights. These values are not only lived in political institutions, they are also learned at school.

The Reykjavík Summit and the Council of Europe's 2024-2030 strategy emphasise the importance of education in transmitting these values, promoting social responsibility and supporting digital transformation while respecting human rights.

To make this a reality, we also need to combat violence, harassment and discrimination in schools.

This fight must be framed by law, with the creation of points of contact in each school, a helpline available 24/7, prevention plans, training for staff, art projects and, why not, a ban on phones in lower and upper secondary schools to limit cyberbullying.

Guaranteeing a safe environment means enabling every child to participate, express themselves and achieve their full potential. It means learning to live in diversity, resolve conflicts peacefully, stand up for others and act responsibly. A school free of violence thus becomes a space for inclusion and participation, preparing pupils to become responsible and active citizens, capable of defending and living democratic values.

The Principality of Monaco has invested in education, teacher training and inclusive structures as a lever for shaping these citizens. The Member States of the Council of Europe must commit themselves fully to making education a pillar of democracy, investing in schools, training teachers and integrating civic and digital skills from the earliest age.

This is how Europe will be able to prepare citizens capable of protecting and promoting its fundamental values.

Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): [Applause]

Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar BALDURSDÓTTIR.

Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar BALDURSDÓTTIR (Iceland, SOC): Mister President,

I'm sorry. We are debating socialising at schools, inclusive and participatory education, and the strengthening of democratic values. Everything that concerns young people matters, because the future of our democracies depends on whether young people are recognised as equals in shaping our societies.

The report before us rightly reminds us that schools are not only places of academic learning. They are spaces where democracy must be lived. This starts with participation, but it cannot end there.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms children's right to participate in cultural and social life. Yet participation alone is not enough. Young people also have the right, and the capacity, to take on responsibility, in ways that are appropriate to their age, maturity and interests.

Responsibility builds self-confidence. It creates the feeling that one can have a positive impact, on oneself, on others and on the community. Research consistently shows that when young people are entrusted with meaningful responsibility, they engage more deeply and make a greater effort. When they succeed, they experience pride, which strengthens their motivation to contribute further.

Environmental action is one clear example. Across Europe, young people are deeply engaged in issues related to sustainability, the use of resources and the protection of nature. Schools must be places where they can discuss ethical questions, take a critical stance and transform concern into responsible action. The environment is only one of many areas where young people want to contribute, but it shows what becomes possible when initiative is encouraged.

Young people do not want to be spectators. They do not want to be consulted only after decisions are made. They want to be responsible actors and initiators.

That is why this report is so important. It rightly calls for youth participation to evolve from consultation to shared responsibility, ensuring that young people have both the right and the means to influence decisions that affect their lives.

If we want resilient democracies, we must trust young people, and allow them to practise democracy every day, starting at school.

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD (Switzerland, SOC): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

Mr Adam BALTEN (Germany, ECPA): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in German*

Ms Marijana PULJAK (Croatia, ALDE): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Mister President, dear colleagues,

This report reminds us of something fundamental: democracy is not learned from textbooks alone, it is learned by living it.

Schools are among the very few spaces where children from different backgrounds meet every day. They are not only places of instruction, but places of socialisation, belonging and trust. If young people do not experience democracy, inclusion and participation at school, we cannot expect them to trust democratic institutions later in life.

The report rightly warns us about growing challenges: bullying, discrimination, segregation, and a serious mental health crisis among children and adolescents intensified by social media, disinformation and online pressure. At the same time, teachers across Europe are exhausted, under-supported and too often excluded from decision-making.

There is a dangerous gap between the democratic values we proclaim in curricula and the reality students experience in schools. And we all know: the most powerful learning happens through everyday practice, not declarations.

That is why this report is so important. It calls on us to move from teaching democracy to living democracy in schools: through student participation, inclusive and cooperative learning, socio-emotional education, conflict mediation, and responsible digital citizenship including AI literacy.

I strongly support the emphasis on a whole-school approach and on investing in teachers. Democratic resilience will not be built by slogans, but by safe, inclusive and participatory school environments where young people feel seen, heard and respected.

In a time of democratic backsliding across Europe, schools may be our most strategic investment in the future of democracy.

This report deserves our full support and, more importantly, concrete action by member States.

Ms Susanna VELA (Andorra, SOC): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in French*

Ms Tuula HAATAINEN (Finland, SOC): *(Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2)*

Dear President,

Dear colleagues,

We are witnessing rapid and worrying phenomena that threaten democracy. In the morning, we discussed here how we could strengthen democracies with young people. That is why learning and practicing democracy should be a core political priority in the education system. I want to thank for this excellent report on this important issue.

I want to emphasize the values behind our education systems: equal access to education, support to children with different needs and inclusiveness. School has to be the place where children and young people feel safe and respected.

Schools are the places where young people should gain trust in democracy and engage in democratic citizenship. Schools and the education environment are utmost important in order to learn to live and work together with classmates from different backgrounds. Teachers have here crucial role in giving an environment where young people can actively learn how democracy functions. Young people have to be part of the decision-making in schools and on local level.

Member states should ensure that schools and teachers are able to educate children in a holistic way. We have a long tradition of participation and participatory governance in schools in Helsinki. Schools have active student councils and young people are also allowed to participate in the city council meetings, when the council discusses matters that concern young people.

Finally, I welcome the recommendation to "Introduce socio-emotional education to promote students' well-being, prevent mental health problems, increase social cohesion and provide support for students' personal and societal development".

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I must now interrupt the list of speakers.

The speeches of members on the Speakers list who have been present during the debate, but have not been able to speak, may be given to the Table Office for publication in the Official Report.

Speeches must not exceed 400 words. I remind colleagues that the type-written text can be submitted electronically, if possible no later than 4 hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

I call Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, rapporteur, to reply.

You have 3 minutes.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Thank you Mister President, and thank you very much to all our colleagues for their statements and for their support.

It seems we very much agree on the diagnosis we are making of education for the 21st century. The resolution of the draft recommendation we are examining today, is based on an unquestionable premise. Education is not only a tool for the transmission of knowledge, but one of the essential pillars of our democracies. Educational institutions are privileged spaces of socialisation where not only academic skills are taught, but also civic attitudes, democratic values, and fundamental abilities such as critical thinking, empathy and respect for diversity.

We must not confuse the purpose of this report. We cannot ignore the profound challenges currently facing our education systems. Growing social and cultural diversity, while enriching, requires policies and practices capable of fostering cohesion and mutual understanding, regardless of the family environment that people come from.

There are worrying phenomena persisting such as discrimination, racism, school bullying and exclusion, which are often exacerbated by the inappropriate use of social media which amplifies disinformation, stereotypes and the social isolation of young people. And then there's also poverty which is a phenomenon which affects many families.

And we need to add to this an alarming reality: the deterioration of teachers' working conditions in many member states. Excessive workloads, lack of resources, limited participation in educational governance as well as insufficient professional recognition not only affect teachers' well-being but also directly undermine the quality and fairness of education. We cannot have democratic schools without trained, valued teachers who are supported.

We would also like to highlight the gap between the democratic values proclaimed in school curricula and the real experience that students have of schools, which is still marked by authoritarian or hierarchical practices in many cases.

In a context of declining global democracy, this resolution represents a clear political call to action. Investing in education will give schools flexibility, promote student-centred teaching methods, integrate social and emotional learning, strengthen digital literacy, and ensure democratic citizenship adapted to all ages. These are not just notions, but unavoidable responsibilities.

International cooperation, particularly with the European Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, is also key to ensuring a common and effective approach, as well, of course, to support the normalisation of education in Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen, to defend the democratic role of education is to defend the future of Europe. Let's make our schools places where democracy is not only taught, but practiced every day.

I'd like to conclude by thanking the Secretariat and, in particular, Ms Dana KARANJAC, for working closely with me throughout the drafting of this report. Thank you very much.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Does the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Mogens JENSEN, wish to speak?

You have 3 minutes.

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

At a time when democracy is under serious threat across the globe, we face a clear responsibility here in Europe. If we want democracy to endure, it must be learned, practised and lived. That is why the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media firmly believes that learning and practising democracy must be a core political and educational priority today.

Education is not only about academic achievement. Schools are also democratic spaces. They are places where children and young people learn how to participate in a community, how to co-operate with others, how to think critically and how to develop empathy. They are environments where democratic values are not simply taught, but experienced. Respect for human rights, appreciation of diversity and active citizenship are shaped there every day.

The Council of Europe Ministers of Education have set new priorities and actions to implement the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy by endorsing the Council of Europe's Education Strategy. This strategy is built on three essential pillars: renewing the democratic and civic mission of education, enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education, and advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation.

The report by our colleague Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO fully supports this process and provides concrete recommendations to help member states undertake a strategic policy review. In particular, the report calls for a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to education. This means ensuring that all learners benefit from inclusive education, including migrant children and children with special educational needs. It means valuing each student's talents, abilities and interests, and refusing to define young people by perceived limitations. It also urges us to strengthen the democratic mission of our education systems by aligning them fully with the European space for citizenship education and by facilitating the widespread implementation of the reference framework of competences and democratic culture.

Furthermore, it recommends providing age-appropriate education for democratic citizenship as a distinct compulsory subject, while also integrating competences for democratic culture across other subjects at all stages of formal education.

On behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, I invite you to support the proposals outlined in the draft resolution and the draft recommendation. Support them with your vote today and carry this commitment forward in your national parliaments tomorrow.

Thank you, and we hope for your support.

Vote: Socialising at schools: for an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Dear colleagues, the debate is closed.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a Draft Resolution, Document 16314, to which 6 amendments have been tabled.

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

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

I understand that the Chairperson of the Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 1, 2, 5, 6, 3 and 4 to the Draft Resolution, Document 16314, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as definitely rejected.

Is that so, Mr Mogens JENSEN?

Mr Mogens JENSEN (Denmark, SOC, Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): Yes.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): If no one objects, I will consider the amendments to be rejected.

Are there any objections?

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA): I would like to object the rejected amendments.

And to do so, may I ask 10 of my colleagues to stand up with me?

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The request of the Committee is rejected, so each of the amendments will be taken individually.

I call Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA to support Amendment 1. You have 30 seconds.

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

All of the amendments presented, which were rejected by the Committee, have just one purpose, which is for the Draft Resolution to be recognised, if it were to be approved, that families – the parents of children – have a role and duty to fulfil in schools, as well as in matters of socialisation.

We believe that excluding families, that is, the parents of children, is exclusive and therefore against what has been signed and would not contribute towards pluralism.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

Rapporteur, please.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Yes, thank you.

We are against this amendment and all the amendments that have been submitted by Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA and by others inter alia, because there was this allusion to parents – one of the fundamental agents in the education system – which is already included in point 6.2.6, so I don't understand the need to repeat this, because there are many agents involved in these issues in the educational system, not just families.

In the process of socialisation, you cannot just develop that in a family, but it also needs to be developed in a school context with other children, otherwise it wouldn't be socialisation.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority. I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

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

Amendment 1 is rejected.

I call Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA to support Amendment 2. You have 30 seconds.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA)*: Mister Chairman,

I'd like to repeat that the purpose of this amendment is the same; to enable parents to participate in the life of schools and in education in general.

If we don't think that exclusion will undermine pluralism, well, I think that excluding parents will not enable a contribution to the defence of democracy.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Rapporteur?

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Well, I think that what Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA has said has very little to do with the draft of the amendment.

The purpose of the amendment is to see to it that teachers need support.

In all educational systems, the responsibility of teachers is to support children first and foremost, and not parents.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

Amendment 2 is rejected.

I call Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA to support Amendment 5.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA): Mister Chairman.

Our colleague couldn't vote on the previous amendment.

Also, Mr Fabio PIETRELLA couldn't vote on the previous amendment.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Okay. We are checking.

I call Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA to support Amendment 5.

You have 30 seconds.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA)*: It has been said that families should also be educated in these democratic values.

That is not what is written in the amendment.

Here, it says that it has the affect of the family and the teachers would have this task, mutually, of conveying them.

Well, the amendment is the same as I have already said on two previous occasions.

We cannot conceive that it is possible to have education when we are talking about socialisation, while excluding the family.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Rapporteur.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: The text literally says "Parents need to be educated and considered in the first place".

It's including a new obligation for teachers that they train parents.

I repeat, the aim of this report is to train young people and students in this, not families.

And of course we don't want to add additional burdens because there are other things which work in many other education systems.

These things have to be promoted by others.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 5 is rejected.

As Amendment 5 was rejected, Amendment 6 will not be voted on because the text is identical.

I call Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA to support Amendment – is it 3? Three? Yes.

Amendment 3, you have 30 seconds.

Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA (Spain, ECPA)*: Yes, I do not want to create any controversy, but I have the French draft in front of me, which says "It is therefore necessary for teaching staff and parents to support each other" [in French] and it also says "the family becomes the predominant social asset and is therefore a key partner in the school system" [in French].

That is exactly what we want.

It is not a matter of educating parents; if you want to interpret this in this way, of course, you are free to do so.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: Well, I'm reading what it says in the text.

They're your amendments, not mine.

The implications would be that it would be up to the families and the parents of children to detect any mental health or other emotional issues.

But I think many families don't have that ability. It would be a big mistake, I think, to give them that responsibility.

They should not be the ones who have the responsibility to detect mental health issues.

I think it's up to the health system, but certainly not up to the parents and the families.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 3 is rejected.

I call Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA to support Amendment 4.

You have 30 seconds.

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

Once again, the amendment tries to draw attention to the active involvement of families and the governorship of the schools.

It concentrates on families and their involvement in the educational activity without being excluded.

I am not going to repeat what I said before, but I have to say that we believe that families are able to see any type of problems in their children.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Rapporteur)*: President,

Once again I have to insist, families are mentioned in point 6.2.6.

Yes of course, others are involved in the smooth running of the education system as well as schools, the educational community and others.

There are many other people involved and the children involved in a range of activities to promote learning and democratic co-existence, so I don't think we should restrict this support.

We want them to be involved in a range of things, not just limited to the family.

Mr Sigurður Helgi PÁLMASSON (Iceland, SOC, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment with a two-thirds majority.

I shall now put the amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed:

Amendment 4 is rejected.

We will now proceed to vote on the Draft Resolution contained in Document 16314 as amended.

A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The Draft Resolution in Document 16314 is adopted.

[Applause]

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a Draft Recommendation, Document 16314, to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft recommendation. A two-thirds majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed:

[Applause]

The Draft Recommendation in Document 16314 is adopted.

The Assembly will hold its next public sitting tomorrow morning at 10.10 a.m., with the Agenda approved on Monday.

The sitting is adjourned.

The sitting is closed at 8:10 p.m.