

Provisional edition

Thursday 29 January 2026, afternoon

Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting No 8

Debate: For a ban on conversion practices

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues, I apologise for the delay.

The sitting is now open.

I remind Members that, in order to be registered for the sitting, you should insert your badge when you take your seat, and keep it inserted for at least 30 seconds.

You should also insert your badge in order to speak or vote. To request the floor, please press the “request” button, just once.

I also remind the Assembly that Members who have not submitted an annual declaration of interests are required to start any intervention with an oral declaration of interests under paragraph 20 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

The next item is the presentation and discussion of the report by Ms Kate OSBORNE, entitled, and I quote: “For a ban on conversion practices”, on behalf of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

We will then hear from Ms Helena DALLI, former European Commissioner for Equality and former Minister for European Affairs and Equality of Malta.

We should have finished examining this text, including the vote, at around 6:25 p.m.

We will therefore have to interrupt the list of speakers at around 5:55 p.m. so that we can hear the Commission's reply and proceed to the vote.

Rapporteur, you have 7 minutes to present your report and 3 minutes to reply to the speakers at the end of the general debate.

Rapporteur Kate OSBORNE, you have the floor.

Ms Kate OSBORNE (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mr Chair,

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.

Can I start by paying tribute to Dr Helena DALLI, who will address us shortly and thank her again for the time and expertise she shared with us over the last few years and for leading the way with Malta banning conversion practices 10 years ago, as well as for addressing the side meeting earlier today.

Dear colleagues, I want to thank all my fellow members of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for unanimously adopting the draft resolution we are debating today and to the secretariat, especially Mr Giorgio LODDO.

These conversion practices that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, often young people, still face are alarming. They range from pseudo-medical treatments, to threats, verbal abuse, social isolation, physical and sexual violence, including rape, and psychological violence, often in the form of coercive control, threats of deportation, or forced marriage.

I want to begin with something that can sometimes get lost in discussion and debate.

This is not theoretical.

This is not about abstract principles.

This is about people. Real people.

People who have been pressured, coerced, shamed, isolated, threatened and abused.

People who have been harmed.

People who I met, who have shared with me the damage that conversion practices have done to them, to their physical health, to their mental health, to their ability to have relationships and to live without fear or shame of who they are. That is at the heart of the most fundamental and basic rights to live and thrive.

This is also about whether Europe's leading human rights institution, the Council of Europe will address that harm with the seriousness and action it deserves.

It was harrowing to hear testimonies that right now people still suffer from these practices, up to and including electric shock therapy. We need to call these abhorrent practices what they are: abuse.

People think that this is not happening anymore, that these abusive practices are a thing of the past, but we have found that it is happening everywhere, including in my country, in the UK.

The report I present today uses recent data collected by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and by civil society organisations, based in the United Kingdom or operating Europe-wide, such as ILGA Europe, who I would also like to thank for their help.

The report makes clear, conversion practices are deliberately designed attempts to change, repress, suppress or erase someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression based on the false belief that such core aspects of a person's identity are pathological or undesirable or somehow able to change.

Sometimes they are sold as "therapy". Sometimes as "counselling".

Sometimes as "prayer", "deliverance", or "guidance". Sometimes they don't even have a name at all.

The damage these abusive practices can cause lasts a lifetime. In the UK Parliament we heard evidence from people in their teenage years who had recently suffered conversion practices, people in their mid-life and people in their retirement who had suffered these practices decades ago. The abuse spanned generations.

These practices harm society as a whole by conveying the message that there is something wrong, something that needs to be cured or changed about being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex.

There is not. We, I, do not need to be cured. I am what I am and I am proud of it and proud to be bringing this report to protect LGBTI people.

In many Council of Europe member states, professional organisations of medical doctors, including psychiatrists and psychologists have banned conversion practices.

This is an important step in the right direction and significantly strengthens protection against this danger and puts paid to the lie that a ban would stop people getting emotional help.

This is not about banning therapy, emotional support or any other truly genuine health need, but about banning abuse.

The recommendations in the report are based on the experience of several Council of Europe member states, starting with Malta of course who led the way, and including France and Germany. Other member states are expected to follow, including the UK, who should be bringing forward legislation in the next few months.

The report has been carefully crafted to achieve consensus and I would like to thank everyone who met with me to engage in a constructive way to achieve consensus on this report at the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

I am aware that people have been emailed misinformation about the impact on professionals, and parents and various other claims. So I was pleased to work with colleagues and members from other political groups to accept an amendment to the report to ensure we have clarity.

So let me be just as clear in my speech: this report will prevent abuse.

The independence of qualified clinicians providing gender identity healthcare services to adults, young people and/or children will not be affected by a conversion practices ban.

Similarly, in terms of parents or religious institutions, playing a role in supporting exploration of sexual orientation and gender identity will not be impacted. Those supportive conversations of course should happen.

Bans on conversion practices respect the right of parents to provide support to their children, to help them through it, to have discussions. Crucially though they also protect children from the harm that conversion practices can cause, when parents are involved in these practices as is sometimes the case.

Then of course we have seen attempts to remove gender identity from protection. That is not acceptable.

Attempts to strip gender identity from protection are deliberate.

They would leave trans people, including young people, uniquely exposed to practices already recognised as abusive elsewhere.

That is not safeguarding. That is abandonment.

The report before you includes concrete measures, it makes a solemn reference to a fundamental principle: the need to uphold personal autonomy, as protected under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to respect for private and family life.

This right includes the freedom to make autonomous decisions about one's life, and to live our lives as we are, regardless of our sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics.

I call on all members of the Assembly to support this report.

Thank you.

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

I now have the pleasure of welcoming Ms Helena DALLI, former European Commissioner for Equality and former Minister for European Affairs and Equality of Malta.

Ms DALLI, Minister, you have the floor.

Ms Helena DALLI (Former European Commissioner for Equality, former Minister for European Affairs and Equality of Malta): Thank you President,

Distinguished members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Colleagues,

Today, this Assembly is faced with a choice that goes to the core of Europe's identity. A report on conversion practices – practices that seek to change, suppress, or erase a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Let us say this without euphemism: these practices are a form of abuse.

They are grounded in a lie – the lie that diversity is a defect. They are sustained by stigma. And they persist only because institutions and States have allowed them to persist.

Science has rejected them. Medical and psychological professionals have condemned them. Survivors have testified, again and again, to the harm they cause: trauma, depression, shame, loss of self-worth, and an unacceptably high risk of self-harm and suicide.

And yet, across Europe, conversion practices continue, behind closed doors, under new names, shielded by silence, and too often imposed on children and young people who are sometimes powerless to refuse. This is not a legacy issue. It is not a marginal issue. It is a failure of protection happening now.

When I served as Minister for Equality in Malta, we faced the same choice that confronts many States today: whether to act decisively, or whether to look away. In 2016, Malta became the first country in Europe to outlaw conversion practices, not because it was easy, but because it was necessary.

We acted because human dignity does not defend itself. It requires the protection of law. Our legislation was clear, proportionate and principled. It did not criminalise belief. It did not interfere with legitimate therapeutic support. What it did was establish a non-negotiable boundary: no one has the right to deny another person's identity.

That boundary matters. Because when the law is silent, abuse fills its space.

Let us look at the arguments that are still used to delay action, and why they no longer withstand scrutiny:

Consent does not legitimise harm. Human rights law has never accepted consent as a justification for degrading or abusive treatment. We reject it elsewhere, and we must reject it here. Freedom of religion is a fundamental right, but it has never been absolute. It has never included the right to subject others, especially children, to practices that cause lasting harm. Belief is protected. Abuse is not. This is not a new principle. It is a settled one.

What is new, and increasingly indefensible, is the continued hesitation of States in the face of overwhelming evidence.

The report makes it unmistakably clear: conversion practices violate the European Convention on Human Rights. They undermine the right to private life, to bodily and psychological integrity, to freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment, and to equality and non-discrimination. In the most severe cases, they put lives at risk.

When states fail to act, they are not neutral. They are enabling harm. They are failing in their duty of care.

Fragmented protection across Europe is not an accident. It is the result of political choice. And as long as those choices persist, conversion practices will continue to exploit legal gaps, move across borders, and adapt to avoid accountability, including online.

This is precisely why the Council of Europe exists. Not to wait for consensus at the lowest level. But to set standards worthy of our values.

The report by Ms Kate OSBORNE does exactly that. It does not ask politely. It demands clarity, courage and action. Comprehensive bans. Real enforcement. Professional accountability. Support for survivors. Education to dismantle the stigma that makes these practices possible in the first place.

This is the moment to be honest with ourselves. Either Europe affirms, unequivocally, that diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity is part of the human condition, or it tolerates practices that treat it as a pathology.

There is no middle ground. There is no neutral position. Delay is a decision. Silence is a choice.

Future generations will not ask whether this was politically convenient. They will ask whether we acted when we knew.

I strongly welcome this report and commend Ms Kate OSBORNE for her leadership and resolve. I call on this Assembly, and on every member state, to move beyond statements of principle and into decisive action.

No one in Europe should be told that who they are is something to be fixed. No one should be harmed in the name of "therapy". And no state should claim fidelity to human rights while allowing these practices to continue.

This is a test of Europe's moral leadership. Let us not fail it.

A Europe that protects human dignity cannot tolerate practices that deny it. If we know these practices cause harm and still allow them, then the harm becomes our responsibility.

Because no child should grow up believing they are broken. No adult should be told that their identity is a mistake. And no democracy should ever confuse abuse with care.

History will not remember the excuses we made. It will remember whether Europe had the courage to say, clearly and finally: this ends here.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Helena DALLI, thank you for your speech, which has been of great interest to the members of our Assembly, and we shall now move on to the general discussion.

I would remind you that speaking time is limited to 3 minutes per speaker, so we shall now give the floor to Mr Georgios STAMATIS of the Group of the European People's Party.

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

Dear colleagues,

Dear former Commissioner Ms Helena DALLI, thank you once again for your inspirational speech.

And I think we are very lucky here because we have teenagers that look to us because we are here. Not for us, we are here for them. And I think it is crucial that the report before us today aims to safeguard the freedom, dignity, personality and self-determination of individuals who are at risk at becoming victims of conversion practices.

Conversion practices are not therapies. They are attempts to suppress or change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, based on the false and deeply harmful belief that these aspects of human identity are pathological or undesirable. These practices may include psychological or behavioural counselling, spiritual and religious rituals, aversion methods as well as verbal abuse, isolation, forced medications, electric shocks, and physical and sexual abuse.

We welcome this report that clearly demonstrates that conversion practices have no scientific basis and causes serious harm. Victims experience fear, psychological trauma, depression and, in many cases, suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts. As clearly illustrated in this report, conversion practices violate the very principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to private life, to autonomy and freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment.

We are also deeply concerned that despite growing awareness, conversion practices persist across Council of Europe Member states, often hidden from public view and sometimes operating across borders to evade national bans. It emphasised the need to integrate these bans into broader anti-discrimination strategies and to ensure proper monitoring and reporting mechanisms. It is of major importance that the report highlights the necessity of education, awareness-raising and professional training, so that health workers, educators, social services and others have a role in this.

Dear colleagues, by supporting this resolution we send a clear message There is nothing to cure, nothing to erase and nothing to be ashamed of in being who you are. In light of this evidence, I call you to vote for the report in order to ensure that our same commitment, a shared commitment to human dignity is translated into real protection for those at risk.

And finally, dear Kate, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party for accepting our amendment that guarantees the rights of parents, priests and doctors. Counsel and advice is not the same as pressure.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Bob De BRABANDERE of the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates Group, has the floor.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Dear colleagues,

Let me be clear at the outset: coercion, abuse and violence have no place in any society. That principle is not in dispute.

What is in dispute is that this resolution does not confine itself to banning abuse. It establishes a far-reaching ideological framework that intrudes deeply into medicine, education, family life and freedom of thought. It is quite simply based on ideological wishful thinking, not on scientific facts.

The resolution deliberately broadens the concept of "conversion practices" beyond sexual orientation to include gender identity and gender expression. These concepts, particularly when applied to children and adolescents, are neither medically settled nor universally defined. Yet the text treats them as unquestionable facts and labels any form of exploration, hesitation or non-affirmation as harmful. That is not evidence-based policy; that is dogmatic legislation.

Also troubling is the call for criminal sanctions under this expanded definition. The resolution explicitly frames "disbelieving, denying or ignoring" a person's declared gender identity as a form of conversion practice. In practice, this places parents, therapists, teachers and social workers under legal suspicion for exercising caution, professional judgement or parental responsibility. Criminal law should protect against abuse, not enforce ideological conformity.

The resolution also imposes state-mandated training and alignment across virtually all sectors of society: schools, social services, and so on. It prescribes what may be taught, how professionals must act and which views are acceptable. Disagreement is no longer treated as part of legitimate democratic debate, but redefined as misinformation or harm.

And finally, the resolution fails to seriously address its own unintended consequences. It will discourage therapists from working with children suffering from gender dysphoria. It will silence careful, exploratory and individualised care. And it will harm precisely those it claims to protect, including lesbian and gay youth.

A serious ban on abusive practices requires legal precision, proportionality and respect for pluralism. This resolution offers none of these. It replaces protection with coercion and care with ideology.

For those reasons, we will vote against this resolution and I urge anyone from the other groups, who even slightly agrees with me on the issues I presented, to do the same. Because if you do not, I think we will need to consider a new report, on political dysphoria.

Because when you vote for this resolution, you are not Christian, you are not conservative, you are not centre-right and you are not defending families, parents and children. You might tell yourself that you are, but that still does not make it true and society will not need to accept that.

Thank you.

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

Mr Andries GRYFFROY, of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, has the floor.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY (Belgium, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Colleagues,

Conversion practices, as a broad term for therapies, aimed at turning someone away from their natural sexual orientation. For a long time, some people were told that who they loved or how they understood themselves was a mistake, something that needed fixing. Conversion practices grew out of that belief. They promised change, certainty, relief. What they often delivered instead was fear, shame and silence.

People entered these programmes hoping to be accepted by their families, their faith communities or society. Many were young, many didn't really choose it. They were told that if they tried hard enough, prayed enough, endured enough, they could become someone else. And when that didn't happen, this was blamed on them.

Over time, doctors, psychologists and survivors began to tell the same story from different angles. These practices don't change who someone is, but they can break someone inside them. Anxiety deepens, self-trust erodes. The message sinks in that love is conditional and identity is a flaw.

As science advanced, another truth became clear. Being LGBTQ+ isn't an illness. There is nothing medically or psychologically wrong that needs correcting. So the idea of treatment stopped making sense. What remained was harm. And bans on conversion practices came from that realisation. They aren't about policing belief or silencing religion. They are about drawing a line where harm begins. Society already does this in many places. We don't allow medical treatments that don't work and injure people, even if someone essentially believes in them.

At heart, the ban says something simple, but powerful. People should not be punished for being themselves, especially when they are at their most vulnerable. Protection, not punishment, is the goal. And that's why we have already banned in some parliaments, for example, like in Belgium, conversion practices, because they are cruel, unsafe, unscientific and severely harmful, with dramatic consequences for their well-being and emotional balance.

There is no doubt we must protect people and erase these practices aimed at suppressing human beings' identities.

Thank you.

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

Mr Emmanuel FERNANDES of the Unified European Left Group has the floor.

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

The report presented to us today on the prohibition of conversion practices is an essential, courageous and, unfortunately, always necessary report. My group congratulates and thanks the rapporteur, Ms Kate OSBORNE.

There can be no ambiguity: conversion practices are incompatible with human rights, human dignity and real equality for all. As this report reminds us, conversion practices are not only scientifically unfounded, but profoundly abject, cruel and intolerable.

These practices involve psychological, spiritual, sometimes physical and sexual violence, causing lasting trauma, depression, post-traumatic stress syndromes and a dramatic increase in the risk of suicide, particularly among children and young people.

France took on a major responsibility by adopting a law banning conversion practices in January 2022. This is obviously a salutary step, and we are defending it and supporting it here too. But this report clearly shows that banning is not enough if we do not really protect. Practices are shifted, concealed and reinvented, particularly in family, religious or transnational settings.

The fight against these barbaric practices cannot stop with this law: without compulsory training for professionals, serious evaluation of its application and investment in research, the ban will remain partial and the victims will continue to be invisible. This battle cannot stop at our borders. It is also a broader political battle.

I would like to salute the success of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) on banning conversion practices in the European Union, which has attracted more than 1.2 million signatories and marks a major step forward for the rights of the people concerned. We now look forward to a swift favourable review by the Commission.

Conversion practices thrive where reactionary rhetoric gains ground, where the rights of LGBTI people are called into question, where identities become ideological targets. Across Europe, the decline in LGBTI rights is growing with the rise of the far right. Unfortunately, we can see this very clearly in Hungary in particular. Marriage and adoption for all are banned, pro-LGBTI content is censored and Pride is banned. These are not simple administrative decisions, of course; they are deliberate political acts, messages of hatred sent to an entire community and to humanity as a whole.

These increasingly repressive laws create a climate of fear and stigmatisation. They legitimise violence, encourage the emergence of transphobic and homophobic groups, and provide fertile ground for conversion practices, presented as supposedly legitimate responses to identities that we seek to erase. The anti-LGBTI offensive is spreading across Europe, fuelled by hate speech, discriminatory legislation and coordinated attacks.

We will therefore defend this report and this resolution. Because there is nothing to convert, nothing to cure, but everything to protect.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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

Mr Michael FARRUGIA of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group has the floor.

Mr Michael FARRUGIA (Malta, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much.

Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, LGBTQI+ persons were considered as criminals.

In 1920, LGBTQI+ persons were then considered as not criminals, but suffering from a mental illness.

It was the time when research started on how to best cure this “illness”. In 1987 the American Psychiatric Association declared LGBTQI+ persons as not mentally ill. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1990 took homosexuality off the mental diseases list. In 2004, the British Psychoanalytic Council issued a consensus statement that conversion therapy is not only unnecessary, but has the potential to cause harm.

Current evidence-based medical and clinical guidance is that homosexuality, bisexuality and gender variance are natural and healthy aspects of human sexuality. Malta in 2016 was the first European country to make conversion therapy illegal. Since then other countries followed. In 2020 the United Nations independent experts on sexual orientation and gender identity called for a global ban on conversion therapy.

Conversion therapy, sometimes called “reparative therapy”, is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Such practices have for decades been rejected by every mainstream medical and mental health organisation.

Conversion therapy negatively affects the well-being of LGBTQI+ persons. Minors are especially more vulnerable. Literature, by renowned medical authorities and experts, show that persons who underwent conversion therapy were more susceptible to mental illness, mental disorders, drug use, homelessness, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

This document in no way stops persons or parents from seeking professional advice to understand one's gender identity. This is not – I underline *not* – conversion therapy and it is not banned. In addition professional support is sometimes necessary both for those not sure of their gender identity, sexual orientation or gender expression, but also to those around them.

I, as a medical doctor, honouring the Hippocratic Oath not to do harm but to seek the best interest and treatment to my patients, voted to ban conversion therapy in my country Malta and now I, urge you all, in the name of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, to support with your vote in favour of this document that sets the reason for legislation banning conversion therapy across Europe.

Thank you Ms Kate OSBORNE for pushing forward as rapporteur this well-written and researched document.

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

We will now continue with the list of speakers.

Baroness Ruth HUNT has the floor.

Baroness Ruth HUNT (United Kingdom, SOC): So-called conversion practices are real. They cause harm. They are based on the false idea that who a person is can or should be changed. That is why they must be stopped.

I often describe three kinds of response people receive when they speak about their sexual orientation or gender identity: affirmative, curious, and furious.

An affirmative response listens, respects and supports.

A curious response is also caring – it asks questions, explores, and allows space for reflection without pressure.

A furious response shames, rejects, or humiliates. Sometimes this is hate crime and we have laws that condemn such things.

Many of us will recognise all three. I have experienced all three. I have not experienced conversion practices.

Conversion practices are something else. They are not curiosity. They are not careful clinical assessment. They are not parents trying, sometimes imperfectly, to understand their children. Conversion practices are directional and coercive and have a pre-determined outcome. They involve an attempt, by someone in a position of power or trust, to force an identity outcome, to change or suppress a person, through pressure, manipulation, or abuse.

That is the line. And it is right that we draw it.

I want to say something personal. I am a lesbian. Even standing here, in Europe's human rights assembly, it feels risky to say that out loud. That should give us pause. Because if it feels difficult here, imagine what it feels like for young people in families, schools or communities where they are already uncertain or afraid.

We need to tell them that they belong that there is nothing to cure.

We can protect open conversation, proper clinical care and parental love, while being equally clear that coercion and identity suppression are unacceptable.

There is nothing to cure.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Rónán MULLEN has the floor.

Mr Rónán MULLEN (Ireland, EPP/CD): "Thank you very much" [in French], Mister Chairman.

We hear more and more about the danger of giving puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones to children with gender dysphoria and the health and happiness-destroying effects of mutilating surgeries. Those are among the real conversion therapies. This report doesn't condemn those. Instead, it encourages a circling of the wagons around these practices, threatening to criminalise and exclude parents, teachers, counsellors and medical professionals who might want to help steer beloved children away from this toxic train wreck. We'll be hearing more with all the emerging litigation by detransitioners that may be coming down the track.

Medical experts in Ireland who have assisted adults with trans ideation point nevertheless to the incidence of autism among children who – in worryingly high numbers in recent years – have presented with gender dysphoria. These responsible professionals warn about the hijacking of the political and medical establishments by the kind of trans activism that is on display in this report. I ask your support for my two amendments, which identify what is appropriate to ban, but by removing the gender ideology and upholding the legitimate rights of parents, educators and all those professionals who insist on an evidence base for their interventions, seeks to return this report to doing something good and away from doing something very harmful.

I will support the well-meaning Group of the European People's Party's amendment, which, however, merely takes the report from being even worse back to being still desperately bad.

The most notable feature of this report is that there isn't a single proposed amendment from what might be called the left or the extreme left. And that's because this report and draft resolution couldn't be more radical. It is a trans activist charter.

And for a lesson in cynicism, compare the title of the report with the content of the draft resolution. Because, friends, if this were about the abuse of gay people, and vulnerable young gay people, in particular, in order to change their sexual orientation, there would be nothing to oppose. But we see how little the report actually cares about gay people when it leverages people's antipathy to conversion therapy, commonly understood, to advance instead a radical, or perhaps, in addition, a radical gender affirmation agenda that is so harmful to children.

And finally, a geopolitical point. This report will be derided and hopefully ignored by the sensible people, the adults in the room, especially parents across Europe and elsewhere. But sadly, it will enthuse and embolden Europe's opponents, west and east, who will see in this latest chaotic and crackpot interpretation of human rights, proof of our incoherence and inadequacy.

Friends, you can support a ban on conversion therapy today, but do so by incorporating the credible amendments that have been tabled by myself and others here, which seek to distinguish what is good and necessary from what is bad and toxic.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Bob DE BRABANDERE, you have raised the blue card, which means that you have the floor for 30 seconds and that this is for Mr Rónán MULLEN, to be extremely precise, who has just taken the floor and who will himself have 30 seconds to reply.

You have the floor.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, ECPA): Mr Rónán MULLEN, I do want to take the chance to congratulate you on your courage to go against the flow. And I hope when it comes to the voting, there's many more people of the silent majority who will follow you.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Rónán MULLEN, would you like to take the floor again for 30 seconds?

Mr Rónán MULLEN (Ireland, EPP/CD): Just very briefly, to acknowledge the sincerity of good people on all sides of this debate.

But we often say at home in Ireland, it's never too late to do the right thing. People who want this report, but amended, have the option to do that today, and let nobody be in fear of being accused of homophobia because they try and put this report right through the amendments. Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Markus WIECHEL has the floor in the debate.

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

At first glance, it might appear as if this resolution advances human rights by condemning genuine abuses.

In reality, its sweeping and ambiguous language poses a serious threat to evidence-based care, especially for vulnerable young people.

The text conflates undeniable wrongs, coercion, force, or physical harm, with legitimate, consensual practices: thoughtful exploratory talk therapy, empathetic listening to a child's feelings, or parents offering loving, age-appropriate guidance to a confused or distressed son or daughter.

Critically, vague terms like prohibiting anything that might 'repress or suppress' gender identity could criminalize honest, supportive professional conversations.

Therapists might fear prosecution simply for helping a questioning child carefully examine their emotions without rushing to affirm one path.

Look at Malta, the often-cited 'gold standard' ban. Since its introduction, it has led to real prosecutions: individuals facing criminal charges, fines, or even prison threats simply for sharing their personal life stories or faith-based perspectives in interviews.

This is not protecting people; it's chilling free expression and open dialogue.

We all condemn real abuse. Coercion or harm is already illegal and must remain so.

But this resolution mandates one rigid approach, immediate, unquestioning affirmation, while silencing cautious, evidence-informed alternatives.

It dismisses these well-documented realities and ignores mounting international concerns about rushed pathways for youth.

Colleagues, let's protect long-term wellbeing, preserve parents' vital role, and safeguard professionals' freedom to provide thoughtful, individualized support.

Reject this overly broad resolution. Demand targeted, balanced measures that address true harm without unintended damage.

I urge you all to vote no.

Thank you.

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

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD has the floor.

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

Dear colleagues,

I would like to begin by thanking our colleague Ms Kate OSBORNE for her hard work on this report.

Conversion practices, also known as conversion therapies or "reparative" therapies, refer to all measures aimed at modifying, repressing or suppressing a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. They are based on a false and dangerous premise: the idea that certain identities or orientations are abnormal and should be corrected.

In 2026, it is deeply worrying that these practices continue to be defended. Identifying with a sexual orientation or gender identity that differs from the sex assigned at birth is neither an illness nor a psychological disorder. It is not a pathological condition and, consequently, there is nothing to "cure".

It is essential to clearly state the reality of these practices. Behind a sometimes euphemistic vocabulary lie coercive and violent methods: oriented psychological consultations, religious rituals, aversion methods, psychological pressure, verbal, physical or sexual violence, forced administration of medication, even electric shocks.

These practices have a single objective: to force the people concerned to conform to an imposed norm.

Contrary to what their advocates claim, the effects of these practices have been well documented. Numerous experts and psychotherapists, backed up by numerous scientific studies, stress their deeply traumatic nature. They generate guilt, psychological distress and loss of self-esteem. Young people are particularly at risk: subjected to the influence of pseudo-therapists or self-proclaimed "healers", some develop serious psychological problems, which can lead to depression or suicide.

It is our responsibility to protect individuals from practices that are fundamentally contrary to human rights and medical ethics. Homosexuality and the diversity of gender identities are not diseases, they are not deviances. They should not be corrected or repressed.

On the contrary, we must fight against all forms of discrimination and protect the rights of LGBTI people.

Today we must set out a clear and unambiguous framework: conversion practices must be banned and subject to effective criminal penalties.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Tone Wilhelmsen TRØEN has the floor.

Ms Tone Wilhelmsen TRØEN (Norway, EPP/CD): Mr Chair,

Dear colleagues,

In Europe, children and young people are still subjected to conversion practices aimed at changing or suppressing sexual orientation or gender identity.

These practices are coercive and intimidating. They rely on shame, pressure, and control, and cause real and lasting harm, with research published in The Lancet showing strong links to depression, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Conversion practices are based on the idea that sexual orientation or gender identity must be corrected. That idea is wrong, and the harm that follows is well documented.

The distinction is clear. Conversion practices are defined by their intent to change or suppress identity. Supportive healthcare respects individual autonomy and does not seek to alter who a person is. This ban is not about restricting care or counselling, but about stopping harmful practices.

Evidence from across Europe shows that trans people are disproportionately targeted by conversion practices, which are often more coercive and intrusive.

An increasing number of countries have already chosen to ban these harmful practices – my country, Norway, included – not to limit freedom, but to prevent harm, especially to children.

I want to thank EPPride for their important work in keeping this issue visible.

Colleagues, our responsibility is clear. We are here to protect human rights, including the right to private life, to physical and mental integrity, and to be free from degrading treatment.

Protecting human rights means drawing clear lines. Banning conversion practices is one of them.

I would like to commend and thank Ms Kate OSBORNE for her important work.

And on an ending note, I would like to say I'm a Christian, I'm a Conservative, I defend family rights and values. But I am extremely proud today to be part of a Parliamentary Assembly that votes in favour of banning conversion practises.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr Michael RUBBESTAD has the floor.

Mr Michael RUBBESTAD (Sweden, ECPA): Mr President,

The draft resolution we are discussing today has serious weaknesses, especially because of its very broad definition of conversion practices. The term is used to cover almost any action related to sexual orientation or gender identity. This risks blurring the line between coercion and support, between abuse and conversation and between violence and professional guidance.

The resolution does not answer a key question: how are legitimate non-coercive therapy, parental guidance and professional judgment protected? Without a clear safe harbour, therapists, teachers, social workers and parents may become afraid to speak openly because they fear sanctions.

Dear colleagues, criticism of this resolution comes from many directions, including clinicians, parents and women and gay rights organisations. They warn that gender non-conforming children are often treated as having a fixed identity despite evidence of mental health vulnerability and later change. This makes it risky to set firm norms in an area where evidence is still contested. The language of the resolution also risks treating non-affirming but supportive conversations as prohibited. Exploratory therapy that encourages reflection may be interpreted as suppression.

Mr President, protecting children requires more than good intentions. It requires clear boundaries and respect for professional judgment. A policy that makes adults afraid to speak openly with children risks leaving children alone in their confusion, and that is not care, that is a failure.

In conclusion, I share the goal of stopping real abuse. Real abuse. But I cannot support a resolution that blurs the line between violence and conversation, lacks legal safeguards and turns caution and responsibility into something suspicious.

For these reasons, I will vote against the resolution in its current form.

Thank you for your attention.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Cat ECCLES has the floor.

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

Colleagues,

Today I speak firmly in favour of a comprehensive ban on conversion practices. I'd like to thank my colleague Ms Kate OSBORNE for her dedication as rapporteur on this vital report.

Conversion practices, misleadingly called “conversion therapy”, are attempts to change or suppress a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, based on the false belief that these can or should be altered. The evidence is unequivocal: these practices have no scientific basis and cause deep psychological harm.

Across Europe they continue, sometimes openly and sometimes behind closed doors, but their impact is severe, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal ideation, with children and young people especially vulnerable.

This is not only a public health issue. It is a human rights imperative. Such practices violate rights protected under the European Convention on Human Rights and have been described by UN experts as cruel, inhuman, and degrading, and in some cases as torture.

We therefore have a duty to act. The report calls for clear, comprehensive, and enforceable legislation across healthcare, education, religious settings, and commercial environments. It also stresses the need for robust victim support services, including confidential counselling, legal assistance, and psychological care.

I wholeheartedly support these recommendations. I am proud that a full ban was included in the Labour Party manifesto and look forward to the UK government implementing these measures, recognising that protecting LGBTQ+ people is a matter of dignity, equality, and fundamental rights.

We have a strong, evidence-based proposal, informed by countries such as Malta, where comprehensive bans have proved effective and socially transformative.

Colleagues, this is not about ideology. It is about protecting people from harm and affirming everyone’s right to live freely and without coercion as their true authentic selves.

I know some in this chamber may disagree and that is your right but that only reaffirms the necessity of this report. You have no right to dismiss someone's existence and truth and expose them to harm in pursuit of your ideology.

I urge you to support this report.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Nerea AHEDO has the floor.

Ms Nerea AHEDO (Spain, ALDE)*: The fact that, in the year 2026, the 21st century, the fact that today we are speaking about banning conversion practices, which, by the way, are reminiscent of acts of torture, of the inquisition, seems surreal. I mean, it could almost be considered a joke if it weren't such a serious matter, if it didn't affect so many people.

Conversion practices are harmful, they are delegitimised by medical, psychiatric and psychological organisations. Their intention is to change people's sexual orientation and gender identity, but they have been proven to be completely pointless.

Now, this is based on the idea that this individual is ill, clearly we can cure them or they are in the wrong, we can bring them back to the path of truth, and from a religious point of view, the situation is experienced as something inherently evil. The idea is that not only can we, but we must cure them, we must change them and we must put them on the right path, because they are in the wrong.

But what we actually cause is harm, pain and suffering: physical, psychological suffering, which can lead to low self-esteem, depression, isolation, guilt and shame, and suicide. Because, actually, what's being done through these practices is appalling, denying the identity of an individual, something so intimate. And you're interfering with the personal integrity and autonomy of an individual, and it completely flies in the face of freedom.

Also, let's not forget, it's a sad fact that homosexuality is still criminalised in 64 countries around the world, and in seven, subject to the death penalty. And transsexuality is considered an aberration.

Now, I know that there are those that would argue that pseudo-therapies are basically based on good intentions, but, of course, as you know there's a road that leads to somewhere that's paved with good intentions, if you'll pardon my pun.

Anyway, in those places where it's not banned, we actually experience an attitude that is clearly based on homophobia, that views these situations as immoral, that these people are actually regressing. We're talking about something that is absolutely unacceptable. We're talking about infringements of people's individual rights, the right to their integrity. Also, let's not forget that this is business, it's a lucrative business.

So, therefore, allow me to really thank the rapporteur for her excellent report. I can see that we've got our work cut out for us. We need to work on legislation, legislative reforms, we need to ban these pseudo-conversion therapies, we need to protect victims and we also need to undertake social reforms, which is much harder. And these need to be based on education and awareness-raising of tolerance, on understanding that we are all different, all equal, understanding that diversity is part of life's rich tapestry. And also accepting every person as they identify and as they are. Nobody can tell us who we are, nobody can deny who we are.

[Applause]

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

Mr Mike READER has the floor.

Mr Mike READER (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to remind us all today that we are debating a resolution on practises that cause real and lasting harm to people across Europe: conversion practises have no scientific basis. They have been rejected by every major medical and psychological body. There is clear evidence these practises are increasing depression and mental health conditions. These practises increase serious harm and suicide in our societies. These practises are torture, something this Council of Europe serves to eradicate.

The report in front of us today is not speculative. It is not driven by ideology or wanting to stop loving parents from speaking to their children about their sexuality or gender, as has been suggested by some. It's definitely not about stifling religious beliefs, as was suggested in the disgusting remarks from the member for Belgium.

It is rooted in evidence. That includes evidence and testimonies from survivors that the Committee heard directly from, but also includes positions of professional bodies and legal analysis drawn from across our member states.

We know that almost one in three LGBTQI people have been offered or subjected to conversion practises, with trans people and young people being put at the greatest risks.

These are real experiences and real harms. It's something this Council of Europe cannot turn a blind eye to.

As my colleague has said, a ban is something the government of the United Kingdom has committed to. A ban that was prominent in our Labour manifesto and a ban which each and every member of the Labour Party was voted into government to deliver.

Against that backdrop today, we must be clear about the decision before us.

This report has received full scrutiny at committee stage and was adopted unanimously.

But now there are well-funded campaign groups bombarding Council of Europe members with misinformation and threats.

I condemn those who attempt to influence the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in such an underhanded matter.

Colleagues,

The credibility of this Parliamentary Assembly depends on our ability to do serious work and then to stand by it.

This report meets that test. The Committee has done its work, and now the Parliamentary Assembly should do the same.

We must support this report.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA has the floor.

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

A lot has been said already in this debate. For instance, the fact that coercion, trying to impose conversion practice or any other kind of method, that this would be an offence. It should actually be an offence in all of our criminal legislations in member states of the Council of Europe.

So I don't think there is any need to actually introduce special provisions on this particular type of practice because it involves coercion; therefore, it is already covered. First point.

The second point that I want to make in this debate. If this is, indeed, the case, and I don't think that it can be denied, I am just stating a fact, under those circumstances, I think it would be extremely difficult – borderline impossible – to ban any of these so-called conversion practices if they are voluntary in nature. What I mean by that is that if you have an individual who receives conversion practice, it is because they have asked for this treatment, because it has been proposed by a third party, and they accepted it. That is the premise. And therefore, I do not understand the point of all this. You can't justify a ban. You can't justify a ban that goes against the will of the interested party, surely? There is no justification for that.

Again, provided that you want to respect Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which by the way is mentioned many, many times in this draft resolution, the right to respect for one's private life and the right to respect for the autonomy of the person. So could you be so kind as to explain this to me? Why would you deny this right to someone who is an adult – so who has come of age – and has voluntarily submitted themselves to this kind of practice? So, if you can explain this to me, then it is fine, but haven't heard any justification to that effect so far. Not a single word.

I can see the report. I can see the reasoning. And, by the way, it's a woke report, it's an ideological report in that I think you're trying to say something that goes against what we actually find in practice. So it doesn't make any sense to me; it's irrational.

You talk about the argument of suicide. Again, it's nonsense because what you'll find is that there'll be a lot of people saying that suicide is legitimate if it is part of a person's self-determination. You're allowed to commit suicide if that is part of your self-determination. And what happens then to physical integrity, the health of the citizens and the role of the state in protecting that? So, again, under those circumstances, I don't think this is consistent, trying to ban a practice because of the risk of suicide, if suicide is actually deemed to be acceptable and legitimate.

Anyway, I will come to my conclusion. None of what has been said in this text is based on science. None of it. It is said without any kind of authority. We only have the voice of the rapporteur. The rapporteur says that she is referring to science, but you'll know perfectly well, Madam, that there are lots of doctors, psychologists, scientists, who would not concur with you here.

[The speaker is cut off]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Sandra REGOL has the floor.

Ms Sandra REGOL (France, SOC): Thank you, Mr Chairman,

And thank you, Kate OSBORNE, for this work, which reminds us of the essentials and which, above all, has provided the opportunity to hear absolute nonsense. Corrective rape, mental manipulation, assault and battery, teaching self-hatred. Who voluntarily asks to be subjected to this? What kind of world do you live in? No one, adult or child, ever asks to be raped. And to hear such filthy talk in this hemicycle revolts me.

Because yes, that's what all the surveys say happens in these so-called therapies, which are nothing more than conversions. There's nothing therapeutic about it. Torture is never therapy. Torture is an abomination. We condemn it, all countries condemn it.

So no, there can be no confusion with therapy, which is an act of listening, an attempt at dialogue and repair. Therapy is about listening to others. Torture is about flattening and denying the other person. And that's exactly what these conversion therapies are.

I've heard adults' rights contrasted with children's rights, as if we could still decide in a political hemicycle that adults should have access to children's bodies. Do you understand what your words mean, what doors they open and what they allow certain people to do to children's bodies? Those are your words.

And it's an insult to the fundamental rights of all LGBTQI people, of all young people, of all children, and an open door to a totalitarian society. No democracy, no person who claims to be a democrat, could tolerate any of these words.

So we can never say it enough: there is nothing to cure when you are gay, when you are bisexual, when you are lesbian, when you are trans. There's nothing to cure when you love someone of the same sex. There's nothing to heal when you're in a body that doesn't correspond to who you are and you choose to finally be yourself. There is absolutely nothing to cure.

On the other hand, there is everything to love, everything to share and everything to be proud of when you support these people. There's nothing to cure. There's everything to love. That's why environmentalists have always fought against these therapies and passed an amendment in 2018 condemning them in the European Parliament. And yet we're still here today.

We're still here, because there are networks with billions of dollars flooding social networks, feeding political parties and spreading manipulation, making children around the world hate themselves, making sure that, for women's rights, we always have to fight, to maintain them. And sometimes you win a few small victories.

Sometimes you win a tiny little thing. But in the end, love always wins the war. It won it yesterday, and this text is its heir. And today's children will be the heirs to this text. And tomorrow, they will put your ideas out of their minds. And they will put this love at the heart of the society we want to transform.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Ms Martina KEMPF has the floor.

Ms Martina KEMPF (Germany, ECPA): Mr President, I am still submitting the declaration of interest for this year.

Dear colleagues,

Of course, none of us are in favour of therapy with violent treatment to change gender orientation. We all agree on that. But the first sentence of the resolution equates these therapies with the following: any means or effort intended to change a gender identity – that is, any spoken word – is included that is not an affirmation.

So if a child or adolescent has been given the idea that they are in the wrong body, this resolution states that there can only be an affirmation of the child's opinion. Anyone who gives even well-intentioned advice to another person, whether as a teacher, church youth leader or church counsellor in prayer, must, according to this resolution, expect heavy fines, such as up to 150 000 euros in Malta or prison sentences, as has already been considered in Spain.

The fact is that the resolution is also too far-reaching because it also excludes paedophiles and exhibitionists from therapy, unlike the law in Germany.

Dear colleagues from the bourgeois parties,

I understand that you are reluctant to reject the draft because you do not want to be criticised as homophobic. But rejecting the bill has nothing to do with homophobia. No, even several organisations that campaign for the rights of lesbians and gays are urgently warning against the adoption of this bill. These people are also concerned with protecting the rights of children, especially against the use of medication that can lead to irreversible voice changes and to them no longer being able to bear or father children. According to the resolution, advising a young adult against gender reassignment surgery – for example in a letter – would now be a criminal offence.

Finally, the draft even contains dictatorial elements. A Complaints Office is to be set up for denunciations from pupils. Pupils are to denounce others, especially their teachers. Something similar already existed in the socialist, so-called German Democratic Republic.

So, dear liberal democrats, please remember that the draft also curtails the professional freedom of teachers and even of pastors who want to exercise their religious freedom and represent the divine intention and order. They too could all be liable to prosecution simply because they do not want to reinforce a child's or young person's current self-categorisation. Religious communities are so intimidated and they are supposed to co-operate with trans ideology organisations and receive training according to this ideology.

So please also see the 150 000 signatures in an online petition and the many concerned... [interrupted by the President]

[Applause]

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

I now give the floor to our last speaker who will close the debate, Ms Naomi CACHIA.

You have the floor.

Ms Naomi CACHIA (Malta, SOC): Thank you, Chair.

The very notion that someone needs to be cured, or fixed, because of who they are is vile. It should make all of us angry.

I come from Malta. Small island Malta. Very Catholic Malta. And yet, ten years ago – ten years ago – we became the first country in Europe to prohibit conversion practices.

Not because it was the easy thing to do. But because it was the right thing to do. And, yes, we are very proud to be the gold standard, thank you very much. We did it because we listened. To professionals. To families. And above all, to those who had lived through these practices.

People who were told that their love was wrong. That their identity was a problem. That acceptance was conditional.

Let us be absolutely clear: these practices go far beyond any honest or ethical understanding of therapy, or legitimate psychological support. They are not treatment. They are not care. They are abuse disguised as concern.

There is absolutely nothing to defend, accept or justify about conversion practices – especially for Council of Europe member states that claim to be committed to the protection of human rights.

I invite you – truly – to listen to the lived experiences. Listen to the survivors. Listen to the fear, the isolation, the lasting trauma. They speak of shame. Of degradation. Of humiliation. Of feeling utterly worthless.

This goes beyond ideology, this is not a "woke" report. This is about protecting vulnerable young people.

And even where there is disagreement on an ideological level – then at the very least, look at the science. There is absolutely no scientific basis for these practices. None. They are ineffective. They only harm. They are a scam. They are fraudulent. They are profoundly harmful. And they need to stop.

In Malta, we recognised that a society which has come so far in embracing diversity has no place for practices that are so diametrically opposed to its values.

And so, colleagues, now, it is up to us. What is the message that this Assembly wants to send? Are we saying that it is acceptable to subject vulnerable young people to practices that deny their very existence? Or are we going to step up – as a human rights Assembly – and say clearly, without hesitation, that these harmful practises have no place in our societies?

Because if this Assembly cannot speak up to protect children from practices that teach them to hate themselves, then we must ask who our human rights framework is for.

Thank you, Ms Kate OSBORNE, for your very important work.

Europe must be a place where every young person hears one resounding message: You are not broken. You do not need fixing. And it is more than okay to be who you are.

Thank you very much.

Ms Annika STRANDHÄLL (Sweden, SOC): *Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2.*

Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

I speak today in my own capacity, as a member of the Socialist, Democrats and Greens Group, in strong support of this resolution.

Across Europe, we like to see ourselves as societies founded on equality, dignity and respect for every individual. Yet conversion practices, aimed at changing or suppressing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, are still taking place in too many of our member States. These practices are not only scientifically discredited; they are deeply harmful, often leaving lasting psychological scars. This Assembly is right to address them as both a serious public health concern and a clear human rights issue.

For me, this is fundamentally about human dignity and social justice. No one should be told that who they are is wrong, disordered or in need of "fixing." No child, no young person, no adult should be subjected to pressure, shame or coercion disguised as care. The resolution calls on member States to adopt effective legislation and policies to prohibit these practices and to protect those most at risk. That is a call we must take seriously.

The Council of Europe exists to defend the rights of individuals, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalised. Standing up against conversion practices means standing up for the right to live openly, safely and with dignity. It means affirming that diversity is not a threat to our societies, it is part of their strength.

Today, our vote sends a message: to victims that they are not alone, and to governments that inaction is not acceptable. I will vote in favour, and I encourage colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

Ms Agnes Sirkka PRAMMER (Austria, SOC): *Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2.*

Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

Imagine. A teenager finally confides: "I'm gay" or "I'm trans". And the response is not open hatred, but "help". Meetings are arranged, prayers are suggested, counselling imposed, all with the promise that this can be "fixed". The people involved may believe they are acting out of care, love or responsibility. But for the person at the centre, the message is unmistakable: who you are is wrong, and must change in order to be accepted.

That is what conversion practices do. They are coercive and damaging. They are abuse.

As a Green politician, I support a ban on conversion practices as they are incompatible with international human rights standards. UN experts have made it clear that they violate fundamental rights: they are cruel, inhuman and degrading, and in some cases they amount to torture. Any practice that aims to suppress or change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity is based on stigmatisation and causes real and lasting harm, especially to children and young people.

International human rights law is very clear on this point. States do not only have a duty to refrain from violating rights themselves; they also have a positive obligation to protect people from serious harm inflicted by others – including in private, family or religious contexts. Freedom of religion and belief is, of course, a protected and fundamental right. But it is not an absolute one. It does not justify practices that violate the dignity, physical integrity or mental health of others.

We hear, that some opponents claim this would criminalise parents for talking with their children about sexual orientation or gender identity. That is false. Supportive conversations, listening and guidance are not the target of this report. What must end are coercive practices that apply pressure, shame and fear in order to erase a person's identity.

By supporting this ban, we reaffirm the principles of universality, equality and non-discrimination. I urge colleagues to support this report.

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

First of all, I would like to say that I consider it a very serious mistake to be discussing this issue late on Thursday afternoon. This is a proposal that will fundamentally change people's lives and have a serious impact on children. It affects not only those directly involved and their families, but entire societies.

I find it incomprehensible that the majority of the General Assembly did not support the proposal of my fellow representative and the conservative - patriot fraction to postpone the debate to the next General Assembly.

The proposal stigmatizes those who try to express opinions that differ from those of the gender ideology. It discriminates against them and seeks to silence them through intimidation.

The text is extremely one-sided and omits some very serious facts, some of which I would like to mention, highlighting why the proposal endangers children.

Social transition can be traumatic in itself. It can cause difficulties in life that someone may regret. Or it can lead to a crisis situation that would not otherwise have arisen.

Medical transition, including hormone treatment, causes irreversible damage to otherwise healthy organ systems. This poses a serious risk to young people who are unable to make decisions or those with mental disorders.

It is important to emphasize that the genetic background of gender identity and sexual orientation is unknown, and its biological background is minimal. In contrast, the environment and its impact on the individual influence the development of gender identity and sexual orientation by two-thirds.

Transition significantly increases the risk of developing or worsening mental disorders, including suicide risk.

In addition, the majority of people who have undergone transition, more than half, regret their decision.

This highlights the need to prevent young people and children from making such serious decisions. In childhood and adolescence, the nervous and emotional systems are immature, making it difficult to make serious, life-changing decisions that carry numerous health risks.

The text before us is against families, questioning the right of parents to raise their children and to participate in their children's lives. This right is guaranteed to parents by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights.

I believe that the proposal does not help those in need, but rather exposes them to even greater danger.

I cannot support it under any circumstances.

Baroness Lyn BROWN (United Kingdom, SOC): *Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2.*

Before being placed in the House of Lords, I was honoured to be the MP for an East London constituency. Sadly, conversion practises happened on the fringes of some of the communities I represented. They were high rolling, high status activities for those who sought to persuade frightened parents that their child could be prayed out of being gay. It destroyed childhoods. It destroyed people and it destroyed families. It is anathema. Snake oil in our modern age. Children, vulnerable people, isolated from their peers or wider family, under duress, subjected to physical, psychological and even sexual abuse, told they are lesser, sinful, will burn in hell because of their sexual or gender identity.

The UK Government is committed to outlawing such practices. This has been the intention of successive UK Governments not yet realised solely due to the difficulties of drafting complex legislation. Our legislation will need to be laser focussed on the harmful degrading practices that are solely directed to changing, denying repressing a persons sexual orientation or gender identity. It's not about punishing unsupportive parents, professionals or pastors it's about ending the sadistic conversion programmes specifically designed to coerce, manipulate or torture people into being something they are not.

Let us be clear, conversion practices are abuse, an abuse of human rights, they have no place in our societies.

So, I am thankful to Ms Kate OSBORNE for this resolution, and to member nations that have already introduced conversion bans. This will hopefully galvanise all of Europe and finally bring an end to this deplorable practice that has senselessly destroyed so many lives.

Mr Francesco VERDUCCI (Italy, SOC): *Speech not pronounced (Rules of Procedure, Art. 31.2), only available in Italian.*

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

Mister President,

I am proud to speak in support of the report by Ms Kate OSBORNE MP on the banning of conversion practices.

The Council of Europe was founded on a simple but profound promise: that cruelty, coercion, and the denial of human dignity would never again be excused or legitimised. Human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are not abstract ideals here; they are lived commitments, tested in moments exactly like this one.

Conversion practices are incompatible with those principles. They are rooted not in care or consent, but in coercion and harm. They seek to deny people the truth of who they are, to pathologise identity, and to replace dignity with shame. There is no place for such practices in a Europe that claims to uphold the European Convention on Human Rights.

This hemicycle has long been a crucible of democratic progress. From the abolition of the death penalty to the protection of minorities, this Assembly has repeatedly shown the courage to stand on the right side of history, often before it was easy or popular.

By backing this report, we write another chapter in that proud history. We affirm that no one should be subjected to abuse in the name of "correction," and that everyone has the right to live authentically, free from fear, stigma, and violence. As a proud gay man I can tell you there is nothing to cure about who you love and who you are.

Let us affirm, together, that human dignity is not conditional. Let us back this report and defend the values on which this Council was built.

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

We must now interrupt listening to the speakers.

Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): Mister President,

As per Rule 37.1.d., I'm moving forward a motion to have the report referred back to the Committee.

This debate has shown very clearly that among many disgraceful and shameful resolutions in the history of this Assembly, this is perhaps the most shameful because it intends to punish parents that want to help their children. And I urge colleagues from the Group of the European People's Party, the left is already lost.

"Pablo, please do not vote in favour of this stupid resolution. Please." [in Spanish]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): You're going beyond what you asked for when you spoke. We have taken note.

Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI, you are asking for the report to be referred back to the committee. As this is a procedural motion, only the mover of the motion, one speaker against and the rapporteur or chairman of the committee concerned may be heard.

Does anyone now wish to speak against the motion? The opinion of the committee? Yes.

Sir, you have the floor.

Mr Michael FARRUGIA (Malta, SOC): I would like to speak against the motion for one particular reason. The reason brought forward is false. So there is no reason why the motion should be accepted.

Thank you very much.

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

What does the Commission think?

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination): Thank you, Mr President.

No, the Commission wants to maintain this text today in plenary.

The text is ready, it is balanced, despite all your comments.

So we are keeping the text in plenary today.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The House will now vote by simple majority on the proposal to refer the matter back to the committees.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The motion is defeated.

We will continue with the report.

And so I was explaining that now, registered speakers who were present during the debate but were unable to speak can send their typed speech to the sessional services within 4 hours, for publication in the minutes. This text must not exceed 400 words and must be transmitted electronically.

The next speaker is the Commission, rapporteur Ms Kate OSBORNE.

You have the floor for 3 minutes.

Ms Kate OSBORNE (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for your contributions. Well, maybe not quite everyone. I'd particularly like to thank Doctor Helena DALLI. I know she had to leave.

So at the Assembly, whilst resolutions are not legally binding, they carry significant political weight, as they are based on broad consensus around standards. This report sets out a framework that can be applied across different – excuse me, sorry. Sorry. This report sets out a framework that can be applied across different legal traditions and jurisdictions, because we are not all starting from the same place. Some countries have already acted, 10 of them, and the Netherlands and the UK, joining them soon. Some are exploring legislation, some are stuck, but many face opposition that is organised, well-funded and determined.

Colleagues, conversion practises are not therapy. They are acts deliberately designed and intended to suppress, shame or erase a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The harm is documented, the trauma is real, the outcome predetermined.

We are seeing across Europe a pushback on our rights and we see it here today. We are seeing the anti-gender movement attack women's rights and we are seeing those same players pour money into attacks on all our rights. These attacks are a deliberate attempt to misrepresent what a ban on conversion practices is and the conflation of gender and sexual orientation.

Of course, we are not trying to criminalise parents or teachers who want to have an honest, good and open conversation with children. Those who seek to spread misinformation and divide us do so for a very simple reason. They want to create fear, to delay action and have loopholes and harm our fight for equality. A ban does not interfere with ethical exploratory support, but it will stop coercion dressed up as care.

Member states now have a framework to bring forward comprehensive legal measures, not vague statements, not partial bans with loopholes. A full ban. A full ban that means that there will be consequences for those who profit from this abuse or who hide behind institutional power to carry it out.

I'm not ashamed, but those opposing this should be ashamed. I am not. I am proud. Passing this report matters. Conversion practices are harmful. They have no place in Europe or indeed anywhere. And they must be banned.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Does the Chairwoman of the Commission wish to reply?

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination): Thank you, Mr President.

Our debate reminds us that the struggle to make homosexuality or transidentity commonplace is not over. Indeed, if some people believe they can convert these people, it is because they consider them to be either abnormal or marginal. I can only thank Ms Kate OSBORNE for having prepared a comprehensive and very balanced text, which our Commission approved unanimously.

The member states of the Council of Europe must prohibit conversion practices and punish those who promote or carry them out. Victims must be supported and protected, families must be made aware of the problem, and particular attention must be paid to protecting children. These practices have no scientific basis and are based on beliefs or prejudices. In the most serious cases, they can be likened to acts of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment. While I hope that LGBTQI people are no longer subjected to trepanning or electric shocks, it is disgusting to think that they continue to be subjected to forced chastity, forced heterosexual relations – which can be likened to rape – , deprivation of food, insults or threats, or even forced marriages, expulsion from the parental home or crimes committed in the name of so-called honour. How can you claim to be putting someone back on the so-called right track and at the same time be responsible for their abuse?

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Every effort must be made to guarantee LGBTQI people the same rights as everyone else, without discrimination. But above all, putting an end to these practices means fighting for the human dignity of everyone in our societies. We cannot condone such barbaric acts. Banning these practices is essential, and the need to move towards a dedicated legislative framework is indisputable. The values of our Assembly and of our treaties, first and foremost the European Convention on Human Rights, are the first foundations for combating these insidious practices.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At a time when individual freedoms are being eroded, I call on you to give your strong and united support to this text. It is a necessary and urgent resolution, and an important step in our fight to strengthen and consolidate equality for all in Europe. Lastly, although the international and European trend seems to be moving towards banning and combating these practices since the example of Malta in 2016, only a minority of European countries have taken legislative measures against these practices. I hope that the citizens' initiative aimed at banning these practices in the European Union, submitted to the European Commission on 17 November 2025, will find a favourable outcome and ultimately win the support of all the Member States of our organisation. Justifying these conversion practices is tantamount to legitimising physical and psychological torture.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Vote: For a ban on conversion practices

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Thank you Madam President, that concludes the general discussion.

The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has presented a draft resolution to which 10 amendments have been tabled.

I have been informed that the Chair of the Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 3 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, be considered as rejected by the Assembly.

Is this the case, Madam President?

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination): That's right [off mic].

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

If there are no objections, I will take these amendments as definitively rejected.

If there is an objection, we will have to check that it has the required support of 10 people.

Is there any objection?

As there are more than 10 representatives or alternates who object, the request of the Chair of the Commission is rejected.

These amendments will therefore be discussed in the usual way. They will be called in the order in which they apply to the text, as published in the compendium of amendments.

I would remind you that the speaking time for each amendment is limited to 30 seconds.

Amendment 1.

Mr Rónán MULLEN has the floor to support Amendment 1.

Mr Rónán MULLEN (Ireland, EPP/CD): Thank you Mr President.

Everything that has been proposed as bad, and that we've been reminded of, that is conversion therapy or conversion practices, is clearly identified as being such in this Amendment 1.

But what this Amendment 1 makes sure of, is that the good faith exercise of parental rights to educate, etc., and evidence-based gender care, including where that is gender care that doesn't seek to push children down the path of gender transition but rather is non-affirming, though certainly non-coercive.

And I think every reasonable parent, or someone who has children's welfare at heart, will see that this is what this amendment seeks.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against this amendment?

You have the floor.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

Believe me, as an openly gay man, I can tell you that there is nothing to cure about who you love and who you want to be.

And let me say to the member from Ireland, that doing something in good faith, trying to convert somebody's gender identity or sexuality, does not make it right.

I think we should reject this amendment because it seeks to remove the fundamental basis of this report, and crucially, would introduce loopholes that would allow these vile conversion practices to continue.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I request that the result be displayed.

The amendment is therefore rejected.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE has the floor for Amendment 4.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, ECPA): This amendment aims to remove ideologically contested and medically undefined concepts from the scope of the resolution, and confines it to sexual orientation where clear scientific and legal consensus exists.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Who wishes to speak against this amendment?

You may speak.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

We should reject this amendment, because again, it changes the basis of the report, and it seeks to limit what we would mean as an Assembly by the definition of conversion practices, in order that some of the abusive practices could continue.

I urge the Assembly to reject this amendment.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority, and we shall now proceed to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the vote to be posted.

The amendment is not accepted.

In Amendment 5, the floor is given to Mr Bob De BRABANDERE.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, ECPA): With this amendment, we want to safeguard freedom of expression, scientific inquiry and evidence-based care, particularly for vulnerable children and adolescents.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Who wishes to speak against this amendment?

The floor is yours.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

We have already heard throughout the debate, from people much more eloquent than me, that science is crystal clear on this. These conversion practices are harmful. They are harmful to people that this Assembly was created to stand up for. This leaves the door wide open if this amendment is carried.

Therefore, I urge the Assembly to reject this amendment.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Commission rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I request that the result be displayed.

The amendment has not been adopted.

We will now consider Amendment 2.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS has the floor, and I would point out that there is also an oral amendment.

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

As I mentioned before in my speech, the European People's Party political group fully supports this draft resolution.

And with this amendment, we want to strengthen the text by highlighting the important role that parents play in the education of children, the independence of healthcare professionals and, of course, the support that religious institutions can provide to young people and everyone that needs it.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Presidency has received the following oral sub-amendment on behalf of the Committee from the rapporteur.

After the word "parents", add the words, and I quote: "organised religious institutions". And the amendment thus amended would read, and I quote: "The Assembly affirms that a ban on conversion practices should not restrict supportive interventions by parents of organised religious institutions or qualified clinicians providing health services to adults, young people and or children, nor restrict the independence of such interventions so long as the interventions do not seek to change, repress individuals."

Pursuant to Rule 34.7.a. of the Rules of Procedure, the President may exceptionally declare an oral amendment or oral sub-amendment to be admissible if, in his or her opinion, it is designed to provide clarification, to take account of new facts or to lead to conciliation. I consider this oral sub-amendment to be admissible under the criteria of the Rules of Procedure.

However, it cannot be taken into account if at least 10 representatives or substitutes object and rise.

Are there any objections to this oral sub-amendment being taken into account?

There are no objections.

We will therefore consider this oral sub-amendment.

The rapporteur has the floor to support the oral sub-amendment on behalf of the Committee.

Ms Kate OSBORNE (United Kingdom, SOC, Rapporteur): Yes, I accept this amendment, as does the Committee.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against this oral sub-amendment?

No one.

What is the opinion of the author of the amendment?

Mr Georgios STAMATIS, I don't see him.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS, what is your opinion on this amendment?

Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD): Yes.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Commission is in favour. We shall therefore proceed to vote on this oral sub-amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The sub-amendment is therefore adopted.

Moving on to Amendment 2, does anyone wish to speak against the amendment as sub-amended?

Yes, you have the floor.

Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

We will actually vote in favour of this amendment, although unfortunately it changes nothing, because while it is a rotten compromise between the left and the Group of the European People's Party, pretending to be right, we have very dangerous wording at the end of it, because all of these actions are not prosecuted, so long as they do not attempt to change people.

Well, what is the reason? If parents want to help their children, they do indeed want to change them, and for a very good reason, they should be rewarded and supported, not prosecuted.

We'll support it, but unfortunately, the resolution is still terrible.

[Light applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): What is the opinion of the Committee ?

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination): The Committee is in favour of the amendment as amended.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): We shall now proceed to the vote on the amendment as amended.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The amendment, as amended, is adopted.

Amendment 6.

I call Mr Bob De BRABANDERE.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, ECPA): This amendment is one of the most important. It aims to restore legal certainty and prevents the resolution from functioning as an instrument of ideological enforcement against families and professionals. So if you are not in favour of dictatorship, you should support this amendment.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Who wishes to speak against this amendment?

You may speak.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

This is nothing to do with supporting a dictatorship; this is about the definition in the text that we include.

I said earlier in the debate, the words "good faith" are far too broad and leave open a loophole if we support this motion. And take it from me, as a proud gay man, that the words "good faith" are often used for people who carry out these vile practices in their name against young people.

We should reject this amendment.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Commission rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I request that the result be displayed.

The amendment is not adopted.

Amendment 7.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE has the floor.

Mr Bob De BRABANDERE (Belgium, ECPA): Well, once again, criminal sanctions are inappropriate for regulating therapeutic, educational or parental conduct in the absence of coercion or abuse.

This amendment aims to remove the risk of criminalising caution or disagreement, so I urge everybody to please vote for this.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

You may speak.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

If we accept this amendment, we will considerably weaken the brilliant report that has been put together by Ms Kate OSBORNE, my colleague and wider friend in the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

Crucially, if we accept this amendment, we will continue to allow people making money around Europe from this vile abuse.

I urge you to reject this amendment.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): *The Committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.*

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The amendment is not adopted.

Amendment 8, I call Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI.

Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

This is a basic fact: if a 13-year-old boy comes to his parents and says that he feels that he is a girl, he doesn't magically become a girl. And if his parents want to help him, they shouldn't be prosecuted.

Do you know who should be prosecuted?

Those who try to administer life-changing drugs, so called "puberty blockers" to these children.

This is a test, not for the left, as I said again – the left is already lost. But the Group of the European People's Party, please: if you really want to protect children, you should vote in favour of this amendment to prosecute the people who are harming them.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against this amendment?

Yes? You may speak.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

We heard earlier in the debate that this was an ideological debate. This amendment is an ideological amendment.

It seeks to introduce totally irrelevant contents to the report, and crucially to add restrictions on what can be classified as conversion practices. I urge you to reject this amendment.

[Light applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The amendment is not adopted.

I call Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI to support Amendment No. 9.

Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): Dear colleagues,

You say that you are against conversion. So here is the chance for you to prove it.

This amendment intends to have criminal consequences, criminal sanctions for people who are actually trying to convert children and to implement life-changing surgical procedures upon them. They are still confused; they still do not realise what consequences it could have for their entire lives.

This is perhaps the most far-reaching amendment, but also the most important. So, please, protect our children.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Who wishes to speak against this amendment?

You have the floor.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

I would reject this amendment and urge the assembly to reject this amendment.

It once again seeks to add restrictions on what we would define as conversion practices. And it totally changes the fundamentals of the report. It's clearly beyond the scope of the report, therefore you should reject this amendment.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): *The Committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.*

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The amendment is not adopted.

I call Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI to move Amendment 10.

Mr Paweł JABŁOŃSKI (Poland, ECPA): This amendment is equally important because young children that do not still realise who they are, what they feel, often fall prey to predators. Predators from radical left-wing organisations that intend to coerce them into sex change operations. This should be banned. And all this harmful online content that harms our children should also be prosecuted, not parents who try to help them.

So please, vote in favour of this amendment.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Does anyone wish to speak against the amendment?

You have the floor.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

This is well beyond the scope of the report. Let me just address a point that was made earlier by our colleagues who are sat across the Assembly.

They said it was "unchristian" to try and ban conversion practices.

Let me quote to you Romans in the Bible, chapter 13, verse 10 which said:

"Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law".

How dare you make an allegation that it is unchristian to stand up for human rights, and for people's sexuality and for people's gender?

That's precisely what this Council of Europe was founded on and that's precisely what we should be standing up for in this Chamber.

I urge you to reject this amendment.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Commission rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I shall ask for the result to be displayed.

The amendment is not adopted.

Mr Rónán MULLEN has the floor to support Amendment 3.

Mr Rónán MULLEN (Ireland, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President.

Well, I find it surprising that only one person has defended or opposed each of these amendments. It does reinforce me in the belief that a small number of activists are driving this, being enabled really by a much larger group, who do not choose to speak.

The sole consolation that I have is that the idea that we will be pushing at home is that now people, parents and professionals can work with children, and from trying to change them from gender dysphoria, they are, of course, not trying to change them as people.

This amendment, it is clear about what it does. It honours the principle that there are bad things which we should oppose, but it carves out what is important to protect.

Thank you.

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): Who wishes to speak against this amendment?

Mr Michael PAYNE.

Mr Michael PAYNE (United Kingdom, SOC): Thank you, Mister President.

I'm sorry to disappoint you Mr Rónán MULLEN that I might be the only person speaking, but believe you me, I speak for millions of people across this continent who want to see this vile practice thrown out.

[Applause]

I'll finish by saying this, Mister President. This Council of Europe was founded to stand up for human rights back in the 1940s. And it led the way on issues before, like the death penalty, like standing up for minorities. This is the next important chapter for this Council of Europe. I urge you to reject this amendment and reject the vile ideology that we've heard in this chamber today.

[Applause]

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France, ALDE, President of the Assembly): The Committee rejected this amendment by a two-thirds majority.

We shall now proceed to vote on the amendment.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I request that the result be displayed.

The amendment is not adopted.

We shall now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 16315, as amended.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I ask that the result be displayed.

The motion for a resolution contained in Document 16315, as amended, is adopted.

[Applause]

Mr Patrick CASEY (Ireland, ALDE): For the record, I would like to mention that during the vote on the draft resolution "For a ban on conversion practices", my intention was to vote in favour, and that I abstained by mistake.

Debate under urgent procedure: The 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter: social rights as the foundation of resilient democracies and social justice

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Good afternoon, my friends.

We move on to the item on the agenda.

The next item of business this afternoon is a debate under urgent procedure on "The 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter: social rights as the foundation of resilient democracies and social justice" presented by Mr Paul GALLES on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

In order to finish by 7:00 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 6:50 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I call Mr Paul GALLES, rapporteur.

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

You have the floor, my friend.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mr Chair,

Dear colleagues,

2026 marks the 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter. Sixty-five years of commitment to social rights. Sixty-five years of a text that remains a compass for Europe. A compass for economic and social rights. A compass for democracy.

The Charter is not just another treaty. It is the only European instrument entirely devoted to protecting the most vulnerable. It is a source of pride. Above all, it is a collective political responsibility.

Social rights are not secondary. They are the bedrock of social cohesion, the foundation of confidence in institutions and an essential condition of democratic resilience. Failure to respect these rights weakens our societies. Protecting them means strengthening democratic stability in Europe.

2026 also marks the 30th anniversary of the revised European Social Charter. The most comprehensive legal framework we have for social and economic rights. This framework would be nothing without a guarantor. That guarantor is the European Committee of Social Rights. This Committee does more than simply interpret the Charter. It brings it to life. Each decision transforms the rights enshrined in a text into concrete protection for our citizens. Thanks to the European Committee of Social Rights, social justice becomes tangible, on a daily basis. And I would like to thank them on your behalf.

But the pressures on social rights have never been greater than they are today. Budgetary pressure. Social pressures. Administrative pressure. It is in this context that the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter, in Chişinău in March 2026, takes on particular importance. It will be a key political moment. A moment to turn renewed commitments into concrete action, at national and parliamentary level.

A moment to send a clear message: Europe chooses social justice, now and for the future, for strong and resilient democracies. Or as someone else put it: "*predictable and loyal*".

Our draft resolution and draft recommendation are fully in line with this dynamic. They form a coherent, action-oriented whole. They remind us that ratifying the Revised Charter, the Turin Protocol, and in particular the Protocol on Collective Complaints, is not just a legal formality. It is a very powerful political act. A visible signal from Chişinău of renewed confidence in social rights and democratic participation.

The collective complaints mechanism is a very practical tool. It allows civil society, the social partners, to contribute directly to the Charter system. To make the voices of those who need it most heard. It is also an intergenerational instrument, open to young and old alike. A sign of democratic maturity.

The role of national parliaments is very central here. We are key players in the implementation of the Charter. We are its guarantors and watchdogs.

It is up to us to build up our expertise on the Charter, to incorporate its obligations into our legislation and our impact assessments, to monitor the decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights, to re-examine the provisions that have not been accepted and the reservations, and to initiate the necessary reforms. This is how the commitments made in Chişinău will become concrete reforms in our countries.

The recommendation complements this work by focusing on practical actions, in particular by inviting the Committee of Ministers to launch and support campaigns, debates and awareness-raising initiatives around social rights and the Charter, to mobilise civil society, young people and social partners, and to strengthen the universality of the application of the Charter, without territorial exceptions.

It also opens up prospects for the future, in line with the current political momentum, in particular by exploring greater recognition of the right to a healthy environment and by considering how the scope of the Charter should evolve.

Dear colleagues, sixty-five years after its adoption, the European Social Charter is more than a symbol: it remains a compass. And that is why this debate is somewhat of an emergency, because there is an urgent need to implement the Social Charter and to celebrate its anniversary. And today we have a special responsibility to give it new political impetus.

I therefore urge you to support these draft resolutions and recommendations.

For social justice, for democracy and for Europe.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Paul GALLES.

And in the debate, I call first Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO from the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates.

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

Thank you Mister Chair.

Dear colleagues,

We are now speaking about the social charter. I want to take this opportunity to tell you about the social humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine.

Unfortunately, right now, we have this catastrophe.

During this session we twice discussed the Middle East, narrower, broader – and this is a very important issue, I completely agree with this.

But we have something happening in a member state right now, and I am speaking about humanitarian catastrophe.

I just want you to imagine: –20 Celsius; no heating; no electricity; no running water in your apartment. Just imagine this for, I don't know, for one day. How do you live like this?

Millions of Ukrainians are now living like this. It's absolutely crazy.

I want first; to address you. You will go back to your parliaments, to your countries. Please, before this winter ends, please send humanitarian convoys to Ukraine. We need everything: generators, food, fuel, warm clothes. Because next week it will be up to –30 Celsius in Ukraine. I can't imagine how these people, especially poor people, will live, because those who have some money for generators or for some inventor, something, but for poor people, elderly people, people with small children, it's very difficult, believe me.

I am not accusing you of not paying attention; I am just asking for your support.

I also understand one of the reasons why we are not speaking about this, because our government and our president likes to send you signals of power, resilience and greatness, invincibility. Just several days ago in Davos, President Volodymyr ZELENSKYY spoke about power and everything. And it was very well received, with standing ovations – great!

And then these people who were applauding in Davos went home to their warm houses, and Ukrainians were watching this from their freezing apartments. Just like dying from these temperatures; like having no hope, having no electricity, many of them having no jobs, and everything else that war brings with it.

So, this signal of power is very, is very, people like it.

But I want to give you another signal from Ukraine.

SOS. Save our souls. We are on the edge. It's not a survival show – you know, as if it were a TV reality. I understand that many got used to it, and you think – oh! Tanks, oh missiles, now drones, now hypersonic missiles, now –30... and Ukrainians are still unbreakable!

We are exhausted.

Please, save our souls.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO.

The next speaker is Mr Iulian BULAI on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mr Iulian BULAI (Romania, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you very much, Mister President.

Dear rapporteur, dear colleagues,

Dear Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, there is no place for criticising your President. Here, we are all behind the Ukrainian people, behind your leadership, to do the best for our country, and we should have solidarity here. So there is no place for criticism for the greatest man in Europe, defending us from the brutal Russians wanting to destroy our identities and values. So, please refrain from that. We are all behind Ukraine.

The European Social Charter is a unique international instrument with a comprehensive scope, legally binding commitments, collective complaints mechanism and monitoring. In 65 years, this document has developed and evolved to respond to changing social realities. The European Social Charter is a leading instrument and model for the promotion and protection of social rights globally, not only in Europe.

I agree with the rapporteur when he says that social rights are under unprecedented pressure in Europe and beyond. AI tools affect the job market. In Europe, the ageing population and the deindustrialisation are a challenge. The gender pay gap often persists. Ethnic and racial discrimination remains a sad and appalling reality for many. The unpredictability of the foreign trade system with some other friends using unfriendly tariff policies is not helpful. As parliamentarians, we try to find solutions and we confront this pressure in our daily work with our citizens at home. We also feel the devastating consequences of this pressure, including when our citizens are lured by populist forces into supporting easy solutions to complex problems.

And I have to mention that, all the conservatives criticising what goes on here, pretending that they care for poor people with limited resources, they are just totally absent from this debate, and that has to be said, that they really don't care about the poorest of the poor of this continent, and we should distance ourselves from this type of hypocrisy. We must not overlook social rights, or abandon our pursuit of social justice, employment and decent working conditions today, when important technological, structural, economic and social changes are reshaping the labour markets.

In Europe, we have made tremendous progress in the past 65 years, and we are the most advanced group of countries on this matter. Let us not stop here. The European Social Charter is a major source of inspiration, and available to us all in this pursuit. Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Iulian BULAI.

In the debate, I call next Mr Berdan ÖZTÜRK from the Group of the Unified European Left.

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

On behalf of the United European Left, we strongly support the report marking the 65th anniversary of the convention and all efforts to strengthen it.

As reaffirmed in the May 2023 Reykjavík Declaration, the European Social Charter is an integral part of the human rights system. Without effective social rights, full respect for human rights is impossible, and human dignity depends on social justice, equality and solidarity.

Social rights are the material foundation of democracy. When access to education, healthcare, housing and social protection is unequal, concepts such as dignity, equality and participation lose their real meaning. This is particularly true in countries where the democratic institutions are weakening, as in these contexts, social rights are often the first to be undermined.

Türkiye provides a clear example of this dynamic. While social rights are formally recognised, in practice, access to these rights is often determined by political views, identity and backgrounds.

These structural problems affect vulnerable groups most severely. For Kurdish communities, the lack of access to public services and education in one's mother tongue is not merely a cultural issue; it is the question of equal citizenship. Language barriers make it difficult to access healthcare, social assistance and municipal services, pushing vulnerable groups further to the margins of public life.

This exclusion is reinforced by the unlawful use of power, such as the appointment of government trustees in municipalities. Replacing elected local leaders eliminates democratic representation and breaks the connection between local governments and the communities they serve. In many Kurdish-majority municipalities, elected administrations have developed inclusive social policies, such as women's centres, elderly support programmes, multilingual services and community-based welfare networks. After trustees were appointed, many of these initiatives were cancelled.

Gender inequality is compounded by the loss of local sport mechanisms that enable participation in social and economic life. For older people, the centralisation of services increases isolation and makes access to care more difficult.

Here, the link between social justice and democracy becomes clear. When local democracy is weakened, social rights are weakened in practice. Protecting social rights, especially at the local level, and for vulnerable groups, is therefore not only a matter of social policy, it is a prerequisite for democratic legitimacy, social cohesion and long-term stability.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Berdan ÖZTÜRK.

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

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

65 years after its adoption, the European Social Charter continues to provide the cornerstone for social and economic rights on our continent: recognition of crucial rights, such as dignified work, housing, health, education and social protection means that people are centre stage when it comes to our European system of standards.

The 1996 version extends those rights to workers' families and vulnerable groups and consolidates it as the real European social constitution, notwithstanding certain advances that the rights which are guaranteed by the Charter are under unprecedented pressure: growing inequalities; casual unemployment; the gender gap; lack of housing and tensions between economic and social rights.

The European Committee on Social Rights has flagged persistent shortcomings such as homelessness the plight of migrant workers, discrimination when it comes to housing or the lack of educational inclusivity.

That is why we have to work to strengthen compliance amongst our member states. The Parliamentary Assembly has always been a driving force in supporting and defending the Charter, and its role is absolutely vital if we are to promote legislation, proposals and public policies. We have to play therefore a strategic role and strengthen social rights because they are not merely a moral imperative, but an essential element of democratic security.

As the report points out, it's important to invest in social rights in order to reduce inequalities, to drive social justice and to restore confidence in institutions.

The Charter has had a real impact: decisions by the European Committee on Social Rights have led to a slowing of forced evictions, have improved access to social housing, have beefed up protection against dismissal – particularly in situations of vulnerability – and have shaped policies to counter the rise in the cost of living by recommending that the minimum wage be increased.

However, it is important that the Charter be mainstreamed into national legislation so that we have evaluation of the social impact.

We need therefore to strengthen the mechanisms to monitor compliance. We need to update social standards and promote the participation of civil society via the collective complaints protocol, which is still to be ratified by a number of states.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Social Charter continues to provide us with a roadmap for a just, inclusive and democratic Europe, and its full implementation is key for social cohesion and the legitimacy of our institution. That is why we must have a clear commitment.

We want more Social Charter, and a better Social Charter, with renewed political leadership, and to make sure that social rights are the bedrock of our shared future.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

The next speaker is Ms Albana VOKSHI from the Group of the European People's Party.

Ms Albana VOKSHI (Albania, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Chair, colleagues,

First of all, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur for bringing this report, not as symbolic as he mentioned, but because it's timely. It marks 65 years of the European Social Charter, the social pillar of the Council of Europe, and the indispensable counterpart of the European Convention on Human Rights.

As this Assembly has long underlined, social rights are not secondary; they are essential for a resilient democracy, social cohesion and citizens' trust. At a time of demographic fragility, growing inequalities, demographic pressure, a rapid labour market transformation, the Charter remains one of Europe's strongest safeguards for dignity and fairness. Yet the 2025 conclusion of the European Committee of Social Rights sends an ugly warning across Europe's core labour. Social rights are under serious strain, particularly due to digitalisation, climate change and weakened social dialogue as is mentioned in the report.

The figures are alarming. Out of 230 conclusions, only 42 of them found conformity, while 171 did not. This is not a marginal gap, but evidence of systemic and recurring failures and they demand political attention.

And I'm not going to repeat what my colleague said about the other problems that the report has found, like excessive working hours, gender inequality, collective bargaining. So I won't repeat them. But I would like to highlight to the Committee a concerning issue: failure to report.

Three states, including my country, Albania, submitted no reports at all. The Committee is clear that this constitutes a breach of the Charter. This is not a technical omission, but a failure of democratic accountability. The Charter is not optional, and not reporting undermines the credibility of the entire system. Citizens are not being heard.

This is why the report matters: social justice, decent living conditions, social cohesion are not only social objectives. They are as it was mentioned before, pillars of democratic stability and security. That's why in this context, all states should ratify the revised Charter as is requested from the report. They should ratify the Collective Complaints Protocol and the Turin Protocol.

National parliaments have a key responsibility to integrate the Charter into legislation, budget and impact assessment. National authorities, including courts and parliaments, must fully take into account the interpretation and findings of the European Committee. The Group of the European People's Party (EPP) sends a clear message: strong social rights, properly implemented and democratically overseen, are indispensable for a resilient democracy, social justice and citizens' trust.

[Light applause]

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

Thank you, Mr President,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Paul GALLES, for drawing the Assembly's attention to the European Social Charter as the most comprehensive legal framework for the protection of economic and social rights in Europe.

Democracy cannot exist if people lack the most basic conditions for dignity, security, work, housing, social protection. The Charter rightly places these rights at the centre of democratic life. The report calls to strengthen parliamentary engagement, to better integrate the Charter into national legislation, and to promote ratification of the revised Charter and its protocols. That will reflect our countries democratic maturity.

In this context, I would like to underline that only sixteen out of forty-six Council of Europe member States have ratified the Additional Protocol on collective complaints. This mechanism is a vital democratic tool, allowing civil society and NGOs to raise social rights violations directly before the European Committee of Social Rights.

Ukraine has ratified this protocol and incorporated most of European social provisions into national legislation. However, implementation remains extremely difficult due to the ongoing war.

Today, around 6 million Ukrainians are internally displaced, and approximately 8.5 million are displaced abroad. Since Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine has experienced one of the most severe housing crises in Europe. Around 2 million households had their homes damaged or destroyed due to the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure by Russia. Millions have lost their homes and their jobs.

For now only around 22,000 certificates for buying new homes were issued nationally. I want to stress on the role of The Council of Europe Development Bank, through its Housing Certificate programme, has provided 6,000 certificates, demonstrating example of one of the most effective solutions. We would like Council of Europe to scale up this loan program for Ukraine. As with certificate that provides money a family can immediately buy a home wherever they want without waiting for years for their home to be restored or newly built

Ukrainian Parliament also has recently adopted legislation reforming housing policy according to EU practices. As without parliamentary engagement social rights remain abstract commitments.

And by ensuring Social justice and social rights we will restore trust of people in our institutions and make our democracies stronger.

Thank you.

Mr Garret AHEARN (Ireland, EPP/CD): *Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2.*

It is a privilege to speak today as we mark the 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter, an instrument that has made a real and lasting difference in the lives of people across Europe, including in Ireland.

For Ireland, the Charter has never been an abstract set of principles. Its impact can be seen in workplaces and communities throughout our country. The Charter has helped shape protections for fair pay, safe working conditions and reasonable working hours, benefiting generations of Irish workers.

Its influence is also evident in Ireland's approach to social protection and inclusion. Commitments under the Charter have supported stronger safeguards for children, older people, people with disabilities and those experiencing poverty or social exclusion. The Charter's emphasis on dignity and equality has reinforced Ireland's efforts to expand access to healthcare, social security and education, ensuring that economic progress is shared more fairly.

At a time when Irish citizens, like many across Europe, are navigating cost-of-living pressures and housing challenges, the Charter remains a vital reference point. It reminds us that resilience and competitiveness must never come at the expense of social justice.

On 30 December 2025, the Department of Enterprise submitted Ireland's national report on the Revised European Social Charter to the Council of Europe. Ireland's 2025 report, 21st national report, responded to targeted questions from the ECSR on Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 20 relating to safe and healthy working conditions; the right to organise; the right to bargain collectively; and the right to equal opportunities between women and men.

The report will now be considered by the ECSR, who will issue their conclusions in the coming months.

As we celebrate this anniversary, Ireland reaffirms its strong commitment to the European Social Charter and to the work of the Council of Europe in safeguarding social rights.

Our responsibility now is to ensure that the Charter continues to deliver, not just in law, but in the everyday lives of our citizens.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL): *Undelivered speech, Rules of Procedure Art. 31.2.*

Mister President,

Dear Colleagues,

For six and a half decades, the Charter has stood as the social counterpart to the European Convention on Human Rights, affirming that dignity cannot exist without the fundamental rights to housing, health, employment, social protection and equality. Yet today, these rights are under unprecedented pressure. Austerity measures, precarious labour, rising poverty and shrinking welfare systems are undermining the very social foundations of our democracies.

Furthermore, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and the deepening housing crisis across Europe make the effective implementation of the European Social Charter more urgent than ever.

Social rights are neither optional, nor secondary to civil and political rights. They are enforceable human rights and a prerequisite for democratic security. Without social justice, democracy becomes hollow and vulnerable to fear, inequality and authoritarianism.

We therefore welcome the renewed political momentum reflected in this report, including the reference to the New Democratic Pact for Europe and the pivotal role of the European Committee of Social Rights. However, commitments alone are not enough. The Charter must move from principle and be put into practice.

This requires the universal ratification of the revised Charter and the Collective Complaints Protocol. It means that national parliaments must actively apply the Charter into legislation, budgeting and oversight. It also means recognising that investing in social rights is a safeguard against democratic erosion, not a cost

If Europe is serious about resilience, cohesion and trust, then the European Social Charter must be treated not as a symbolic text, but as a binding social constitution for our continent.

Thank you.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Albana VOKSHI.

I am really sorry, colleagues, 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 texts can be submitted, electronically if possible, no later than 4 hours after the list of speakers is interrupted.

Thank you, that concludes the list of speakers then.

I call Mr Paul GALLES, rapporteur, to reply. You have 3 minutes.

Mr Paul GALLES (Luxembourg, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): [Off-mic]... reports here in the Assembly, and I hope to know what the colleagues that did not have the opportunity to speak now wanted to say.

I'm very grateful for the support and, let's be realistic, because compared to the debate before, this is a nice debate, we have the impression that this is a nice debate and it's consensual, but I think we have to bear in mind that talking about the Social Charter is talking about a diamond. It's a treasure. We bear in our midst a treasure. And if we read the Social Charter, it is enormously strong. And I think it would be... so, it was also a discovery for me when I went into the detail of the whole Social Charter of all the protocols and everything, it is enormously strong.

We, as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, part of the Council of Europe, have an enormously strong instrument. And defending social rights, means defending every single person. And defending social rights, means defending a society that wants to live together, not being separated. It means defending democracy. And, I think, I'm really convinced of it, that the Social Charter will be one of the main instruments to defend our democratic pacts, to defend the future of Europe.

I totally understand that for some countries it might not be easy to ratify and sign everything. And I know it from my own experience. I understand that many countries try to implement it in the spirit, even if not in the words, but in the spirit. But I think that there are a lot of dynamics, that's what I saw in the last two years when I had the opportunity to be President of the Sub-Committee on the European Social Charter, I saw that in many countries there are dynamics to go further, to ratify, to sign, to reflect on how can we do it, not only in the spirit, but also in the words.

I totally understand that war means to lose all social rights at once and that this becomes a totally dramatic situation. And I think that after war, the most important thing will be to defend the social rights of everybody. Also, to have a heated home, where you can sleep and live with your family.

So I understand that the way is long for the Social Charter. A diamond is also sharp, it demands, it has ambitions, but the Social Charter is a diamond. And I thank you very much that we celebrate together this diamond.

[Applause]

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr Paul GALLES.

Does the Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Saskia KLUIT, wish to speak? I hope so.

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

I would like to say something, not in the least to Paul, because you can hear, he was not only rapporteur on this report, but you also chaired the sub-committee for two years, and you totally internalised the importance of the Social Charter, and are well-equipped to explain why it's so important.

The Committee has requested this debate to be able to organise an event. And that is important because it is 65 years since we have this Charter, that people have access to the rights that come from this Charter, and yet, we see all over Europe, people complaining about housing, their work, and living conditions.

It's a cornerstone that protects social justice, democratic stability and citizens' trust. And it should address real-life needs. And I feel a bit sad that we do it today. At the end, you are all tired. I can see it. It was a long day. But as Mr Paul GALLES said, this is the most important part of our work. If we do not deliver on the social rights, we can forget about it on the other rights.

The Charter must be more visible, it must be understandable, and it must be accessible, especially to younger generations. So I have been filming my colleagues this week, and I've been asking, "Why do you want to come to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) this week? Why are you here?" And when they come, they all mention social rights. Some mention human rights, but most mention social rights.

And this was because if I can do it, you all can do it. You can talk about social rights on your social media and explain that we are not working here only on complex, difficult geopolitical situations, but that we also work on normal things, like a house without damp or a house with electricity.

I come to the draft resolution. What does it actually say? Mr Paul GALLES already said it. It promotes ratification. We all should work on that between now and the end of the year. And the protocol on Collective Complaints. We should help our governments to make instruments to monitor and to implement social rights. And we should mainstream it. So whenever you talk about housing, don't forget to mention the Social Charter.

The next step is the High-Level Conference in Chişinău. And that is a political momentum. And that will be in March. So if you want to enthuse your minister, you have about six weeks to do so. So I would say rest well this weekend and start working next week.

It has been unanimously adopted, so I can leave here and give you back the floor.

[Applause]

Vote: The 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter: social rights as the foundation of resilient democracies and social justice

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Ms Saskia KLUIT.

The debate is now closed.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has tabled a draft resolution and a draft recommendation on the '65th anniversary of the European Social Charter: social rights as the foundation of resilient democracies and social justice'.

There are no amendments so we can proceed directly to the votes.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution.

A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Adopted.

[Applause]

We will now proceed to vote on the draft recommendation.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Adopted.

[Applause]

Congratulations, thank you very much.

Debate: Post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Good evening,

My fellow representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

We can continue our work. I wish you fruitful debate.

The next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled *Post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia* (Document 16317), presented by Ms Sibel ARSLAN and Mr Joseph O'REILLY on behalf of the Monitoring Committee.

In order to finish by 8 p.m., I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 7.45 p.m. to allow time for the reply and the vote.

We will begin with Ms ARSLAN and Mr O'REILLY, co-rapporteurs.

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

I call Ms ARSLAN.

Ms Sibel ARSLAN (Switzerland, SOC, Co-Rapporteur): Thank you very much dear Chair,

Dear colleagues,

On 9 December 2025 the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) adopted our report on the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia and proposed to close this process after 25 years.

Our report is based on the findings of our fact-finding visits to Skopje, on reports from the Council of Europe bodies, from the European Commission and information received from the authorities and other external sources.

It focuses on the issues spotted in the previous Assembly Resolution 2304 (2019) on North Macedonia: the functioning of the democratic institutions, the electoral framework, the situation of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and the rights of minorities.

As regards the functioning of the democratic institutions, we conclude that political freedom, including the right of freedom of association, assembly and expression and media pluralism are generally respected.

The last parliamentary election took place on 8 May 2024 and concluded with a victory of the right-wing Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), after seven years in the opposition.

Also in spring 2024, a new president was elected following two rounds, which led to the victory of the VMRO-DPMNE candidate Ms Gordana SILJANOVSKA-DAVKOVA, who was elected as the first female head of state of North Macedonia.

On 23 June 2024, parliament approved a new government coalition led by Prime Minister Hristijan MICKOSKI.

In its election observation report, the Assembly concluded that the election was competitive and well-run, given the challenge of organising two different elections at the same time, and despite some allegations of vote-buying and negative rhetoric in the election campaign.

In 2025, the VMRO-DPMNE party won decisively in two rounds of local elections held on 19 October and 2 November.

A delegation from the Council of Local and Regional Authorities observed the elections and concluded that they were well-run.

Regarding the election framework, we have noted the urgent need for reform in long-standing recommendations from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission).

This is particularly pertinent in relation to campaign rules, access to the media and the allocation of state funding.

There are also some issues concerns the voting rights of the diaspora. We acknowledged the government's announcement regarding the form of the electoral legislation. We would like to emphasise that it is at democratic stake; it is essential that the legal framework translates into democratic elections.

We recognise some process in relation to the judiciary, particularly with regards to ensuring the transparency of the work of the judicial council, the requirements of new judges and prosecutors, and the introduction of the automatic court case management information system and other digital case management tools.

However, we announced that there were a number of allegations about the politicisation of the judiciary as well as the low level of its perceived judicial independence.

The judiciary's outdated infrastructure and limited financial and human resources are also a cause for concern. It has affected the quality and efficiency of justice, which has declined as the lack of processing has increased.

We welcome the co-operation of the Minister of Justice with the Venice Commission and hope the authority will implement its recommendations.

[Applause]

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you, Ms Sibel ARSLAN.

I call now Mr Joseph O'REILLY. You have the floor.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, Co-Rapporteur): In terms of preventing and controlling corruption, the authorities have implemented numerous measures to fulfil the recommendations of the Group of States Against Corruption. Nevertheless, corruption remains widespread throughout the public sector, suggesting

that the measures taken so far have not been effective. The State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption is doing its utmost to investigate corruption and report on cases of conflict of interest, but it still lacks the technical resources to operate fully and has lacked committed leadership.

Its former president, who resigned last summer, has been officially accused of being embroiled in a fraud scandal. Furthermore, the prosecutor's office specialising in prosecuting organised crime and corruption requires additional resources. We note with interest the government's work on the reform of the criminal justice system. We hope this reform will soon address the negative impact of the changes made to the Criminal Code adopted in September 2023, following which penalties for some corruption-related offences were removed or reduced.

Regarding human rights and the rights of national minorities, there are still some issues to be addressed, particularly concerning the Bulgarian minority, as well as the use of the "balancer" tool and the application of the law on state languages. We hope that the authorities will soon address these problems in line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies.

Progress was also noted as regards the Roma situation by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'FLAHERTY, who, I'm proud to say, is a compatriot of mine and indeed my colleague there, Senator Garret AHEARN, in the front seats, who visited North Macedonia at the same time as us in April 2025. The Commissioner praised North Macedonia for its long-standing commitment to addressing the human rights issues faced by the Roma community. In particular, he commended the adoption of the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion and the measures taken to eradicate statelessness among the Roma population and improve the civil registration. We conclude that North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-confessional country and could serve as a model for other countries in promoting a "living together" culture and mentality.

In terms of respect for human rights, North Macedonia has around 35 pending Court of Human Rights judgements before the Committee of Ministers. Some of these require complex legislative or other execution measures. Examples include the *X v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* judgement, which concerns the lack of legislation on the conditions and procedures for transgender people to change their sex on birth certificates, and the *Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia* judgement, which concerns discrimination against Roma pupils due to segregation in state schools.

Although human rights and fundamental freedoms are generally respected, we are nevertheless concerned about the poor conditions in some places of detention, particularly Idrizovo prison. We note the interest that improving prison conditions is now a priority for the current Minister for Justice and that an ongoing project on this issue is being implemented with the help of the Council of Europe's Development Bank.

To conclude, we are generally satisfied with the progress made by North Macedonia since 2019. At the same time, we propose that the Committee re-examine the situation in the country within a few years as part of a periodic review, as some issues still require close attention.

After the adoption of our report by the Monitoring Committee, we also held informal consultations with the European institutions, which took place in Brussels two weeks ago. All of our interlocutors in Brussels have supported our proposal to close the post monitoring dialogue. They have stressed that North Macedonia remains dedicated to its European...

[Speaker's mic was cut off]

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The five minutes is over, yes. Thank you, Mr Joseph O'REILLY.

We continue with the list. In the debate I call first Ms Rian VOGELS on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Ms Rian VOGELS (Netherlands, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

The report before us confirms an important reality: North Macedonia today is a functioning democracy, where fundamental rights and freedoms are broadly respected. Elections are competitive and well administered, as I witnessed myself as the election observer in 2024. Democratic institutions operate effectively, and co-operation with the Council of Europe remains strong.

For these reasons, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe supports closing the post-monitoring dialogue. This reflects genuine institutional progress and sends a clear message to pro-European and reform-minded actors that commitment and reform do make a difference.

However, closing post-monitoring must not be mistaken for ending scrutiny. The Parliamentary Assembly retains its permanent responsibility to uphold Council of Europe standards, as it does for all member states. The end of post-monitoring is not the end of responsibility; it marks a new stage of democratic maturity and accountability.

From a liberal perspective, human rights are not a checklist to be completed once and set aside. They require constant political will, resilient institutions, and sustained societal engagement.

The report rightly identifies areas where further progress is needed. Judicial independence remains vulnerable to political pressure and limited resources. The fight against corruption must be assessed not by action plans, but by credible investigations, prosecutions, and final court decisions.

We also underline that implementing the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights is a core and ongoing obligation. The end of post-monitoring does not reduce North Macedonia's duty – nor that of any member state – to fully and promptly execute Court judgements.

Particular care must be given to the protection of minority rights in the broadest sense: ethnic, religious, social, and sexual minorities. While inter-ethnic relations have improved, serious concerns persist regarding LGBTQI rights, including the absence of legal recognition for same-sex couples, incomplete implementation of gender-identity-related judgements, and continued incidents of violence and hate speech.

A transparent democracy, an open society, and full respect for human dignity are not optional elements of European integration. They are its very foundation.

In conclusion, the ALDE Group supports closing the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia. At the same time, we emphasise that this decision comes with expectations: continued reforms, firm respect for the rule of law, and unwavering commitment to human rights for all.

We thank the rapporteurs for their effort, and their substantive report.

Thank you.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): [Applause]

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

I now call Mr George LOUCAIDES on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

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

Our group, the Group of the Unified European Left, also supports the proposal of our rapporteurs to close the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia, as recommended in the draft resolution before us.

The report acknowledges the progress achieved in the functioning of the democratic institutions, the conduct of competitive elections, the general respect for fundamental freedoms, as well as continued co-operation with Council of Europe bodies.

At the same time, the report is explicit in that a number of key issues remain unresolved. For our group, therefore, closing the post-monitoring dialogue should go hand in hand with the Assembly's continued follow-up through its periodic review mechanism.

The report highlights ongoing consensus about the independence, efficiency and funding of the judiciary, as well as the low level of public trust and the risk of political interference. The Assembly rightly emphasises the need for further reforms in line with the Venice Commission's and Group of States against Corruption's (GRECO) recommendations, including those relating to the composition and functioning of the judicial council, the provision of adequate financial and human resources, and the implementation of effective anti-corruption measures.

The report also highlights ongoing challenges in the field of human rights, notably the situation of the Roma community, the need to end educational segregation, the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, prison conditions and the safeguarding of freedom of expression and media freedom.

For the Group of the Unified European Left, the conclusion of the monitoring process is a recognition of progress, not a signal of disengagement. The Assembly should continue to support North Macedonia through structured scrutiny, encouraging the further consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in accordance with the commitments undertaken as a member state of the Council of Europe.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Applause]

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call Mr Piero FASSINO on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

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

As our colleagues have already mentioned, our rapporteurs' report states that much progress has been made in North Macedonia and that the country has gradually consolidated democracy, the rule of law, and the rules that govern full democratic life.

However, our rapporteurs also emphasised that we still need to make progress on crucial issues: the fight against corruption, according to the indications that the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) has provided and is providing, the completion of judicial reforms, so as to effectively guarantee the impartiality and independence of the judiciary and, in relation to this, also an intervention on the prison system, characterised by considerable criticalities, the redefinition of electoral laws, also on the basis of the advice and indications that have come and are coming from the Venice Commission.

There are also, of course, problems that need to be addressed regarding the large Roma community living in Macedonia and relations with Bulgaria, which, despite the Prespa Agreement, have not yet found a definitive solution, and this is an issue that I believe is very important.

In any case, I think that putting an end to post-monitoring is the right thing to do, but it must be accompanied by constant monitoring of the progress that is being made in Macedonia regarding the issues that are still ongoing, and it seems significant to me that the final resolution advises the Monitoring Committee to put the periodic review of Macedonia on the agenda, precisely so that it can continually accompany the evolution of this country and support it, help it and verify its results.

And all this is important for one reason: Macedonia is a candidate country for entry into the European Union and it is clear that the implementation of the reforms that are indicated means carrying out processes of convergence with the *acquis communautaire* and with European rules, which are essential so that the entry of Macedonia, like the other countries of the Western Balkans, can finally be achieved after more than twenty years since the beginning of this process.

For this reason, I support the proposals of our rapporteurs and thank them for their work.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

The next one is Mr Georgios STAMATIS on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

We welcome this report on behalf of the European People's Party and we congratulate the rapporteurs. However, what is very interesting here for the day after is the observations that have been made. And I'd like to start with what Mr Piero FASSINO has just said.

The democracy of North Macedonia has signed a treaty, the Prespa Agreement, with a partner country, that is Greece. It is a member of the Council of Europe and the European Union. In order to proceed to the day after, we will have to see that this is complied with as it has been signed. And, that means that the constitutional name has to be used as set forth in this treaty.

Now, with respect to the Roma community, permit me to speak also as the General Rapporteur on Roma and Travellers in the Council of Europe. Indeed, there has been improvement, but I think we have to see much more progress made. There has been a solution in terms of nationality, but there are still Roma citizens that do not have access to water. And, we are here, those who vote, for the need to have access to water.

Something else that hasn't been mentioned is the situation in prisons. It is very important. It is there that we judge, in actual fact, democracies, what happens to the most vulnerable. And there, the Republic of North Macedonia, in the dialogue it has with us, but mostly with the European Union, will actually take these reforms forward.

Now, when it comes to the mass media, we see that there is pluralism, but the report shows the efforts undertaken by North Macedonia to come closer to Europe. We're here to support it. And North Macedonia must actually pick up speed in terms of reforms against corruption, with respect to pluralism, respecting minorities, but mainly the values that we advocate here and we are called upon to vote for today: rule of law, human rights and democracy.

I must say that the monitoring procedure and this reinforcement of accountability is in the right direction. I believe that it is, in fact, a matter of urgency to update the electoral framework in line with the Venice Commission. And we're here to support North Macedonia in its course to Europe, so long as the Venice recommendations are put into practice.

Thank you very much.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you very much.

I call, on behalf of European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates, Ms Cristina Gabriella DUMITRESCU.

Ms Cristina Gabriella DUMITRESCU (Romania, ECPA, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Madam President.

Dear colleagues, allow me first of all to congratulate the two rapporteurs for their rigorous, balanced and uncompromising work. The report provides a realistic assessment of the state of the post-monitoring dialogue with the Republic of North Macedonia and clearly indicates both the progress made and the remaining shortcomings.

Although there have been developments in certain areas, structural reform remains incomplete and issues such as the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, media freedom and respect for the rights of national minorities still require attention. In this regard, we draw attention to the need for the effective implementation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Recommendation 1333 from 1997.

But in the end, our group supports the conclusion of the monitoring procedure. We are convinced that North Macedonia can make tangible progress in the areas monitored, demonstrating that it is a credible partner committed to the fundamental values of our organisation.

Thank you.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

After the spokespersons for political groups, we continue our debate with the speakers list. You have 3 minutes.

And I call from North Macedonia, Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA.

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

Dear friends,

Allow me to first congratulate our two rapporteurs who put up with us and they can finally say after tonight that they are done with North Macedonia. But you are most welcomed to visit us in the summer in Ohrid!

Thank you to all of you that you recognize the past and the present efforts of my country!

I am sure that the colleagues from my delegation, from North Macedonia, will have better speeches than me and it will be more formal. Because tonight, I want to speak from my heart.

The closing of this long process for my country is of utmost importance. It signifies that the reward comes at the end, if you do not lose sight and clarity and if you look at the forest and not at the trees.

This report is a picture of every single politician that has been and is active since 2000, the year when we entered the postmonitoring process, while I was still in high school. This report is a picture of every single decision, every setback, every progress that show that people in North Macedonia want progress, they want democracy and they know what democracy means, how they reacted when freedom was negated and how they still react when politicians do not fulfil their needs. And that they will not stop demanding their rights!

And that regardless of the party in power, Macedonians know where they belong and what their government that they elect must do to ensure progress.

My country has been through a lot, from wars that everyone could see and feel, to wars that nobody knew we were or are into. We have faced massive migrations of our future out of the country because politicians failed. We have had our history, identity, language, music, art and whole being negated. We were told that we are not who we are. Yes, in the two World Wars and today.

But Macedonians do not give up! We take care equally for people living inside and outside North Macedonia and we strive to make sure they enjoy the same human rights regardless in which part of the world they live. And we will continue to do that.

And indeed, my country has been through a lot. Or to be precise, I was born in Yugoslavia, my first child in Macedonia and my second child in North Macedonia. So the adoption of this report gives me hope that all of the political figures in North Macedonia get the clear sign what they have to do next and allow future generations to live in an European North Macedonia.

So now, we have to do our homework.

Thank you!

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

The next one is Mr Garret AHEARN from Ireland.

Mr Garret AHEARN (Ireland, EPP/CD): Thank you very much, Madam President.

It's very difficult to follow such a powerful and impressive speech. I congratulate you on that.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate on the post monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia. And I want to first thank the rapporteurs and the secretary for their thorough work and continued engagement. In this context, I would like to offer a particular acknowledgement to my friend and colleague, the co-rapporteur Mr Joseph O'REILLY, for his dedication and balanced approach throughout this process. And it's his experience that has contributed meaningfully to the credibility and effectiveness of our engagement with North Macedonia.

North Macedonia has demonstrated a sustained commitment to the values of the Council of Europe, often in a complex political and regional environment. I recognise in particular steps taken to improve the functioning of democratic institutions, advance judicial reform and enhance media freedom.

My fellow Irishman, the Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Michael O'FLAHERTY, has also acknowledged the progress on the rights of the Roma Community. These reforms are essential to building public trust in the democratic governance.

At the same time, though, the post monitoring dialogue reminds us that reform is an ongoing process. Continued focus is required on issues such as the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and the integration and civil liberties of the Bulgarian minority.

And as my colleague in the Group of the European People's Party said, Mr Georgios STAMATIS, more can be done for the Roma community also.

Ireland strongly supports the post monitoring dialogue as a co-operative and forward-looking instrument, one that encourages progress through partnership, mutual respect and national ownership of reforms.

In closing, Ireland reaffirms its support for North Macedonia's continued engagement with the Council of Europe and for the vital role this organisation plays in strengthening that democracy, the rule of law and human rights across our shared European space.

Thank you.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I give the floor to Mr Denis BEGIC from Sweden.

Mr Denis BEGIC (Sweden, SOC): Thank you.

Madam Chair,

Dear colleagues,

I had the opportunity to observe the national elections in North Macedonia. What I saw was clear: people could vote freely, calmly, and without pressure.

But a good election day does not mean that everything in a democracy works well. Both the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe point to important problems: unclear rules for campaign financing, weak transparency in the media, limited ways to challenge results, and last-minute changes to election laws. An election can be free, but it must also be fair.

We see similar challenges in the rule of law. Courts do not have enough resources. Many posts for judges and prosecutors remain empty. And there is still too much political pressure on the justice system. This is not just about institutions, it is about public trust. People must feel that the law applies equally to everyone. The tragic fire in Kočani showed how corruption and weak oversight can cost lives. These issues cannot be ignored.

North Macedonia is a diverse and multi-ethnic society. The country has taken steps to improve minority rights, including for Roma communities. But serious problems remain, segregation in schools, poor housing and environmental risks, and those must be solved. And they must be solved with facts, fairness and stability, not through political pressure or bilateral disputes.

For me, as a Swedish parliamentarian, one thing is clear: long-term democracy support works. The Swedish Parliament has co-operated closely with the Parliament of North Macedonia for many years. It is a partnership based on respect and dialogue, and it has helped strengthen democracy and institutions.

Let us continue that support for North Macedonia's progress, be honest about the challenges, and remain constructive partners. That is how we strengthen democracy, in North Macedonia but also in every other member state.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call Ms Ivanka VASILEVSKA from North Macedonia.

Ms Ivanka VASILEVSKA (North Macedonia, EPP/CD): Dear Madam President,

Dear colleagues,

It is an honor to address this Assembly today on behalf of my country, a country that has chosen, consistently and decisively, the path of European values, democratic reform and constructive co-operation.

For three decades, our membership in the Council of Europe has been a guiding framework for transformation. This Draft Resolution before us recognizes not only where we stand today, but also the seriousness with which we have approached our obligations. We see the decision to close the post-monitoring dialogue as recognition of a long and often demanding reform process, carried out with perseverance and responsibility.

In 2024, we held competitive, well-organized parliamentary and presidential elections that respected fundamental freedoms and resulted in a peaceful change of power. The election of our first female President stands as a symbol of democratic maturity and social progress. The swift formation of a stable coalition government further confirmed the strength of our institutions.

We are proud of our open and transparent co-operation with the Council of Europe, particularly with the Monitoring Committee and the Venice Commission 50 years jubilee.

In the fight against corruption, we have made measurable progress. Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) has closed both its Fourth and Fifth Evaluation Rounds for North Macedonia, confirming that the majority of recommendations have been implemented. This reflects our firm political will to strengthen integrity, accountability and public trust.

Our institutions, parliament, government are and will remain, multi-ethnic and inclusive. We value our diversity as a strength.

Dear President, dear colleagues,

We do not claim perfection. Reform is a continuous process, and we remain fully committed to addressing the remaining challenges. But today's resolution sends an important message: that effort, dialogue and genuine commitment matter.

My country will continue to be a constructive partner, a responsible member state, and a strong advocate of the values that unite us in this Assembly.

For these reasons, I urge all members to support this draft resolution. It not only acknowledges the progress we have made but also affirms our commitment to a diverse society that remains united. Let us defend this model, nurture it, and take pride in it, let us cast a positive vote in favor of this resolution.

Thank you.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you very much.

I give the floor to Ms Iris LUARASI from Albania.

Ms Iris LUARASI (Albania, SOC): Dear colleagues,

On behalf of Albania, I'm very pleased to support this resolution and to warmly congratulate our neighbour North Macedonia.

This country has been in post-monitoring dialogue for more than two and a half decades. Yet this mechanism was never meant to last that long and never intended to become a semi-permanent status. Closing it today is therefore the correct decision and above all a deserved one.

The report before us shows clearly that North Macedonia is a solid functioning democracy.

It shows constructive co-operation with all the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies, and meaningful steps to strengthen democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law in an inclusive, multi-ethnic society.

Like all of us, North Macedonia still faces remaining challenges, but the appropriate way to follow this is through the normal periodic review applied to other member states.

Ending the post-monitoring dialogue is a sign of confidence. I would say that, most importantly, it is a sign of respect.

For Albanians, today's decision sends three important messages to our region.

First, it recognises the progress and the maturity of North Macedonia.

Second, it sends strong signals that reform efforts and democratic commitments in the western Balkans are seen, valued and rewarded.

Third, it speaks directly to the European Union.

Today it is more obvious that the enlargement of the EU with countries of the Western Balkans is a strategic investment in Europe's peace and stability.

This message is equally valid when we speak about Kosovo.

Two years ago the Assembly took a courageous, fair and forward-looking decision to recommend Kosovo's immediate membership in the Council of Europe.

The decision remains pending. Every month of delay keeps Kosovo somehow hostage to subjective justifications that do not reflect our standards or the values and principles that we are talking about.

Kosovo's membership is not only a matter of principle. It is an investment in human rights protection, in regional stability and in the credibility of our organisation itself.

Dear colleagues,

Let me conclude by expressing our sincere congratulations to our North Macedonian colleagues here and in Skopje for this important milestone.

We hope and wish that 2026 would also find them at the table of the accession negotiations with the European Union.

We thank the co-rapporteurs for their excellent work and for the draft resolution before us, which we will firmly vote in favour of.

Thank you.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call Mr Petr SOKOL from Czechia.

Mr Petr SOKOL (Czechia, NR): Dear Chair, dear rapporteurs,

Allow me to support the decision to close the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia.

I am convinced that North Macedonia is a well-functioning democracy where human rights and fundamental freedoms are generally respected. This is not a given in a situation where Macedonia has undergone a very complicated historical development since its declaration of independence. The country has even experienced violent confrontations on ethnic grounds.

This is of course a strong call for us to properly monitor the human rights situation. The Republic also had to change its official constitutional name due to external pressure. Relations with its neighbours have significantly complicated the country's integration into North Atlantic treaty Organisation. and still constitute an obstacle on the path to European Union membership.

North Macedonia absolutely deserves a place in the EU and should not be subject to unnecessary obstacles. But only for this reason, I would like to commend Macedonia's progress in a number of monitoring areas. In the area of elections, I want to emphasise their orderly conduct, the alternation of power and other positive steps. There are, of course, parts of the electoral legislation where there are recommendations for improvement, but the character of democratic and free elections cannot be questioned.

I would also like to mention the issue of national minorities, which is very sensitive in the country. I am convinced that the issue of citizens belonging to the Bulgarian minority in particular, should not be instrumental in inter-state disputes and should be handled in accordance with the usual standards of protection of human and minority rights. I myself come from a country where individual minorities are not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, and I have some doubts that Macedonia should be pressured to do so. However, I clearly condemn all attacks on citizens, from the Bulgarian minority or other minorities.

In conclusion, I would like to once again support the decision to end the post-monitoring dialogue and wish this country further progress. And please, let's not forget geopolitics.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

And I call Mr Bekim KJOKU from North Macedonia.

Mr Bekim KJOKU (North Macedonia, SOC): Since 1995, member of the Council of Europe. Since 2000, in post-monitoring dialogue. But this is great news. This is great news for North Macedonia and great news for the Council of Europe. It is also great news that I'm the last speaker tonight.

Madame Chair,

Distinguished colleagues,

Today marks an important moment for the Western Balkans. With the conclusion of the post-monitoring dialogue, North Macedonia reaches a significant milestone. This development carries meaning beyond one country; it sends a clear signal of progress for the region as a whole.

I would like to sincerely thank the rapporteurs, Ms Sibel ARSLAN and Mr Joseph O'REILLY, for their thorough, balanced and constructive report.

The Western Balkans should no longer be viewed through the lens of permanent transition. We are an integral part of Europe's democratic space. Today's decision shows that sustained reform and commitment to Council of Europe standards deliver results.

As the fourth country among the Western Balkan's six to conclude the post-monitoring dialogue, North Macedonia's progress should serve as encouragement, not as an exception. Stability and democracy in Europe depend on continued advancement across the Western Balkans.

At the previous Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe session, we welcomed the conclusion of the post-monitoring dialogue with Bulgaria, our friendly neighbouring nation. That decision sent a positive message for the region and reinforced the credibility of this Assembly.

In this spirit, we look forward to progress toward the conclusion of the monitoring dialogue for Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the completion of post-monitoring dialogues for Albania and Montenegro, and continued firm engagement toward full membership for Kosovo.

At the same time, our progress also has a clear geopolitical dimension. North Macedonia is fully aligned with the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, reflecting our role as a reliable and responsible European partner.

The "living together" approach, recognised in the resolution, is central to our multi-ethnic society and democratic stability. European integration is among the three main priorities of the current government. In this context, North Macedonia was among the first candidate countries to receive pre-financing under the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, and the related Reform Agenda is being implemented with strong political commitment.

I invite you therefore to support the adoption of this resolution, as recognition of progress achieved and as encouragement for continued reform across the Western Balkans.

Thank you very much.

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

That concludes the list of speakers.

In a moment I shall call Ms Sibel ARSLAN and Mr Joseph O'REILLY, co-rapporteurs to reply.

You have 5 minutes in total.

First, Mr Joseph O'REILLY. Yes, please.

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

It falls to me now to make a few valedictory remarks.

I want at the outset to thank our professional colleague from the Monitoring Committee Secretariat, Ms Agnieszka NACHILO, for her incisive intellect and her academic prowess that she brought to bear professionally on our work.

I want to thank my colleague Ms Sibel ARSLAN, who was an excellent co-rapporteur.

The North Macedonian delegation who showed us nothing but courtesy and painstaking efforts to give us honest answers always.

The contributors, all of the contributors to the debate tonight, with a special reference to Senator Garret AHEARN who was coerced into saying what he said by me (we spoke about coercion earlier tonight).

To thank as well Ms Elvira KOVÁCS and the Monitoring Committee for their work on this.

Now, my good friend Ms Sibel ARSLAN will address some of the more substantive arguments later. But just in the time I have, I'll say that we fully support North Macedonia's bid to join the EU and we call on all the political parties to find a compromise, to implement the French proposal included in the conclusions of the Council of Europe of July 2022.

In other words, North Macedonia's constitution should be amended. And I would appeal to the political powers there: we had wonderful speeches tonight from the North Macedonian colleagues, please give leadership in your country to resolve this. And then we get you into the EU. We want you in the EU and we hope that you can make the change to your constitution.

I'll leave it to my wonderful colleague Ms Sibel ARSLAN at this stage, she'll make more substantive remarks.

Thank you.

Ms Sibel ARSLAN (Switzerland, SOC, Co-Rapporteur): Thank you very much, Mr Joseph O'REILLY.

Dear Chair,

We hope that this Chamber will approve our proposal to close this post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia after 25 years. And we hear it also; everybody wants that.

This is one of the reasons that you are all still here, to also support this report on North Macedonia.

Thank you very much to you all.

I want to thank also the North Macedonian delegation who worked really well with us, also our secretary and my co-rapporteur. And to you all.

I think the work will go on, but we are on the best way.

Thank you very much to you.

[Applause]

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much, Ms Sibel ARSLAN and Mr Joseph O'REILLY.

Does the Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee wish to speak? Yes, I give you the floor.

Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD, Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)): Thank you, distinguished Chair.

Dear colleagues, as we heard tonight, North Macedonia joined the Council of Europe back in 1995. Until 2000, North Macedonia was subject to the full monitoring procedure, and since 2000, under the post monitoring dialogue procedure.

The previous Assembly's resolution, which was mentioned by our wonderful rapporteur, Resolution 2304 (2019) on North Macedonia, dates from 2019. According to our rules, only two reports can be debated within the framework of the post monitoring dialogue. Therefore, the Monitoring Committee could only propose either the closing of the post monitoring dialogue or returning to the full monitoring procedure. And in December last year, 2025, the Monitoring Committee chose the first option and proposed to close the post monitoring dialogue after 25 years.

North Macedonia's political situation has been characterised by ongoing challenges related to internal reforms, ethnic relations and its Euro-Atlantic integration ambitions. The country has made significant strides over the past decade, notably resolving a long-standing name dispute with Greece in 2019, which opened the path to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization membership and closer ties with the European Union.

North Macedonia is now a well-functioning democracy where human rights and the rights of national minorities are generally respected. The authorities have made efforts to reform the judiciary and the prosecution services and to fight and prevent corruption.

As explained by our really dear friends, co-rapporteurs, both of them, some issues still require close attention. Therefore, the Assembly and its Monitoring Committee could re-examine the situation in North Macedonia in the near future in light of the recommendations proposed in our Committee report.

But I can only really sincerely congratulate North Macedonia's authorities for their efforts and engagement in implementing the necessary reforms despite internal problems such as political fragmentation and frequent shifts in government. Our Committee's proposal to close the post monitoring dialogue now needs to be approved by you, dear colleagues, the Assembly, by this Chamber. So we sincerely hope that you will agree with that.

Thank you for your attention.

Vote: Post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia

Ms Mónika BARTOS (Hungary, ECPA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Thank you, dear Chairperson.

The debate is closed.

The Monitoring Committee has presented a draft resolution to which 3 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 2, 1 and 3 to the draft resolution, which were rejected by the Committee with a two-thirds majority, be declared as definitively rejected.

Is that so? Madam Chairperson?

If no one objects I will consider the amendments to be rejected.

Is there any objection?

If not:

Amendments 2, 1 and 3 to the draft resolution are therefore rejected, and will not be called.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 16317 as amended.

A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed:

[Applause]

The draft resolution is adopted unanimously.

Congratulations.

The Parliamentary Assembly will hold its next public sitting tomorrow at 10 10 a.m. with the agenda approved on Monday.

The sitting is adjourned.

Thank you for your hard work. I wish you a nice evening and a good rest.