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The Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Rapporteur: Mr Tiny KOX, Netherlands, Group of the Unified European Left

Summary

The report aims at contributing to the ongoing reflection on strategic priorities for the coming years for the Council of Europe. It offers an opportunity to reiterate the views of the Parliamentary Assembly, as a statutory organ and driving force of the Organisation, on priority issues that it deems of strategic importance for the Council of Europe.

The report points out that the Council of Europe's overall priority is to remain the guarantor of human rights and rule of law, independence of justice, the pillar of democratic security, to provide a unique platform for multilateral co-operation in Europe and to preserve and reaffirm its own identity as an independent forum for a comprehensive and inclusive political dialogue and co-operation. The solid legal framework provided by the Council of Europe must be efficiently implemented, including the execution of the European Court of Human Rights judgements, and the role of the Assembly in this respect enhanced. It welcomes the forward looking four-year strategic approach presented by the Secretary General but underlines the need for sufficient flexibility and necessary resources to address unforeseen future challenges.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4562 of 19 March 2021.



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A. Draft Resolution²

1. The Council of Europe's aim is "to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress" (Article 1.a) of the 1949 Statute of the Council of Europe, ETS No. 1).
2. In the course of seven decades, the Council of Europe has become Europe's largest treaty-based organisation, in which all European States (except for Belarus and the Holy See) are represented. All member States have committed themselves to the European Convention of Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention"), thus indeed contributing to a greater unity as formulated in Article 1 of the Statute. Over 220 Council of Europe conventions have been concluded during the past seven decades within the scope of Article 1 of the Statute, to the benefit of member States and citizens, including the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35). This unique legally binding conventional system must be further promoted and enhanced as the best basis of democratic public legal order in Europe, now and in the future. The European Court of Human Rights was created "to ensure the observance of the engagements undertaken by the High Contracting Parties in the Convention and the Protocols thereto" (Article 19 of the Convention) and several other mechanisms have been set-up to monitor implementation of commitments in these conventions as well as to identify priority areas for action.
3. All member States are obliged to be represented in both statutory organs of the Organisation – the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly – to discuss "questions of common concern" and develop "agreements and common action" in the further realisation of the aim of the Organisation, as formulated in Article 1 of the Statute. Consequently, the Assembly deems it its duty to contribute to the ongoing reflection on strategic priorities for the coming years for the Council of Europe, so as to enable it to play fully its statutory role and to use the potential of Europe's oldest and largest treaty-based organisation.
4. The Assembly refers to its relevant recent work – in particular [Resolution 2277 \(2019\)](#) "Role and Mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future", [Resolution 2186 \(2017\)](#) "Call for a Council of Europe summit to reaffirm European unity and to defend and promote democratic security in Europe", and [Recommendation 2114 \(2017\)](#) "Defending the acquis of the Council of Europe: preserving 65 years of successful intergovernmental co-operation" – based on wide consultation with national delegations and in which strategic priorities for the Assembly, in particular, as well as for the Council of Europe in general, were identified.
5. The Assembly also takes into account the political guidance delivered by the Heads of State and Government at the 3rd Summit (Warsaw, May 2005), the policy decisions by the Committee of Ministers at its 129th session in Helsinki (May 2019) and the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Presidency (November 2020).
6. The Assembly particularly welcomes the reaffirmed commitment to unity in Europe and to greater solidarity among nations, as well as the unwavering commitment to the principles of the rule of law and the enjoyment by all persons within member States' jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as stated in the Athens Declaration.
7. The Council of Europe's overall priority is to remain the pillar of democratic security, the guarantor of human rights and rule of law, as well as platform for effective multilateralism in Europe and to preserve and reaffirm its own identity as an independent forum for a comprehensive and inclusive political dialogue and co-operation. Effective and sustainable co-operation with other multilateral organisations, both in Europe and globally, should be further developed, thus strengthening the role of the Council of Europe as a cornerstone of the European political architecture.
8. Human rights must remain at the very core of the Council of Europe's strategic framework with the implementation of the Convention in all member States its top priority. To support member States to do so, the Organisation must prioritise its implementation programmes and bring together experience and promising practice. The authority of the European Court of Human Rights must be upheld by all member States and by the Council of Europe as a whole, its effectiveness must be further improved, notably by enhancing the execution of its judgements by all member States. This is particularly vital in times of crisis, such as pandemics.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 30 March 2021.

9. The accession of the European Union to the Convention is a strategic priority. It will strengthen the credibility of the European Union and the relevance of the Council of Europe and the Convention for all its citizens and its member States.
10. Echoing to the decisions of the Committee of Ministers session in Helsinki in May 2019, the Assembly highlights the need to put a stronger emphasis on the protection of social and economic rights in the work of the Council of Europe.
11. The Assembly further joins the Committee of Ministers in calling on member States that have not yet done so to consider signing and/or ratifying the Revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163) and its Additional Protocol Providing for a System of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158). It also considers it of great importance to promote the European Union accession to the European Social Charter system.
12. The Council of Europe must prioritise achieving genuine equality, inclusion and respect of human dignity. It must continue to champion equality and eliminate discrimination on any grounds. It possesses ground-breaking standards and tools to do so, notably through the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210) – the gold standard –, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197), its standards in the area of non-discrimination, including minorities, combined with independent monitoring bodies and multi-disciplinary expert committees to translate these standards to national policies. The Organisation's position as a unique leader in this area globally must be further reinforced. In this respect, the Assembly strongly regrets any attempts to weaken the international framework to protect human rights put in place by the Council of Europe conventions.
13. The Organisation's role in building a Europe for and with children must be reinforced, notably by ensuring best interest of the child, and with a special focus on providing all our children a life free from violence, particularly through the Council of Europe Convention of the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201).
14. The Council of Europe has to address existing and emerging threats to democratic societies and democratic security, by promoting a contemporary and holistic vision of human rights, including new generation rights such as the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment, and by assessing the impact of the inherent relationship between human rights and development. As a recognised international standard-setter in the field of human rights protection, the Council of Europe should focus on devising common replies and establishing new standards to protect human rights vis-à-vis new and evolving challenges.
15. Increasing challenges to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly need to be responded with firm action, as without that meaningful dialogue, including with those who do disagree, is not possible.
16. In this context, the Assembly stresses the strategic importance of providing adequate responses to challenges related with the emergence of new technologies, in particular artificial intelligence (AI), so as to enhance its contribution for progress in our societies but also to prevent the potential negative and amplifying impact that its use may have on human rights, the rule of law and democracy. It refers to its relevant resolutions and recommendations adopted in October 2020 – [Resolution 2341 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2181 \(2020\)](#) “Need for democratic governance of artificial intelligence”; [Resolution 2342 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2182 \(2020\)](#) “Justice by algorithm – The role of artificial intelligence in policing and criminal justice systems”; [Resolution 2343 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2183 \(2020\)](#) “Preventing discrimination caused by the use of artificial intelligence”; [Resolution 2344 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2184 \(2020\)](#) “The brain-computer interface: new rights or new threats to fundamental freedoms?”; [Recommendation 2185 \(2020\)](#) “Artificial intelligence in health care: medical, legal and ethical challenges ahead”; [Resolution 2345 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2186 \(2020\)](#) “Artificial intelligence and labour markets: friend or foe?”; [Resolution 2346 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2187 \(2020\)](#) “Legal aspects of “autonomous” vehicles”; and reiterates its view that the Council of Europe is in a strategic position to provide the necessary guidance and support, in close co-operation with other European and international institutions and organisations, for creating a global regulatory framework for AI.
17. The Assembly is aware of the threat to the democratic principles of the Council of Europe posed by global IT companies, which often neglect the right of citizens to access and disseminate legal information in favour of their market policies, and expresses readiness to discuss conventional mechanisms to counter such approaches.

18. The Assembly supports the conclusion in the Athens Declaration that life and well-being on our planet is contingent on humanity's collective capacity to guarantee both human rights and a healthy environment for future generations. It welcomes the signing of the 2015 Paris Agreement of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by all 47 member States, thus committing themselves to strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change which puts at risk the exercise of human rights. It deems it of high importance to work towards new legal instruments aimed at ensuring the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment for present and future generations, and making it a legal obligation.

19. The Assembly further reiterates its firm support to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as set out in United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and welcomes the important contribution by the Council of Europe to that end, including by the Assembly and national parliaments. Referring to its relevant texts – [Resolution 2271 \(2019\)](#) and [Recommendation 2150 \(2019\)](#) “Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and [Resolution 2272 \(2019\)](#) “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: synergy needed on the part of all stakeholders, from parliaments to local authorities” – it points to the need for the United Nations and the Council of Europe to enhance their co-operation, within their respective mandates, to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the SDGs towards fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

20. The Assembly fully shares the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers' priority as regards the need to bring the Organisation closer to the people. In this context, it strongly supports the Committee of Ministers' decision to examine further options for strengthening the role and meaningful participation of civil society organisations, and national human rights institutions, in the Organisation. It also believes that specific emphasis should be made on engaging in a meaningful way with the young people and children.

21. The Council of Europe must also – in line with Article 1 of the Statute – continue to keep high on its strategic agenda the search for common responses to societal problems challenging the rule of law, notably corruption, money laundering, terrorism and violent extremism, by means of effective implementation of relevant legal instruments and mechanisms or by establishing new ones if appropriate. Furthermore, the Assembly stresses the need to ensure proper protection of parliamentarians and journalists.

22. The Assembly reiterates its call, backed by the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki (May 2019), for a stronger and more structured co-ordination between the monitoring activities of the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as of the various specialised monitoring and advisory bodies and mechanisms of the Organisation, without prejudice to their independence. More broadly, it deems it worth considering ways of co-ordinating more efficiently monitoring activities with other international organisations, including the United Nations, in order to achieve more synergy, avoid unnecessary duplication and alleviate the reporting burden for member States. It stands ready to engage in a constructive institutional dialogue on this matter and will evaluate its own monitoring activities.

23. The Assembly highlights the importance of consolidating the role of the Council of Europe as a pillar of co-operative regional order in Europe, promoting the outreach of its legal instruments beyond European borders and enhancing partnerships with States and organisations in both geographical neighbourhood and political proximity.

24. The role of the Assembly in promoting the Council of Europe key conventions and Organisation's core values must be better recognised and further enhanced.

25. The Assembly sees it as a strategic priority to carry out its work independently but, where possible, in effective complementarity with the activities of the Committee of Ministers and the intergovernmental part of the Organisation, to increase impact of each other's action. The further development of a regular, meaningful and effective 'trialogue' between the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the Assembly should be considered as a means of ensuring the strategic relevance of the Organisation. Recommendations of the Assembly to the Committee of Ministers need to be addressed in a transparent and meaningful way.

26. The Assembly underlines the importance of the new complementary joint procedure, which it adopted in January 2021, enabling the Council of Europe's statutory organs, to act together in case of a blatant violation by a member State of its obligations under the Statute.

27. The Assembly considers it necessary to make more visible the meaning of the Council of Europe membership, both in terms of advantages for both a given member State and all its citizens, and that of obligations of all member States. Protecting and promoting the rule of law, human rights and democracy is clearly to the advantage of all member States and all their citizens.

28. The Assembly reiterates its call on the governments of member States to consider all options to guarantee the financial sustainability of the Organisation so as to enable it to remain fully effective and politically relevant. It welcomes the commitment of member States to “zero real growth” policy for the current biennium – even if this does not imply a “growth”, but it reiterates its long-standing position that member States should invest more in democratic security, as embodied by the Council of Europe, and therefore ensure a better funding of it.

29. The Assembly expresses support to a future-oriented four-year strategic outlook as proposed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe which should allow a prospective approach in programming the Organisation’s activities while providing necessary flexibility to adapt to new emerging challenges.

30. The Assembly resolves to continue its strategic reflection on the future of the Council of Europe and the ways to further increase its political relevance and prominent position as a leading European political institution.

B. Draft Recommendation³

1. The Parliamentary Assembly deems it its duty to contribute to the ongoing reflection on strategic priorities for the coming years for the Council of Europe, so as to enable it to play fully its statutory role and to help to use the potential of Europe's oldest and largest treaty-based organisation, as formulated in the Statute.
2. To this purpose, the Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to take into account, in its discussions on the eve of the forthcoming ministerial session in May 2021, the views contained in Resolution ... (2021) "The Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe".
3. The Assembly will continue its strategic reflection on the future of the Council of Europe and the ways to further increase its political relevance, preserve and reaffirm its own identity as an independent forum for a comprehensive and inclusive political dialogue and co-operation, and ensure that it remains the pillar of democratic security and successful and effective multilateralism in Europe as well as a cornerstone of the European political architecture. It stands ready to engage in a constructive institutional dialogue with the Committee of Ministers on this matter.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 30 March 2021.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Tiny Kox, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1.1. Origin

1. The Committee of Ministers is scheduled to hold its next ministerial session in May 2021. On this occasion, it is expected that the Ministers should consider the strategic framework for the Council of Europe on the basis of proposals by the Secretary General.
2. In January 2021, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly suggested that the Assembly should make a contribution to this discussion. The chairpersons of all political groups agreed.
3. Following the presentation to the Bureau of the Assembly by the Secretary General of her Strategic Framework for the Council of Europe and 'trialogue' discussions on 26 January 2021, the Bureau decided, at its meeting on 1 February 2021, to seize the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy to prepare a report – in time for a debate by the Assembly during the April 2021 part-session – on “The Assembly’s vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe”.
4. On 4 February 2021, the committee appointed me as rapporteur, subject to the ratification of the reference. The Assembly referred the matter to the committee at the meeting of its Standing Committee on 19 March 2021.
5. When preparing my report, I had an exchange of views – amongst others – with Ambassadors representing their governments in the Committee of Ministers, including with Ambassador Rolf Mafael, Permanent Representative of Germany, Chairperson of Ministers’ Deputies. I thank them for their kind and useful co-operation.

1.2. Purpose and scope of the report

6. In my view, this report offers an opportunity to state and reiterate the views of the Assembly, as a statutory organ with general competence, on a limited number of priority issues that we deem of strategic importance for the Council of Europe. This is fully in accordance with the Assembly’s statutory role, and its responsibility as political driving force of the Organisation.
7. However, the report is not meant to be neither a catalogue of Assembly work in all domains under the scrutiny of its committees nor a comprehensive review of Council of Europe activities across the board. Instead, to have an impact, it will focus on a few issues only – which does not mean that other issues have no importance. The aim of the Council of Europe is formulated in the Statute of the Council of Europe (1949, ETS No. 1), to which I refer in the first paragraphs of the resolution.
8. Moreover, as the strategic reflection on the future of the Council of Europe will certainly continue well beyond the ministerial session of the Committee of Ministers in May 2021, the Assembly must be part of this process and positively contribute to it by bringing in the political dimension.

1.3. Reference points

9. It is worth recalling that all strategic options that we consider must contribute to fulfilling the statutory goal of the Council of Europe as enshrined in its founding act: “... to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress” (Article 1 of the Statute of the Council of Europe). This aim “shall be pursued through the organs of the Council by discussion of questions of common concern and by agreements and common action in economic, social, cultural, scientific, legal and administrative matters and in the maintenance and further realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.” (Article 1.b). “Every member of the Council of Europe must accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council” (Article 3).
10. The Assembly has, on many occasions, expressed its views, on strategic choices for the Council of Europe, both in general and specific terms. In particular, reference should be made to [Resolution 2277 \(2019\)](#) “Role and Mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future”, [Resolution 2186 \(2017\)](#) “Call for a Council of Europe summit to reaffirm European unity and to defend and promote democratic security in Europe”, and [Recommendation 2114 \(2017\)](#) “Defending the acquis of the Council of Europe:

preserving 65 years of successful intergovernmental co-operation” based on wide consultation with national delegations and in which already strategic priorities for the Assembly in particular as well as for the Council of Europe in general were identified.

11. I refer also to the political guidance delivered by the Heads of State and Government at the 3rd Summit (Warsaw, May 2005), including the comprehensive Action Plan which, in the view of many member States, remains of utmost relevance in its entirety. Most recently, the policy decisions by the Committee of Ministers at its 129th session in Helsinki (May 2019) and the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship (November 2020) have framed the Council of Europe response to new challenges.

2. Strategic priorities

12. As mentioned above, summing up the priorities which I believe to be of prime importance for the Council of Europe, I very much rely on the previous and on-going work of the Assembly. In fact, virtually all Assembly resolutions and recommendations aim at formulating political positions with regards to various existing and emerging challenges, thus contributing to the strategic positioning of the Council of Europe.

13. In my view, the Council of Europe’s overall priority is to remain the pillar of democratic security and successful and effective multilateralism in Europe and preserve and reaffirm its own identity as an independent forum for comprehensive and inclusive political dialogue and co-operation.

14. The Council of Europe’s unique conventional system, comprising more than 220 legally binding instruments with the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, “the Convention”) and the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) at its core, is one of the main strengths and a comparative advantage of our Organisation. It constitutes the basis of democratic public legal order in Europe. Many conventions belonging to this conventional system are open to States non-members of the Council of Europe and are also used as an inspiration in drafting national legislations globally. In addition, the uniqueness of this conventional system is that implementation of several conventions is monitored, including by independent experts, and States parties are supported in overcoming any shortcomings. This system must be further enhanced, both internally, by promoting member States’ adherence to, and compliance with, Council of Europe conventions, and externally, by encouraging non-member States to adhere. Also, the relevance of the system must be upheld by designing new instruments to respond to emerging challenges.

15. The implementation of the Convention in all member States must remain the top priority for the Council of Europe and for both statutory organs. The Convention embodies the founding values of the Organisation. This requires the continuous engagement of all member States at the national level. The authority of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court) as a remedy of last resort for over 800 million Europeans must be upheld by all member States and by the Council of Europe as a whole. This is consistent with the principles of subsidiarity, which places primary responsibility for the implementation of the Convention on the States parties, and of shared responsibility, which obliges the Committee of Ministers to take effective action to safeguard the Convention system.

16. Furthermore, in line with the Assembly’s principled position expressed on numerous occasions, including, most recently, in [Recommendation 2193 \(2021\)](#) “The implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights”, I must underscore that the execution of all the Court’s judgments, as well as its interim measures under Rule 39, must be ensured.

17. One of the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe is the accession of the European Union to the Convention, in order to complete a single common legal space from Reykjavik to Vladivostok without exception. Accession would strengthen the credibility of the European Union and the relevance of the Council of Europe and the Convention for all its citizens and its member States. It would further enhance human rights protection across Europe by making all public bodies that are capable of interfering with individual rights subject to the jurisdiction of the Court, which is a key element of European public order in the field of human rights. Accession should therefore be pursued urgently, in line with political decisions to this effect already taken at the highest level.

18. In the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Council of Europe must rise more than ever to the social challenges currently facing the peoples of our continent. Therefore, referring to the decisions of the Committee of Ministers session in Helsinki in May 2019, I wish to highlight the need to put a stronger emphasis on the protection of social and economic rights in the work of the Council of Europe.

19. I also think that the Assembly should join the Committee of Ministers in calling on member States that have not yet done so to consider signing and/or ratifying the Revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163) and its Additional Protocol Providing for a System of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158). It should be recalled that, at the Warsaw Summit in 2005, the Heads of State and Government considered that the Revised European Social Charter should be regarded as the minimum core of social rights which all member States should guarantee.

20. It is also important to promote the European Union accession to the European Social Charter system. Currently, nine of European Union member States are not parties to the revised Charter.

21. The Council of Europe has been an active actor in promoting genuine equality and respect of human dignity, and in combating discrimination on any grounds. It must continue to contribute actively to achieving these goals. Ground-breaking conventions, such as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, “the Istanbul Convention”), the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, “the Lanzarote Convention”) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) have become global “gold” standards and their efficient implementation must remain a key priority. Both Council of Europe multi-annual Strategies on Gender Equality and the Rights of the Child provide useful guidance on priorities where the focus should be placed with the support of the Council of Europe’s multiple tools to use them. In this respect, the Assembly should express its strong regret at any attempts to weaken the international framework to protect human rights put in place by the Council of Europe conventions. I refer to the joint statement⁴ by Council of Europe leaders in reaction to Turkey’s announced withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (21 March 2021).

22. The Council of Europe must be more proactive in facing and addressing existing and emerging threats to democratic societies and democratic security, in promoting a contemporary and holistic vision of human rights, including new generation rights such as the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment, and in assessing the impact of the inherent relationship between human rights and development.

23. I wish to particularly welcome the importance that our President Rik Daems is placing on the new generation of human rights and notably on making the case for environment as a human right. The right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment must become a principle, not just a policy. The holistic contribution that the Assembly will be making to this major challenge by adopting texts with proposals from various Assembly committees will illustrate the uniqueness of our Assembly in making a difference on issues that matter to all our citizens.

24. In the same vein, we should support the conclusion contained in the Athens Declaration that life and well-being on our planet is contingent on humanity’s collective capacity to guarantee both human rights and a healthy environment for future generations. I welcome the fact that all 47 Council of Europe member States have signed, and all but one have ratified, the 2015 Paris Agreement of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, thus committing themselves to strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change. It is of high importance to work towards new legal instruments aimed at ensuring the right to safe, healthy and sustainable environment for present and future generations, and making it a legal obligation.

25. I also think that we should further stress the paramount importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set out in United Nations 2030 Agenda and make achieving the SDGs a transversal priority. The important contribution that the Council of Europe already makes to this global task is welcome, but it should be made more visible and explicit. I refer here to relevant Assembly resolutions and recommendations⁵, and I see it as a priority that the United Nations and the Council of Europe continue to work together, within their respective mandates, to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the SDGs and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. I welcome very much the upcoming address of the Secretary General of the United Nations to the Assembly, on the invitation of the Assembly’s President, on the occasion of the June 2021 part-session.

26. As a recognised international standard-setter in the field of human rights protection, the Council of Europe should keep pace with the speed and scale of societal change, and focus on devising common replies and establishing new standards to protect human rights vis-à-vis new and evolving challenges.

4. [Council of Europe leaders react to Turkey’s announced withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.](#)

5. [Resolution 2271 \(2019\)](#) and [Recommendation 2150 \(2019\)](#) “Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and [Resolution 2272 \(2019\)](#) “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: synergy needed on the part of all stakeholders, from parliaments to local authorities”.

27. In this context, I believe that the Council of Europe is the appropriate framework for providing adequate responses to challenges related with the emergence of new technologies, in particular artificial intelligence (AI). It is important to prevent the potential negative impact that its use may have on human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Relevant Assembly Resolutions and Recommendations⁶, adopted in a joint debate in October 2020, contain key elements for streamlining the on-going Council of Europe work in this field. I would like to reiterate at this point the Assembly view that the Council of Europe is in a strategic position to provide the necessary guidance and support, in close co-operation with other European and international institutions and organisations, for creating a global regulatory framework for AI.

28. I wish to particularly point out one of the priorities of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, namely the need to bring the Organisation closer to the people. Accordingly, I strongly support the Committee of Ministers' decision to examine further options for strengthening the role and meaningful participation of civil society organisations and national human rights institutions in the work of our Organisation. Specific emphasis should be made on engaging with the young people and children.

29. Turning to new threats and challenges, the Council of Europe should not lose momentum on its traditional activities which are of great importance for many member States, and indeed for all Europeans. We must continue to keep high on our strategic agenda the search for common responses to societal problems challenging the rule of law, notably corruption, money laundering, terrorism and violent extremism, by means of effective implementation of relevant legal instruments and mechanisms or by establishing new ones if appropriate.

30. Although the monitoring of member States' obligations and commitments is often perceived as a sanction or a punishment, I strongly believe that it constitutes an extremely important means of ensuring, through co-operative action, that all member States comply with their duties willingly signed to when joining our Organisation. However, it is true that many simultaneous monitoring processes by various institutions and bodies may lead to 'monitoring fatigue'. I think that the Assembly should reiterate its call, already backed by the Committee of Ministers at its ministerial session in Helsinki in May 2019, for a stronger and more structured co-ordination between the monitoring activities of the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as of the various specialised monitoring and advisory bodies and mechanisms of the Organisation, without prejudice to their independence. More broadly, it is worth considering ways of co-ordinating more efficiently monitoring activities with the other international organisations, including the United Nations, in order to achieve more synergy, avoid unnecessary duplication and alleviate the reporting burden for member States. In line with my report on the role and mission of the Assembly, I stipulate in this resolution that the Assembly stands ready to engage in a constructive institutional dialogue and will evaluate its own monitoring activities.

31. In order to consolidate its role as a pillar of co-operative democratic order in Europe, our Organisation should further develop effective and sustainable co-operation with other multilateral organisations, both in Europe and beyond. We should engage more actively in promoting the global outreach of our legal instruments, many of which have played a pioneering role, for instance on the relevant international platforms such as the United Nations. I also believe that the Council of Europe should push further the reflection on its external action and bypass the 'geographical neighbourhood' logic by seeking partnerships with States and organisations sharing the same or similar values and principles.

32. As already stressed in the past, the unique nature of our Organisation stems largely from the mere fact that it has a parliamentary statutory organ composed of members from national parliaments, reflecting the whole spectrum of political views including the opposition. This must be also used to the benefit of the whole Organisation when identifying priorities for the years ahead.

33. I believe that the Assembly and national parliaments should play a more prominent role and strengthen their contribution as guarantors of the Organisation's core values, including by promoting the Council of Europe key conventions in their countries and in their national parliaments with a view to increasing the impact of these instruments on national legislative and political processes. This should include enabling

6. [Resolution 2341 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2181 \(2020\)](#) "Need for democratic governance of artificial intelligence"; [Resolution 2342 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2182 \(2020\)](#) "Justice by algorithm – The role of artificial intelligence in policing and criminal justice systems"; [Resolution 2343 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2183 \(2020\)](#) "Preventing discrimination caused by the use of artificial intelligence"; [Resolution 2344 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2184 \(2020\)](#) "The brain-computer interface: new rights or new threats to fundamental freedoms?"; [Recommendation 2185 \(2020\)](#) "Artificial intelligence in health care: medical, legal and ethical challenges ahead"; [Resolution 2345 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2186 \(2020\)](#) "Artificial intelligence and labour markets: friend or foe?"; [Resolution 2346 \(2020\)](#) and [Recommendation 2187 \(2020\)](#) "Legal aspects of 'autonomous' vehicles".

parliamentarians to contribute to the effective implementation of Council of Europe conventions by exercising parliamentary oversight of the follow-up to the conclusions under the reporting procedures. For instance, the Assembly could hold regular debates on reports and conclusions by conventional supervisory bodies, as well as on the resolutions and recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers.

34. While keeping its political and institutional independence and carrying out its work as the parliamentary part of the Organisation, the Assembly should aim at developing effective synergy with the activities of the Committee of Ministers and the intergovernmental part of the Organisation. It can provide a significant holistic and thematic contribution to all the priority areas of the Organisation. The further development of a regular, meaningful and effective 'trialogue' between the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the Parliamentary Assembly should be considered as a means of ensuring the strategic relevance of the Organisation.

35. It needs to be recalled that the membership of Europe's oldest and largest treaty-based organisation should never be considered as granted for free and without commitments. Belonging to and participating in the unique pan-European structures of the Council of Europe provides, and should continue providing, a whole range of measurable and sustainable advantages to any member State, in many respects and areas. In return, any member State should fully respect its statutory obligations, to the benefit both of its own people and of the whole community of Europeans united under the auspices of our Organisation.

36. The new joint procedure, adopted in January 2021 by the Assembly, which allows the two Council of Europe's statutory organs, the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, and the Secretary General, to act together in case of a blatant violation by a member State of its obligations under the Statute may play a significant role both in preventing and in finding the ways to end or correct such violations.

37. Moreover, it is necessary to increase the visibility of what the membership of the Organisation means, both in terms of advantages for the member States and their citizens, as well as the obligations of all member States. It has to become obvious what the Council of Europe is doing and can do for its member States and their citizens. Member States should also question what they could contribute to the Council of Europe by sharing common values. Protecting and promoting the rule of law, human rights and democracy is clearly to the advantage of all member States and all their citizens.

38. The Assembly should reiterate its call on the governments of member States to consider all options to guarantee the financial sustainability of the Organisation so as to enable it to remain fully effective and politically relevant. While the agreement of member States to depart from "zero nominal growth" policy and revert to "zero real growth" for the current biennium must be welcomed, I have to recall the long-standing Assembly position that member States should invest more in democratic security as embodied by the Council of Europe and therefore ensure a better funding of it. Without financial stability, the relevance of the Organisation, including its unique conventional framework, will lose impact. The existence of the Council of Europe as such, and the advantages that it provides to the member States, go far beyond financial costs. It should be a strategic priority to make member States realise this fact and to convince them that even a small increase of the Council of Europe budget can lead to far bigger possibilities to make the Organisation more effective and productive.

39. I believe that we should express support to the proposal to pass on a future-oriented four-year strategic programming outlook. It is indeed important to build a longer perspective for key priorities, while leaving sufficient flexibility for addressing unforeseen challenges that might come up during that period, including recommendations from the Assembly. It is also important to focus on areas where the Council of Europe has an added value and not to spread our resources too thin, running the risk of losing relevance due to the lack of capacity to monitor and support the implementation of the Council of Europe's key conventions.

3. Conclusions

40. On the basis of the elements above, I have prepared a draft resolution suggesting the position of the Assembly on priority issues that are of strategic importance for the Council of Europe for the years to come.

41. In addition, a draft recommendation aims at conveying the message by the Assembly to the attention of the Committee of Ministers on the eve of its ministerial session to be held in May 2021.

42. The Assembly should continue its strategic reflection on the future of the Council of Europe and the ways to further increase its political relevance and prominent position as a leading European political forum.