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Recent challenges to security in Europe: what role for the Council of Europe?

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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Summary

The Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine has done grievous harm to the international order and unsettled the European security architecture.

Security is a wider concept than defence, and rests to a great extent on compliance with democratic processes, human rights and the rule of law. The notion of democratic security, first endorsed by Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at the 1993 Vienna Summit, is today as relevant as ever.

The Council of Europe should enhance the comprehensive and long-term security of its member States within the scope of its mandate and contribute to making them more resilient in countering threats and preventing conflicts. In this respect, the backsliding of democracy in Europe should be urgently addressed.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4631 of 28 January 2022.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, waged in open defiance of international law, has done grievous harm to the international order and unsettled the European multilateral architecture.
2. Reacting to this serious violation of the Council of Europe Statute (ETS No. 1), the Committee of Ministers took the unprecedented decision of excluding the Russian Federation from the Organisation, in line with the unanimous position expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly in its Opinion 300 (2022). This war of aggression represents not just a challenge for the Council of Europe, but possibly the greatest test for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since its creation in 1975, affecting its capacity to carry out its mandate with the consensus of all participating States.
3. The historical changes due to the surge of a large-scale military threat in Europe have led a number of Council of Europe member States to abandon their neutrality, increase their military expenditure, and seek membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In parallel, NATO plans to adopt a new Strategic Concept at its Madrid Summit in June 2022, the first in 12 years. Furthermore, the European Union has found a new impetus to develop its Common Security and Defence Policy, with European Union leaders reaffirming their commitment to increase the European Union's capacity in this area at the European Council meeting on 10-11 March 2022.
4. Everyone's eyes are cast on the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, but in Europe there are a number of other long-term open or frozen conflicts and various situations of tension. Alongside these, new security threats have emerged in the past two decades. Some threats are transnational, such as terrorism and violent extremism. Some rely on technology such as misinformation and disinformation, hacking of digital infrastructures, or interference with electoral processes. Migrants, energy and food are being weaponised in new forms of hybrid war. Some challenges are environmental and man-made, such as climate change. Some, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, can have a global impact on the economy, democratic governance and the exercise of fundamental freedoms.
5. In this new security context fraught with risks, Council of Europe member States should renew their commitment to the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. They should reiterate their support for the Council of Europe as the cornerstone European organisation to develop a shared space for these values to thrive, in the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation. While Europe is experiencing a period of uncertainty, it should reaffirm its unity around the values which are, and should continue to be, the foundation for the multilateral architecture.
6. Whereas defence issues are excluded from its remit, the Council of Europe should enhance the comprehensive and long-term security of its member States within the scope of its mandate and contribute to making them more resilient in countering threats and preventing conflicts, while providing a platform which is conducive to mutual trust and the development and consolidation of good neighbourly relations.
7. Security is a wider concept than defence, and rests to a great extent on compliance with democratic processes, human rights and the rule of law. This notion of democratic security, first endorsed by Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at the 1993 Vienna Summit, as well as the concept of "indivisible security", included in the OSCE Charter of Istanbul of 1999, are today as relevant as ever.
8. In this respect, the backsliding of democracy in Europe should be urgently addressed not only because of its domestic repercussions, but also because of the potential risks for democratic security on the whole continent. Supporting the role of civil society, increasing citizens' trust in public institutions, innovating democratic practices, finding new ways of involving citizens in decision-making processes, reinforcing adherence to the rule of law and to fundamental rights and freedoms, and safeguarding media plurality and access to information are all essential elements to strengthen the resilience of democracies.
9. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:
 - 9.1. as regards democratic security:
 - 9.1.1. invest in all aspects of a comprehensive security approach, including deep/soft security, human security and democratic resilience;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 16 May 2022.

- 9.1.2. safeguard their societies from attacks on the good functioning of democracy, including disinformation and misinformation, and particularly from internal or external attempts to undermine, or interfere in, electoral processes;
- 9.1.3. ensure adherence to the rule of law and to fundamental rights and freedoms, so as to build trust in public institutions;
- 9.1.4. promote the role of civil society, finding ways of involving citizens in decision-making processes and safeguarding freedom of association;
- 9.1.5. ensure that the ability to access and impart information is protected, including by guaranteeing an independent and pluralistic media environment;
- 9.1.6. prioritise good neighbourly relations with each other, and commit to resolving disputes and disagreements through dialogue and diplomacy;
- 9.1.7. support cross-border co-operation and other efforts to defuse tensions and promote understanding at the local level, including with and among civil society;
- 9.1.8. tackle socio-economic inequalities, which threaten the democratic stability of our countries and dent citizens' trust in politics;
- 9.2. as regards multilateralism:
 - 9.2.1. fully subscribe to rules-based multilateralism while striving for its further strengthening;
 - 9.2.2. review the European multilateral architecture in order to make it more responsive and effective in tackling the present challenges;
- 9.3. as regards the role of the Council of Europe:
 - 9.3.1. give fresh impetus and political support to the central role of the Council of Europe as the guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe and a platform for political dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism;
 - 9.3.2. support the further development of Council of Europe work in the area of democratic security;
 - 9.3.3. allocate the necessary financial resources to ensure the financial sustainability of the Council of Europe;
 - 9.3.4. support the organisation of a fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, which would address, *inter alia*, the promotion of democratic security, countering democratic backsliding and its root causes, ways to rejuvenate democracy and spur citizen engagement, and the introduction, within the Council of Europe, of early warning mechanisms to timely address threats to the rule of law, democratic standards and human rights protection in its member States;
 - 9.3.5. allocate the necessary resources to ensure that the Council of Europe can expand its work on confidence-building measures to help build the foundations for long-lasting peace.
10. As regards its own activities, the Assembly should:
 - 10.1. increase its focus on parliamentary diplomacy as a tool to defuse tensions, promote dialogue, reinforce mutual understanding and enhance confidence building and conflict prevention;
 - 10.2. contribute to the Council of Europe's efforts at early warning, in order to address situations which risk posing a threat to the rule of law, democratic security and good neighbourly relations;
 - 10.3. in the context of the overall Council of Europe's reflection on monitoring, consider reviewing its procedure relating to the monitoring of obligations and commitments by member States;
 - 10.4. place greater emphasis in its work on new security challenges and how they relate to democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
 - 10.5. enhance co-operation on deep/soft security matters, confidence building and conflict prevention with other international parliamentary assemblies, including the European Parliament, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly;
 - 10.6. strengthen co-operation and carry out joint activities with national parliaments on deep/soft security, confidence building and conflict prevention.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. The Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine has done grievous harm to the international order and unsettled the European security architecture. It represents a clash between two approaches to international relations: one based on dialogue, co-operation and a rules-based international order and another based on spheres of interest and imposing options through the use of force.
2. In the face of this challenge, it is necessary to assert the unity of Europe around its values and give a new political impetus to the role of the Council of Europe as the cornerstone European organisation aimed at developing a shared space for democracy, human rights and the rule of law to thrive, in the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation.
3. The goal to make the Organisation "fully capable of contributing to democratic security", as declared by Heads of State and Government at the 1993 Vienna Summit, is today as relevant as ever, given the interdependence between respect for democratic standards domestically and an international position based on the respect for common rules. The Organisation should therefore have a clearer focus on reversing the current backsliding of democracy, proposing ways to rejuvenate the functioning of democracy and promote democratic resilience.
4. At the same time, it is important for the Council of Europe to make better use of its bodies and mechanisms which can help enhance democratic security and have greater flexibility and capacity for rapid reaction in the face of negative trends which risk deterioration, sometimes with spill-over effects beyond national borders.
5. In light of the foregoing, the Parliamentary Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to:
 - 5.1. set up a Democratic Resilience Initiative which, building on the work of bodies and mechanisms which already exist within the Council of Europe, will monitor democratic developments in member States, and form the basis for enhanced political dialogue to help member States address situations of concern;
 - 5.2. enhance the exchange of best practice in all areas relating to democracy and democratic governance;
 - 5.3. establish a mechanism to monitor developments related to civil society, freedom of association, and civil participation and engagement in Council of Europe member States;
 - 5.4. consider strengthening and expanding the Council of Europe's activities relating to confidence building measures and conflict prevention, including in its civil society and cross-border co-operation dimensions;
 - 5.5. convene a Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, which would address, *inter alia*, the promotion of democratic security, how to counter the backsliding of democracy, ways to rejuvenate democracy and spur citizen engagement, and the setting up of a Council of Europe early warning mechanism to address threats to the rule of law, democratic standards and human rights protection.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 16 May 2022.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Bogdan Klich, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Matters relating to national defence do not fall within the scope of the Council of Europe, as explicitly stated in its Statute (ETS No. 1). Military affairs are not included in the mandate of any Council of Europe subsidiary body or committee. But security is a wider concept than defence, and rests to a great extent on compliance with democratic processes, human rights and the rule of law, issues which fall squarely within the remit of the Council of Europe. Indeed, the Statute itself says that the very aim of the organisation is “to achieve a greater unity between its members” and refers to the “pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation”.

2. While the Russian Federation’s large-scale, unprovoked, and unjustified aggression against Ukraine has brought to the forefront military concerns, it is necessary to take a comprehensive and long-term view and work towards strengthening democratic security in Europe, so as to make Council of Europe member States more resilient in the face of current and future crises. Even before the current war of aggression in the heart of Europe, Council of Europe member States had acknowledged that as threats to security evolve, the Organisation’s contribution to common stability and security needs to evolve accordingly and concerted responses developed.⁴ In this spirit, it is important for the Council of Europe to look at all the various aspects of security that are related to its mandate.

3. Within the Parliamentary Assembly, various notions of security fall within the mandates of committees. Issues related to democratic stability, soft security, and the prevention and settlement of crises and conflicts fall within the remit of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. The fulfilment of the obligations assumed by the member States under the terms of the Statute, the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and other conventions, are under the purview of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States, which also has a Sub-Committee on Conflicts between Council of Europe Member States. To confirm the transversal concern with these matters, in the past a Sub-Committee on Conflict Prevention through Dialogue and Reconciliation and an *ad hoc* Sub-Committee on early warning systems and conflict prevention in Europe existed in the committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. The Committee has currently set up a Sub-Committee on Democracy.

4. The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights is concerned with allegations of serious human rights violations, rule of law and issues relating to the fight against terrorism. And while the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons is tasked with addressing all matters relating to these groups, the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media covers issues related to freedom of the media, disinformation, internet governance and security.

5. Themes explored by previous Assembly reports and resolutions have included private security firms and the erosion of the State monopoly on the use of force, escalation of tensions and conflicts in specific areas of Europe and the neighbourhood, counter-terrorism co-operation and the threat to European security posed by drug trafficking. Some of the specific security challenges in Europe addressed by the Assembly in the past include the Chechen wars, the conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the Russian Federation’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the Russian war with Georgia in 2008.

2. Democratic security

6. The notion of democratic security, first put at the heart of the Organisation’s mission in the Vienna Declaration of 1993, is central to understanding the role of the Council of Europe in this area and how to further strengthen it. Concluding their First Summit, the Heads of State and Government affirmed their will to render the Council of Europe “fully capable of contributing to democratic security” and consolidating peace and stability on the European continent, while countering “territorial ambitions, the resurgence of aggressive nationalism, the perpetuation of spheres of influence, intolerance or totalitarian ideologies”. They committed to promoting joint security by opening doors to newly democratic countries and building a European construction based on the Organisation’s values.

7. The subsequent Summits of 1997 in Strasbourg and 2005 in Warsaw also reaffirmed the need for the Council of Europe to intensify its contribution to stability and security on the continent, outlining new threats that called for concerted responses in numerous areas.

4. [See the Warsaw Declaration, 2005.](#)

8. Former Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland made democratic security the central analytical framework through which to assess the state of human rights, democracy and rule of law in his 2015 annual report.⁵ This report followed two major threats to security in Europe: the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, in violation of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity which are enshrined in international law including, amongst others, in the Helsinki Final Act; and two terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen committed by radicalised individuals affiliated with Daesh.

9. Noting that democracies rarely, if ever, go to war with each other, and that democratic practices protect States from internal strife, he stressed that Council of Europe member States have a shared responsibility for ensuring democratic security. While “hard security” continued to be vital, the report noted that deterrence and military capacity could not guarantee stability on their own, and that democratic norms and practices were the necessary foundations for lasting peace.

10. In this respect, the backsliding of democracy, as described by the current Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić in her 2021 annual report,⁶ is all the more worrying. In addition to domestic repercussions, this development is bound to have consequences on the collective security of Europe if allowed to persist, as the two spheres are interdependent. We cannot reasonably expect a country which violates democratic principles domestically to be a safe and reliable partner in its relations with its neighbours. Democratic strength in all of our societies leads to more collective security within the common democratic European home.

11. Democratic security has many dimensions. One of them is citizen and civil society engagement, as underlined by the Assembly in its Resolutions [2437 \(2022\)](#) “Safeguarding and promoting genuine democracy in Europe”, and [2186 \(2017\)](#) “Call for a Council of Europe summit to reaffirm European unity and to defend and promote democratic security in Europe”.

12. To strengthen democracies and counter the backsliding it is essential to find new ways of involving citizens in decision-making processes, in addition to ensuring the good functioning of representative democracy. Civil society plays a key role in holding the authorities accountable – but civil society engagement is often the target of manipulation, and for this reason the Council of Europe needs to give citizens tools to stay resilient against misinformation and attempts to manipulate them. Freedom of the media, the protection of journalists and access to reliable information are also essential to ensure a healthy pluralist environment and to exert a counterbalance to power.

13. In a context of democratic backsliding, freedom of association is often restricted, specifically to limit the scrutiny by civil society organisations, and must therefore be better safeguarded. Local democracy plays a key role in shaping public trust towards public institutions, as it is the governance level which is the closest to people. Cross-border initiatives can further help confidence building, conflict prevention and the establishment of good neighbourly relations.

14. Working on all these fronts will serve to increase the public’s trust in democratic institutions and will contribute to strengthening democratic security.

3. A comprehensive concept of security

15. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is the first intergovernmental organisation to have adopted a concept of comprehensive and co-operative security, which its participating States have reaffirmed in major documents and decisions taken since the Helsinki Final Act.⁷ According to this approach, comprehensive security includes:

- a politico-military dimension,
- an economic and environmental dimension,
- a human dimension.

16. These three dimensions are complementary, interconnected, interdependent and of equal importance. The underlying idea is that the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and economic and environmental governance are as important for the sustainability of peace and security as is politico-military co-operation.

5. Secretary General's annual report, “[A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe](#)”, 2015.

6. The 2021 annual report focused on the backsliding of democracy in Europe

7. The OSCE Concept of Comprehensive and Co-operative Security, SEC.GAL/100/09, 17 June 2009.

17. Another way to describe this complex interaction is by using concepts such as:
- hard security, which relies on the use of military force to respond to external, inter-State, threats,
 - and soft/deep security, which focuses on non-military ways to build resilience against threats and prevent conflicts.

4. Human security and equality

18. The Council of Europe's core priority of promoting human rights, democracy and rule of law contributes directly to the notions of soft, deep and comprehensive security.

19. The Westphalian notion of security is centred on contracts between sovereign countries, on military activity and on national and regional stability. While still relevant today, since the fall of the Berlin Wall there has been a significant shift in recognising the importance of "soft" security – societal stability and individuals' well-being – in both the domestic and the international arena.⁸ A human security approach, focused on human beings and on their rights, livelihoods and dignity, became more important in political discourse, including within the Council of Europe.

20. The Final Declaration of the Second Summit of Heads of State and Government recognises the citizens' concerns regarding new dimensions of threats to their security and includes people-centred elements in its Action Plan. As the guardian of human rights on the continent, and as the principal body for standard-setting in democracy and rule of law, the Council of Europe has played a central role in promoting human security, whether explicitly presented as such or not.

21. Zooming out from the individual to the societal, the Council of Europe has always paid close attention to equality as a cardinal factor in a democratic society. Beyond the anti-discrimination and human rights aspects of equality, it is important to underline that socio-economic inequalities threaten the democratic stability of our countries and dent citizens' trust in politics. The Assembly addressed this topic recently in [Resolution 2437 \(2022\)](#), noting how growing inequalities are among the factors having contributed to a general feeling of disenchantment with democracy in Europe.

5. New security threats

22. In the past decade, new security threats have emerged, forcing a realignment of resources and attention from governments and international organisations. These new threats also point to the importance of organisations such as the Council of Europe, to focus on how they can play their part to contribute to shared security outside the military sphere. Many of these new threats are transnational and see the involvement of non-State actors.

23. New forms of "hybrid wars" seek to use cyberattacks, disinformation, migration and energy supplies as ways of destabilising rivals, even outside the context of open war. The classic distinction between war and peace is therefore blurred, leading to new security threats faced by Council of Europe member States outside of the military realm.

5.1. Cyber security

24. Cyberattacks have become a mainstay in both peacetime intelligence operations and more overt conflicts as parallel means of harming the enemy. Cyberattacks are particularly dangerous as they can hit a country's strategic infrastructure, such as its energy supply, financial networks, the air traffic control system or nuclear plants. The Assembly has already explored the ramifications of such type of warfare, and raised specific concerns, in Resolution 2217 (2018) and Recommendation 2130 (2018) "Legal challenges related to hybrid war and human rights obligations".

25. The recent aggression is no exception. In the two months preceding the Russian aggression, Ukraine was targeted by at least three waves of cyberattacks specifically aimed at sites of government bodies, the networks of the Ministry of Defence, banks and other State institutions.

8. "From Soft Security to Hard Security in the Black Sea Region – Does the osce Fit?" – <https://brill.com/view/journals/shrs/aop/article-10.1163-18750230-bja10008/article-10.1163-18750230-bja10008.xml?language=en#fn000003>.

26. Beyond the most obviously disruptive cyberattacks involving the functioning of computers and servers, States are increasingly confronted also with mass disinformation campaigns, including fake news, interference in election processes, and disruption of communications. These represent direct attacks on the functioning of our democracies, and therefore of our common democratic security. In this respect, the Budapest Convention on cybercrime (ETS No. 185), whose Second Additional Protocol was opened for signature on 12 May 2022, remains an important framework.

5.2. Disinformation

27. In Resolution 2326 (2020), the Assembly expressed its concern over the scale of “information pollution,” the spread of disinformation campaigns aimed at shaping public opinion, and trends of foreign electoral interference and manipulation. It pointed to the need to improve the internet’s content and architecture, build up the resilience of Europe’s democratic systems and societies, counter disinformation, invest in quality journalism and preserve freedom of expression and media and political pluralism, especially in the context of elections. Similarly, two recent recommendations by the Committee of Ministers identified disinformation as a growing threat to democracy and provided specific guidelines for States to address it.⁹

28. The European Parliament, likewise, has expressed concern about the growing incidence and increasingly sophisticated nature of attempts at foreign interference and manipulation of information, mainly by the Russian Federation and China, targeting the democratic functioning of the European Union and its member States. In a March 2022 resolution, it called on the Commission to propose a cross-sector strategy aimed at equipping the European Union with appropriate foresight and resilience policies and deterrence tools, and to consider the establishment of an independent European Centre for Interference Treats and Information Integrity.¹⁰

5.3. Migration as a weapon

29. While ensuring the safety of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers remains a humanitarian concern for European governments, the appalling truth is that migrants are increasingly being weaponised. Non-democratic governments use the aspirations and desperate situations of human beings as tools to exploit political divisions and public fears over uncontrolled immigration in European countries. This, in turn, hardens attitudes towards migration and asylum seekers within specific countries, leading to less stability and social cohesion.

5.4. Energy security

30. While the notion of energy security is not new, the recent large-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated in the starkest terms the potential security effects of energy supply chains. Many European countries’ dependence on Russian gas has been a brake on the full force of international reactions to the invasion. Conversely, hydrocarbon flows have been a convenient political lever for Moscow – and other energy suppliers – for many decades, also helpful to defuse criticisms over their human rights or democratic records, in turn hampering prospects for shared democratic security.

31. In a sharp demonstration of the risks to European countries, the Russian Federation abruptly suspended natural gas deliveries to Poland and Bulgaria on 27 April 2022 due to their refusal to pay in roubles, despite this not being in breach of their contractual obligations to Gazprom. This followed the Russian leadership’s announcement a few weeks earlier that “unfriendly” foreign buyers would have to pay for gas in the Russian currency.

5.5. Violent extremism and terrorism

32. While in the past few years these issues have been less in the focus of public attention, radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism continue to be major threats to democratic security in Europe. The Council of Europe should continue to support its member States in preventing and combating this scourge while ensuring international co-operation and assisting its victims.

9. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age; Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on electoral communication and media coverage of election campaigns.

10. www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0064_EN.html,
<https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1696807&t=e&l=en>.

5.6. Food security

33. The Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine has cast a tragic light on the impact of conflict on food security. Ukraine is a net exporter of agricultural products, and nearly 50 countries depend on the Russian Federation and Ukraine for at least 30% of their wheat imports and generally to meet their consumption needs.¹¹ The Russian aggression has resulted in an enormous food security challenge, disrupting livelihoods during the agricultural growing season in Ukraine and significantly affecting global food supplies. Scarcity of key food and agricultural products can lead to instability and unrest in many countries and has the potential to affect European security.

6. Conflicts in Europe

34. Since the end of the Second World War, multilateral fora have played an important role in providing a space for bilateral issues to be addressed constructively. Disputes have emerged throughout the years, ranging from interpretation of historical events to trade and economic disagreements, but dialogue prevailed as the option to address outstanding issues.

35. Nonetheless, certain long-standing, unresolved conflicts in Europe, often fuelled by dangerous political narratives, continue to create instability and can potentially escalate.

36. The island of Cyprus remains divided by an unresolved conflict which saw multiple military interventions in the 1970's. Despite several attempts over the past 47 years to reach a political agreement, the outcome remains uncertain, and the presence of blue helmets is maintained to this day. Disagreements remain among Council of Europe member States over the status of Kosovo.*¹² Twenty-five years following the end of a brutal war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, tensions are once again on the rise and threatening to tear apart a delicately crafted balance. The implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland has provided much respite from past violence but remains fragile and in need of responsible political stewardship. Disagreements on maritime boundaries and natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean have led to military build-up, and dangerous rhetoric, between member States over the last years.

37. There are also a number of protracted conflicts with significant military activity which have been affecting the lives of thousands of people. The situations in Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where the Russian Federation has supported breakaway movements in violation of member States' sovereignty and territorial integrity, pose serious security and humanitarian problems. Longstanding hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh erupted into full scale armed conflict in 2020 and, despite a peace deal from later that year, a renewed crisis in 2021 led to further clashes.

38. Notwithstanding these different types of conflicts affecting Europe, it is clear that the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine is on an entirely different scale. Nothing compares to what we are witnessing in Ukraine, with the full-on invasion of sovereign country from various sides, through land, air and sea attacks and with the complete destruction of entire cities and civilian infrastructure. The Geneva Conventions on international humanitarian law are being openly flouted, with civilians being targeted and numerous recorded instances of war crimes.

39. The Council of Europe must draw lessons from this war of aggression. In this new hostile environment, where the scale of conflict is unlike anything our continent had seen since the Second World War, the Organisation needs to redouble its efforts to contribute to deep/soft security throughout all of its activities and be a forum for member States to uphold democratic security with renewed vigour. Its role as a platform for dialogue, diplomacy, confidence-building and conflict prevention should also be strengthened.

7. The need to protect and reform rules-based multilateralism

40. The Russian aggression against Ukraine cannot be seen as a bilateral issue between two States. It is a clash between two mindsets and approaches to international relations: one relies on a rules-based international order while the other is based on spheres of interest. One is based on rules, dialogue, co-operation and finding political solutions to disputes; the other one is based on confrontation and the use of force.

11. "Impact of the Ukraine-Russia conflict on global food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations", Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 8 April 2022

12. *All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

41. Rules-based multilateralism must be part of the solution to the new and revived security concerns facing Europe. As a direct result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, however, many multilateral institutions find themselves weakened.

42. The UN General Assembly's 145-5 vote against the Russian aggression on 2 March 2022, and its April decision to suspend the Russian Federation from the Human Rights Council, showed the relevance of international diplomacy. But the main body charged with international peace and security, the Security Council, finds itself paralysed. The Russian Federation's veto power has prevented the Security Council from expressing itself on one of the most consequential security matters of our time and will likely inhibit its action in the future. The lack of co-operation in the Security Council will also impact international responses to crises globally.

43. The Russian aggression on Ukraine represents the most severe test for the OSCE since its founding in 1975. As the multilateral body most involved in the security architecture in Europe since the days of the Cold War, it had already played an important role in Ukraine since 2014, leading a sizeable monitoring mission and participating in the Trilateral Contact Group, with the Russian Federation and Ukraine, to try to find a diplomatic solution to the war in Donbass. The OSCE remains one of the few organisations with the potential to play a role in implementing any ceasefire agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, given its wide membership and security focus.

44. Nonetheless, as a consensus-based organisation, the stark differences of views on the situation among the participating States will prove a difficult obstacle for the effectiveness of its work. The recent failure to extend the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission, which expired on 31 March 2022, is a concrete demonstration of the challenges to the OSCE's core functioning.

45. The Arctic Council has been a venue for the eight States and indigenous peoples of the Arctic to tackle the challenges of sustainable development and environmental protection since 1996. In March 2022, all members aside from the Russian Federation announced a pause in their participation in the Council, and their withdrawal from all meetings to be hosted by the current chair, the Russian Federation.¹³

46. The Russian aggression on Ukraine is an event of such magnitude that it is leading to the repositioning of some Council of Europe member States in relation to their military alliances. Sweden and Finland are in the process of formally applying to join NATO, abandoning decades-long neutrality policies. The popular sentiment in both countries seems to be shifting as well, with 62% of Finnish respondents saying they favour NATO membership, up from 21% five years ago, and a growing majority in Sweden supporting the move.¹⁴ Finland's accession to NATO would be particularly significant, as it would represent the sixth State bordering the Russian Federation to join the alliance, and one with a 1 340 km-long shared border.

47. For more than one reason, 2022 will be a defining year for NATO. In addition to eventual decisions on enlargement, allies will adopt a new Strategic Concept in June 2022, the first one in twelve years. As part of its recommendations for the Strategic Concept, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly proposed the establishment of a Democratic Resilience Centre within NATO Headquarters, to protect democracy and strengthen allies' ability to resist and counter attempts to undermine it.¹⁵ It also suggested that the Strategic Concept should promote a more "political NATO" to facilitate the convergence of views among Allies.¹⁶

48. These kinds of initiatives to reinforce democratic resilience and political dialogue are to be supported. In the face of the current challenge to rules-based multilateralism, it is necessary not only to protect multilateral institutions but also to reform them and equip them with new tools which can make them more effective and capable of tackling the current and future threats. This includes questions regarding enlargement, as more countries in Europe seek to join multilateral institutions on the basis of shared values.

49. In this new security context fraught with risks, Council of Europe member States should renew their commitment to the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and reiterate their support for the Council of Europe as the cornerstone European organisation aimed at developing a shared space for these values to thrive, in the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation. While Europe is

13. "Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine", United States Department of State, 2022.

14. "Yle poll: Support for Nato membership hits record high", Yle Uutiset; "Growing majority of Swedes back joining NATO, opinion poll shows", Reuters.

15. <https://nato-pa.foleon.com/coordination-centre-on-democracy-resilience/the-case-for-a-center-for-democratic-resilience-in-nato/introduction/>.

16. www.nato-pa.int/document/2021-transatlantic-link-and-burden-sharing-changing-strategic-environment-yildiz-report.

experiencing a period of uncertainty, it should reaffirm its unity around the values which are and should continue to be the foundation of the multilateral architecture and support the next phases of European enlargement as a strategic way of reinforcing democratic security.

8. European Union response

50. The Russian aggression on Ukraine has proved to be a catalyst for the unity and greater leadership of the European Union as a global actor. In just over two months, with unprecedented speed, the European Union adopted several packages of increasingly fierce sanctions against the Russian Federation. President von der Leyen's visit to Kyiv and Bucha – the site of an alleged massacre of civilians by Russian forces – in early April was the most visible representation of the European Union's solidarity with a third country under attack. The security and defence discourse that has emerged from both Brussels and EU capitals indicates a fundamental shift in the European Union's approach to continental security.

51. France, a long-time proponent of stronger EU military integration and current holder of the rotating presidency, has pointed to the Russian invasion as evidence that Europe must become more self-reliant for its own defence.¹⁷ At the informal European Council meeting in Versailles of 10-11 March 2022, EU leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen European security and defence and increase the EU's capacity to act autonomously. President von der Leyen announced that the European Commission would prepare an analysis of the defence investments gaps by May 2022, and the President of the European Parliament also indicated the European Union should go further on joint defence.

52. As President von der Leyen asserted in a speech to the European Parliament in early March 2022, "European security and defence have evolved more in the last six days than in the last two decades."¹⁸

53. Several EU countries, including Germany, Romania and Sweden, have announced an increase in their defence spending.¹⁹ In addition, many of them, including traditionally neutral ones like Finland and Sweden, have been sending weapons to Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian aggression, with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, both calling on EU member States to increase their supply of heavy weapons and military equipment in the leadup to a recent Foreign Affairs Council.²⁰

54. Under the European Peace Facility, an instrument established only in 2021 aimed at enhancing the European Union's ability to prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, the European Council approved a total of €1.5 billion in funding since February 2022 to support the Ukrainian armed forces.²¹

55. Even the new Strategic Compass, approved by the European Council on 21 March 2022, has a strong defence focus, with plans to establish a rapid deployment capacity of up to 5 000 troops, conduct regular live exercises on land and at sea, enhance military mobility and substantially enhance member States' individual defence expenditures. The new strategy also seeks to address the prominence of hybrid threats, committing to developing Hybrid Toolbox and Response Teams, an EU Cyber Defence Policy, and a Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox.

9. The role of the Council of Europe: conclusions and proposals

56. At different moments of their history, Council of Europe member States decided to join this common European home because they believed in a Europe without dividing lines. They cherished the same values and accepted to be bound by the same obligations. And yet, we are faced with the tragic reality of a brutal military aggression in the heart of Europe. This event has shaken the international and regional order.

17. www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/europe-must-become-more-independent-shore-up-defence-emmanuel-macron.

18. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/%20en/speech_22_1483.

19. <https://epthinktank.eu/2022/03/15/outcome-of-the-informal-european-council-in-versailles-on-10-11-march-2022/>.

20. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-11/eu-urges-member-states-to-send-ukraine-weapons-in-days-not-weeks.

21. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/.

57. Reacting to this challenge, the Committee of Ministers for the first time used Article 8 of the Statute to end the membership of a member State. If there is one initial lesson to learn is the confirmation that Council of Europe member States are interdependent for their security and stability. They are interdependent for ensuring the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation, which, as the Statute reads, is vital for the preservation of society and European civilisation.

58. In this new, volatile and tense geopolitical context, it is necessary to give a new vigour to the Council of Europe, support it politically and equip it with robust means to carry out its mission. The Council of Europe needs to have its deserved place in the European political and institutional architecture, to support the democratic security of its member States as well as rules-based multilateralism.

59. If this Organisation and its bodies are called to have an impact on democratic security, it should have a clearer focus on reversing the current trend of backsliding of democracy, on proposing ways to strengthen and rejuvenate democratic institutions and to tackle the root causes of this downward momentum. To this end, it is imperative for the Council of Europe to put greater emphasis on its activities aimed at strengthening the respect of the rule of law in its member States, including through the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), the work of which is crucial not only to enhance institutional resilience against corruption but also to enhance public trust in the functioning of democratic institutions. The ongoing reflection on the Council of Europe's monitoring procedures should be further pursued, and the Assembly should also play its part.

60. Amongst the proposals that I would like to put on the table is the creation of a new Council of Europe structure to strengthen the member States' democratic resilience. This Democratic Resilience Initiative should monitor democratic developments in member States, bringing to bear the work of existing Council of Europe bodies and mechanisms with a view to preventing breaches of Council of Europe standards and putting forward measures to strengthen democracy and the rule of law.

61. Strengthening the Council of Europe's action to reinforce civil society in its member States should also be a priority. As a cardinal element of democratic life, the vitality of civil society will help determine the resilience of our shared democratic security and help deter further backsliding. In this respect, I believe the Council of Europe should establish a mechanism to monitor developments related to civil society, freedom of association, and civil participation in member States and provide early warning and recommendations to the Secretary General. A reinforcement of the already-existing Expert Council on NGO Law, for example, could be an avenue to be explored.

62. Building resilience of our domestic institutions is one of the best investments our Organisation can make for the long-term stability and security of Europe as a whole.

63. The Council of Europe should also have greater flexibility and capacity for rapid reaction, particularly for issues which could have spill-over effects beyond national borders, such as the protection of the rights of national minorities. Unresolved issues can augment tensions in the Council of Europe's shared space, challenging democratic security as well as democratic stability.

64. The Council of Europe should also play a greater role in the area of conflict prevention, including through its parliamentary dimension, and in promoting good neighbourly relations. When disputes emerge between member States, parliamentary diplomacy can play an important role to defuse tensions and promote mutual understanding before things escalate further. The Assembly should increase its activities on this front: through field visits, urgent procedures, hearings, and its ability to bring parliamentarians together for dialogue, it can be even more useful as part of our Organisation's efforts at early warning and conflict resolution.

65. Another area where the Council of Europe can re-focus more attention and resources is in confidence-building measures. The Organisation already conducts some limited activities in this regard, bringing together civil society from the two sides in a conflict situation to undergo joint trainings, thereby not only helping to forge understanding but also spreading awareness of European human rights, rule of law and democratic standards. The added value of the Council of Europe in confidence-building lies precisely in the vast array of standards that it can offer as a way of bringing people together. The Assembly could therefore encourage member States to allocate specific financial resources to this, and the Secretary General could consider allocating staff dedicated to confidence-building measures in the field offices.

66. Finally, the Council of Europe should place greater emphasis on identifying and addressing new security challenges, including "hybrid wars", and to establish processes to step back and look at how all the specific new challenges, from energy supplies to cyber-attacks, relate to one another and affect European security.