Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2515 (2023)[1]

The role of the Council of Europe in preventing conflicts, restoring credibility of international institutions and promoting global peace

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The price of every war will always be many times higher than that of preventing it. Throughout its seventy-four years of history, the Council of Europe has played an active role in preventing conflicts on the European continent, employing a panoply of tools, such as early warning and monitoring, confidence building and the promotion of common values. Recently, however, peace has been fundamentally challenged.

2. After a gradual decline, the number of armed conflicts in the world began to rise again in 2010. Some 35 conflicts are currently ongoing. Contributing factors to this rise include the breakdown in the rule of law, weak State institutions, the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources that exacerbates climate change, the erosion of social welfare, the weakening of multilateralism and the passivity of the international community towards emerging threats – all of which might contribute to the rise of authoritarian regimes. The international order has been placed under an existential threat as a result of the current Russian aggression against Ukraine, which was launched on 20 February 2014 and drastically escalated on 24 February 2022.

3. The Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1) begins with a preambular paragraph declaring that "the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation is vital for the preservation of human society and civilisation". According to Article 1 of the Statute, "the aim of the Council of Europe 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". However, greater unity cannot be achieved without peace.

4. Indeed, the Council of Europe is a peace project, aimed at tackling, in a structural and systematic way, the root causes of tensions and disputes before they erupt into conflicts.

5. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that 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. While national defence is explicitly excluded from its scope of responsibility, the Council of Europe is a frontrunner in protecting democratic security. This notion, first endorsed by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at the 1993 Vienna Summit, along with the concept of "indivisible security", included in the Charter for European Security of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Istanbul, 1999), are today as relevant as ever.

6. 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 a cornerstone European organisation for developing a shared space where these values can thrive, in the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 12 October 2023 (23rd sitting) (see Doc. 15821, report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Ms Lesia Vasylenko; and Doc. 15824, opinion of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), rapporteur: Mr Claude Kern). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 12 October 2023 (23rd sitting).
See also Recommendation 2259 (2023).

7. The Assembly believes that the Council of Europe should develop additional tools to promote democratic security, namely a common democratic security policy aimed at intensifying the efforts of the Council of Europe to protect and strengthen international security. The policy should ensure the comprehensive use of early-warning and confidence-building measures, improve policy making, strengthen accountability and prevent future conflicts. This policy should be drawn up and implemented within the legal and political mandate of the Council of Europe, in parallel with the activities of other international organisations competent in this field.

8. The Assembly strongly advises member States to refrain from initiating official interactions with the governments of both the Russian Federation and Belarus, particularly in the realm of diplomatic appointments.

9. The Assembly should fully use its significant potential to contribute to the reform of the global security architecture, as its good functioning will have a direct impact on the democratic security of Council of Europe member States. In doing so, the Assembly should promote co-ordination and co-operation between the Council of Europe and other international organisations.

10. The Assembly also underscores the importance of the complementary joint procedure, enabling the Council of Europe's statutory organs to take action together in case of a blatant violation by a member State of its obligations under the Statute.

11. In addition, the Assembly underlines the role of national parliaments in fulfilling their key function to uphold representative democracy in Europe: to reflect and advise on the best ways in which modern democracies might advance and democratic security can be preserved.

12. In light of these considerations, as regards democratic security and democratic resilience, the Assembly recommends that Council of Europe member States:

12.1. ensure adherence to the rule of law and to fundamental rights and freedoms, so as to build trust in public institutions in every member State;

12.2. engage in a dialogue on the state of democracy in Europe, so as to consolidate the Council of Europe's role as the guardian of democracy throughout greater Europe;

12.3. consider the ways in which public debate can be organised in member States in order to raise awareness about democratic security and to explore ways to strengthen democratic resilience;

12.4. prioritise good neighbourly relations and commit to resolving disputes and disagreements through dialogue and diplomacy;

12.5. give priority to the use of early-warning and confidence-building measures;

12.6. commit to the peaceful settlement of disputes by recognising as compulsory the jurisdiction of international tribunals, strengthening their capacities and streamlining their procedures;

12.7. ensure early access of decision makers to international legal expertise to guide national policies;

12.8. intensify co-operation with the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and support its activities;

12.9. support cross-border co-operation and other efforts to defuse tensions and promote understanding at the local level, including with and among civil society;

12.10. promote multilateral dialogue and contribute to the formation of uniform positions of different international organisations, which will pave the way for building a strong and unified response to violations of international law;

12.11. start a dialogue on consolidating member States' positions on reforming crucial security institutions, in particular the United Nations Security Council, and pursue an active and concerted policy to initiate change;

12.12. invest in all aspects of a comprehensive security approach, including soft security, human security and democratic resilience;

12.13. recognise that the notion of security is closely intertwined with numerous challenges, such as energy dependence and climate change;

12.14. 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;

12.15. promote the role of civil society, finding ways of involving citizens in decision-making processes and safeguarding freedom of association;

12.16. ensure that the ability to access and impart information is protected, including by guaranteeing an independent and pluralistic media environment;

12.17. tackle socio-economic inequalities, which threaten the democratic stability of our countries and dent citizens' trust in politics;

12.18. consider, for instance in the framework of the World Forum for Democracy to be held in Strasbourg in November 2023, the ways in which democracy can be strengthened by giving it a firmer foothold at all levels of the State and also by reinforcing it at the transnational level.

13. As regards the role of the Council of Europe, the Assembly recommends that its member States:

13.1. fully subscribe to rules-based multilateralism while striving to further strengthen it, in particular by ensuring full compliance with international law and the honouring of the obligations stemming from the conventions to which they are parties;

13.2. ensure that the European multilateral architecture is more responsive and effective in tackling present challenges;

13.3. 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 as a platform for political dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism;

13.4. support the further development of Council of Europe work in the area of democratic security and democratic resilience;

13.5. promote all efforts aimed at ensuring accountability for violations of international law by recognising the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, lifting all jurisdictional limits for the prosecution of the crime of aggression and, when necessary, to ensure full accountability, establishing ad hoc tribunals with a narrowly defined jurisdiction, such as a special tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine;

13.6. encourage the participation of the Council of Europe, as appropriate, in relevant consultations and negotiations and the provision of concrete expert and technical support for the process of creating the special tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine;

13.7. enforce the obligation to provide compensation to the victims of aggression, including by lawful confiscation of State-owned and privately owned assets;

13.8. support the establishment of a comprehensive compensation mechanism as provided for by the Riga Declaration of 11 September 2023, including the development of the already created Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and an international commission for the examination of claims for damages;

13.9. support the active role of the Council of Europe in promoting reforms of other international organisations to ensure their effective functioning;

13.10. allocate the necessary financial resources to ensure the financial sustainability of the Council of Europe;

13.11. ensure effective follow-up to the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, 16 and 17 May 2023);

13.12. allocate the necessary resources to ensure that the Council of Europe can expand its work on confidence-building measures to help lay the foundations for long-lasting peace.

14. As regards its own activities, the Assembly should:

14.1. increase its focus on parliamentary diplomacy as a tool for defusing tensions, promoting dialogue, reinforcing mutual understanding and enhancing confidence building, and conflict prevention;

14.2. contribute to the Council of Europe's efforts on early warning in order to address situations which risk posing a threat to the rule of law, democratic security and good neighbourly relations;

14.3. strengthen the capacity of both the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), in particular in terms of early warning, in line with the conclusions of the 2023 Council of Europe Summit, and give consideration to mechanisms to ensure that due account is taken of such early warnings;

14.4. strengthen elements relating to conflict prevention, conflict resolution and democratic security in the terms of reference of its committees and sub-committees;

14.5. place greater emphasis on new security challenges and how they relate to democracy, human rights and the rule of law and mobilise political will to address structural factors that erode democratic institutions;

14.6. enhance co-operation on confidence building and conflict prevention with other international parliamentary assemblies, including the European Parliament, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO);

14.7. strengthen co-operation and carry out joint activities with national parliaments on confidence building and conflict prevention.