Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16498
29 September 2026

Fake 'elections' in Russia and its destabilising attacks on Europe

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision on a request for urgent debate, Reference 5012 of 28 September 2026. In accordance with Rule 50.4 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, the report of a committee shall not contain an explanatory memorandum if the report is prepared under the urgent procedure.

Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly unequivocably condemns Russia's campaign of unprovoked attacks on member States. Against the backdrop of a failure to achieve its military and strategic objectives despite immense human costs, over the last few months Russia's hostile actions against the rest of Europe have intensified, entering a more dangerous phase. While such activities are not new, they have recently expanded in scale and frequency, becoming more sophisticated and increasingly aggressive.

2. Cyberattacks, sabotage and arson, attempted assassinations, interference in democratic elections, attacks on critical infrastructure and navigation systems, industrialisation of disinformation, airspace violations and drone incursions are multiplying across the continent. Far from being isolated incidents, these actions form part of a broader co-ordinated pattern of Russian hostilities, interference and attempts at destabilisation. The goal of Kremlin activities is to marginally increase the threshold that could trigger a response, thus testing the resilience of European States, seeking to undermine democratic security and weaken European democracies and their resolve in supporting Ukraine.

3. Recent developments underscore the scale and gravity of this escalation. In Germany, Russian operatives attempted to carry out a drone attack using military-grade material at Leipzig Airport. Denmark, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Poland and Romania have likewise faced a range of serious provocative acts. More broadly, sabotage, cyberattacks, electronic interference and other hostile operations directed against public authorities and critical infrastructure have been reported in numerous Council of Europe member States, with States bordering Russia particularly exposed. Reports have also warned of possible hybrid attacks using drones against countries supporting Ukraine, which Russia could present as accidental to weaken North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s willingness to respond under its collective-defence commitments.

4. The Assembly notes that these attacks are increasingly carried out not by Russian intelligence officers acting in person but through proxies: criminals, extremists and so-called "disposable agents". This is a State outsourcing terrorism, and the use of proxies does not dilute the responsibility of Russia. The Assembly also notes efforts by the Russian State to present attacks as accidents and affirms that Russia's recklessness is not an accident; the responses of member States must compel the Russian State to operate with more caution.

5. The escalation of attacks is particularly alarming at a time when Europe is in an intense electoral period. Electoral processes in Europe are enduring increased hostilities, notably through foreign information manipulation and interference involving Russian State-controlled media, covert and proxy networks, attempts to co-opt political actors, co-ordinated online campaigns and deceptive information outlets. With a succession of elections taking place across Europe in the months ahead, the risk of such interference is especially acute. These operations seek not only to influence public debate and electoral processes, but more fundamentally to distort the information environment in which citizens make democratic choices, amplify divisions and polarisation, erode trust in elections and democratic institutions, and weaken European democracies. The Assembly also recognises this escalation as a symptom of the failure of the Russian State to achieve its military and strategic objectives in Ukraine, and to export instability abroad to distract from domestic instability.

6. The Assembly utterly condemns the continuing escalation of Russia's illegal, unjustified and unprovoked full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, with relentless strikes on populated areas, notably in Kyiv, and on civilian infrastructure, including railway networks, food production and storage facilities, causing mounting civilian casualties and compounding the hardship faced by millions of civilians as another winter approaches. The Assembly is particularly appalled by the use of ever more advanced attack drones, including high-speed jet-powered drones and AI-enabled systems with autonomous targeting capabilities. The Assembly also expresses its deep concern over the dire humanitarian situation in Oleshky, in the temporarily occupied Kherson region of Ukraine, where civilians are trapped by drone attacks and landmines and are deprived of access to basic necessities. It considers that such actions are in breach of Russia's obligations, as the occupying power, under international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions.

7. At this critical juncture, the Assembly urges all Council of Europe member States to recognise the full extent of the threat posed by Russia's attacks against member States, and to take co-ordinated and effective measures in response. These reckless acts should not be dismissed as accidents or "grey-zone" activities, they are attacks on member States. The Assembly stresses that such hostile acts must be attributed to the aggressor, as attribution is the first act of deterrence. Every unattributed attack allows the Russian State to believe that further aggression, or continued recklessness, carries no cost, increasing the likelihood of war by

2. Draft resolution unanimously adopted by the committee on 29 September 2026.

miscalculation rather than by decision. Russia's actions therefore require a firm, co-ordinated and proportionate response, which should not be regarded as an act of revenge, but as a means of deterring further aggression while preventing unintended escalation. Activities deliberately designed to remain below the threshold of conventional armed conflict must not be allowed to weaken Europe's resolve.

8. Member States should therefore strengthen, individually and collectively, their preparedness, deterrence and resilience, educate their domestic populations on the risks faced, and improve their capacity to detect, attribute and respond effectively to hybrid attacks. Supporting Ukraine and strengthening the resilience of European democracies are inseparable components of safeguarding Europe's security and peaceful future.

9. Russia's destabilising attacks on Europe go hand in hand with the intensification of authoritarian repression within Russia. The so-called "elections" to the State Duma held from 18 to 20 September 2026 took place in an environment characterised by the systematic and institutionalised suppression of political opposition, the criminalisation of dissent, multiple incidents of voter intimidation and electoral irregularities, severe restrictions on access to independent information and the absence of conditions for genuine political competition. The Assembly recalls the murder of Alexei Navalny by the Russian State, as well as the mass incarceration of political prisoners and activists, and the chilling effect these actions have had on Russian opposition forces and the Russian citizens. The exclusion of candidates from the Yabloko party, one of the last remaining opposition forces in Russia standing on an anti-war platform, further deprived Russian voters of genuine political choice. Russia's decision not to invite observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), for the third occasion of a nationwide vote, also deprived the electoral process of independent and impartial international observation, in disregard for binding commitments undertaken by all OSCE participating States.

10. The Assembly condemns the fake observers deployed to Russia in an attempt to counterfeit legitimacy and election-wash. The Assembly is particularly concerned about the participation of nationals of Council of Europe member States and the deployment of fake observers in the temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine.

11. The Assembly recalls that free and fair elections are the foundation of representative democracy and require genuine political pluralism, freedom of expression, association and assembly, access to independent information and meaningful competition between political alternatives. It also considers that the process held from 18 to 20 September 2026 did not meet these fundamental conditions and cannot be regarded as a genuine expression of the will of the Russian citizens. In the light of generally recognised European and international standards governing the status of parliamentarians, including the principles of a free representative mandate, the separation of powers and legal certainty, the persons thus designated cannot be considered to exercise a representative mandate or to perform official functions. The Assembly considers that the resulting State Duma cannot be recognised as democratically elected or as the legitimate representative of the Russian citizens, just as the Assembly declared Vladimir Putin an illegitimate President of Russia.

12. Furthermore, the Assembly unequivocally condemns Russia's illegal conduct of so-called elections in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, namely in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol and in parts of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine. These acts constitute yet another flagrant violation of international law and of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and form part of Russia's policy of attempted illegal annexation. Conducted under wartime repression, the elections have no legitimacy or legal effect and must not be recognised. The Assembly reiterates that all those responsible for organising and facilitating such illegal electoral processes should be held accountable.

13. The Assembly underlines that the State Duma has endorsed Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its neighbours, the illegal temporary occupation of Ukrainian territories and the attempt to annex them. The new composition of the State Duma should be considered in the context of this institutional responsibility for the war crimes committed in Ukraine. The Assembly believes that the process held from 18 to 20 September 2026 cannot restore democratic legitimacy to that institution that has been instrumental in consolidating Russia's aggression abroad and authoritarian rule at home, and that the resulting State Duma cannot be considered as a legitimate, democratic, representative body, independent of the Russian executive.

14. The Assembly likewise condemns the organisation of elections in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova without the consent of the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova and the opening and operation of Russian Government polling stations without the consent of the Government of Georgia, in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. The Assembly reiterates its strongest support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine within their internationally recognised borders and regrets the continued mistreatment and repression of the peoples in those occupied territories.

15. The Assembly considers that the sham electoral process within Russia, the holding of illegal "elections" in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe, and the escalating attacks against European democracies form part of the same broader strategy: suppressing democratic choice in Russia, denying it in territories under its illegal occupation and seeking to undermine it in other European States. Fake elections and hybrid attacks are the same project: manufacturing consent inside Russia and manufacturing fear and instability outside its borders. Referring to its Resolution 2593 (2025) "Foreign interference: a threat to democratic security in Europe" and Resolution 2622 (2025) "Russia: new threats to European democracies", the Assembly recalls that, through foreign interference, Russia seeks to manipulate democratic processes in European States, bolster political forces aligned with its interests and influence political decisions and strategic choices, including by eroding support for Ukraine. Against the backdrop of mounting threats and hostile actions, the Assembly firmly reiterates that attempts to destabilise European democracies through force, fear and foreign influence must be resolutely opposed and defeated. Russia must end its aggression and provocations and be held accountable for its crimes and violations of international law.

16. Referring to its previous resolutions on Ukraine, in particular Resolution 2637 (2026) "Supporting the commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine and the security of the European continent", the Assembly commends the comprehensive activities undertaken by the Council of Europe in support of Ukraine and accountability, encompassing the establishment of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the steps taken to establish an International Claims Commission for Ukraine and the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine. It further welcomes the Organisation's sustained efforts to protect the rights of the children of Ukraine, including through the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine and the Special Envoy of the Secretary General, as well as the legal, policy and institutional support provided under the Action Plan for Ukraine.

17. The Assembly further recalls its Resolution 2463 (2022), in which it called on member States to declare the current Russian regime a terrorist one. It considers that these findings provide the legal basis for treating sabotage, arson and assassination plots on the territory of member States as acts of State terrorism rather than as "hybrid activity"; that hybrid operations conducted in support of the war of aggression are candidate cases for the Special Tribunal; and that the damage they cause should be recorded on the model of the Register of Damage.

18. In light of these considerations, with respect to Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and attacks aimed at destabilising European democracies, the Assembly, referring to its previous relevant resolutions, urges Council of Europe member and observer States, relevant European institutions and international partners to:

18.1. reaffirm their unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and for a just and lasting peace that fully respects Ukraine's right to determine its own future, including its sovereign right to pursue its integration into the European Union and membership of other international organisations, including NATO;

18.2. provide strengthened political, financial and practical support to Ukraine, recognising that Ukraine's security and democratic resilience are inseparable from the security and democratic stability of Europe, and continue efforts to ensure accountability of Russia for crimes committed in the context of its war of aggression against Ukraine;

18.3. make full use of immobilised Russian sovereign assets for the defence and reconstruction of Ukraine;

18.4. pursue pressure on the Russian State to secure renewed diplomatic efforts towards possible de-escalation steps, such as a moratorium by Russia on strikes against energy infrastructure, a comprehensive and unconditional ceasefire, return of Ukrainian territories, and genuine negotiations aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace, in full respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and in accordance with the principles set out in Resolution 2637 (2026), including as regards humanitarian issues; in this context, to intensify support for international humanitarian mechanisms and co-ordinated diplomatic initiatives aimed at securing safe humanitarian access, medical assistance and the evacuation of civilians from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine, in accordance with international humanitarian law;

18.5. strengthen national and international capacities to detect, attribute and respond to Russian sabotage, espionage, covert interference, cyberattacks, acts of violence, and other hostile activities, including through enhanced co-operation between intelligence, law-enforcement and cybersecurity authorities;

18.6. consider sabotage, arson, assassination plots, attacks on critical national infrastructure on the territory of member States attributable to Russia as acts of State terrorism.

18.7. strengthen the protection and resilience of critical infrastructure, including energy, telecommunications, transport, digital and satellite infrastructure, against physical and cyber threats and communicate to their populations the importance of domestic resilience and preparedness;

18.8. work to protect exiled Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian citizens, journalists, human rights defenders and civil society on their territory from transnational repression, surveillance and intimidation;

18.9. adopt Schengen-wide restrictions on the movement of accredited Russian diplomats and officials, together with standing expulsion arrangements in place of one-off, case-by-case expulsions; and restrict the issuance of tourist visas to Russian nationals in the light of their documented abuse for hostile purposes;

18.10. legislate, where member States have not already done so, for a foreign interference offence and a public registration scheme for those acting at the direction of a foreign power, drawing on models such as the United Kingdom's National Security Act 2023, which created offences of assisting a foreign intelligence service and of foreign interference, its Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, under which the Russian Federation is specified on the enhanced tier, and its rules prohibiting foreign money in politics;

18.11. co-operate closely with and provide support to States targeted by Russian interference and other hybrid threats, with a view to strengthening their capacity to safeguard national sovereignty, protect elections and democratic institutions, and reinforce societal resilience;

18.12. reinforce international co-operation and co-ordinated responses to Russian hybrid threats, with a view to enabling rapid and effective attribution and responses to hostile activities and countering attempts to divide European societies and undermine democratic institutions;

18.13. in view of current and forthcoming democratic elections in Europe, strengthen the resilience of democratic institutions and electoral processes and urgently develop effective responses to foreign information manipulation and interference, including through effective safeguards for electoral infrastructure, political financing and political parties, media pluralism, use of artificial intelligence, and independent election observation, while ensuring that measures to counter foreign information manipulation and interference fully respect freedom of expression and other rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5);

18.14. develop and implement whole-of-society strategies to strengthen democratic resilience, including through civic education, institutional preparedness, support for independent media and civil society, and enhanced co-operation among public authorities, democratic institutions and other relevant actors in addressing hybrid threats;

18.15. explore the possibility to devise a mechanism tracking Russian hybrid attacks including all Council of Europe member States which would complement the co-ordination mechanism currently being drawn up by the European Union.

19. Beyond the need to hold Russia accountable, with respect to the need for increased pressure on Russia, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States as well as relevant European institutions and international partners to:

19.1. reject the sham elections to the State Duma held from 18 to 20 September 2026, and refuse to recognise any legal or political consequences deriving from the illegal organisation of so-called "elections" by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine;

19.2. refrain from interacting with the new Russian State Duma and review the arrangements for its participation in international parliamentary co-operation such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, while preserving strictly necessary channels to facilitate genuine peace negotiations and humanitarian arrangements, including the exchange of prisoners of war and release of illegally detained civilians and the return of forcibly transferred and deported children and displaced persons;

19.3. continue, for as long as necessary, the political and diplomatic isolation of the Russian authorities, including through co-ordinated efforts to exclude their representatives from key international forums and to prevent any normalisation of Russia's participation in international sporting and cultural events;

19.4. impose sanctions against the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, its chairperson and members, the regional election commissions, and all those who organised, administered, stood for election or acted as “observers” in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine;

19.5. reinforce targeted sanctions and other restrictive measures against the Russian authorities, individuals and financial and industrial entities directly or indirectly involved in the war of aggression against Ukraine, violations of international and international humanitarian law and also hostile activities against European States, and strengthen measures to prevent sanctions circumvention;

19.6. continue to support Russian democratic forces, independent journalists, human rights defenders and civil society actors working for a democratic future for Russia and opposing Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and Russian hybrid warfare against European democracies, including through the Platform for Dialogue with Russian democratic forces established pursuant to Resolution 2621 (2025).