

1525th Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

16 April 2025, Strasbourg (France)

Elements for statement by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Chair of the Committee of Ministers,

Dear Secretary General, dear Alain,

Mr Deputy Secretary General, dear Bjorn

Dear Ambassadors,

Our Spring part-session was a reflection of the complexity and volatility of the times we are living in now, as we had to deal with a sheer variety of urgent and topical matters, each of which merited close attention.

Having received a record number of requests for current or urgent affairs debates, some of which I understand have also been on your agenda, we managed to accommodate them all, in one way or another, in addition to reports already prepared, and held long hours of debates with numerous speakers on many of them.

We didn't debate for the sake of debating though. We debated and adopted decisions to reaffirm our commitment to upholding our fundamental principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law; these very principles which, against the background of a changing world order, are those which make our Assembly and the entire Council of Europe more relevant than ever.

Indeed, I think it becomes increasingly clear that Europe must lead the process of preserving the principles of democracy and the rule of law, reversing the democratic backslide, restoring the public trust in democratic

institutions and serving as the main guardian of integrity of our values. This is a challenging task that requires courage and resilience, but I am sure that our Organisation is up to it.

This is why our session last week was centred around the notion of our common values and the importance of promoting, upholding and not compromising on them in the current shaky geopolitical context.

And this is also why I fully support the proposal of the Secretary General of the Organisation in favour of “a dynamic process leading to a new commitment to revitalise Democracy”, as a follow-up to the Reykjavik declaration and earlier calls from the Assembly itself. As you have already been informed by our Secretary General of the Assembly, we have created an ad hoc committee for this purpose, composed of chairpersons of relevant committees and the General Rapporteur on Democracy, and hope that we would contribute efficiently to the reflexion and the final outcome.

It was precisely the concept of “democratic security” that was at the centre of an important debate we held last week on foreign interference as the threat to democratic security in Europe which gathered more than 60 speakers. In the resolution adopted at the end, we urged the European countries to mobilise against “foreign interference” which aims at undermining democracy in Europe. We called for transparency in government and politics, stronger democratic institutions and an informed and educated citizenry which is alert to media manipulation tactics. We particularly noted the sharp escalation in hostile interference originating from Russia since the beginning of its full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and condemned its attempts to disrupt electoral and democratic processes across Europe. These challenges need to be addressed as the war goes on and we have sadly witnessed an aggravation of the Russian missile attacks on civilians in Ukraine in recent days with many innocent people (including children) brutally killed.

This is why Ukraine and its fight against the Russia's aggression remains high on our agenda. In a separate debate last week, we reconfirmed our strong unwavering commitment to continue to pursue a robust accountability agenda and to support ongoing efforts to establish as soon as possible the ad hoc tribunal on the crime of aggression.

Once again, our Assembly called a spade a spade and reiterated an obvious fact: that the war of aggression, launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, violates core international legal principles and requires a response to ensure accountability. We noted the progress achieved by the core group on the ad hoc tribunal and stand ready to support any actions leading to its establishment.

We also discussed worrying developments in Türkiye and called for the immediate release of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul, who was arrested on 19 March 2025, placed in pre-trial detention on corruption charges, and was removed from office. The Assembly also called for the dropping of all unfounded charges against him and others involved in the same investigation and for the repeal of the decision of Istanbul University to revoke his university degree. I welcome in that regard the call by the Secretary General on the authorities of Türkiye to honour their international obligations, particularly with regard to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The situation in Georgia remained at the centre of our attention and, during the urgent affairs debate, our Assembly deeply regretted that, despite our decision to ratify the credentials of the Georgian delegation, all its members resigned from the delegation, thus rejecting dialogue. It remains our firm view that the participation in the PACE's work and monitoring procedures of a delegation whose credentials were ratified, is not an option, but an obligation.

You will remember, dear ambassadors, that when addressing you back in January, I warned that, should we tolerate the cherry-picking by members

States of the Council of Europe's institutions, the day might arrive when a member State would decide to unilaterally withdraw from the Court or refuse to execute its judgments. I could not imagine that this situation would arise so quickly. But it has. It is thus a fact that the head of a member State, the President of Azerbaijan, publicly announced a blanket refusal to implement the judgements of our European Court of Human Rights. As one of the top leaders of this organisation, I felt compelled to react to this attack on our core principles during the traditional press conference I gave after the session last Friday.

Clearly the situation in Azerbaijan is not improving and I think we will all agree that these developments do require a strong concerted reaction which would hopefully lead to this member State finally complying with the Organisation's membership obligations and resuming full cooperation with all statutory organs and other bodies of the Organisation.

We also held a current affairs debate on the "Protests and rallies in the Western Balkans and Central Europe", where the need to enshrine protections for peaceful protest was underlined, as well as the necessity to engage with young people and support civic innovators.

Other debates during our latest part-session called for an immediate end to the humanitarian blockage of Gaza and the reinstatement of ceasefire, putting an end to collective expulsions of aliens, and strengthening relations between the Council of Europe and Latin America after hearing also the President of the Senate of Mexico and interconnections between Council of Europe and European Political Community.

Other highlights of the week included the adoption of the Assembly's Opinion on the new Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law, following a request by your committee and an urgent affairs debate so that the calendar you have agreed could be respected.

Moreover, for the first time, the 2025 Council of Europe Museum Prize was awarded to the winner, Euskararen Etxea (the House of the Basque Language) in Bilbao, Spain, in a ceremony organised in the hemicycle.

As you also mentioned dear Chair, we had the honour to hear the address by His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Luxembourg and our very popular women@pace group, together with women ambassadors and members of the staff, had the honour to exchange views with Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg. I would really like to praise the excellent cooperation between our teams which ensured the success of the visit of the Royal couple to Strasbourg last week and thank you also for the wonderful concert on Wednesday evening we all enjoyed.

Many thanks to the presidency of the CM also as regards the exchange of views with the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Luxembourg Mr Xavier Bettel, whose open and frank replies were highly appreciated by the members of PACE.

A very interesting address was also delivered by the Prime-Minister of Andorra Mr. Xavier Espot Zamora, and I would also like to thank the Andorran Ambassador for the excellent cooperation.

Dear all,

Let me close by inviting you already now to the meeting of the Joint Committee which I will convene during the June part-session, most likely on Thursday afternoon, to deal with institutional issues and exchange views on current political issues as I am convinced that closer cooperation between the two statutory organs of the Council of Europe and mutual understanding of each other's position are highly needed.

I thank you all for your attention and look forward to hearing your comments and questions.