

1549th Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
Strasbourg, 4 February 2026

Statement by Petra Bayr
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Chair of the Committee of Ministers Deputies, dear Daniela

Secretary General,

Deputy Secretary General,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It has been a great honour for me to be elected, last week, as the new President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, one of the two statutory organs of this Organisation.

And I would like to start by paying respect and thanking my predecessor, Theodoros Rousopoulos, whose energy, vision and diplomatic skills were highly regarded by all of us and were the key factor that made his Presidency successful, visible and memorable. One of the keys to this success was clearly the effective dialogue and co-operation he managed to establish with you, dear Ambassadors, and you, dear Secretary General through building the relations of mutual trust and partnership.

I wish to assure you that it is my firm intension to maintain and even deepen this co-operation as I am convinced that in the current volatile and uncertain international context, only through developing a coherent concerted approach of this organisation as a whole to emerging challenges, will keep the work of the Council of Europe relevant and impactful.

In addressing the Assembly last Monday following my election as President, I have highlighted a number of priorities which I intent to pursue during my term of office. As you may have noticed, some of them overlap with the priorities of my predecessor and I am quite pleased with this fact as it should ensure proper continuity and stability in the direction of the work of the Assembly.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and its consequences is unquestionably the highest priority for all of us. I will continue to push relentlessly for the establishment of the comprehensive system of accountability of the Russian Federation for all the wrongful acts it has done in and against Ukraine, in particular accelerating the creation of the special tribunal

of the crime of aggression. Now, when the sufferings of the Ukrainian people have increased dramatically with the Russian attacks deliberately targeting civilian energy infrastructure in an exceptionally cold period of time, our support is needed more than ever. Austrian parliamentary initiative – roll out to member countries.

Last week, our Assembly urged an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire as well as genuine negotiations that must lead to just, lasting, and stable peace. Such peace based on international law and preservation of dignity of Ukraine and its people is essential to the security and stability not just of Ukraine, but for the future of European and global security.

We also voiced strong support to the Ukraine's accession to the EU, recognising that this process provides a strong incentive to pursue relevant reforms and will provide a meaningful security guarantee. Indeed, it is our responsibility to step up the efforts aimed at supporting Ukraine in strengthening and consolidating its democratic institutions, fighting corruption and preserving the system of protection of individual rights and liberties even at the time when the country bravely fights the brutal Russian aggression. We appreciate the efforts made by all Ukrainians at this difficult time.

Another priority that I emphasised in my inaugural speech was the need to ensure the protection and development of the Convention system and of the international rules-based order at large. This work should ensure that the European Convention of Human Rights remains a powerful mechanism that is fit to respond to the new challenges including the need to cover the new generation of human rights, related to, for example, environment protection and the proliferation of the AI.

These issues were incidentally in the centre of the Assembly's agenda this week as we held a current affairs debate on safeguarding the system of international justice and approved a resolution on the case of Greenland and threats against the international order.

Also, discussing the instability in the broader Middle East and serious human rights violations in both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic disproportionately affecting minority communities, we stressed that the lasting peace and stability in the region could only be achieved through respect for international law and political solutions that prioritise the protection of civilians.

Overall, I was very pleased with the first part-session, over which I presided both in terms of the quality of the debates and active participation of the Assembly members in plenary sittings and committee meetings. In that regard, the Assembly will continue to seek dialogue with the parliaments of Azerbaijan and Georgia which did not submit credentials for the time being.

I am sure we have all been very impressed with the address to the Assembly by Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, who reminded us that Europe faces two wars: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; and an equally dangerous, less visible hybrid war involving disinformation, cyberattacks, and external interference in European democracies. I was really struck that this message of hers resonated very much with what I chose to say in my inaugural speech on Monday when I identified this hybrid threat (especially with the use of the AI and

social networks) among the top priorities of my Presidency. I am also grateful to President Sandu for finding time and force to participate in a meaningful and memorable way in the meeting of the Women@PACE on Tuesday.

We also were honoured to listen to very interesting address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan, who spoke in the context of the celebration of his country's 30th anniversary of joining this organisation. An exchange of views with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, Mihai Popsoi, (in his capacity as the Chair of the Committee of Ministers) also took place.

PACE also called, following a very intensive debate, on member states to adopt legislation to prohibit conversion practices (which aim to change, repress, suppress or eliminate a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression based on the false belief that such aspects are pathological or undesirable), providing for criminal sanctions and establishing effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Furthermore, the Assembly proposed a set of measures concerning victim support and protection as well as with regard to training and public awareness.

We also held many other important debates this week, including on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Bosnia and Herzegovina, on developments in the Assembly's monitoring procedure, on the observation of the early parliamentary elections in the Kyrgyz Republic. Members of the Assembly also discussed strengthening democracies with young people, socialising at schools, and inclusive and participatory education and on elections in times of crisis. We also adopted the opinion on a new protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning the involuntary placement and treatment of persons in mental health care.

I am particularly pleased that last week we took a decision to close post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia, which lasted almost 25 years and pass on my congratulations to the people of North Macedonia.

We elected new judges to the European Court for Human Rights in respect of Cyprus and the Netherlands.

Another highlight of the week was the launch of the Platform for Dialogue with the Russian Democratic Forces, the rules of functioning and personal composition of which were approved by the Bureau on Monday. The first inaugural meeting of the Platform was held on Thursday, and I am grateful to the participants who were prepared to travel to Strasbourg at a short notice and to take active part in the discussions during this meeting. We expect that these meetings will be held regularly at each session with specific agenda prepared in advance.

Finally, I am very pleased to inform you that the PACE part-session last week attracted considerable media attention, and we recorded the second highest figures in terms of coverage in the history of the Assembly in the last years. I hope we will build on this success during our next session.

Thank you for your attention.