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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

AS/Per (2024) PV 02

24 June 2024

Standing Committee

Minutes

of the meeting held in Vilnius

on Friday 24 May 2024

1. Opening of the meeting by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, **opened** the meeting and welcomed all those present. The meeting was taking place one week after the handover of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers to Lithuania at the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers, which had marked the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe. The Foreign Affairs Ministers had reaffirmed their support for Ukraine, set the Organisation's future policy directions and adopted the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, the first international instrument in this field, which would be opened for signature in Vilnius in September.

2. Opening speech by Ms Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, Speaker of the Seimas

Ms Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen stressed the historical significance of the Seimas building for Lithuania's path to independence. 30 years later, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine was similarly ensuring the continuity of democracy, serving as the primary defence against brutal aggression and exemplifying the crucial role of parliaments in emergency situations. That is why the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe - embodied by the Parliamentary Assembly - was very important. Referring to the Russian Federation's war of aggression, the Speaker stressed that Ukraine must be helped in its fight, as this also meant defending the very principles the Council of Europe stood for. She referred to the Assembly's relevant work in this context, including its adopted texts advocating for the Russian Federation's exclusion from the Organisation, a comprehensive compensation mechanism and the establishment of a Register of Damage. In the same vein, the Lithuanian delegation's proposal to establish a register to track companies aiding Russian entities in circumventing sanctions should be given serious consideration. The human dimension of the war should also not be forgotten. Thousands had been killed and injured, millions had been forced to flee their homes, and Ukrainian children had been deported. The only lasting way to alleviate the suffering was to push for an immediate Russian withdrawal from the Ukrainian territory and to ensure a secure and democratic future for Ukraine through European Union and NATO membership. There should be accountability for all the crimes committed, including for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. Thus, the establishment of a special international tribunal for this crime should be supported. Belarusian people and democratic forces and their fight for a democratic future should also be supported. Authoritarian regimes should not be allowed to operate with impunity. By working together, member States would ensure that the Council of Europe continues to be a beacon of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

3. Welcome address on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe by Professor Vytautas Landsbergis, First Head of State of the re-established independent Lithuania

Professor Landsbergis said that the Assembly was the body representing democratic Europe and a core structure of the European democracy. He cherished the period when he was a member of the Lithuanian delegation, where parliamentary democracy was becoming increasingly important, as well as the political role of elected representatives. The Assembly represented the European citizens and should continue to act as an important political body of the unified European democracies. The European democracy deserved to be saved.

4. Exchange of views with Mr Gabrielius Landsbergis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Mr Landsbergis outlined the priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency stressing that the current geopolitical landscape was marked by a dangerous rise of authoritarianism, declining respect for human rights, and backsliding of democracy. The Council of Europe was one of the very few organisations that had expelled the Russian Federation after its full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, which was also an attack on European shared values. The Lithuanian Presidency would therefore focus on fully supporting Ukraine to defend itself and ensuring accountability, including by advocating for the expansion of the membership of the Register of Damage and consolidating efforts to establish a comprehensive compensation mechanism as well as a special tribunal for the crime of aggression. It would also continue to demand the safe return of illegally deported Ukrainian children, bolster the Organisation's efforts in strengthening Ukraine's democratic institutions and support its reconstruction efforts. The Presidency would ensure continuity in the implementation of the Reykjavik Summit decisions, strengthening the Organisation to face modern challenges such as fight against discrimination and hate speech, artificial intelligence and the triple planetary crisis. Closer engagement with parliaments, civil society and youth would be crucial and support to independent media and human rights defenders from Belarus and other countries would be prioritised. The Presidency also attached great importance to the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr Schwabe asked the Minister's impressions on the progress made by Kosovo in terms of its aspirations for Council of Europe membership. He wondered whether there was a way to ensure that the Committee of Ministers take decisions on important issues in between the yearly meetings at Ministerial level.

Mr Landsbergis said that Lithuania recognised Kosovo as a country and supported its aspirations to become a member of Council of Europe. The Assembly's opinion in favour of membership had been transmitted to the Committee of Ministers which now had to take a decision. As the President of the Committee of Ministers, he would listen to all member States' position and facilitate further progress on this matter.

Ms Mezentseva asked whether the return of Ukrainian prisoners of war and abducted civilians since 2014 could be included in the priorities of the Presidency.

Stressing that Ukraine was at the core of the Presidency, **Mr Landsbergis** thought that this should be possible.

Mr Goncharenko said that Ukraine desperately needed more training on demining for its troops and a Polish Mission on the Belarusian border, which would free Ukrainian units to fight in the eastern and southern fronts.

Mr Landsbergis said that Lithuania was ready to consider being part of a coalition of countries that could perform training in the territory of Ukraine and would not consider this to be an escalatory move.

Mr Loucaides thought that the Committee of Ministers' silence on the ongoing genocide in Gaza was not consistent with the Council of Europe values. Referring to the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in *Demirtaş* and *Kavala* cases, he wondered the Presidency's plans to ensure the implementation of these judgments by Türkiye.

Mr Landsbergis said that the Committee of Ministers remained deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and its disproportionate effect on civilians, especially on women and children. At the same time, it condemned terrorism, while also stressing the importance for Israel to uphold international humanitarian law. The Presidency would carefully consider the Assembly's relevant resolutions and recommendations on the issue. Regarding the implementation of the Court's judgments, the Presidency stood ready to engage in dialogue.

Ms Schou asked whether consideration could be given to the possibility of holding more than one Committee of Ministers' meeting per year at the Ministerial level.

Stressing the need to ensure accountability for the crime of aggression, **Mr Corlăţean** asked what the Minister's assessment and prediction were about the establishment of a special international tribunal for this crime.

Ms Kalniņa-Lukaševica asked the Minister to comment on Russia's provocations regarding the maritime border with Finland and Lithuania, and its proactive actions regarding the Estonian border in Narva River.

Mr Landsbergis said that the issue of holding more than one yearly Ministerial meeting could be raised. Lithuania fully supported the establishment of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression and believed that the Council of Europe was the next best arena to raise this question after the United Nations, which at this stage was not operational. The increase in Russian hybrid activity in the wider Baltic region was worrying and had to be firmly addressed. If not, Russia would continue moving forward with even more aggressive action. At the upcoming NATO meeting, the Baltic States were likely to raise this issue, and the Lithuanian Presidency would also raise it at the Council of Europe level.

Mr Stamatis referred to the recent elections in North Macedonia and asked the Minister's reaction on the newly elected President's reticence to use the constitutional name of North Macedonia for her country.

Mr Kiljunen said that Council of Europe member States were faced with a dilemma due the weaponisation of migrants and refugees: they had to secure their borders while at the same complying with their human rights and humanitarian obligations. He wondered how this dilemma could be addressed.

Mr Zingeris recalled the important steps that had been taken to ensure accountability for Russia's international crimes and to establish a comprehensive compensation mechanism. The possibility of establishing a second register for companies avoiding and circumventing sanctions should be considered.

Mr Landsbergis regretted the wording chosen by the newly elected officials in North Macedonia and stressed that the agreement achieved on this issue would be upheld. Lithuania was familiar with the instrumentalisation of migrants. The situation at the border with Belarus was rather stable, but it was only a matter of time before Russia pushed again thousands of migrants to the Lithuanian border. The Minister welcomed Finland's decision to join Lithuania's case on this issue before the European Court of Human Rights and invited others to join as well. The establishment of a second register merited further consideration.

Ms Agnieszka Pomaska, Vice-President of the Assembly took the Chair.

5. Examination of new credentials

[Doc. 15987]

The Standing Committee **ratified** the credentials of a new member of the Assembly submitted by the French delegation.

6. Modifications in the composition of committees

[Commissions (2024) 05, Commissions (2024) 05 Add.]

The Standing Committee **approved** changes in the composition of Assembly committees as set out in document Commissions (2024) 05 and its addendum.

7. Requests for debate (under Rules 52 and 53 of the Rules of Procedure)

The President informed members that a request for an urgent procedure debate entitled “The 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe: how to ensure the participation of all Europeans in the future of our Organisation?” had been submitted by Mr Oleksii Goncharenko (Ukraine, EC/DA) and other members of the Assembly. A request for a current affairs debate entitled “Recent challenges to democracy in Georgia” had also been submitted by the leaders of the political groups.

The Bureau had agreed to recommend not holding an urgent debate on “The 75th Anniversary of the Council of Europe: how to ensure the participation of all Europeans in the future of our Organisation?” but holding a current affairs debate on the same subject and had appointed Ms Ingjerd Schie Schou (Norway, EPP/CD) as the first speaker. It had also agreed to recommend holding the current affairs debate on “Recent challenges to democracy in Georgia” and appointed Ms Edite Estrela (Portugal, SOC) as the first speaker.

The Standing Committee **approved** the proposals of the Bureau.

8. Agenda

[AS/Per (2024) OJ 03 rev5]

The draft agenda was **adopted**.

9. Third part-session of the Parliamentary Assembly (24-28 June 2024)

[AS/Bur (2024) 20]

The Standing Committee **took note** of the draft agenda of the third-part session of the Assembly.

10. References to committees

[AS/Per (2024) 04]

The Standing Committee **ratified** the references proposed by the Bureau (see Appendix 1).

The President took the Chair.

11. Current affairs debate on “Recent challenges to democracy in Georgia”

Introducing the debate, **Ms Estrela** regretted the deteriorating situation in Georgia, a country which was often quoted as a model in the region due to its ability to carry out reforms and its openness to engage in an open and constructive dialogue with the international community. Constructive co-operation and dialogue had given way to harsh rhetoric and attacks on anyone questioning the authorities’ policies. The situation had to urgently change. The hasty adoption of the highly criticised law on the transparency of foreign influence - which the Venice Commission had found to be fundamentally flawed - and the authorities’ harsh response to the demonstrations, as well as the attacks and intimidation campaigns carried out against journalists, civil society activists and opposition leaders were worrying. The introduction of the law was part of a series of developments which had caused concerns, including the problematic draft constitutional laws on the protection of family values and minors, and amendments to the electoral code. The law on foreign agents should not be promulgated, the Assembly should send a large-scale electoral observation mission to Georgia, dialogue with the authorities should be maintained, and there should be an urgent debate on the issue during the June part-session.

Mr Shalva Papuashvili, the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, said that his country was trying to maintain the integrity of its political, economic and security systems against foreign interference. Due to its geographic location and complex regional setting, Georgia was particularly vulnerable. The law on transparency of foreign influence addressed the concern of foreign funding of NGOs in full compliance with international human rights standards. It would increase NGOs’ responsibility and accountability. The stigmatisation and labelling of the law to discredit it and cause public outcry were unwelcomed. Georgia did not agree with the opinion of the Venice Commission and the law would come into force despite the President’s veto. Georgia stood ready for constructive and fact-based dialogue.

Ms Veronika Bílková, Vice-President of the Venice Commission and member in respect of Czechia reminded that the so-called laws on foreign agents which applied to entities receiving a part of their funding from abroad had been assessed mostly critically, including by the Venice Commission and the European Court for Human Rights. The Law

of Georgia on transparency of foreign influence was no exception. The Venice Commission had concluded that this law was incompatible with the international standards enshrined in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, especially standards related to the freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to privacy, and the prohibition of discrimination.

Ms Kalniņa-Lukaševica stressed that as a candidate to European Union membership, Georgia should not deviate from its European path and its commitments to uphold human rights and the rule of law. The Assembly's concerns about the law on transparency of foreign influence had been confirmed by the opinion of the Venice Commission. The Georgian Parliament should find a wise solution.

Lord Keen noted that the foreign agents' law was problematic both in terms of the legislative process and in substance. Georgia, as any other member State, should respect the Council of Europe bodies and institutions and engage with them in good faith. These seemed to be lacking, as the Parliament had adopted the law before the Venice Commission could adopt its opinion.

Ms O'Loughlin said that the Council of Europe had to react when a member State was clearly disrespecting the European values and democratic standards that the Organisation defended. She called for an urgent debate on the issue during the June part-session and said that the Council of Europe must be prepared to intervene and help Georgia to get back on track, using all instruments at its disposal, including the joint procedure.

While appreciating the Assembly's interest in the developments in her country, **Ms Sepashvili** defended the *rationale* of the law, which was in line with the expectations of the European Union and the Council of Europe in terms of increased transparency. Georgia was pursuing its European path.

Mr Schwabe strongly disagreed with the accusation that Georgia was confronted with an aggressive disinformation campaign. The Council of Europe was simply doing its job of protecting democracy, rule of law and human rights. Georgia was leaving the European path and the fairness of the upcoming elections was in jeopardy as the new law might exclude independent NGOs from observing the elections. There was still time to choose the right path and not to go ahead with the law.

For **Mr Fridez**, based on the Russian experience of foreign agents' law, it was obvious that such laws were very dangerous and could lead to all sorts of abuses.

Referring to Venice Commission's conclusions on the law on transparency of foreign influence, **Ms Schou** stressed that going ahead with this law would not only go against Georgia's commitments vis-à-vis the Council of Europe, but it would also derail the process of the country's future membership of the European Union. A direct engagement with the Georgian leadership was necessary. She called on the Georgian parliament to listen to public opinion and international advice and to overturn the law.

Mr Goncharenko argued that Russia was behind the current situation in Georgia which would meet the same fate as Belarus. The Council of Europe should do everything in its power to support the Georgian people and to stop Georgia from becoming another Belarus.

Mr Zingeris reiterated that the law should be repealed. Labelling everyone opposing the law and harshly punishing those demonstrating against it could not be accepted. An Assembly delegation should go to Georgia to discuss the situation with the authorities.

Ms Bílková noted that while there was no doubt that transparency was a value, it did not mean that any measure taken in its name would necessarily be legal and legitimate. She hoped that the constructive co-operation between Georgia and the Venice Commission would continue. The Venice Commission stood ready to help Georgian authorities to find the right way to address any legitimate concerns that they may have concerning existing transparency laws.

Ms Estrela regretted the lack of constructive dialogue on the part of the Georgian authorities. Transparency was welcome, but it should go hand in hand with the freedoms of association and expression and political pluralism. The law on foreign agents must be repealed as it was incompatible with international standards. Georgia could overcome this crisis and should remember that Europe was its friend.

12. Current affairs debate on "The 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe: how to ensure the participation of all Europeans in the future of our Organisation?"

Introducing the debate, **Ms Schou** stressed the symbolic value of holding a debate on the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe in a country known for its resistance to dictatorship and fight for the values of human rights,

democracy and the rule of law. In the face of the Russian Federation's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, Council of Europe member States had to be united more closely than ever around these shared values. The Organisation's strength and influence depended on its commitment to ensure respect for these values. European citizens were looking for answers to the challenges such as climate change and artificial intelligence and the Council of Europe had an important role to play in navigating these challenges. It was crucial to engage with citizens across Europe, in particular with the younger generation, and to make them understand the relevance of bodies like the Council of Europe. Ms Schou invited everyone to be optimistic for the future, grounded on the strength and purpose of the Council of Europe.

Mr Schwabe praised the Council of Europe which was a family of European States who had willingly accepted the authority of the European Court of Human Rights. Every country wanting to join the Organisation should be welcomed on the condition to respect its values and standards. He particularly referred to Kosovo in this context, as well as the recent decision of the Assembly not to ratify the credentials of the Azeri delegation.

For **Mr Goncharenko**, being European was about values. Russia was not European, but some Russians were. Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe should be supported.

Ms Kalniņa-Lukaševica praised the Council of Europe's work in the field of democracy and human rights. Against the background of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Organisation would be defined by its ability to ensure accountability and justice. The Assembly had done a lot to support Ukraine and should do more, including by pushing for a comprehensive compensation mechanism and a special tribunal for the crime of aggression.

Ms O'Loughlin praised the Council of Europe's contribution to bringing peace to Ireland. In the face of the unjustified, unprovoked and unlawful aggression against Ukraine, it was important to recognise the Organisation's work in safeguarding and promoting genuine democracy in Europe, as well as upholding human rights and the rule of law. All members States bore the responsibility of preserving the democratic values. At the Reykjavik Summit, member States had renewed their commitment to safeguarding and promoting democracy and this commitment should be given proper follow-up. Kosovo should become a full member of the Council of Europe.

Mr Zingeris was worried about the democratic backsliding, the progress of dictatorships and Russia's growing influence across the globe. The Council of Europe should respond adequately to these challenges and Russia's war of aggression.

Ms Schou joined the previous speakers in supporting Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers should be more active in addressing democratic backsliding in member States, including by meeting more than once a year at the Ministerial level to take important decisions. The Council of Europe was an important part of the international architecture, and its leadership would be crucial in responding to current challenges. Dialogue was important but so was firmness in the protection of values the Council of Europe stood for.

The Standing Committee observed a minute of silence in memory of Mahsa Amini.

13. Statement by Ms Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Leader of the Belarusian democratic forces

Ms Tsikhanouskaya expressed her gratitude to the Assembly and Council of Europe member States - in particular Lithuania which, amongst others, had accepted thousands of Belarusians fleeing prosecution - for their commitment to free Belarus and Ukraine. Belarus' democratic movement and the Council of Europe were fighting for the same values. Sanctions were one of the means to weaken dictatorial regimes, but their circumvention should be addressed effectively. Lukashenko's regime was a threat to regional security and had to be isolated, while support to the people of Belarus should be maintained. With the help of Lukashenko, Putin was trying to anchor his control over Belarus, destroy its sovereignty and Belarusian national identity. Belarusians were supporting neither the war nor the unification of their country with the Russian Federation. Ms Tsikhanouskaya asked the Assembly to stand with Belarus and support the Belarusian democratic forces, stressing that investing in free Belarus meant investing in peace and democracy, as well as stability in the region. Belarus' likely transition from dictatorship to democracy would be a big blow to Putin's regime and would help Ukraine to win the war. Referring to the ongoing repression in Belarus, she invited members to show solidarity with the political prisoners and support the fight for their release, including by joining the campaign of adopting political prisoners. Ms Tsikhanouskaya thanked the Assembly for inviting Belarusian political parties to participate in its work. This allowed them not only to learn and practice democracy but also to develop an efficient strategy on Belarus. Ultimately, Belarus should join the Council of Europe. As a first step towards this objective, she called on members to support the request to grant democratic Belarus observer status to the Council of Europe. With the Council of Europe's support, democratic Belarus would become a cornerstone for stability and security in Europe, justice and the rule of law would be restored, free and fair elections held and the members of a democratically elected parliament from Belarus would take their seats in the Assembly.

14. Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

a. Ending the detention of “socially maladjusted” persons

[Doc. 15983 and amendments]

Mr Schennach stressed that the report followed the Assembly's previous work on the issue, denouncing the involuntary placement and treatment of people with mental health problems. These measures were accepted under Article 5 (1) (e) of the European Convention on Human Rights. While the Convention was a living instrument, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights showed no progress in this field as the imprisonment of people of “unsound mind” was regularly found to be in line with the Convention. It was urgent for the Council of Europe, as a leading regional human rights organisation, to fully integrate into its work a more modern human rights-based approach by amending Article 5 (1) (e) of the Convention by way of an additional protocol.

Lord Keen said that from the perspective of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, there was a fundamental problem with the draft recommendation. Article 5 (1) (e) of the Convention provided for the detention of, amongst others, persons of unsound mind, as they may represent a risk to other members of the public and to themselves. If adopted, paragraph 4.1 of the draft recommendation would guarantee these persons' right to liberty. Such a recommendation would be wrong and diminish the Assembly's position in the eyes of the Committee of Ministers.

Mr Schennach stressed once again that forced treatment and placement were outdated and could not be successful in addressing the needs of persons who were subjected to these measures. Informed consent was the very basis of any medical treatment. He called on members to support the draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, which was the result of a thorough work.

Mr Gevorgyan, Second Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, recalled that the Assembly had already addressed the issue several times, denouncing the unacceptable treatment and detention of persons with mental health problems, or using alcohol or drugs. Yet, the detention of these persons was in line with Article 5 (1) (e) of the Convention, as it included a limitation to the right to liberty based on impairment, drug or alcohol use or being homeless. This was incompatible with the 21st century understanding of human rights and therefore the report recommended the Committee of Ministers to consider drawing up an additional protocol to the Convention to remove this exclusion.

Mr Schennach was in favour of amendment 1 moved by **Lord Keen**.

Amendment 1 was adopted.

Mr Schennach was against amendment 2 moved by **Lord Keen**.

During the counting of the votes, **Ms Schou** raised a point of order. **The President** clarified that some of the members who voted did not have the right to vote.

Amendment 2 was adopted. Amendment 3 fell following the adoption of amendment 2.

The Standing Committee **adopted** the recommendation “Ending the detention of “socially maladjusted” persons” as amended [Recommendation 2275 (2024)].

b. Children in the world of work: eradicating harmful child labour

[Doc. 15982]

Ms Sepashvili said that the report sought to provide guidance for policy makers to improve the worsening global situation in relation to child labour. The phenomena, which had multiple root causes, was particularly prevalent in agricultural, manufacturing and service sectors, and could take different forms, including slavery, trafficking of children, recruitment and use of child soldiers, and abuse of children for prostitution. The report recommended a three-pronged strategy to address the gap between law and practice, providing a sustainable response to harmful child labour. The draft resolution urged member States to implement measures proposed in the Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour and called on parliaments to closely monitor the implementation of national measures, amongst other things.

Mr Goncharenko noted that deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children were possibly victims of child labour in the Russian Federation.

In reaction to the previous speaker, **Ms Sepashvili** said that the possible implications of armed conflict on child labour were also addressed in the report.

Mr Gevorgyan Second Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, stressed the need to address the root causes of child labour at both national and international levels, with parliaments overseeing governments' action. Since numerous legal tools to combat and eradicate child labour were already available at international, European and national levels, the proposed recommendations focused on national action plans to improve the implementation of these tools.

The Standing Committee **unanimously adopted** the resolution and the recommendation "Children in the world of work: eradicating harmful child labour" [Resolution 2548 (2024) and Recommendation 2276 (2024)].

15. Culture, Science, Education and Media

a. Cultural heritage and climate change

[Doc. 15926]

Mr Gryffroy said that the conservation of cultural heritage rimed with human development. People were individually and collectively enriched by cultural heritage, and consequently, impoverished by its degradation or loss. Cultural heritage had to be protected against all kinds of threats, including climate change and war. Adequate political responses would require a radical change of mindset. Most current methods and processes would have to be altered to change institutional behaviour, to create new partnerships and business models, to adapt planning process and cities and rural areas, to ensure efficient resource and energy management, to invest in research and combine high tech with low tech solutions. The Committee of Ministers should encourage transversal co-operation between the Council of Europe's culture, heritage, education and youth sectors.

Mr Goncharenko stressed the gravity of the constant and deliberate bombing of cultural heritage sites in Ukraine, which was also an integral component of genocide. While climate change was certainly a threat to cultural heritage, in the case of Ukraine an ecological catastrophe had also resulted from the destruction of the Kakhovka dam.

Mr Kiljunen welcomed the report's focus on the link between climate change and cultural heritage, the reference to the rights of the Sami people and recognition of the need to involve them in the protection of their cultural heritage.

Ms Mezensteva also commended the report for spelling out the link between cultural heritage and climate change. The recent missile strike on the printing house in Kharkiv which had caused the destruction of millions of books showed that attacks on cultural heritage can also be insidious.

Mr Gryffroy agreed that climate change was not the only threat to cultural heritage. The report had made it clear by addressing the issue in a broader context, referring for example to the need for skilled workers to rebuild cultural heritage sites that had been destroyed. He argued that policy makers should not shy away from discussing the potential negative consequences of green energy policies on indigenous people.

Ms O'Loughlin, First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media stressed the need to include a strong cultural dimension in the efforts to uphold the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The report built on this innovative and forward-looking vision, with environmental concerns as part of the heritage preservation strategies and heritage as a tool to raise awareness on the need to respect environment. It was therefore essential that member States include cultural heritage concerns in national strategies for mitigation and adaptation to climate change, with the assistance of the Council of Europe's intergovernmental sector.

The Standing Committee **unanimously adopted** the resolution and the recommendation "Cultural heritage and climate change" [Resolution 2549 (2024) and Recommendation 2277 (2024)].

b. Quality education for children with special education needs: challenges of the pandemic, war and digitalisation

[Doc. 15984]

Mr Sushko explained that the report aimed at developing guiding principles for more accessible, adaptable and acceptable education for children with special education needs, advocating for tailored teaching, inclusive learning spaces, collaborative planning, flexible curriculum and digital integration. Inclusive education had to be responsive to the diverse needs of children with special education needs, flexible enough to accommodate these needs, and based on respect for human rights, dignity, diversity and social cohesion. The provision of specially adapted literature, accessible learning materials and technical equipment was also key, as were investing in infrastructure and developing the competences of teachers. The parents should be able to choose between an inclusive class or a special education school and have the possibility to take a paid leave to assist their children in their education.

Ms Khomenko commended the report and drew attention to the urgent needs of Ukrainian children, including proper bomb shelters in schools, technical facilities for online studies and support for rebuilding educational facilities which had been destroyed. Ukrainian children abroad also needed support due to the stress and dual academic load they endured (receiving education both in Ukraine and in the countries where they lived). The recognition of a coinciding curriculum and the provision of high-quality psychological support for these children would be welcome.

Mr Goncharenko also commended the report and encouraged member States to implement its recommendations. Investing in education meant investing in people.

Mr Sushko thanked everyone involved in the preparation of his report and stressed the importance of ensuring continued education for children with special education needs in Ukraine, as their future depended on it.

Ms O'Loughlin, First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media outlined the main recommendations of the report. In developing guidelines for a human rights-based approach to the education of children with special educational needs, consideration should be given to, *inter alia*, tailoring teaching and learning strategies to the specific needs of individuals and groups; ensuring stronger interconnection between physical, social and digital learning spaces and a flexible curriculum; and digitalising education in line with the principles of the Council of Europe Digital Citizenship Education Project.

The Standing Committee **unanimously adopted** the resolution and the recommendation "Quality education for children with special education needs: challenges of the pandemic, war and digitalisation" [Resolution 2550 (2024) and Recommendation 2278 (2024)].

16. Other business

The Standing Committee took note that the deadline for submitting nominations for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize 2024 had been extended until 30 June 2024.

In view of the situation in Georgia, **Mr Zingeris** asked whether a visit to the country was planned.

The President reassured members that the Assembly would continue to closely follow this issue and said that a statement was about to be published on the Assembly website.

17. Next meeting

The Standing Committee **decided** to hold its next meeting in Luxembourg on 29 November 2024.

The President expressed his gratitude to everyone who made the meeting possible and gave his sincere thanks to the Lithuanian delegation, especially to its Chairperson, Mr Emanuelis Zingeris, for their warm welcome and hospitality in Vilnius.

The President closed the meeting at 16:30.

APPENDIX 1

References to committees

1. Preserving European rural culture and heritage

[Doc. 15974](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Ms Zeynep Yıldız (Türkiye, NR) and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media *for report*

2. Eliminating gender stereotypes in the media

[Doc. 15975](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk (Ukraine, ALDE) and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination *for report* and to the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media *for opinion*

3. The humanitarian situation of (mainly) children and women in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel

[Doc. 15977](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Ms Saskia Kluit (Netherlands, SOC) and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development *for report*

**Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) /
Présidente de la Commission pour le respect des obligations et engagements des États membres du Conseil de l'Europe (Commission de suivi)**

Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA

Latvia / Lettonie

**Chairperson of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs /
Présidente de la Commission du Règlement, des immunités et des affaires institutionnelles**

Ms Heike ENGELHARDT

Germany / Allemagne

**Chairperson of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights /
Présidente de la Commission sur l'élection des juges à la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme**

Ms Petra BAYR

Austria / Autriche

Rapporteurs of the Committee / Rapporteur-e-s de commission

Mr Andries GRYFFROY

Belgium / Belgique

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH

Austria / Autriche

Ms Eka SEPASHVILI

Georgia / Géorgie

Mr Pavlo SUSHKO

Ukraine

Ex-officio member of the Bureau / Membre ex-officio du Bureau

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS

Lithuania / Lituanie

Other members of the Parliamentary Assembly / Autres membres de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Ms Mónika BARTOS

Hungary / Hongrie

Ms Saranda BOGUJEVCI

Assembly of Kosovo* / Assemblée du Kosovo*

Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN

Romania / Roumanie

Mr Peter FRICK

Liechtenstein

Mr Armen GEVORGYAN

Armenia / Arménie

Ms Sona GHAZARYAN

Armenia / Arménie

Mr Martin GRAF

Austria / Autriche

Mr George LOUCAIDES

Cyprus / Chypre

Mr Arminas LYDEKA

Lithuania / Lituanie

Mr Kęstutis MASIULIS

Lithuania / Lituanie

Ms Ariana MUSLIU-SHOSHI

Assembly of Kosovo* / Assemblée du Kosovo*

Mr Alexander RYLE

Denmark / Danemark

Mr Georgios STAMATIS

Greece / Grèce

Mr Andrius VYŠNIAUSKAS

Lithuania / Lituanie

Invited personalities / Personnalités invitées

Ms Viktorija ČMILYTĖ-NIELSEN

Speaker of the Seimas / Présidente du Seimas

Professor Vytautas LANDSBERGIS

First Head of State of the re-established independent Lithuania /
Premier chef d'État de la Lituanie au rétablissement de son indépendance

Mr Gabrielius LANDSBERGIS

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe / ministre des Affaires étrangères de la Lituanie; Président du Comité des Ministres du Conseil de l'Europe

Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI

Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia / Président du Parlement de Géorgie

Ms Veronika BÍLKOVÁ

Vice-President of the Venice Commission and member in respect of Czechia / Vice-Présidente de la Commission de Venise et membre au titre de la Tchéquie

Ms Sviatlana TSIKHANOUSKAYA

Leader of the Belarusian democratic forces / Cheffe des forces démocratiques biélorussiennes

Secretaries of Political Groups / Secrétaires des groupes politiques

Ms Francesca ARBOGAST	SOC
Ms Denise O'HARA	EPP/CD / PPE/DC
Mr Tom VAN DIJCK	EC/DA / CE/AD
Ms Maria BIGDAY	ALDE / ADLE
Ms Anna KOLOTOVA	UEL / GUE

Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General / Cabinet de la Secrétaire Générale et du Secrétaire Général adjoint

Mr Bjørn BERGE	Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe / Secrétaire Général adjoint du Conseil de l'Europe
Ms Natacha De ROECK	Adviser, Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe / Conseillère, Cabinet de la Secrétaire Générale et du Secrétaire Général adjoint du Conseil de l'Europe

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU-TSOVILIS	Secretary General / Secrétaire Générale
Ms Louise BARTON	Director of Committees - Human Dignity and Sustainable Development / Directrice des commissions - Dignité humaine et développement durable
Mme Valérie CLAMER	Head of the Table Office, Information Management and Events Department / Cheffe du Service de la Séance, de la gestion de l'information et des événements
Mr Sergey KHRYCHIKOV	Head of the Private Office of the President of the Assembly / Chef du Cabinet du Président de l'Assemblée
Mr Francesc FERRER	Head of the Communication Division / Chef de la Division de la communication
Ms Liri KOPACI-DI-MICHELE	Head of the Parliamentary Co-operation and Electoral Division / Cheffe de la Division de la coopération parlementaire et électorale
Mme Isild HEURTIN	Head of the Secretariat of the Bureau of the Assembly / Cheffe du Secrétariat du Bureau de l'Assemblée
Ms Ayşegül ELVERİŞ	Head of the Secretariat of the Standing Committee / Cheffe du Secrétariat de la Commission permanente
Ms Kateryna GAYEVSKA	Adviser, Private Office of the President of the Assembly / Conseillère, Cabinet du Président de l'Assemblée
Mme Martine MEYER	Administrative assistant of the Standing Committee / Assistante administrative de la Commission permanente
Mme Aurélie HAUG	Assistant of the Standing Committee / Assistante de la Commission permanente
Mme Anne GAREL	Assistant of the Bureau / Assistante du Bureau