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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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Standing Committee

Draft minutes

of the meeting held in Reykjavik

on Friday 25 November 2022 from 09:30 to 12:30 and from 14:00 to 17:00

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

Mr Tiny KOX, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, said they would meet all the wishes that they had, realising that they were here to do their most important work, but also to enjoy life, with the caveat that not a few hours flight away, a fully-fledged war was still taking place. He repeated that meeting while war was raging on their own Continent should never be accepted as a norm.

In particular, the President welcomed **Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA**, who was greeted with a round of applause.

The President called Ms MEZENSTEVA a remarkable ambassador, who under the circumstances was forced to fly from Kiev to Reykjavik the night before via an 11-hour car journey, followed by four hours on an airplane.

War could never become a normality for her and her compatriots, even if it was there every day.

The President thus proposed everyone to stand and take a moment of silence for those who had passed away and those who were in mortal danger, as long as what he called the horrible war of aggression were to last.

[MINUTE OF SILENCE OBSERVED]

The President then thanked the Icelandic authorities for their hospitality and tremendous efforts to organise the meeting over the last couple of days in Reykjavik.

The President noted that the historic decision by the Committee of Ministers – to convene a Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member States – became the real culmination of the Irish presidency of the Committee of Ministers, who then passed the torch for preparing the meeting onto Iceland. The decision for the summit to be held on 16 and 17 May was taken on the 7 November.

There was also excitement about this decision, which the Parliamentary Assembly had been making as a proposal since 2017. Strong insistence on its happening began with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022.

They really were now on the road to Reykjavik – to Reykjavik from Reykjavik – and with this, the President meant not only a geographical location, but something which clearly had acquired important political meaning.

The President said there was no place he could think of which was a better fit for this purpose, since in October 1986, [then-US President] Ronald REAGAN and [General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] Mikhail GORBACHEV met to essentially agree on the end of the Cold War.

Now, the President said, Reykjavik would be a place to find effective answers to the challenges that Russian aggression against Ukraine produced for the whole of Europe, in order to preserve peace, to strengthen multilateralism, and to avoid new global wars.

They had to ensure that the summit was a success.

The President was convinced that Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR, Prime Minister and Minister for Equality of Iceland, Ms Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð GYLFAÐÓTTIR, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland and Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON, Speaker of Alþingi – the Parliament of Iceland, and the entire Icelandic government and delegation would do their utmost to achieve this objective.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was committed to working very closely with the Icelandic authorities, to prepare this Fourth Summit, to contribute for a new, improved and reinforced Council of Europe which could better promote and protect peace and prosperity across the whole of Europe, in the interest of all Europeans.

This context meant that the day's Standing Committee was particularly relevant and important – they would be holding several debates that day which would eventually perhaps feed into the decisions to be made by Heads of States and Government in May.

The ad-hoc group on the Fourth Summit had met the day before and had a very fruitful exchange of views on the draft report prepared by their colleague Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN, which they expected would be adopted in the 2023 January part-session.

Both this report and the conclusions of the High-Level Reflection Report set up by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe would help change the concrete outcomes of the Summit.

Thus, the road to Reykjavik began, said the President. He pledged that they would do what was needed to arrive in time, well prepared, with meaningful results on the 16 and 17 May. He added that a lot of work had to be done

by governments, parliaments and the Parliamentary Assembly. He strongly encouraged everyone to actively contribute to the participation of the Summit, at home, in their parliaments, and in dialogue with their governments.

The President then went on to present the agenda of the day, starting with an opening speech by Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON, Speaker of Alþingi – the Parliament of Iceland.

There would then be a special event marking the International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women.

Later, there would be an exchange of views with Ms Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð GYLFAÐÓTTIR, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, and later with Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR, Prime Minister and Minister for Equality of Iceland.

If they agreed, the Standing Committee would also hold a current affairs debate on the escalation of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as debates on the eight reports presented by the Committees of the Parliamentary Assembly.

The President asked that speaking time be limited to three minutes, which he joked in Iceland meant exactly the same as in speakers' own countries, and that he would be strict on that.

All Committee chairpersons were allowed to speak for three minutes, while he hoped rapporteurs were allowed seven minutes to present their reports, and three minutes to answer for them.

There was a 30 second time limit for questions to the minister; preparation of amendments, sub-amendments; any other questions or as to procedure.

2. Welcome address by Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON, Speaker of Alþingi – Parliament of Iceland

Mr Tiny KOX, had the formal honour to welcome Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON, Speaker of Alþingi – Parliament of Iceland, the oldest parliament on earth. Mr KOX joked that he was always informed about this fact whenever he was there.

He thanked Mr ÁRMANNSSON for being present for the opening of the Standing Committee and handed him the floor.

Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON thanked the President and the honourable members of the Standing Committee.

He said it was a pleasure to welcome everyone to Iceland and his hometown of Reykjavik. He noted that many present had participated in meetings and events the day before. He hoped that those who attended the reception of the Chair of the Icelandic delegation to Alþingi really enjoyed their visit.

Iceland was a founding member of the Council of Europe in 1949, he said, and Alþingi was the first representative in the Parliamentary Assembly ten years later, in 1959.

Mr ÁRMANNSSON had personal knowledge of how important everyone's work was, since he had the pleasure of participating in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly as the Chair of the Icelandic delegation from 2005 and 2007.

From the outset, the core purpose of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly was to uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe, he said. He added that following the bloodshed of the Second World War, reconstructing a peaceful Europe based on these principles was a worthy undertaking. Yet 73 years had passed, and he said that regrettably they had witnessed conflicts and civil wars on their continent.

The Russian Federation launched a brutal and illegal invasion into Ukraine earlier in 2022, a terrible war of conquest which he said was on a scale unseen since the end of the Second World War.

Mr ÁRMANNSSON condemned Russia's illegal invasion in the strongest terms, and the devastating consequences it had on the people and infrastructure of Ukraine. This, he said, of course led to the expulsion of the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe.

The rule of law, international convention and respecting human rights was paramount, he said, not least for smaller States like Iceland.

It was the second time that Iceland would be assuming the presidency of the Council of Europe since 1949, and Iceland was looking forward to the work ahead.

Mr ÁRMANNSSON said that a special chapter on human rights was introduced via the 1995 amendment to the Icelandic constitution. It was based to a large extent on the European Convention on Human Rights; Article 2 stated that 'everyone's right to life shall be respected by law'. This basic human right was worth underlining not only in times of war, but especially on a day like this day – the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. He reminded the room that a special event would be held that day at the Harpa conference room to mark the occasion, around midday.

For Mr ÁRMANNSSON, women, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ+ and other groups were victims of violence on a daily, indeed hourly basis. Lawmakers could counter this, he offered, by providing the necessary legal frameworks, entrusting the executive to enforce it, and trying to change the mindset and culture for the better.

In recent years, the Icelandic parliament Alþingi had passed important legislation aimed at improving the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and rainbow families; introduced a comprehensive law on gender equality and equal pay; and extended the right to parental leave. Iceland was leading the gender gap index, and Iceland had tried to create an open and welcoming society for all.

However, Mr ÁRMANNSSON said that securing and safeguarding the basic principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law was a perpetual task, and that everyone had to stay alert to avoid setbacks to their progress, for the benefit of their citizens, not least the most vulnerable.

Mr ÁRMANNSSON addressed the president and dear members of the Standing Committee for the important work which was ahead of them, and said that he did not want to take up all of their time.

He hoped to see everyone in the evening for dinner in the Harpa conference hall, and reiterated his words of welcome, wishing everyone a good and productive day of work. He thanked the room, to a round of applause.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked the speaker, Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON, and mentioned that they had the time to discuss a little more in length the day before how importantly the Icelandic parliament also considered the upcoming Fourth Summit to be, and had time to meet with the delegation, assembly, and leadership.

Mr Tiny KOX was quite sure that there would not be a moment where they could not rely on Icelandic cooperation. This was very important, as everyone shared a wish that the upcoming summit of Heads of State and Government also include the Parliamentary Assembly, the parliamentary dimension, which was one of the two statutory bodies of the Council of Europe.

In earlier discussions Mr KOX had with the Icelandic president, prime minister and minister of foreign affairs and Mr ÁRMANNSSON, Mr Tiny KOX said it was clear Iceland was on their side in this respect, and that was great.

He thanked Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON again for his opening words.

5. Examination of new credentials

Mr Tiny KOX expressed his gratitude for the opening remarks, and moved on to the customary items on the Agenda, beginning with the examination of the credentials of the new members of the delegations of Greece, Portugal and Sweden, which were in Doc. 15657.

He then asked if there were any objections to those credentials being accepted, or if there were any changes in the composition. Given he didn't see any, he ratified the credentials.

6. Modifications in the composition of committees

Point 6 on the Agenda was the modification of the composition of committees, to consider the modification in the composition of committees communicated by the Greek national delegation.

Three new members of the Monitoring Committee were nominated by the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance, and the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, respectively. The changes are set out in document Commissions (2002) 08 and addendum. He then asked if the proposed changes were agreed to. They were agreed to with no objections.

7. Request for a current affairs debate

Under Item 7, they had to deal with a request for a current affairs debate under Rule 53 of the Rules of Procedure.

Mr Tiny KOX informed of a request for a current affairs debate entitled Escalation in the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, which had been submitted by the five political groups.

The Bureau, at its meeting on the day before, agreed to recommend holding that current affairs debate, and proposed that Mr Damien COTTIER open the debate.

Mr Tiny KOX proposed to limit the debate to one hour, and to start it after Item 10. There were no objection to the holding of that current affairs debate during the Standing Committee.

8. Agenda

The revised draft agenda was adopted without any objections.

9. First part-session of the Assembly

Mr Tiny KOX moved on to Item 9. He mentioned, after a small correction by Mr Rik DAEMS, that at the meeting the day before, the Bureau drew up the preliminary draft agenda for the forthcoming part-session, from January 23-27 of the following year. Rule 27.4 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure stipulated that the draft agenda had to be submitted where possible to the Standing Committee. They were doing so. The Standing Committee was invited to take note of the Plenary's draft agenda.

Mr Rik DAEMS briefly mentioned that he of course agreed on the Agenda, but he wanted to make one remark, both for the President and the Secretary General, to see whether it would be possible in the future to hold a briefing about their networks. He was presiding over one of them. He inquired if it would be possible in the future to have a moment for all the members to be informed about the work the networks were doing.

Mr Tiny KOX responded that they would carefully look into Mr Rik DAEMS's proposal, and mentioned that indeed, the networks that they had organised were meant to be functional. That meant that the Assembly had to be updated about that. One of the moments could be – as he said that the Secretary General was the brains, and he was only the mouth – the progress report, that could be the moment in which the rapporteur, sitting just behind Mr DAEMS, Mr George KATROUGALOS, could include it in his report or he could take the floor to do that.

10. References to committees

Mr Tiny KOX received Mr Rik DAEMS's approval and thanked him together with the Secretary General. He then hoped note had been taken of the preliminary draft agenda and moved on to Item 10, references to the committees, in document AS/Per (2022) 07. It contained the proposals made by the Bureau the day before. The Standing Committee was invited to ratify the proposals, and so they were, without any objections.

12. Current affairs debate (under Rule 53 of the Rules of Procedure)

Escalation in the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine

Mr Tiny KOX introduced the current affairs debate, which it was decided would be held on the escalation of the Russian war of aggression.

Mr KOX introduced Switzerland's Mr Damien COTTIER (ALDE) to be the first speaker to introduce the debate, with an allotted time of five minutes.

Mr Damien COTTIER thanked the president and addressed 'ladies and gentlemen', members of the Icelandic parliament, and colleagues.

The atrocities uncovered in Ukraine, which he said was freed recently, unfortunately once again underscored how far they had to work to tackle impunity. The Ukrainian authorities had announced that they had discovered four torture centres in the Kherson region. Many bodies, both of soldiers and civilians, seemed to have demonstrated traces of torture. Many things to be deplored, such as forced disappearances, were affecting those assumed of being 'pro-Ukrainian'.

He asked how many of these people were dead or had been deported to Russia against their will. Within this latter section, 11 000 children were, according to credible reports, among those who had been deported. He pointed to the Russian propagandists who boasted of having 'saved' 300 000 children in this way.

Russia was, in the past few hours, systematically targeting and destroying vital civil infrastructure including electricity, heating, drinking water throughout the country, and right at the beginning of winter, which he noted was particularly harsh in Ukraine.

He said that infrastructure experts said the military were being advised to attack real nerve centres. It meant that the operation of even the existence of a modern society without electricity, heating, drinking water was being called into question. He warned that a humanitarian catastrophe was impending.

In addition, he said that frequent explosions were striking many cities as well as Europe's largest nuclear power centre, in Zaporizhzhia. The very fact of military occupation of this power centre, of terrorising its technicians and using it to store armaments, was a war crime endangering the whole of Europe.

The occupying forces were blaming the Ukrainian forces for attempts to destroy the Dnieper dam, but Mr COTTIER said it was obviously in Russia's interest to cause a major catastrophe here – which would affect their own territory too. He said some of these elements probably could come under the definition of crimes against humanity, as expressed in the Statue of Rome of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Mr COTTIER said it looked ever more as if this conflict was more and more looking as though it were an attempt at genocide – which had an immediate legal importance for the entire international community.

He recalled the 1948 UN Convention definition of genocide, in Article 2, including the concept of: "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole, or in part".

Article 2 also included the concept of "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group".

Mr COTTIER asked if it had gone that far. He admitted that it was difficult to decide with certainty – but, unfortunately, they had to note that they were probably at least in the initial stages, which was something which was totally prescribed by the UN Convention.

To ensure that these horrors would no longer be seen again and again, a precedent had to be established: the leaders of an aggressor country had to be judged by an international ad hoc court, as they had suggested in April 2022. The idea of its establishment had to continue to be promoted via the Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe, to be held in Reykjavik in May 2023. This had been proposed in January when discussing the aggression against Ukraine by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, which Mr COTTIER suggested he chair.

Mr COTTIER suggested that either the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the Ukrainian justice system, helped by a joint investigation team, needed to prosecute those who were committing these war crimes and crimes against humanity; those who were even attempting genocide, possibly; and those who had ordered or tolerated these crimes as superiors in the hierarchy.

These member States of the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe itself would of course give the necessary support, for example in sending out experts and their support to investigations into sexual crimes.

The aggressor country also had to be held responsible in the work to be done for rebuilding Ukraine – via the Lugano Principles established in Berlin as a guide – and to contribute to the damage caused as far as possible and in respecting the principles of the rule of law.

Mr COTTIER announced that the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights was preparing a report about these questions to serve as a basis for an urgent debate in January 2023.

More than ever, he reiterated it was important that the values expressed by the Council of Europe were deemed to be essential to construct the future of their continent, on a healthy and sustainable basis.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Damien COTTIER for introducing a topical debate and informed the speaker that he would have three minutes at the end. Then, after the speakers of the political groups, he would be asking Ms Maria MEZENTSEVA to open the debate, and others could then indicate if they wanted to take the floor.

As Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS and Mr Zsolt NÉMETH, first two on the list, were not yet in the room, Mr KOX gave the floor to **Mr George KATROUGALOS** of Greece. He was speaking on behalf of the Group of the Unified Left (UEL), with an allotted three-minute speaking time.

Mr George KATROUGALOS thanked the president.

He estimated that their reaction to the violation of international law, consisting of the unprovoked invasion of Russia against Ukraine, had been very swift and proper.

They expressed their unity and commitment to the values and principles of the Council of Europe. He said that they needed to continue in this way, not just out of the necessary solidarity to the people of Ukraine, but also to also avoid something like this from happening again in the future.

Mr KATROUGALOS said that after the war would end in victory for Ukraine, that they should also avoid a return to the bipolar world of the Cold War of the previous century. This would be a much more dangerous situation, exactly because he said they lacked the devices and guarantees developed in the twentieth century.

Mr KATROUGALOS called this an 'eclipse' of Europe, of the European Union, in this direction. They had not seen any kind of European proposal. He said they seemed limited in Europe, to act as an accessory to American policies; it had to be very clear that they had conflicts of interest – they shared values with their partners on the other side of the Atlantic – but their geostrategic interests were not exactly the same.

Europe had to develop a diplomatic proposal for peace in this direction. Precisely because peace was among their core values, it should be at the top of their agenda. In this, any first word was to go to Ukraine and its sovereign rights, since a diplomatic solution without respecting this was unimaginable.

Mr KATROUGALOS found it very worrisome that nobody was speaking about peace and diplomatic solutions and emphasised that it was the Council of Europe's role to speak to that. Their solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and their struggle with impunity was also part of the agenda – in this, he fully shared in what his colleague Mr Damien COTTIER had said.

Peace should also be part of the agenda, he said.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr George KATROUGALOS.

He introduced **Mr Frank SCHWABE** from Germany, on behalf of the Socialists, Democracy and Greens Group (SOC).

Mr Frank SCHWABE thanked the president and Mr Damien COTTIER.

Mr SCHWABE gave a thought to the people who were suffering, who were dying in Ukraine at that very moment. He said it felt very stupid and nonsensical that this was happening for nothing, especially as it was clear from the outside that Russia was not successful in its aggression in the end.

Whilst Ukraine was strong, it needed their support, and Mr SCHWABE reflected that there was always discussion about how best to organise and give the Council of Europe's support.

The word Europe was changing in this historic situation, and they were more than witnesses now; they were part of this and these developments and needed to take responsibility.

The Fourth Summit was finally happening as a result of this situation in Europe, and answers would be needed.

They were witnesses to war crimes, he said, of a war which he called stupid from beginning to end, with no reason or argument worldwide to destroy civilian infrastructure, knowing what that meant. It was clear, he said, what Russia intended to do, beyond bombing people to death every day, and women were one of the main targets of this aggression.

They had to stand with Ukraine and unify a democratic Europe and democratic world. They had taken the step of talking about terrorists in the Russian regime, and the European parliament followed this, which he wanted to mention. They also agreed to support Ukraine with weapons and humanitarian and technical aid.

A debate had also started about the past, which was also important to understand the situation today. For example, the German parliament had discussed Holodomor as a genocide, and Mr SCHWABE had heard that other parliaments were doing the same.

For Mr SCHWABE, the main thing which could be done here was to help Ukraine, to document war crimes, as they were doing, and to really do everything to hold those responsible for committing war crimes to account.

He said he understood that colleagues from Ukraine such as Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA and others could sometimes lose a little bit of patience when it came to solutions. He personally did not know what the right structure was, but he understood that more results and a unified position from their organisation was needed, with the UN and others, but it had to be done very soon.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Frank SCHWABE. He reiterated that as Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS and Mr Zsolt NÉMETH were still not present, he would invite representatives from both the European People's Party (EPP/CD) and the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance (EC/DA) to take the floor on this issue.

He handed the floor to **Ms Ingjerd SCHOU** of Norway (EPP/CD).

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU thanked the president.

She began by recognising that nine months had passed since Russia had invaded Ukraine. They had seen suffering and devastation; millions had left their homes and lost their livelihoods. Most days, they were waking to news of air strikes, missile attacks and bombs falling. On the way to the airport the day before, she saw reports on the TV screens on her train of power cuts in Kiev due to attacks during the night.

In the Security Council meeting of Wednesday, the Norwegian ambassador had said that: “the attacks serve no military purpose; the aim seems to be terrorise the population; they are illegal and they may constitute war crimes. Those responsible must be held to account”.

Even if the liberation of Kherson gave a glimmer of hope, she said it was a fact that the Russian aggression was continuing and escalating. After nine months, the war had become the new normal. Yet, she said, they could not allow themselves to settle into fatigue about this; no averting of the eyes or steering of the focus into other directions.

They had to continue to support their Ukrainian friends, who were carrying the burden of this war and fighting on the European frontline for democracy. They were fighting not only for their country, but for the fundamental values that modern Europe was founded on. They thus had to continue their support, ensure a tribunal was established to hold the perpetrators accountable, and they had to continue to provide humanitarian aid and shelter for refugees.

They had to establish and contribute generously to a fund for reconstruction, since the day to rebuild Ukraine would come.

Ms SCHOU thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Ingjerd SCHOU.

He handed the floor to **Mr John HOWELL** of the United Kingdom on behalf of the Group of European Conservatives and Democratic Alliance (EC/DA).

Mr John HOWELL thanked the room and said it was quite a surprise to be speaking at this moment in this debate.

He said he was wearing a badge with great pride. He expressed his full support of actions the Council of Europe had taken in Ukraine.

However, he said Ukraine was not just about military action, although there was a tremendous amount of military action which could still continue.

At the last plenary session, Mr HOWELL said he had asked Ukrainian president Mr Volodymyr ZELENSKYY about the fact that he only had 10% of what was needed for a missile defence system. Mr HOWELL said 10% was a small amount considering that Ukraine was a big country and would need these resources for defence.

Other things needed to be done for Ukraine. Two weeks prior, Mr HOWELL had appeared via a Zoom call at the equivalent of a select committee in Ukraine, an interesting meeting which he said aimed to work out the effect of war on the environment; this fit in with a paper he was to present at the next plenary session.

One thing was clear: there was very little national or international legislation to help in this situation, since much of the human rights legislation was designed to – quite rightly, he said – protect human beings.

Yet the entire devastation of large parts of the Ukrainian environment meant a new treaty had to be introduced to support Ukraine in this respect. The crime of ecocide had to be established to be able to take forward all that was held dear in this respect.

Mr HOWELL once again expressed his full support for Ukraine and for the comments which had gone before.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr John HOWELL.

He said that the day before, in the presidential committee, it had been agreed that Mr Damien COTTIER would open the debate and additional remarks would be made by Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS of Lithuania, the rapporteur of the last current affairs debate, before going to Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA.

He gave the floor to **Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS** (EPP/CD).

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS thanked the room.

He expressed how glad he was that there was now a common opinion and unity. He thanked the president for the last meeting, and for the united front being represented in the international community in the war of aggression against Ukraine by Russia in the last ten months. He said tens of millions of people were suffering, were without electricity, the hospitals were without power too.

It was something that he had seen with his own eyes; he gave thanks for the approval of his trip with Mr Damien COTTIER under the leadership of the Human Rights Committee, to see Bucha and Irpil. He described it as the most terrible impression that the international community had got, probably since the Second World War.

He reminded colleagues that in May they would assemble back here, with the leaders of 46 States, and Mr Tiny KOX had given good news, that they would have a meeting a day in advance with leaders of the group, of the bureau, in Reykjavik, to prepare the contents for May.

To propose statements for the leaders of the States, including the idea that an international tribunal for war crimes and crimes of aggression should be finalised. He told Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA that it was a good idea to finalise it during the summit for the Heads of States in the place.

Mr ZINGERIS said that Mr Bjorn BERGE, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and the leader of the Icelandic delegation, was doing excellent work and would be busy until May with duties. He expected his side to be cementing the internal environment for the meeting.

If the heads of state under the Council of Europe umbrella were to establish this one great idea, for an international tribunal, it would be the biggest achievement for the Council of Europe for years to come.

He shared an example from 1960, when a Danish delegation suggested a resolution about the illegal occupation of the Baltic States, which was approved by consensus in a so-called consultative assembly of the Parliamentary Assembly. It would, he said, be simply great.

Since the Ukrainian military was continuing its advance and retaking occupied territories – he thanked them for doing this in the name of Europe – on 10 November, Russia announced it was withdrawing from Kherson, in what he described as a humiliating defeat for the aggressor and a big success for the Ukrainian forces.

However, the terrorist regime had created a terrible human rights disaster in the Kherson region. Mr ZINGERIS expressed his wish to visit, as soon as possible, for the president to organise a new trip, and to discover these new terrible places of mass killing in the Kherson region in a second trip, and to bring the results of the trip connected to the attorney's office and prosecutors office of Ukraine.

He thanked everyone for supporting the last resolution from the Political Affairs Committee, and hoped to continue with an update of that in a follow-up report called 'Consequences of the Russian war against Ukraine'.

He thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS.

He prepared to give the floor to **Mr Iulian BULAI** of Romania.

He said that although Mr Damien COTTIER had spoken on behalf of his Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group, he hinted that sometimes rules were there to be broken, adding that he thought it was fine because the EPP had already had two speakers on the floor too. After that, Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA was to take the floor.

Mr Iulian BULAI thanked the president, the Icelandic hosts and Mr Bjorn BERGE, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, for the light inside, given the dark outside.

Mr BULAI began by saying it was not well known that over 35 years ago, the talks on nuclear non-proliferation in Reykjavik, also had a human rights dimension.

He said the day before, during the ad hoc committee, a fantastic, brilliant idea of a possible ad hoc committee or a permanent tribunal dealing with the crimes of Russian aggression should be established as a consequence of the summit. It should have universal jurisdiction in order to make it a permanent body of the Council of Europe. He said it was a very interesting idea. He was very happy that Mr Damien COTTIER mentioned the importance of proposing that the summit would be having this heritage, of a tribunal judging the crimes of aggression.

Mr BULAI mentioned Kherson and called upon the Parliamentary Assembly to ask the Commissioner on Human Rights of the Council of Europe to hold a fact-finding mission in Ukraine in the coming weeks, and to have a full, if not preliminary report, by the end of January 2023 if possible. It lay within the competence of this Parliamentary Assembly to ask another body of the Council of Europe to be proactive in that direction. He said he hoped the message would be sent to Ms Dunja MIJATOVIĆ, Commissioner for Human Rights.

Secondly, with regards to Ukrainian people's suffering, Mr BULAI pointed out that the Council of Europe did not offer humanitarian aid, but the International Red Cross did; Mr BULAI had it from Ukrainian friends and sources that their presence was welcome and needed more than ever there, to put it simply. Having a formal demand for more of the International Red Cross's presence was relevant, and there was a lot of needs that this organisation could be covering there.

Thirdly, it had come to Mr BULAI's attention recently that a minister of foreign affairs and top official of the Council of Europe had been to Russia on a main speaker invitation to an event in Sochi called ATOMEXPO. It was the moment, he said, to remind the room that both Moldova and Ukraine were suffering from destroyed electricity capacity, sabotaging gas and electricity deliveries to these countries. It was thus an insult to their core values, that a country's politician was not showing full solidarity with the victims, but also with the principles of the Council of Europe. He pointed to this and raised the need for repair, because matters could not continue like this in terms of what had been decided earlier this year, when the Russian Federation was expelled due to its aggression in Ukraine.

Finally, Mr BULAI referred to what Mr Frank SCHWABE said about keeping the memory of the suffering of Ukraine alive, in terms of recognising the Holodomor as genocide. Two days before, the Romanian parliament had officially recognised it as genocide. He thought it fair that the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly call upon more member States to have more and more of this type of official recognition of past suffering, in order to understand what was happening now - which was a continuation of what started almost 90 years ago.

Mr BULAI thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Iulian BULAI. He introduced **Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA** (EPP/CD) of Ukraine and said she could have longer than three minutes to update the room, since time was fading away in Ukraine.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA told the president she would try her best.

She told dear friends and colleagues that there was nothing more she could address them with than that: they had become Ukraine's strongest and most united family on the battlefield of diplomacy, with the greatest achievement and the highest bravery.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had taken very solid, planned decisions since the events of 24 February 2022.

She pointed out that the day before, they had passed a red line: nine months and nine days of a brutal war, which started with repeated aggression by the Russian Federation not only in Ukraine, but also in other member States of the Council of Europe.

She told colleagues that she could not believe what she was hearing: a very straightforward support of an ad hoc tribunal, that she was sure would be established.

Politicians would be in the international relations history books, since there had finally been a realisation that the International Criminal Court (ICC) did not have a mandate to support the investigation of multiple, multiple war crimes – amounting to almost 75 000 registered only in Ukraine. Ms MEZENTSEVA highly saluted 15 of the European countries which were investigating those under their national jurisdictions.

She said, of course this was a terrorist regime; calling it that was again an act of the Council of Europe, now followed by resolutions in national parliaments.

Violence against women, children, men, and everyone now fighting in Ukraine – also members of other countries were at the frontlines, standing for democracy and their common values.

She reminded colleagues that everything started with what she called the silent invasion of Crimea, and she said it had to end with Crimea. She highly saluted the initiative of Croatia to host the second Crimea Platform, where member States speakers were very straightforward with their speeches and support.

War prisoners, civil prisoners, more than one million extra displaced persons, forcibly passportised, children sent to sort of camps to become healthier – they were disappearing. Mr Damien COTTIER had mentioned 30 000 of these children, which she added was still a very approximate number.

She addressed colleagues, telling them this was indeed a genocide attempt. She called on parliaments to proceed with something which was repeated in the history of the Stalinist regime in the 1930s; of a great famine, which was bravely being talked about in national parliaments.

This was not just in Ukraine's name, but in Europe's name.

Ms MEZENTSEVA said it was not a problem for her to not have electricity, heating or water in her apartment; but burying her friends was a problem.

She called on dear colleagues to stay inspired and to have no doubts that they would win this war together, very soon.

She thanked the president and everyone.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA, for her presence too, considering her long journey to Reykjavik. He said it was important to have Ukrainian delegation members present to not only talk about Ukraine, but with members from there.

He introduced **Mr Ahmet YILDIZ** (NR) of Türkiye, giving him an allocated speaking time of three minutes.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ thanked the president.

He confirmed that the week before, the Turkish parliament had also debated the same issue.

He said the transatlantic bond was important to counter this aggression for a prolonged war, which he said seemed certain.

Ukraine's liberation of Kherson was a 1 300-kilometre natural line of contact on the Dnipro river.

They needed to support Ukraine in every way. While Türkiye was supporting Ukraine, it was also in contact with Russia, to help Ukraine, including as the war was going on. The first step being a grain corridor which was helpful for Ukrainian farmers this year and for the coming years, to sustain agriculture, which was important for the country and for the food security of many regions in the world.

Mr YILDIZ shared news of a recent dialogue facilitated by Türkiye with the US and the CIA and their counterparts in Istanbul and spoke of his belief that it contributed to toning down a hint of the nuclear threat from Russia, which was important.

Türkiye also facilitated an exchange of prisoners, which included very noble commanders of the Azovstal resistance, as well as Ukrainian prisoners of war. Conditions agreed between the two sides meant some of them were hosted in Türkiye and said they would continue to do.

The war presented many challenges, with the energy crisis and food BULAI, but security and territorial integrity of Ukraine was the most important priority, he said.

Mr YILDIZ felt excited about the motion that the presidential committee put forward the day before in the bureau, about the abuse of veto power in the Security Council. He was a fan, because this abuse of veto power had caused the prolongation of many conflicts in the world, especially with the Palestinian issue – where the US abused this veto power – and the Syrian war, where the veto power was abused by Russia to prevent any expression from Syrians being included in the Security Council, etc.

This time, Mr YILDIZ, it came about in the search for overcoming the veto power for establishing the tribunal. He repeated that he was a fan of it and would support it when it came to the agenda. He thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Ahmet YILDIZ. He introduced the next speaker, **Ms Petra STIENEN** of the Netherlands (ALDE).

Ms Petra STIENEN thanked the president and the previous speakers, with a special mention to Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA, who she said they stood beside.

To make this support practical, she shared that the Senate in the Netherlands was trying to help the Ukrainian delegation come to the 21st Assembly of State Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court at the beginning of December 2022. They would be inviting the delegation to the Senate to exchange views. There was a lot to share, including on experiences of the MH17 case, about which there had been a ruling the week before.

When these crimes against humanity happen, Ms STIENEN said they had shown the international community that they could take this to the courts, and have due process, and deal with it under the conditions of civilised rule of law.

This experience could also be used to look into the special tribunal. The next Standing Committee was happening in the Hague, and the organising committee as well as the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the president, were also looking into how to have a good session on fighting impunity and ensuring justice would prevail at a time when genocide was happening in a European country.

Ms STIENEN reaffirmed that they stood by Ukraine, and that they could be called if they were needed, and they would try to help in a legal, democratic, civilised way, showing how things could be done in the 21st century.

She thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Petra STIENEN and introduced **Ms Petra BAYR** of Austria (SOC).

Ms Petra BAYR thanked the president.

She started with a reflection on Mr Damien COTTIER's words on genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Unlike others in the room, Ms BAYR said she was really convinced that it was in fact not up to parliaments to decide whether an ongoing atrocity was genocide or ethnic cleansing or not; she was convinced that it was far beyond their mandate, since they had courts, be it ad hoc courts, or be it the international criminal court, which were made for crimes of aggression against humanity and war crimes and genocide and ethnic cleansing.

She reminded the room of the concrete title of the 1948 Convention: "the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide". The problem, she said, was that they were falling totally short on prevention.

There was just one single example in history, in 2011, when a no-fly zone introduced in Libya really was a multilateral activity for the 'prevention' of a genocide.

Ms BAYR felt it would be a good thing for the Parliamentary Assembly, but also for the Council of Europe as a whole, to think about mechanisms that held multilateral bodies accountable, to be active in prevention, to really act politically before it happened.

She reminded the room of the responsibility to prevent as an emerging international norm, which could be used, and she wanted to be active about the preventive mandate of the convention.

Ms BAYR ended by recalling the words of Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA, who she said correctly mentioned that the ad hoc tribunal was being established in all likelihood because the International Criminal Court (ICC) did not have a mandate to investigate these concrete war crimes.

She described this as a pity. She called on those who had not done so so far, to ratify the Rome Statute as the legal basis for the International Criminal Court, as it would be easier if that were to have happened in many more countries.

She thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Petra BAYR.

He invited other members to indicate if they wanted to take the floor to his colleagues Ms Valérie CLAMER and Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU-TSOVILIS.

He gave the floor **Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ** of Croatia (SOC) and apologised for the pronunciation of his name.

Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ thanked the president.

He started by reiterating his support to Ukraine in these very difficult times.

He said it was an honour for Croatia to host the Crimea Platform, which he was proud to have had the opportunity to do, and that so many speakers of the parliaments with their delegations had attended.

What was happening in Ukraine was atrocious, and unfortunately the war was becoming more and more savage. As the Russians were becoming aware that they were losing in the long run, he said they were venting this anger and frustration on people and civilians, shelling civilian targets and so on.

Mr HAJDUKOVIĆ thus saw the special tribunal dealing with these atrocities as a welcome thing in his opinion.

Whilst they were there in support of their friends in Ukraine, he wanted to draw attention to a country which was a kind of collateral of this war: Moldova.

Moldova was very dependent energy-wise on Ukraine. It was thus also suffering as the infrastructure in Ukraine was being attacked by the Russians. There were mass outages in Moldova recently. He also recognised the peculiar geopolitical situation that Moldova was in, since a part of their territory was also occupied, with Russian forces stationed also on their territories, and so he implored Moldova's plight, not to be forgotten too. In helping Ukrainian friends, sight should not be lost of a country that wanted to be a European member State, and wanted to share their values, and which also needed support to weather this storm, this winter.

He thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked **Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ**. He agreed that the citizens and state of Moldova should indeed not be forgotten, as it was suffering from the consequences of this war.

He asked if any other members wanted to take the floor and welcomed **Mr Damien COTTIER** of Switzerland (ALDE) to react to what had been said.

Mr Damien COTTIER of Switzerland (ALDE) thanked the president and commented that he would not be able to react to all of the very many things which had been said in this useful debate.

He described it as a chance for the Council of Europe and the continent to have a summit in Reykjavik. He commended the efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly, of the president, the Secretary-General and the Committee of Ministers, as well as its former Irish presidency and current Icelandic presidency, to have made this decision and to start preparing for it.

He added that as the Swiss, they were always proud to speak of the spirit of Geneva to help find a solution for the world, but that the spirit that they found in Reykjavik was the same: to find good, concrete solutions for the planet. It was not only a good opportunity to have the summit, but to have it here, with what they had heard the day before in the ad hoc committee and discussion in the bureau about the spirit of the Icelandic presidency, in it not being about the summit itself or their presidency, but about preparing solutions and the continent for the future, and for even stronger values of the Council of Europe. It was important that it was about the content, and it was important as an element of discussion between Heads of States and Governments.

He reflected on how important it was to be there on his trip with Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS and a delegation of ten members of the Parliamentary Assembly to Kiev, Irpin and Bucha in late June 2022. He described it as horrendous to see and hear what they saw and heard in direct testimonies. It was important to acknowledge here what they saw, such as the use of heavy weapons in a populated area, which was clearly a war crime, if not worse.

However, he was not sure if a second expedition to other places in Ukraine was necessary in terms of it being the role of this Assembly in fact-collecting, while he agreed that it was obvious and clear to testify. Instead, he agreed with the thoughts of some that asking the Commissioner of Human Rights to do a mission could bring in other elements that they themselves could not bring in.

He also agreed with the sentiment that Ukraine should continue to be supported with humanitarian aid, especially if there was more need for International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) personnel, which could be discussed with them, since he was in regular contact with them, and knew they wanted to do their utmost. The Geneva Convention provided a specific mandate in international law for this, in how they act and in respecting that.

Mr COTTIER also thought that more dialogue could be created between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Parliamentary Assembly and was trying to arrange a meeting with the ICRC's High Representative in January or later in 2023, as a public hearing of one or both the Legal Affairs Committee or the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.

As a Swiss person, he reacted to the idea that Ukraine could be supported with the delivery of weapons, especially as by international law they have another position. He said that the Parliamentary Assembly was not a security organisation, but all the countries could help in this position, and he heard what was being said and could totally understand the positions. Several countries had different positions, and Switzerland itself was more active when it came to humanitarian aid.

Supporting inquiries was very important; the prosecutor general was doing a lot of work with international support; help was needed, and some countries were providing it. Parliamentarians could push for their countries to do more here.

Peace was of the utmost importance and would come at the end, but it would not be long-lasting or possible if it came without justice. They needed to work on both; on diplomacy and keeping contacts to find peace, and it was also important to work on justice and fight against impunity.

This ad hoc tribunal was thus so important – Mr COTTIER apologised here to the president for taking more time, as it was important – but he said an international judicial system could not just be judging the militaries or officers committing crimes against humanity or war crimes, whilst not charging those who were responsible for the war, those who decided to commit this worst crime of all, as was said in Nuremberg. It was thus so important to have this institution with the broadest possible support.

Personally, and frankly speaking, Mr COTTIER did not think it was important to him if it was a Council of Europe or an intergovernmental or UN institution which did this, as long as it existed and had the broadest possible support.

He agreed with the words of Ms Petra STIENEN that the Hague was probably the right place to do that thanks to the expertise there, but also because of the existing link with the ICC and other institutions, because there was a desire to reinforce, not weaken them. They were however not being active about this crime of aggression, and that was why they needed something more. The place should not be taking time to intervene on the crime of aggression or crimes against humanity, and he mentioned this here clearly.

Mr COTTIER said his last word was on genocide: he was much more careful in not saying this himself and reminded the room that there were hints of it, and it was going in this direction now.

He agreed with Ms Petra BAYR that it was not the role of the political institution, in the end it would be international jurisdiction which would say that, and they had the tools for that.

However, the responsibility to protect was there: it was not only about prevention, if they thought a genocide was being committed right now. They could not wait so that in some years some international court would decide. This was why the impulse to talk about that was there, and to say that if it went in this direction, it had legal consequences which were even heavier than that of war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Unfortunately, he said there were too many elements now indicating that this might be going in that direction, but Mr COTTIER expressed caution and also agreed on that.

They would resume the debate in January 2023 upon availability of the report of the Legal Affairs Committee, and he thanked colleagues.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Damien COTTIER.

He called for the end of the debate.

He thanked everyone for the dignified way in which they contributed to the debate.

He reminded the room that the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy had already been working on a report on the political consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression in Ukraine. He hoped that the debate was useful to feed that report.

11. Draft declaration on the #RoadToReykjavik: towards a 4th Summit which meets Europeans' expectations

Mr Tiny KOX announced they were going to discuss the draft declaration on the #RoadToReykjavik: towards a 4th Summit that meets Europeans' expectations. In document AS/Per (2022) 08, they would find a draft declaration on

the #RoadToReykjavik: towards a 4th Summit that meets Europeans' expectations, that he was submitting to them, to the Standing Committee, for adoption. The draft declaration was considered the day before by the Bureau, which supported it.

It was important that the Assembly formally reacted in support of the decision of the Committee of Ministers to hold a summit of heads of state and government of the Council of Europe on 16 and 17 May, there in Reykjavik, as part of Iceland's presidency of the organisation.

The Assembly had to take pleasure in that significant step forward, which was the culmination of its longstanding efforts. The declaration had to make clear that the Assembly stood, more than ever, ready to make that summit a success, and was going to support the Icelandic Presidency for the work that was to come.

The Council of Europe was at a turning point of its history. The 4th Summit was meant to strengthen Europe's political multilateral architecture and lead to a renewed, improved and reinforced Council of Europe. It had to ensure that their organisation was given all means and competences to meet current and future challenges as well as the expectations of future generations.

Before adopting the declaration, the President announced he would give the floor to the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe to react to the proposal.

Mr Bjorn BERGE began by thanking the President and wishing a good morning to all the attendees. He mentioned they were indeed about to adopt a very important declaration on the Summit. That, of course, came on top of an introductory memorandum. Now, as they had referred to, a draft report on the Summit had also been elaborated, that would be finalised in January.

He was very grateful to the Political Affairs Committee, and in particular to Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN, for that very important work.

He informed them that the introductory memorandum, with its many valuable proposals, had been the subject of quite intense discussions in Strasbourg, in the Committee of Ministers, of course, together with the high-level reflection group report. That was also preparation that was well advanced, together with discussions.

Indeed, Europe was in a deep crisis. They had war in the midst of their continent. And of course, their thoughts were with the brave Ukrainian people, its President, its leaders, and also with Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA. It was very important to hear her and her testimony that day.

The Summit was also, in one way, a unique opportunity, first of all, to reinforce their support towards Ukraine, but also to lay the ground for a forward-looking renewal of the Council of Europe. It was a unique opportunity in that sense.

They were, of course, in the best of hands. He explained that they appreciated the excellent preparation done by the Icelandic presidency in the Committee of Ministers.

Many had, as a matter of fact, repeatedly underlined the issue of visibility for their organisation. To increase the knowledge and understanding of the mandate and the very important work that organisation does every day, in particular in trying to reach out to the ordinary citizens in Europe.

The day before had been a very good day and exchange on that. It had been referred to in the Bureau. It is an ongoing discussion also in Strasbourg, in the Committee of Ministers, on that important topic.

They maybe recalled there was a decision from the Turin ministerial on that specific issue, highlighting the importance of moving ahead and taking specific initiatives.

That was what they had done now. They had started a major campaign. He had already met focal points from all of their 46 member States in groups. They had started the planning of numerous events for the upcoming year in all of their member States. Their aim was to have that every year for the next ten years. If they wanted to have impact, they needed the sustainability.

They of course had so many friends, networks, partners, civil society, youth groups, women's networks, expert groups. He particularly mentioned the OCEAN network, initiated by former President Nicoletti, as a network among universities to promote their conventions.

In particular, they had encouraged their national focal points to reach out to them, the heads of the national delegations of the Parliamentary Assembly. He thought they would do that very soon as well, to invite them to a closer cooperation.

Mr Bjorn BERGE concluded by thanking the President and the members of the Presidential Committee for their very strong support on that. There too, he thought the Summit could be a unique opportunity, because there was to be increased attention in all their member States leading up to the Summit, so it was maybe an opportunity to also focus and organise certain events and take advantage of that in the spring and the following year.

Those could be events organised on important human rights issues, like on violence against women. There was, as a matter of fact, an article in Iceland's main newspaper that day by the Secretary General on violence against women.

Of course, media and social media were going to have a part in that visibility project as well. It could be on any issues: multilateralism, the role of the Council of Europe, sports, or on cultural roots. It was up to them, as member States, to define the themes and what sort of events they wanted to organise.

That was the bottom line. But they could count on the support from the Secretariat. They would do everything they could to support them. There are already dedicated Secretariat members for each member state to follow up on the project.

It wasn't so much about giving elegant speeches on how brilliant the Council of Europe was. It was about reaching out to the people and having the testimonies of individuals that had benefited from the work of their organisation.

They sometimes said that the Istanbul Convention saved lives. Yes. Let's have the testimony where actually a person stands up and said that her life was saved by the work of the Council of Europe. It is very important.

The overall aim, he said, was the following: to bring the Council of Europe from the conference table to the kitchen table. That is really the basic idea behind it, so that ordinary citizens can better understand their work, and they can increase the profile and visibility of their organisation.

He very much looked forward to working very closely with all of them on that very important issue in the years that were to come.

Mr Tiny KOX stressed that it was indeed important that it was shown that the Assembly was working not only in close cooperation with the Committee of Ministers, but also with the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General in the development of their #RoadtoReykjavik.

He also thanked the Deputy Secretary General for his support for the declaration they were about to adopt, and asked if there were any objections.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS mentioned that after a very fruitful and long discussion on the text, and before their good friend President Mr Tiny KOX adopted it, it was exchanges of view about the text what they had in front of them, probably to be adopted in a few minutes.

He was reading the phrase on Paragraph 4, about the 4th Summit. "The 4th Summit should lay the ground for a forward looking renewal of the Council of Europe, which should be given greater political and financial means to contribute to realising peace, stability and prosperity for the benefit of all Europeans, against the pressure of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes."

It was included. But his suggestion the day before, during the Presidential Committee meeting was done, but "against the pressure and interference". He begged that the inclusion of the words "and interference" could be approved.

Mr Tiny KOX mentioned that given it was already Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS' text, he would be very careful about adding more text, because the discussion would be opened again. It was already discussed in the Presidential Committee and in the Bureau.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU said that she took the floor because the day before she shared that when they had a possibility to give their views. Overall, she thought the declaration was good.

But the President said something about expectations of the Summit coming in May. She also thanked the Deputy Secretary General for his good reflections and good initiatives. But she wanted to just lay a message on the table.

She had the expectation that the Summit in May had to be political and not administrative. She expected that they would talk about values and the ground values of the Council of Europe, and not about the financial situation.

She thought that it was important that the declaration that they, as parliamentarians of the Council of Europe, adopted, have a clear and strictly political focus. They had to underline that the goal of the Summit had to be

recommitting to the core values and principles of the Council of Europe on the highest political level. Because they were the highest political level when they would meet in May in Reykjavik.

That is covered in paragraph 4, a very good paragraph. In paragraph 5, both greater political and financial means were emphasised.

In her opinion, all focus should be on the political aspect. They had to of course mention the financial aspect too, but the political aspect was their agenda, their forum, and administrative and budgetary considerations had to come later and not at the beginning of the meeting. When their heads of state recommitted themselves and their States to their organisation. That was important.

Finally, the financial security is important for a renewed Council of Europe. But a renewed Council of Europe has to be a Council of Europe with ideas to prioritise, making do with financial resources being more limited. That is a fact.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU just wanted to underline that, because she thought that they had had a good debate in the Presidential Committee the day before, but she wanted to give those remarks there as well.

Mr Frank SCHWABE believed that they had to understand where they were. It wasn't the end of the report. They had a lot of opportunities to give their opinion. What they just said was a declaration that they were on the field. They were a part, and they played that together with others. It wasn't going to be easy. It was going to be very difficult. But now they had it. They got that 4th Summit they had been asking for a long time.

Now, they had a few months to prepare. They were not going to have another chance. They would not get a 5th summit very soon. If they failed with the 4th Summit, they would really have a problem, so it was really important to prepare it in a very good way.

He understood that it wasn't a guarantee to be successful when all the Heads of States and Governments were going to be present. But it is a precondition.

Mr SCHWABE said that the Chancellor of Germany was going to be part of the Summit, and he was very sure that all the others would do the same.

He thanked Iceland. His feeling was that although it was a small country, they were preparing it very well. Maybe it was a chance. He knew that all of those present and others would find a lot of pictures stormy, compared with the weather, that it was going to be a very tough way to go, but there was a possibility to be successful and to do two things: to put the lessons learnt into the new idea of the Council of Europe, especially from the last month. And secondly, to again underline that the Convention, and the judgments of the Court, were like national law.

That is what it is. One does not have to like judgments. One does not have to like judgments on a national level sometimes as well. But they had to make very clear that it was a law, and they could not accept if any country questioned that. It is the minimum outcome.

Mr SCHWABE welcomed what they did as an organisation. He thought that everybody knew what they were doing as PACE, as a part of that organisation. That declaration was just to underline it. They shouldn't put too much more inside of it than what it needed, but they did need to have that declaration that day.

Mr Iulian BULAI intervened just to support the proposal of Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS, as he understood that was a technical omission. It had been said the day before, as he understood it, but it was just omitted.

If that was the case, he thought they had to support it. If that wasn't the case, he also thought they had to support it as it was more explicit in terms of the aggression, and it wasn't negatively altering the content, but it was just adding more value to the text.

Mr Iulian BULAI reiterated his full support for Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS' proposal.

Mr Tiny KOX corrected Mr Iulian BULAI, stating that there was no mistake made on that side of the table. They had the text of Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS, it was not included, but they were going to add the proposal.

He however asked them to be aware that they were going to change the text that Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS proposed. They would add "and interference" after "against the pressure".

After that remark, the President asked if the declaration could be adopted. Because as he said, that was just the starting point. They would now be on the #RoadtoReykjavik. They all had to be aware the Summit was going to be

held. Heads of state were going to attend. But the content of the decisions to be taken by the Summit were still in the making.

It was a great achievement of their Assembly that they were taken on board by the Secretary General and by the Committee of Ministers.

Looking to the history of earlier summits, the Assembly was not able then, for good or for bad reasons, to play an important role. Now, there was no opposition, neither from the Committee of Ministers nor from the Secretary General, to them playing an important role.

The report by Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN, that was going to be discussed on 30 December in Paris, and that was to be adopted in January, was going to surely be of the highest relevance for the Committee of Ministers. The Committee of Ministers had already said that. Mr Simon Coveney, the former Chair of the Committee of Ministers... That afternoon they were going to listen to the Foreign Affairs Minister and the Prime Minister of Iceland, and they were going to recognise that.

So the fact that the Assembly was going to play a role, he thought was already a success. But success was not to be taken for granted. A lot of things could happen. A lot of things could happen in Ukraine. A lot of things could happen in Europe. They had to be very vigilant and very alert to make that road to Reykjavik end in a success in a way that does not focus on the institution, as the Deputy Secretary General had just said, but focus on the very goals of the organisation, which were to protect and promote peace and prosperity on the basis of rule of law, respect for human rights and a pluralistic democracy.

The President remarked that if they adopted that draft declaration, they would commit themselves to all together be on the #RoadtoReykjavik.

The draft declaration was adopted without any objections nor abstentions.

13. Observation of elections

a. Observation of the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 October 2022)

Mr Tiny KOX announced a point of order by Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS stated that they had already known each other for years and years. They were now friends for probably, in some cases, for decades.

He added that the day before there had been extremely fruitful and successful exchanges of view on that text. Two groups, the EPP and ALDE groups, wanted to ask the President to officially write, correct with one word "and interference"... It was up to him [the President].

Mr Tiny KOX reminded Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS that his proposal had already been accepted.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS thanked the President for the acceptance of his proposal.

Mr Tiny KOX went on to introduce Point 13, the observation of the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH began by stating that since 1996, they had observed elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For this election they had made two missions. One pre-electoral mission and then their delegation with 24 members for the election observation mission, together with a lot of other observers: NATO PA, European Parliament, OSCE PA, ODIHR.

There were more than 500 observers in the country, which was good, by the way, on one hand. Secondly, they sometimes met each other in polling stations, but that was another story.

The election and the PACE delegation worked from the 30 September to 3 October. They made a statement after the pre-electoral mission where they had been in Sarajevo and in Banja Luka.

In Banja Luka they met civil society too, but it was not possible to meet with any media representatives. That was very different to Sarajevo, where they got a lot of good and critical members of the different media.

The high representative started at the beginning of the electoral campaign to speak with the political parties and to renew, in the light of the Venice Commission, the election law. But he failed in that because political parties were not willing to follow that.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH had said the day before, some of their commission were upset that some minutes, or a half hour, before the counting started in the polling station, the high representative said he was thinking about the

new system that was the wrong timing. The content was maybe okay, but the timing was bad. Because first they had to fight that the election was accepted by all. It was in a very peaceful surrounding but they said in the pre-electoral mission, in the press statement, they said to stop the harassment. They asked for more women participation because there was a minimum, but they pushed the women away onto the border of all the movement. It was not the best.

They noticed some irregularities and some problems, but in general, the election was okay.

In the Republika Srpska there was a situation that they spoke about also, of vote paying, because a group of voters, veterans and young people, got money from the state, so from the ruling party, in their accounts.

So what was that? Nobody understood why they got money. Also employees in the public sector. That was not very helpful to create trust into the system.

But all in all, they could say that the election and the result was okay and they could accept that. As he said the day before in the Bureau, there was a difference between the Council of Europe team and the parliamentarians from the European Parliament. They wanted to bring the Ukrainian war into their statement, and he was strictly against that, because the Ukrainian war had nothing to do with it. They had to respect that a country like Bosnia had their own election.

Yes, they had some international cases there. The president of Türkiye was present in Sarajevo during their pre-electoral mission. But also, the President of Croatia took a memorial in a military operation on the 13 December. The President of Serbia attended the Serbian Unity Day in Bijeljina on the 15th. Milorad DODIK, the President of Republika Srpska, was twice by Putin. And the Prime Minister of Hungary made a visit in September, and also he visited Milorad DODIK's home town, Laktaši, on 4 November.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH only reported that. He thought they should think about how good that was for a country that was finding its own way, to find out and to fight against defamation against journalists, cyber-attacks, and harassment against journalists, and to get out of the working environment of political pressure, and even prosecution.

In total, the climate was not good, but some things were changing, the representative of the Bosniaks has changed. There was a change. Change is always good. The 11 parties supported one candidate, and that one candidate won.

It could be seen that the gap between the ethnic lines was deep and deeper. The future of European integration, the future for young people in Bosnia, was only going to be overbridged when those politicians that were now elected understood their job. Their job is to work for the country. To work for the citizens. And not only think in their ethnic prisms what they could do and could not.

What they needed was to make a vital bridge over those gaps, because every young person asked on the street only had one thing in their brain, when they could they immediately leave the country because they had no future in the country.

That was something that their rapporteurs in the Monitoring Committee should pay attention to for the future, because Bosnia needed the help of the Council of Europe, especially in that way.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH had mentioned the day before that what they needed was a constitution that was a constitution that was not based on a ceasefire agreement in the US, which ignores other minorities and ethnic groups, and Bosnia had to respect the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. Currently they still ignored them. They were not able to work and to solve those problems.

Specially, and if he had a look to young people, if one's mother was a Bosniak and father was Serbian, and young people were asked when they were 18, they had to decide which part of their parents to ignore. They had to decide if they were Bosniak or Croatian or Serbian. That was impossible. Their Human Rights Court said stop with that. Young people said if it's not enough to be citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they wanted to leave the country.

That was what they had, and the positive thing was that a new high representative was willing to play an active role again, because in the last year he was more like a passenger. Currently, the new one was going to act. That was helpful, but they needed the Council of Europe. They needed the Venice Commission to come out of their dead-end road.

Participation dropped, so they had 4.5% less than in the 2018 election. In the Brčko corridor there was only 44% participation.

He hoped the next election in Bosnia wouldn't be very soon, because he thought that the turnout would go down and down, and that was not good for a democracy.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Stefan SCHENNACH for his report and for being there with their team and staff.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ expressed his happiness for having been a part of that team. He chose the Srpska area together with Mr Antón GÓMEZ-REINO from Spain. It was a good election day. Everything went properly during the election day. He didn't know before. But he shared the last point Mr Stefan SCHENNACH mentioned. That ethnic thing complicated everything, and it prevented people also from voting.

Their votes didn't matter due to the Dayton system. They couldn't elect their own. They got more votes but could not be Prime Minister, for the reason of belonging to some ethnic group. Even at the level of directors.

He did not feel turnout was low. Of course, Bosnia needs empathy until the system is reformed. But that reform was obstructed until then by ethnic parties. They thought that it was their monopoly.

It would have been good if the high representative and the EU representative there felt their support to them, to get resilient against those obstructers.

Those obstructing forces tried everything to make the state fail, and then came to them and said: "Bosnia is a failed state". They did it on purpose. They should be aware of it.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ agreed that the timing of that news by the high representative was very wrong. He also disagreed with the content. But anyhow, the actors in Bosnia did not have to be stuck to those points and had to look forward.

Mr John HOWELL mentioned that he too was part of the mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. There was one observation that he had above all. That was that at the polling stations, there were long queues outside the polling stations. Long queues to get in. The reason for that was the complexity of the polling forms that people had to examine.

There were four A4 folders in many cases to be filled in. That brought home to him how unsustainable the Dayton Accord results were for Bosnia and Herzegovina. They had to look to sort that out for the future, because that, he thought, was an unsustainable feature of the country's electoral system.

Mr Tiny KOX asked the Standing Committee to take note of the report and thanked the delegation that did that important work for them. He hoped that there would not be another election on short notice, because democracy was more than only voting, it was also taking into account the decision of the voters, however difficult that might be.

3. Event on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women - Digital violence against women

Mr Tiny KOX announced the event on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, especially digital violence against women.

They were then going to be accompanied by Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR, lawyer at the National Commissioner of Police and member of GREVIO, and Mr Aevar Pálmi PÁLMASSON, head of sexual offences investigative division.

That was an important issue, also for the Icelandic Presidency, so they were going to be back in 5 minutes, after a break, given the guests were already arriving.

[Pause]

Mr Tiny KOX reintroduced the topic after the break.

He mentioned that after testimonies heard that same morning, including that of Ms Mariia MEZENTOVA about the violence that was taking place at the current time in Ukraine, which part of it was violence, in its most brutal form, against women in Russia's war of aggression, they had to realise that violence against women was one of the most flagrant violations of human rights.

Therefore, the Standing Committee was an excellent moment to mark time for reflection on that vital subject that was a key priority for their action for more than 15 years, in particular by the initiatives of their Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, and its general rapporteur on violence against women.

The President mentioned that he was honoured to welcome there, on that side of the table, Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR, lawyer and National Commissioner of Police and member of GREVIO, and Mr Aevar Pálmi

PÁLMASON, head of sexual offences investigative division. With them there was also the Icelandic Ambassador and Chair of the Committee Ms Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSÐÓTTIR.

The President joked about his pronunciation of the beautiful Icelandic names and expressed how pleased they were to have them at the Standing Committee.

Before giving them the floor, he underlined that the motto of the Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers was “united around our values and the principal of equality”. The defence of women’s rights is embedded in the ambassador’s priorities.

The President took the opportunity to thank Iceland’s authorities for their commitment towards the Istanbul Convention and to ending violence against women and girls. Their presence demonstrated Iceland’s leadership in upholding the world’s gold standard against gender-based violence.

The Convention is a very practical tool. It offers benchmarks to ensure all the policies and legislation are in place, that they tick all the boxes regarding protection, prevention and support of the victims, prosecution of offenders, and partnerships through a multidisciplinary approach and integrated policies.

Since 2011, 45 States have signed the Convention, and 37 have ratified it. Amongst them, recently Ukraine and the United Kingdom, and before, Moldova.

The President praised the governments and parliaments of those Council of Europe member States for their courage to do so, and to do it then in those difficult times. Especially Ukraine, that had been, since the beginning of that year, confronted by a brutal war of aggression by Russia, in which, as always, violence against women was used as one of the most dirty weapons against the population.

Those ratifications did not have to make them forget that there were still seven countries that had signed but not followed up with ratification. That was also the case for the European Union.

Sadly, some member States never signed the Convention. He once again urged member States to sign and ratify this important tool for the protection of human rights. That was what the Convention was about.

While important gains in the fight against gender-based violence have been made over decades of activism, it is clear that recent technological developments had introduced new forms of violence against women, such as digital violence, and it is urgent to address them.

Indeed, new online tools that have proven to be extremely useful in the prevention and the protection of victims, have also created new threats if they are not used well.

New forms of violence, such as cyber harassment, electronic blackmail, doxing and cyber-flashing, are a particularly worrying development especially, but not only, for the younger generation who are very active online.

Following the 2021 first recommendation on the digital dimension of violence against women, the President was very eager to hear more details of GREVIO’s work, represented by Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR, lawyer at the National Commissioner of Police and member of GREVIO, and also the work done in the field by Mr Aevar Pálmi PÁLMASON, head of sexual offences investigative division.

As foreseen in Article 70 of the Istanbul Convention, the Assembly had always put the fight against violence against women at the top of its agenda, and so did he and his predecessor, for which he was happy that Mr Rik DAEMS was there with them.

The President had the occasion to go to Dublin on 29 September for the Conference of Ministers of Justice organised in the context of the Irish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, which adopted the so-called Dublin Declaration, pledging a series of steps to promote gender equality in order to help prevent domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

They debated a report at the Ordinary Session on ending discrimination in the world of sport, which addressed sexual violence committed on young sportspersons. And in January they were going to address the progress and challenges with the Istanbul Convention, the role of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence, as well as conflict-related sexual violence.

Those who were then going to be their rapporteurs were also present there.

The President also mentioned the great work done by the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence and the Assembly's general rapporteur on violence against women, Ms Zita GURMAI, who were actively working to engage parliamentarians at all levels to raise awareness, initiative, and encourage and promote legislation and policy changes.

It was for them, parliamentarians, by creating a robust and legal policy framework by approving national budgets and providing oversight on the executive action, that played a key role on ending gender-based violence.

To assist them, they had published a handbook for parliamentarians: "The Istanbul Convention, a powerful tool to end gender-based violence". The handbook has been translated into ten languages. The President proposed that it could also be translated into Icelandic, because the language versions would help legislators and civil society to communicate about the Istanbul Convention while working to stop misinformation and fake news about what that Convention stood for as they too often witnessed in their member States. So, the pressure was on, and they needed to keep it on.

In all of their member States, there was some backsliding, there was polarisation, and there was an increase in online hate speech and violence. Parliamentarians need to say no to violence against women and set an example in showing how to stop it, especially in the digital forms.

Ms Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSDÓTTIR began by thanking the President and justifying her presence instead of that of the Prime Minister given another Friday morning commitment she had.

She first thanked PACE for placing the topic of violence against women on the agenda on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

She said that the recommendation the President had mentioned was already translated into Icelandic.

Ms Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSDÓTTIR recalled that they were far from eliminating violence against women and girls. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic they had seen an escalation in gender-based violence, as well as a backlash in human rights and gender equality. The causes of gender-based and sexual violence and harassment online, as well as offline, have the same root, which was systematic gender inequality.

Violence against women and girls in the digital space is a continuation of the gender-based violence affecting them in other areas of life.

Digital violence against women took on all types of forms: from threats of physical and sexual violence, sexist hate speech, sexual harassment, stalking, and more. We now also see intimate partner violence, including digital violence, as well as other forms of violence.

The consequences of online violence could be just as serious as those of offline violence, with negative effects on the health and wellbeing of women and girls, as well as economic, social and political impact.

Women's rights advocates, women in politics, women in media, and other high-profile women, women with intersecting identities such as trans women, women of ethnic minorities and disabled women are more at risk of being targets of digital gender-based violence and hate speech.

This threat of digital violence restricted women's public participation and leadership, as women did not feel safe to participate in public and political life due to the risk of being targets of digital violence and this undermines democracy.

It is unacceptable for women of all ages to be unsafe. Both in the digital world and in the physical world. Safety and security are necessary to be able to participate in society. For a just, equal and fair society women need to have the chance to participate and contribute fully.

Digital gender-based violence is therefore not only a criminal issue, but also an issue of social justice and democracy.

It has been a priority for the Icelandic Government to address gender-based violence. In early 2018, the Prime Minister appointed a committee to look at systemic reform in that area. They had now made the first comprehensive plan for preventive action against sexual violence against children and young people.

The resolutions include an educational campaign for children about the forms and consequences of digital violence.

They also put in place an action to address the increase in online digital sexual violence by reforming the criminal law. That was done the year before with legislative changes on sexual and privacy violations in the general penal

code. A clause on sexual privacy was adopted in the general penal code the year before, aimed at protecting people from sexual violations.

Iceland is also proud to be a co-leader of the Gender-Based Violence Action Coalition in the UN Generation Equality Forum, where one of the commitments was to implement policy measures to support the newly adopted reform of the criminal law when it comes to sexual and privacy violations.

They had to follow those legislative changes with policies aimed at prevention and education. They also had to improve how cases of gender-based violence were handled within the justice system, and do their very best to support survivors of violence.

This work is underway within the National Commissioner for the Police. They were there with them that day to tell them more about that.

The Icelandic Parliament passed a parliamentary resolution on a plan for 2019-20 on measures against violence and its consequences. It covered physical, sexual and mental violence, bullying, hate speech and posting images that encourage violence on social media.

They have also been combating hate speech and hate crimes. The general penal code has been amended so that people with disabilities and intersex persons had protection. An action group has been appointed to fight hate speech.

With all the efforts made in that hugely important fight, there is still work to do. It is essential to keep working until they completely and comprehensively ensured that their policies and laws protected all women from all forms of violence and harassment.

There will never be full gender equality until gender-based violence, in all its forms, is eliminated.

Ms Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSDÓTTIR concluded by mentioning that, as the President mentioned, in the Presidency programme of Iceland, it was highlighted during their programme which they all had yesterday. She also mentioned that on that day they started a 60-day digital agenda where they could see that 60 member States were posting something connected to the Council of Europe and to its member States on how they fought against gender-based violence.

Ms Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSDÓTTIR encouraged them to like it, to press the like button, and to share it, because it was also part of a visibility project of the Council of Europe. She asked them to take active part in that.

Last but not least, she said that the people there on her right-hand side, the doctor on my right side wrote that legislation. What was good about that was that after the legislation had been accepted in the parliament and entered into force, the author of the legislation moved to the state police, and they were implementing the legislation. That was very good. As a lawyer, she thought that was very important. Not only entering into force but implemented.

They would also do, given they also had men and boys as their priority, how would they include men and boys in gender equality. It wasn't only about women speaking about gender equality. It was about including men and boys. She was very glad they had a police there with them, and they were also going to have the police visible in events in Strasbourg. She thought it was very important for men to connect to that important issue.

Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR began by greeting the PACE members present, the President and thanking the Ambassador for her kind introduction. She hoped that they would be able to meet the standards set out for them.

Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR introduced herself and explained that she was tasked with the role of Director for Internet Safety. That was, of course, a very tangible and easy task that they hoped to meet.

Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR wanted to address the audience about how they were combating and reducing digital forms of gender-based abuse in Iceland.

As it was touched upon, that had been introduced through legislation.

As they could see, that was a slightly adopted or adjusted version of the Maslow pyramid of needs for people, as adjusted for the 21st century. Of course, that was a little bit of a joke, but it was also not, because in so many ways we rely on the internet, both in personal and professional, but also in systematic capacities. So increasingly, we rely on the digital sphere with sensitive and private matters. This calls for the legislation and state parties to adapt to that new reality.

As we all know, privacy, as other rights, is highly gendered. That was just a statement from a recent Privacy International report that highlighted that violations of privacy had a very gendered perspective, and it was important for legislative bodies to recognise that reality in responding to those challenges.

When we talk about sexual privacy, it is not a definite international term. But it was what they had referred to as sexual violations through the internet. One of the versions was called IBSA, *internet-based sexual abuse*, or *image-based sexual abuse* rather. She put it out there based on research from other people, but it kind of highlighted the different manifestations of image-based abuse and how it presents itself and the challenges it produced for women.

There in Iceland, women were much more impacted by those types of violations. That is not anything special about Iceland. That is the situation globally. That is the situation with the Council of Europe region. That is not a singular issue within a country, it is a systematic problem.

What has Iceland done to counter that?

Iceland has enacted legislation and it has put in place comprehensive policy measures to implement this legislation.

It is what they call a holistic approach. Anyone who has read anything about the Istanbul Convention knows that this approach is very much inspired by the Convention.

Addressing violence against women as a holistic issue, as something that could not only be targeted through legislation and education or prevention, but as a comprehensive approach that demands the attention of different actors within society.

Those were the key factors of the legislation. Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR decided not to show them... They would have a link to the legislation and an English translation, so that they could take home with them in case they wanted to propose their own. But these were the key factors that they looked at when drafting the legislation.

Any response to digital violence or digital forms of abuse has to be rooted in human rights. It has to respect the challenges we face between rights that are protected under Article 8, privacy rights, and freedom of speech, protected under Article 10. The balancing task between those two could be very much inspired by the text of the Istanbul Convention when discussing these types of issues.

It is also very important to recognise where there are gaps and overlaps in the existing legislation. That's what they did there in Iceland. They examined to what extent the existing legislation provided sufficient protection. They didn't need to invent the wheel every single time. They needed to see how they could utilise what they had, and if they were lacking something they needed to add that.

At the same time, it was very important that they recognised that sexual interaction was very much moving to the digital sphere. So one of the things they did there, in Iceland, was that they made sure that legislation didn't over criminalise sexual consensual interaction between young adults.

And finally, she couldn't stress enough that for them the main focus was on improving the system, but at the same time, they had to listen to what the survivors had to say.

So preparing that, she interviewed police officers and survivors to understand what were the main issues from the different sides. So informing the legal response from a variety of viewpoints she thought was essential in ensuring success.

When the legislation was passed with a brilliant cross-political support, there was general political will to do this. The government decided to follow-up with extensive policy measures. That was from the press conference that was held introducing the measures. It was a project that called for cooperation between different ministries. They had the ministry of justice, the ministry of health, and the ministry of children and young people, cooperating in ensuring that the money put into the policy measures and the efforts put into the actions would actually come through.

It wasn't a single person who was kind of the owner of the project, it was a multi-stakeholder ownership.

That was just shortly about the measures they had done. It was a threefold action plan. The first one addresses prevention and education. The second one is about updating the criminal system. The third one is about protecting and supporting the victims.

If one looked closely and had done their homework on the Istanbul Convention, one would recognise the three pillars of that approach.

So shortly, about what they were doing in the justice system: they were improving the capacity of police officers. They had reports there in Iceland, before the legislation was enacted, that there were victims that went to the police and the police said they couldn't do anything because it was on the internet.

This is not an acceptable response in a digital reality. What they did was that they began to systematically educate their young police officers coming into the police in the basic education. They educate them about cybercrime, and in that, they specifically talked about digital abuse against women. They all had to learn that. They all have to adapt before they started working and understand that dynamic.

They are also training existing police officers. They are training police officers who worked with sexual crimes specifically. They train judges and prosecutors. They would leave no stone unturned until everyone within the judicial system understood and recognised those kinds of violations.

Secondly, they are adopting and reforming new protocols on how they investigate these cases. This is a project that is still ongoing, but one of the factors of it was to better register what they were doing.

Thirdly, they had implemented specific guidelines on how to register these cases within the system so they could get better statistics and have a better overview of trends and developments.

In terms of victim support, they of course, in Iceland, have very good systems for victim support in cases of abuse, violence and sexual violence.

What they did was they built further partnerships with existing partners. They were not inventing any wheels.

They also made new partnerships with the tech companies. They reached out to the big tech companies in Europe operating there in Iceland and sought their partnership.

An example of that was that they collaborated with Meta in a massive campaign aimed at young people. They paid for the distribution. The distribution aimed at young people was on Instagram, and older people on Facebook.

That came from the fact that there in Iceland, 95% of the adult population uses Facebook, which is a world record according to them.

Finally, in terms of prevention and education, they again built on existing partnerships.

They created a massive information hub on all sorts of digital violence on the 112 website, where people can also report and get information about support, and they can also get information on how to limit the spread of the content.

That is very important, because secondary victimisation through existing content online is a big problem. They try to help them to remove, to get content removed from the online sphere.

A part of that prevention effort was a prevention campaign that they ran. They ran it on social media, as she already mentioned. They also produced new material. There were links to that material there on the slides in case they wanted to look at it on their way back. They put up texts in both Polish and English, because they have big immigration populations in Iceland, and it was important to reach everyone.

The material was targeted for 13-year-olds, but it also came with educational guidelines for teachers and information for parents. Because, as in the Istanbul Convention, they needed to address the issue from every side.

How did they measure success? Was it just that they could go there, to big fancy places, and say they had done so well, but they didn't have any statistics to show it, they just felt like they did really well.

That was not the case. What they did was that they implemented a metric approach. They were trying to measure the statistics. She didn't have them ready yet unfortunately. It would be next spring when they would have the review ready.

But one of the things they were measuring was how many cases did they get reported. Some might have said that more reporting meant that there was a bigger problem. But they thought that more reporting meant that people understood that they could get help, and that they were seeking help.

If they had more people reporting, they would see that as a success.

Preferably, the number of people reporting would be the same number as people affected. So, everyone affected would report. That was a second goal they were aiming for.

And secondly, they were seeing the numbers of people working within the system that were trained and were having a better understanding of those violations.

But talking to the audience, as politicians, Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR just wanted to say the following: these are the true barometers of success. They needed political will in order to get changes like that going. That would have never happened in Iceland if there hadn't been a massive political will to do better.

Those who work in the field can talk as much as they want, but if politicians don't take that up within the legislative context, there is going to be no progress. So, if there was one thing they took away from them, it was that that was very much in their hands. Political will, but they also needed some other factors.

Mr Aevor Pálmi PÁLMASSON began by thanking the President and saying it was an honour to be there.

After introducing himself, he explained that he was going to explain two cases that had been investigated, and mentioned that he was also going to talk about digital violence.

What are digital sexual offences? There is no single term and it takes many forms. The general penal code states that it is a conduct involving the use of digital communication in order to prepare, distribute, share, or publish sexually graphic photographs or videos, or other materials, without the consent of the individual.

It is an increasing problem worldwide, and it is often gender based and it is targeting women and girls.

The development: a change in communication and behaviour. He thought the crowd there was all digitally native, well above the average age, 40 or 50, maybe higher, they were not digital migrants. So communication was changing in the digital era.

With the rise of smart technology, increased access to the internet and internet connected devices such as smart devices and social media, the communication behaviour changed.

It could even be said there was a new kind of communication. The possibility of sexual interaction took a turn with digitalisation.

Digital communication is everywhere. It is on social media, photographs, websites, short messages, videogames, emails, cloud storage, file sharing platforms, and much more that he wasn't going to mention.

Domestic and foreign research indicated that these types of offences had increased. They in the police clearly found that and saw that.

There are many social media platforms, like the ones they could see there above, where people could interact with each other with good and innocent purposes. But the dangers are everywhere in the digital world.

In the vast majority of cases under investigation in the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police, in the sexual offences unit, there is almost always some kind of digital or electronic data that they need to collect.

Electronic data is very usable. It is reliable evidence. Electronic footprints are often laid very widely. However, it does not facilitate the investigation of those offences because of the large volume of data, and it is time consuming to search, go through, and review them.

An example of a case. A father came to the police station and expressed concern about that his teenage daughter had been sexually assaulted or violated physically. The girl played videogames with other people over the internet and interacted with an older boy. Soon they moved to an interactive videogame on PlayStation.

Of course, that was not an older boy, it was an older man.

Playing the videogame together, and on the chat platform, the man did build trust with the girl. In that way, he managed to convince the girl to send him sexual material, and then, he convinced her to meet him, when he sexually violated her.

These were communications that started on Instagram leading to sexual violence online, and then led to non-digital sexual violence.

Another example. A woman who lived and worked in Europe contacted the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police, and reported that a friend had informed her that someone had created several social media accounts in her name: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram...

That woman had her own business and, of course, she was devastated. Someone was posting sensitive pictures of her. In addition, there would be direct links to pictures of her on Google photos that were even more sensitive. He would also be sending sensitive material in messages and emails to a number of people in her name: to her clients, to her business colleagues, to her friends.

The woman immediately suspected her ex-boyfriend. Why? Because all the photos had been taken with her consent at the time. However, she had never given her consent or permission for posting them online. Of course, that had a very bad effect on the woman's wellbeing.

In that case, they quickly caught the perpetrator because they knew who he was. They seized computers and smart devices that he had used to commit the offences. They house searched and interrogated the suspect. He admitted to doing it and had no regrets, saying he had his reasons.

But after undergoing these operations and seizing all of this equipment, the violence stopped, but only for a few days.

He bought, or somehow he got, some other equipment, and the violence started again.

There are endless possibilities for storing data and content in cloud services, hard drives, memory keys, mobile phones, etc. So even though the police seized the equipment that the perpetrators use, there is no guarantee that the material is in safe hands.

In short, people, adults, and children send sexual images with good intentions when there is trust between people. Material was created when people are in relationships and there was trust and confidentiality between them.

Those cases find their way to the police when something came up or when confidentiality was breached. People might have been in a romantic relationship that broke up, there would be a threat of distribution, or the content would be distributed even without the threat.

Sometimes, victims reported from third parties that the perpetrator had explicit material and was showing or sending it just like in the example above.

In most cases the offenders are male and the victims are female. However, they were seeing cases where teenage girls were sharing sensitive material of other teenage girls in some kind of conflicts.

Then, they had unwanted content or communications. Messages, photos, videos one did not want to receive. They had many and too many examples of people adding others on Snapchat. As seen in the photo, the quick add button, it is a very dangerous feature on Snapchat, because people, kids, were adding others with that quick add button without knowing the people behind or knowing anything about them.

On those platforms there are no problems for the perpetrators to hide their real identities and sail under false colours. For the offender, all he has to do is wait. It was just like a fishing trawler. He threw out his net, then reeled it in, and there was always some fish in the net.

Communication would begin maybe innocently at first, but then it would evolve and something much worse would happen. Initially the chat is on friendly and innocent notes, then the perpetrator sends a child a sexual image, probably of himself, or probably not of himself, a false image, of some other kid maybe.

From there, they may be asked to meet, or start asking the kid for rougher photos. If the child refused, they would have made copies of all of the child's list of friends on Snapchat or Instagram, and would threaten to share that sensitive material with their friends.

Since friends are usually most important for kids and children, they would take those threats very seriously and feel ashamed. They would not want to tell the parents or grownups, so they would cave to the pressure and send more or they meet.

The perpetrators are masters of deception. They have developed methods and strategies to succeed in criminal activities like this. Like he said, when they ask children or people how they felt, how their feelings were, they described shame, fear, and humiliation. They were anxious that the explicit material would pop up again.

Just like Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR said there before, the second victimisation. Who could blame them?

A little bit about data collection. They have to collect data from those social media companies.

To collect data from Snapchat, for instance, the police has to perform the following. They have to send a preservation request to Snapchat. Snapchat stores the content for 90 days. The prosecutor has to write a letter rogatory with the mutual legal assistance, request of **amlat** as they call it, and has it sent to the Ministry of Justice in Iceland. From there, the Ministry of Justice, it is sent to the FBI, that sends it to a US court, and demands a court order for Snapchat to hand over the data. The ruling is released to Snapchat, which hands over the data to the FBI, which sends it back to the justice department in Iceland, and the justice department sends it back to us, the police. It is a long procedure, and he saw some in the audience yawn while he was describing it.

Mr Aevar Pálmi PÁLMASSON concluded by saying that access to the internet and smart devices is constantly increasing, not just in children, but also in elderly people. The elderly are a growing group that did not have to be forgotten.

The elderly are already at risk of isolation, and if they are exposed to online breaches, they risk being further isolated.

Violence on the internet is a growing problem according to all authorities. Women are at a much higher risk of being exposed online.

Everyone had to act in some way. When he said everyone, he referred to them. They had to educate the children and younger generations on how to behave online. They knew it even better than they did. They were digital natives.

We must educate and train professionals working in judicial systems, police officers, judges, prosecutors. We must also focus on prevention.

Finally, they had to increase the efficiency and update the legal system, such as the **amlat** agreement.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked the speaker and announced that despite the lack of time, interpreters would remain for a few minutes and that would allow some remarks to be made.

Ms Petra BAYR thanked the speakers for their impressive presentations. They all knew that violence against women was a male problem. It was a problem caused by men. She congratulated Iceland for building up on that reality and taking men into account, and also for the disaggregated data and the possibility for impact to be measured.

She intended to make three points. First of all, she wanted to inform her colleagues that there was an existing working group at the Council of Europe that was working on recommendations on combating hate crime for the Committee of Ministers, and of course, including online hate crime. Ms Petra BAYR had the honour to represent the Parliamentary Assembly there. She focused on three things. Mainly gender aspects and intersectionality. If one is a woman and a Muslim, for instance, they might have a double chance to become a victim.

Ms Petra BAYR was also glad they had protection in their presentations, the protection and support of survivors. She wanted to recall that it is not only a problem for the victims or for the survivors themselves, it's a problem for families, for societies, if people are victims of crimes like that.

So if they had any input they would like her to take into that working group, she asked them to please let her know.

The second point she wanted to make was on social media. She thought that they really couldn't rely on social responsibility or the good will of the providers. We really need robust laws to force them to take content off, not just hide it, but to take it off the platforms. If not, they would not compete with the problem, she was really afraid.

Last but not least, she thought that they also had to remind themselves that violence against women, wherever it happens, has its root causes in the imbalance of power, in the imbalance of potentials, in the imbalance of access to social and economic resources and status. Whatever they did there, and she thought it was close to perfect, they should never forget about the root causes.

Mr Rik DAEMS intended to make a couple of short remarks. First, on the Maslow triangle: he wanted to make a distinction between the digital and the physical world. Basically, where they had put internet below, it should, in his view, yes, be one of the basic needs of the game, but it was influencing all the stages above. And making a distinction between the digital and the physical.

It was just a remark. But if it was looked at from that point of view, it was astonishing, how one's life was being influenced in a digital way when one was alone or not.

The second thing was a question. What, in Iceland, was the relationship concerning criminal law between the physical and the digital world? Were they treated in the same way? Because it was not as evident because they

were obviously different. In Belgium, they have a logic whatever one does in the physical world if you do it in the digital world it has the same punishment. Was that the case? And how was that put into practice?

A third very quick remark. How did they think that they could impose, in a certain way, the issue of content ownership? That was one of the key issues. Once something is put on the internet, it was as if it became public ownership and it is not. How would one go against that, referring to the big guys, the Facebooks and whatever?

And the second one, which he thought was also very important. How could they go about making sure that in the digital world you can only use your real identity? This is one of the main drivers. Real identity was hidden and that was how one could perpetrate.

So those two elements maybe would be the most important for him and for their work there, because they work on artificial intelligence. Content ownership and real identity. How did they think that they could tackle that in some way, in the digital world?

Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR said she couldn't agree more. The recognition of imbalance between genders was a fundamental aspect of that. Studies around internet culture, communication studies, they all showed that the technological advances witnessed through social media and through AI and different measures and means of progress were very much enforcing existing gender stereotypes. That was a definite concern. In particular, as regards to AI, because all of the platforms are increasingly deploying AI in content moderation and in their approach to recognising the content, and they are using outdated stereotypes to do so. Doing that, they are further entrenching the harmful stereotypes of gender.

It is very important that in all standardisation about AI, for example, that this is recognised.

Another factor, of course, is the commercialisation of women online. There was a discussion about ownership of content. They have had cases of women who were selling their nude images on OnlyFans and then someone bought the access and illegally copied it and shared it forward, and she says they didn't want them to share the content further, she only sold it to him.

They were suddenly faced with that and whether it was a violation of the sexual privacy act or was that a copyright infringement?

This commercialisation of the internet and the whole internet ecosystem really raised questions around the application of human rights in the online sphere.

Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR agreed on the Maslow pyramid. It was a vague attempt to be funny. But it was true. It really implements every single aspect of their lives.

In terms of the ownership of content, she was somewhat sceptical. There is a movement on data ownership rather than on data protection. She thinks that very much feeds into the commercialisation of the whole ecosystem, and she is somewhat sceptical in that regard. She thinks it is important that even though it takes longer, it is more sustainable to force privacy standards into everything that is done.

Mr Aevor Pálmi PÁLMASSON said he had not much to add, and the previous speaker had covered it all. He however mentioned that as Ms Petra BAYR stated, a legal framework to force social media platforms to hand over data quickly and all the data, was something that needed addressing. It took way too long.

His experience was that when law enforcement asked social media platforms for something, since it did not benefit the platform economically, it just fell behind.

Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR added that there were actually cases where it was easier to get the data in the case from the victim rather than going through the platform. That is not great from a burden of proof perspective. It is really important that there are robust possibilities.

She knew there was the second protocol to the Cybercrime Convention that was enacted, but that did not create a uniform application because States could implement it as they wanted. But it is at least something.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked the speakers for their experience knowledge and for enlightening on such important issues worldwide, not only in Iceland and in Norway, but in all 46 countries and also in the rest of the world.

4. Exchange of views with Ms Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Mr Tiny KOX started the session by complimenting colleagues for being timely in attendance for the plenary meeting, and for the staff in their politeness and in convincing others to be timely. The meeting was about to be continued in the presence of Iceland's high-level officials.

He proposed that they listen to a statement by **Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR**, Prime Minister and Minister for Equality of Iceland, who he joked also had to save her country during the day – and **Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKFIJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, had the same duty, but was more available that day.

The room was then invited for a once-in-a-lifetime chance for a picture with both politicians. The Prime Minister would then leave, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland would share information about the Icelandic presidency and its priorities and take questions.

Mr KOX gave the floor to prime minister **Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR**.

Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR thanked Mr KOX and joked that she was described as having to save the country, but her foreign minister had to save the world – thus she had an easier project.

She said she was very happy to be here with dear colleagues. She said that she was a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2017, which sadly or not so sadly ended because the current government in Iceland left office and she became prime minister.

She really enjoyed her very short time in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as it was a great experience, and she really got to know the Council of Europe and what it was dealing with. She said they had seen in the past few months how important the institution was for all of them, including the member States of Europe.

She congratulated the declaration adopted of the Road to Reykjavik and was very happy to have received it from Mr KOX. She thanked them for that. It was another very important signal of the support of the Parliamentary Assembly, and it also put very positive pressure on the Ministerial Committee to ensure a very positive Council of Europe summit in May 2023. They were beginning to receive answers from presidents and prime ministers, and she shared her optimism that it would be great.

She said that it was the parliamentarians who were the ones who pushed very hard for a summit, and she applauded them for that. There was a lot of discussion about it, but she was convinced that it would reenergise and revitalise the work of the Council of Europe. The time had been used well, she thought; they were preparing the content and substance of the summit, which she hoped would be a beacon forward for the Council of Europe.

In a short meeting Ms JAKOBSDÓTTIR had with Mr Tiny KOX, president, and Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU-TSOVILI, Secretary General, she was very supportive of the idea to have a meaningful presence of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in the summit, and they were looking into it now and how to make it happen. It was appropriate because of the vital role of the Parliamentary Assembly, in the challenging time they had been seeing for the Council of Europe and for Europe, and Europe as a continent to have a meaningful presence at the summit.

There was a twofold aim when talking about substance at the summit, Ms JAKOBSDÓTTIR said. They wanted to recommit, but also to revitalise their work. The brutal war in Ukraine was a decisive factor in the decision to have this summit, she said, and there was still no end in sight. The Council of Europe had reacted swiftly and showed its very firm will to safeguard the main principles of democracy and human rights. Peace was a precondition to human rights and democracy. She said that the Council of Europe had showed its strength.

Though the war in Ukraine would be central to the summit, Ms JAKOBSDÓTTIR added that they needed to look at other challenges that the Council of Europe had been talking about, including increased polarisation, democratic backsliding, and a worrying backlash when it came to gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights, both being factors in the core value of human rights.

She also mentioned the climate crisis, new technologies, and the effect they were having on human rights and democracy. Better links needed to be established between the challenges of the environment and human rights, which was a very topical discussion in Iceland and she was sure it applied to all member States too.

Ms JAKOBSDÓTTIR said that fundamental values and principles, as well as current and future challenges would be the key topics, and their joint goal was to make decisions to make the Council of Europe fit for its meaningful purpose.

Seeing what had been going on in Europe and around the world – the Foreign Affairs Minister was in a Human Rights Council the day before talking about the situation in Iran, and the human rights situation for women and girls there. She said it was so important for the Council of Europe to be very strong in defending those core values.

She was confident that the summit and the participation of the Parliamentary Assembly would be vital for the future of the Council of Europe, and for Europe as a continent.

She looked forward to seeing everyone again in January 2023 when she would have the opportunity to address the Parliamentary Assembly and for what was achieved on this day too.

She thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX invited the Prime Minister to ‘take a hashtag in French and English’, to be ready to pose for a photo with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and members in the room.

[PHOTOS ARE TAKEN]

Mr KOX joked that the Prime Minister was going to save the country, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs was going to save the world, but they needed some time with them first. He asked everyone to take their seats.

[PAUSE]

Mr KOX addressed them as dear friends and asked them to ‘release’ the Prime Minister, since everyone wanted a picture with her.

[PAUSE]

Mr KOX joked that nobody wanted a picture with him but the Prime Minister, who was leaving the room. Mr KOX said that after the address with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, they would create an opportunity so everybody could get a picture with her, joking that it appeared that ministers from Iceland appeared to be popular to take pictures with.

He said Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKFIJÖRD GYLFIADÓTTIR, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland Minister, was responsible for organising the presidency of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, but also – for the first time in 17 years, a summit of Heads of States and Governments – which sounded easier, he realised, than doing it. The Heads of States and Governments would be here, but also there was a parliamentary dimension, and she would be taking care of the substance in the decisions taken then. They had already had a chance to meet long ago. Mr KOX said that Iceland was preparing its job in a most effective way, even at the point when Iceland still had to take over, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland Minister was preparing for the moment to come.

Mr KOX invited **Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKFIJÖRD GYLFIADÓTTIR** to address the Standing Committee on the priorities of the Icelandic chair and the upcoming summit on 16-17 May 2023.

Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKFIJÖRD GYLFIADÓTTIR thanked the President and joked that his pronunciation of her name was in the top five, very high on the list.

She also addressed the Secretary General of the Assembly, parliamentarians, and dear friends, and thanked them for the opportunity to speak with them today and welcomed the conversation and dialogue later on.

She gave a warm welcome to them all to Iceland, Reykjavik and Harpa, which would also be the venue of the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023.

She hoped they would have a fruitful cooperation between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly as they prepared for the Summit in the coming months.

She was sure that they would, as there was a common will, and they would find solutions regarding doing that with good manners.

She said it was an honour to be addressing the room in her capacity as the Chair of the Committee of Ministers. She repeated that she looked forward to the dialogue later on.

The history of this oldest multilateral institution within Europe was known to them all, she said. It was born out of the tragedy of the Second World War, with the aim to unite Europe, to ensure that its violent past would not become

its future. She said they had done quite well for many decades, but the promise of “never again” was clearly a promise that could not be kept.

Iceland was taking over the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at a critical time in history. The tragedy of war had returned to Europe with the Russian aggression against Ukraine – this was a blatant violation of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Iceland and the Council of Europe had firmly condemned Russia’s brutal aggression against Ukraine on numerous occasions.

She said that the latest barrage of missile attacks against civilian infrastructure was abhorrent. She said her thoughts were with the Ukrainian people and she hoped that Ukrainian authorities would be able to repair some of the recent damage to energy infrastructure in the coming cold winter months.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR said that she was aware this was an extremely difficult task, and she also knew that the Ukrainian people and military had done outstanding work for many, many weeks. Yet now, with very massive actions from the Russian side, especially when it was already getting very cold, the situation was extremely serious. She truly hoped that the Ukrainian people would be able to repair as needed, but also with assistance and equipment from friends and allies.

She said they realised more than ever how important it was to stand united in their fight for a just and fair Europe, where democracy, human rights and the rule of law prevailed.

In addressing and resolving pressing global challenges, she emphasised that multilateralism, with its flaws, was always the key. Together they had to strongly advocate for the multilateral system at every opportunity. She had said this before: it was not enough for leaders to agree that multilateralism was the answer. It was also not enough for politicians to agree, even though it was through all political parties. It was not enough that politics agreed that the multilateral system was the key and was the way they made decisions and did things.

They also needed the general public to agree with the fact that multilateralism was the key. There, she believed there was work to do, but also believed that Mr Vladimir Putin’s horrible actions had actually helped them, because the general public now understood in the bigger picture, and realised the importance of multilateralism, and what it meant, and why it was the way they had decided all those decades ago that it was going to be the path forward.

In recent years, they had seen that they could not allow themselves to become complacent when it came to reminding themselves that a world governed by strength of rules was vastly superior to a one dominated by the rules of strength.

They had to remember that words echoed through past decades and required that they were constantly reminded of the horrors that followed when democracy, human rights and the rule of law were discarded.

She said many would have visited the exhibition by the Russian dissenters from the band Pussy Riot the day before. There, the gradual descent of society into the abyss of totalitarianism and aggression was shown in a very chilling way.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR addressed the president when emphasising that the Council of Europe was the guardian of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law on the continent. Together, the 46 member States had to continue to ensure that their organisation was fit for purpose, so it could meet current and future challenges.

To that end, a Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe was a critical opportunity for the Heads of State and Governments of all the 46 member States to convene and unite around their values and work towards strengthening the organisation.

Formal invitations to the Fourth Summit had been sent to leaders of Council of Europe member States through the permanent representation in Strasbourg. Preparations were well under way, and consultations on the agenda and substance of the meeting were beginning.

The input of the Parliamentary Assembly was crucial to the success of the Fourth Summit. In the Assembly more than 300 parliamentarians came together, giving rise to a nuanced discussion, diverse opinions and political opposition.

As seen in the Road to Reykjavik, the Icelandic presidency would be consulting closely with the Parliamentary Assembly over the next six months, in preparation for the summit.

The Parliamentary Assembly was currently working on a report and resolution on the future of the Council of Europe and the Fourth Summit – and she would be following their discussions on this in January 2023 with great interest.

There would also hopefully be a meeting of the Joint Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers in January 2023, where the Fourth Summit could be discussed in greater detail. She said they could be assured that the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly would feed into the Summit, and in April, they would be able to continue their dialogue in the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly.

She said that she looked forward to their cooperation, conversation, and stressed that the success of the Fourth Summit in May 2023 rested on their close cooperation.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR again addressed the president and parliamentarians on how clear Iceland's foreign policy was. She said that Iceland was and would be a nation that built its sovereignty on the respect for international law and active cooperation with other States in the multilateral system.

During these critical times, they felt it was necessary to make the Council of Europe's core values – human rights, democracy and rule of law – their main priority during the Icelandic presidency.

Now and always, she pledged that they would use their voice to champion the rights of women and girls, the environment, and children and youth. These priority areas were to be the main pillars of their presidency.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR thus formally presented the priorities of the Icelandic Presidency.

Firstly, Iceland would have a strong focus on the Council of Europe's core principles of human rights, democracy, and rule of law.

Secondly, the Icelandic presidency would prioritise the environment. They would be highlighting the interrelationship between human rights and the environment. They would explore how some States had incorporated the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment into their legislation, and promoted green public administration and green solutions.

Thirdly, they would place strong emphasis on the rights of children and young people. She said that every child had the right to grow to adulthood in health, peace and dignity. It was imperative for all States to ensure the rights of children. During their presidency, Iceland would promote child-centred policymaking through integrating services and protection systems for children. An early model of this approach, she said, was the Icelandic *Barnahús*, which she hoped they had heard about – the 'Children's House', a child-friendly and multi-agency response centre for child sexual abuse. Its unique approach brought together all services under one roof to avoid revictimisation of the child during investigation and court proceedings, and to provide every child with a coordinated and effective response. Their priority was also about the importance of the inclusion of children in decision-making.

Fourthly, Iceland was steadfast in its commitment to equality and the protection of the hard-earned progress concerning the human rights of women and girls around the world. During the Icelandic presidency, she said they would invest in equality. They had to ensure that all people could enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, which was not the case today.

As Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR was making this address on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, she underlined the importance of the Istanbul Convention in helping prevent and combat violence against women, and domestic violence.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR referred to the opportunity that parliamentarians had that day of hearing about how Iceland was tackling digital gender-based violence, during an event with Prime Minister Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR. As technology evolved and their use of it changed, they were seeing new representations of gender-based violence. It was crucial to recognise that online violence was violence. They needed to be alert to these forms of violence and how they impacted victims in a way that could discourage public speaking, activism and participation in politics, ultimately harming democracies, which was often the purpose of revealing such violence.

She stressed that Iceland was also strongly committed to promoting and protecting the rights of LGBTI individuals, and to creating a safe, inclusive, and enabling environment for the promotion of human rights and equality for all.

She added that Iceland would strive over the next few months, together with all the member States, to ensure that the Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe delivered on expectations of the Council of Europe's many stakeholders.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR told the room that they would have received printed copies of their Priorities and Programme, and access to the French version online, along with the cultural programme of the Presidency. Here,

they could see that the next six months were full of exciting events, both in their cultural and substantive programme, and she hoped that they would participate in as many events as possible.

She emphasised that they were very much looking forward to working closely with all delegations to promote the vision of a strong and effective Council of Europe, that had, at its centre, the core values of human rights, rule of law and democracy in Europe.

She concluded that she had talked for a long time – at least enough – and was now happy to welcome questions and have a conversation.

Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX welcomed the minister's presentation of her priorities and the information she shared about the upcoming Fourth Summit. They had understood that Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR and her prime minister were completely open for a parliamentary dimension in this important event, as there also had to be a follow-up after the Fourth Summit. Things had to be implemented, work would go on, and parliaments would play an important role together with the governments.

Mr KOX opened the floor to questions, inviting **Ms Petra STIENEN** from the Netherlands (ALDE) to start.

Ms Petra STIENEN thanked Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR for her motivational talk and for sharing the priorities of the Icelandic presidency.

She also expressed her happiness at seeing an almost all-female panel, joking that the gender balance was finally being corrected after thousands of years of male panels.

She said that in every crisis – be it war, poverty, COVID, climate – there were no sustainable solutions if they were not looked at through a gender lens.

She thus asked how the Minister aimed to get her male colleagues on board when issues such as gender equality and the Istanbul Convention were being discussed. She apologised for her harsh question, but said she noticed interest in the Parliamentary Assembly could fade and attentions might turn to phones when talking about gender equality, as compared to talk about war. She also said that as the rapporteur on the role of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence, and especially on a day like the International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls, everybody had a responsibility to work towards gender equality.

She thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Petra STIENEN and told her she had spoken a little more than her 30 second allocated time, but that it was all very relevant. He said three questions would be taken together and told others to indicate if they felt it was taking too long for their question to be put to the floor. He handed the floor to **Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN** of Romania (SOC).

Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN thanked the president and the Minister, and said he listened carefully and with great interest to the priorities of the Icelandic presidency and wished her all the best in their implementation.

One essential question not explicitly mentioned related to those priorities was about the authority and importance of the European Court of Human Rights. He asked how she saw the need to politically support the process of negotiation for a future accession of the European Union (EU) to the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

He thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN and handed the floor to **Mr George KATROUGALOS** of Greece (UEL).

Mr George KATROUGALOS said the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and also the Prime Minister, sent a very nice message of equality. Coming from Greece, his country – like Iceland – had been hit very harshly by the economic crisis. They closely followed Iceland's experiments on dark democracy and tackling social injustice. He asked for advice on how they could start to do the same for big inequalities in Greece.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr George KATROUGALOS and handed the floor to **Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, to react, saying there were three not so simple questions to answer.

Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR told Ms Petra STIENEN that hers was not a harsh question, and that she understood the impatience and frustration when they could see too many examples of how tough it might be, and how slow it can move, over time.

As a 20-year-old entering politics, she herself did not even have views on gender equality in Iceland, thinking it was all there already, but then she learned it was not all there in the real world. In Iceland, she said there could also be frustration too on topics such as this, even though they knew they were in the forefront. She gave a shout out to women in the past who had taken the lead from a position of strength and self-confidence. The support of men, too, had contributed.

Her advice was that other countries could look into the way they discussed these matters in Iceland, as it was already a mainstream opinion or view of life – which the Minister said she knew was not a given in other countries, of wearing these ‘equality glasses’ on in all decision-making.

She absolutely agreed with Ms STIENEN about not solving the biggest challenges they faced if they forgot to put those glasses on – it was less sustainable and less likely to find a solution in general. She did not have the answer to the question about how everyone could show interest and engage, but she did know it was not only their role as women, but also everyone who really believed in equal opportunities for individuals, and for anyone who played a role in decision-making and creating stronger societies – then it was difficult to argue *not* having the ‘gender-glasses’ on. Everyone played a role, not only women.

For vulnerable groups in Ukraine for example, it was the role of those were free and who had a voice in democratic societies to be the voice for them in a difficult situation. She said she believed they could bring gender directly and indirectly to the top of their lists of topics. Representation also mattered, in forcing people to show interest.

She shared a side story from her trip to Geneva the day before, of ambassadors not being able to describe or bring out the arguments to their daughters that they would not support the declaration.

Step by step, with more voices from every generation and sector and gender, they would be moving in the right direction. They had to speak up and say what needed to be said, also when it was uncomfortable. Being free came with a responsibility too.

With regards to Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN’s question about the EU’s accession to the ECHR, Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR said Iceland supported it. She said the report of the High-Level Reflection Group also argued strongly in favour of it. Iceland welcomed the ad hoc negotiation group – composed of the 46 Council of Europe member States plus the EU – and their in-depth discussion of the topic. She hoped this would be completed successfully before the planned Fourth Summit.

With regards to Mr George KATROUGALOS’s point about social injustice, the question about what could be done in general was a very difficult one for her as a person of power in a country with very little social injustice compared to others.

She admitted that Iceland did have social injustice and they wanted to change that – though she did not know exactly why that was, perhaps a tiny nation did not want to handle having too much of it. She thought that perhaps they had moved fast from being poor and isolated into a strong society, perhaps.

She felt that the question was similar to the one about gender equality: there was agreement that people didn’t want a society with high social injustice. However, more needed to be done to understand why that was, and what could be done to fix it, and whether there was really the will to do so. There was always huge interest and talk, but the talk needed to be walked. Societies that did talk the walk on these values were less likely to have social injustice. The societies where everyone had real opportunities to seek happiness were obviously stronger and better, but they were also societies created where the welfare system was stronger; where the education system and healthcare was accessible – that’s how a country could have equal opportunities, because people were not born in equal environments. That’s where the balance came, in walking the talk and making big changes and investments in societies, and in paying taxes. There was no better investment than in human capital, she said. She joked that if she had the answer, she would at least be on a huge stage fixing the world.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR and announced time for four more questions. He handed over to **Mr Iulian BULAI** of Romania (ALDE).

Mr Iulian BULAI thanked the president and the Minister for hosting them.

He was glad to hear that the Icelandic chair of the Committee of Ministers had made the environment a top priority for the Fourth Summit.

His question was whether there was room for even more ambition to make the environment – meaning everything that concerned climate change and the environmental rights emanating from that – into one of the fourth possible pillars of the Council of Europe in addition to democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

He thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Iulian BULAI and handed over to **Mr Frank SCHWABE** of Germany (SOC).

Mr Frank SCHWABE thanked the Minister.

He asked whether the fundamental problem of this organisation, with more and more countries not following the court's judgements, or would have a question that was valid in every part of society. The Fourth Summit was a good reminder of the rules and values of the organisation, but he did not want to name and shame them there either. How could that be solved?

Secondly, he spoke of the horrible war crimes of aggression in Ukraine, and while a tribunal was being asked for, there were also some concerns of bodies like the UN or ICC being undermined. What could the solution be?

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Frank SCHWABE and handed over to **Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS** of Lithuania (EPP/CD).

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS thanked the president and the Minister. He appreciated her country's role in recognising the Soviet Union occupation of the Baltic States in the 1990s, the attacks on the parliaments, and supported and recognised their independence.

A resolution had been passed in the name of the Parliamentary Assembly in May, point number 3.6.1. It was about speeding up a special ad hoc tribunal to prosecute the crimes of aggression against Ukraine and declaring the current Russian regime as a terrorist one. All parties had unanimously voted for it – how could it be imagined that 46 countries had done that, to speed up the process.

Remembering the Holocaust slogan of survival as was mentioned earlier – 'never again', something his own mother had said in the camps – supporting their representative's efforts to create a mechanism for that and finalising a procedure for that before the Fourth Summit meeting in May. He asked for a response to the resolution.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS and handed over to **Mr Damien COTTIER** of Switzerland (ALDE).

Mr Damien COTTIER thanked the president and told the Minister they were working on this idea of a special tribunal for the crimes of aggression in the Legal Affairs Committee, which the Assembly would debate in January 2023. He thought it would be important to be a priority to discuss this in the Fourth Summit.

Another priority in his opinion was bringing the young people of Europe nearer to the Council of Europe and its values. He thought it could be an ambitious initiative launched at the Summit, where all young boys and girls had contact and discussion about the values of the organisation in their minds and hearts. It would be an important and concrete step forward in Reykjavik, he thought.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Damien COTTIER and handed over the five not so easy questions to **Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland.

Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFADÓTTIR asked for two minutes extra of speaking time and a sign in case she missed something.

Regarding Mr Iulian BULAI's question about adding the environment to the fundamental core values of the Council of Europe. She said of course the environment and protecting human rights was linked, and it was an important issue that the Council of Europe had worked towards for many years. They could try to make it a stronger focus in everything they did in the Council of Europe, with some legal questions regarding the rights of individuals towards a cleaner environment, but which she didn't have all the answers to as to what was realistic or possible. The Committee in its annual exchange of views with the UN in February spoke on human rights and the environment and held an informal exchange of views with the EU last October. She supported and agreed with the importance of a clear focus, but the size of steps to be taken was the question in terms of being realistic. Time was needed to discuss this, and the presidency's focus could provide room for that.

In response to Mr Frank SCHWABE's question, the Council of Europe had to work in a positive way and support countries on their path, it was always a very difficult balance, on how aggressive actions should be when a member State was not always following things through – could it work to be tough in getting them to change their minds or move further away, what was best for the citizens of that country. But a country could not undermine core values

either. It was always a difficult question and perspective sometimes only came after. The approach nonetheless should be positive.

When it came to the core issue of accountability, and how it would look, Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR's approach was in hearing other bodies' concerns about having enough attention, financing, not being undermined, and she understood it was a typical or natural reaction. Her promise was the answer was no: they did not undermine, but used the mechanisms created, and Iceland supported that clearly. The main purpose of creating a special tribunal or somehow filling that gap was about finding a solution. They did not disagree that they wanted total accountability for those supporting Ukraine and wanting to stand behind values under attack. They had to find ways to fill that gap, which may not be completely possible, but if it made sense legally, she supported it, and had an open mind to filling gaps. This was being discussed also at the UN and the pressure was there.

On Mr Damien COTTIER's point about young people, Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR agreed with the focus on finding more ways to involve them, but checking the box was like the gender equality question – like a stand-alone seminar. They needed to be in the decision-making too and have a seat at the table when it came to diversity – it was genders, generations, backgrounds too.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Þórdís Kolbrún REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR for her in-depth reactions to not very easy questions, which was part and parcel of presiding in the Committee of Ministers.

He said that Iceland had six months to deliver on their priorities, which the Minister had made clear needed to be in cooperation with the member States, with the Parliamentary Assembly, with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. There was also the extra task of organising a summit in May. The good news was they'd be back in Reykjavik, and he joked about the ten-degree weather, and that everybody wanted to see the Northern Lights, not just in a cosy pub, to add to their picture collections. He told the Minister they were looking forward to the Minister and Prime Minister's presentations in January 2023, and to their presence in a Joint Committee and with the ambassador and president of the Committee of Ministers deputies, and the close cooperation with the intergovernmental part, parliamentary part, and the Secretary General would be continued. There were ample opportunities to continue work and to be updated, and he was grateful Iceland would be listening to the Parliamentary Assembly, because they cared about their work. He thanked the Minister Ms REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR again and would look forward to seeing her again in January.

He bid the Minister goodbye.

13. Observation of elections

b. Observations of early parliamentary elections in Bulgaria (2 October 2022)

Mr Tiny KOX announced the item of the election observation mission in Bulgaria. Mr Alfred HEER chaired the mission for the fourth time, which sounded good, but is not always good news. Mr Alfred HEER would inform them about what the election observation mission concluded before allowing the audience to react.

Mr Alfred HEER began by thanking the Bulgarian government for the invitation to again observe the election, and also the Secretariat and his colleagues who were together with him for the observation of the elections, as the President mentioned, for the fourth time.

Again, they could say, as a joke, that Bulgaria was the most democratic country because they had the fourth election within 18 months, which in a way is a good or a bad sign, depending on the view one has.

What they could say this time, they had previous elections before, and after the third election there was a party, We Continue the Change. Basically, in the third election it was all against GERB. The other parties were accusing them of corruption. During the third election the main topic was corruption.

This time, on 2 October, for the fourth election, they had a different scene because of the invasion, of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and also Bulgaria depending on Russian gas. They had geopolitical fuel on those elections. They had the party Revival which were strongly pro-Russian and pro-Putin in this context. They could see, the outcome was clear, they didn't make 10%.

They could at least say Bulgaria is still committed to Western values, even if they didn't agree together to form a government. But they agreed largely on one thing, that they wanted to be a part of the European Union, of the Western values and that they defended the values also for Ukraine and against the Russian aggression. That was the topic this time.

The outcome was that GERB was winning the election. The former major party, We Continue to Change, lost seats. Also, ITN lost seats. The Socialists lost seats. But we saw that that they probably were not going to be able to form again another government.

Elections are one thing, they were well organised, they could not say that they were not well organised. Of course, they always had the same topics that they had before. One was that the Turkish minority were not allowed to campaign in the Turkish language. That was mostly a problem for the MRF party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms. That was something that was always under focus.

They had the minority of the Roma community. They had the machine voting which was introduced, and which to their observation was working well. And of course, they had people that couldn't read and write, and of course, they had problems to use the machines to vote. Because if you have a ballot sheet, you know where to make the cross for which party. But if one had to use a machine, it is more difficult, because you have to follow the instructions on the screen.

So on one hand, it could be said that vote buying, which mostly existed in those vulnerable minority communities, was not easily possible because they couldn't vote. But on the other hand, they were deprived from voting because the machine was introduced. That was something which is still a topic and would remain a topic in Bulgaria. How to continue with machine voting?

But from a technical point of view, machine voting, from what they observed, did not cause any problems.

The major problem is of course the fourth election. That, as it seemed, would not lead to another government because no one really had the capacity or possibility to have a majority. This means that the president has executive power.

He formed a caretaker government that still was in effect. That meant that the president had more power than the parliamentarians that were elected last time and this time.

Of course, when they had meetings, the parliamentarians from all parties complained about the caretaker government abusing its power. But they couldn't say that it abused its power. It was the government. If parliamentarians were not able to make their own government, someone had to govern the country.

It was as it was, that it was up for the president to decide who was the minister, who was the prime minister... They did a decent job.

They also had to say that the prime minister and the ministers were not running in the parliament, so they were not interested in political infights. They were, as he said, a caretaker government.

It is up to the parties to form a proper government, which they were not able to do. After the elections were fulfilled, they saw that there was still not a good mood among the parties. They were not able to form a government. They were split into various parties. GERB was accused, as the former party, of being corrupt. The others said, especially We Continue the Change, that they were the proper people to fight corruption.

So, in a way, they didn't find majorities that were stable, and the president had currently not yet given the mandate to a party to form government. Probably, what was going to happen, and the possibility was very high, is that they would have again a fifth election in January or probably March 2023.

They already saw this time that voter turnout was lower than at the previous election. Of course, people were asking themselves, why did they go to vote for a parliament if they were not able to form a new government, which was the problem.

This was something that couldn't be changed by the people in the Monitoring Committee. They maybe needed to speak with Bulgaria, to the responsible people of those parties, that they should find a way to really defend democracy.

In a way, it is not good if the president had that power to nominate the government. In a democracy, it should be normal that the people elect the parliament and the parliament puts together a government at their will.

So that was the situation as it was. They, as observers, could not change it.

For the technical issues, they were properly made. They couldn't see any... Well, vote paying was still a problem, but they could not see a deterioration or a bad organisation. It was well organised. It was properly done by the Bulgarian authorities. The voting process itself was conducted very well and according to the rules and norms of the Council of Europe. So in that sense they could not complain.

What they saw was that women's representation was a bit low. That was another thing they noticed. That was something that could also be improved. All in all, the main problems were that no government could be formed in Bulgaria due to the outcome of the elections.

Another thing was that the census had been made in Bulgaria, which meant that it might have been that urban areas got more seats in the future, and in a next election that could change the outcome because some parties were stronger in rural areas and other parties were stronger in urban areas. That was something that could change.

They also had to remember that a lot of Bulgarians were living abroad, but they had the possibility to cast their vote. The only other things were that Turkish minorities, coming from Turkey, were hindered crossing the borders. There were excessive controls by customs. It is not known if that was done to prevent them from voting or if that was done not on purpose.

But all in all, they had to say that it was done properly, but as he said, if there were really a fifth election, it was feared that voter turnout would be even lower and the situation would not improve. People that had access to their Bulgarian colleagues should maybe speak to them and tell them that in a democracy some parties had to agree to form a government that was stable for the future.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR mentioned that she was also present at the Bulgarian elections, and that she was one of the co-rapporteurs on Bulgaria.

She thanked the Chair of the Election Committee for his detailed overview of what happened there.

She then went on to add a few remarks for herself. First of all, in terms of the relatively new voting machines that they were using in Bulgaria, most interlocutors seemed to agree that the use of voting machines had decreased the instances of vote buying because they made it practically impossible to prove that one voted in the right way. Because when one voted in those machines, it was in front of everybody. Nobody could see what was voted but everybody could see what was being done, and a phone couldn't be taken out to take a photo of the screen or something like that and prove that the correct vote was delivered.

However, there were still some suspicions towards the electoral system in Bulgaria. There were still accusations that those voting machines could be manipulated in one way or another.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR was not saying that those accusations had any founding in truth. She couldn't say anything about that. What had been brought up repeatedly was that should there be an independent audit, an independent audit on the use of those machines. They brought that up with their interlocutors in Bulgaria at every instance, and she felt there was a lack of understanding as to what difference that would make, and whether or not that mattered. They discussed at length all the other things that were done to ensure the safety and security of those machines, that they couldn't be meddled with. But there was a certain reluctance to understanding that perhaps an independent audit would serve to assuage worries and would increase trust in the use of those machines.

That was something she thought they should just continue to at least ask about to see if it changed.

The Chair already slightly mentioned the lack of female participation. Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR stressed that it was very significant how low the number of women in parliament was, and how low the number of women on lists in the elections in Bulgaria was. It was under 25%.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR had the honour to be asked to attend the press conference where she made a call to the Bulgarian society that it was clear to her that it was not democratic that 50% of the population had less than 25% representation in the parliament. A societal project was needed to change this. It was her impression that because societal institutions were by and large not fully capable of taking care of children, the elderly, and the disabled parts of the population, by and large, this fell to women to take care of, and that was the social expectation, that was probably the biggest hurdle to female participation in politics in Bulgaria.

It is something that clearly needs full societal decision. Bulgaria needs to decide that it wants women to participate.

In terms of the deadlock that the Chair referred to, the most difficult part of politics in Bulgaria was that the politicians could not agree on how to govern the country, and refused to cooperate with one another to form a government that functioned for at least one year.

She thought that at least greater female participation in parliament and in politics would serve to build more bridges rather than tearing them down. That was her personal opinion. She thought that it would help in establishing a more stable governance in Bulgaria.

Finally, she made a small remark which she thought bothered her a little bit. There was an ambiguity, a law in Bulgaria that said that there could only be one observer at a time inside the polling stations.

They never encountered a problem at any time when they were not allowed to observe the polling stations, even though they worked in pairs, and it was important for them to work in pairs.

This ambiguity, and mixed messaging of whether or not they would be allowed to monitor in the way they designed their teams to monitor, was something that had to be looked into and should be clarified beforehand. That was in their election code and she thought it should be changed.

Mr Alfred HEER thanked Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR for her help during their mission. Regarding the election code, it was true that they allowed only one person in the polling station. In practice, they discussed it also with the caretaker prime minister. In practice, it was not a problem. They were allowed to observe as a pair, but they should technically change the election code because it wasn't clear, and he thought they would do it for them to have a clear basis for the next election. But in practice, they allowed them to enter the polling station with two persons. They were not rejected in any of the polling stations.

14. Political Affairs and Democracy

b) Evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of Jordan

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU, Vice-President of the Assembly, in the Chair said the report would be presented by **Mr George LOUCAIDES**, Rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, and allocated 10 minutes in total to him: seven minutes to present the report, and three minutes to reply to the debate.

Mr George LOUCAIDES thanked the Chairperson and addressed his dear colleagues.

He started with the events of January 2016, when the Parliamentary Assembly granted the parliament of Jordan partner for democracy status. Jordan's parliament undertook a number of commitments as Parliamentary Assembly rules, as were required for such a request by Assembly rules.

In 2017, a first assessment was carried out in implementing these commitments. The Parliamentary Assembly noted that some vital reforms had been carried out. Jordan was moving in the right direction, thus it resolved to expand its support to the country, while continuing to follow the implementation of reforms very closely.

Today, more than five years on, a second evaluation took place by the Parliamentary Assembly, with regards to the Jordanian parliament's political commitments.

Mr LOUCAIDES went to Jordan for a fact-finding visit between the 25 and the 27 September 2022, holding meetings with officials, civil society representatives, and several members of the diplomatic community in Amman. It was a useful visit, he said, for understanding the complexity of Jordan's internal and external challenges, namely a constant influx of refugees; economic hardship; and the region's general volatility – challenges which Mr LOUCAIDES said had to be borne in mind when examining the situation in Jordan.

Jordan had made advances in some areas of its political commitments yet stagnated in others.

As an example of the former, Mr LOUCAIDES said parliamentary elections were held in Jordan as scheduled in November 2020, during a peak in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the low turnout, and the fact that most elected representatives were affiliated to tribal or financial forces, the mere fact that elections were organised and conducted without major issues proved, he said, that democratic institutions and processes in Jordan had reached a certain level of resilience and maturity.

Moreover, he said, there were welcomed recent developments, such as the adoption of a new electoral law and a new law on political parties. These laws were aimed at encouraging the formation of political parties, rising above tribal allegiances, and guaranteeing a greater role for youth and women in political life.

There was also some progress in terms of gender equality, said Mr LOUCAIDES. Jordan's parliament amended the Personal Status Law in April 2019, raising the acceptable marriage age from 15 to 16 years old. Article 6.1 of the constitution, however, still made no reference to gender-based discrimination, despite the Parliamentary Assembly's previous calls to this effect. He said that there was now a reference to women in the title of the constitution's relevant chapter.

There was also a new Article 6.6, whereby the state undertook to support women in playing an active role in building an active society in a way that guaranteed equal opportunities, and in protecting them from all forms of violence

and discrimination. It was not enough, said Mr LOUCAIDES, but these changes could be seen as a first step to raising public awareness about gender equality, and to set the basis for further changes in the constitution.

Violence against women continued to be a problem; Article 340 of the Penal Code, allowing perpetrators to get lenient sentences in case of crimes committed against adultery, still had not been repealed.

In the area of administrative detention, there were considerable efforts made to reduce the number of cases. Mr LOUCAIDES was pleased to learn that 82 members of the Jordanian parliament had submitted a memorandum requesting the abolition of administrative detention. He hoped this would have a positive outcome. The purely preventive detention of persons suspected of intending to commit a crime was inconsistent with the Council of Europe standards and needed to be abolished.

No executions under the death penalty had been reported since March 2017. In 2020, Jordan supported the UN resolution concerning a moratorium on the use of the death penalty for the first time – until then, it had always abstained. Both were a step forward, but courts continued to cut down death sentences. The Parliamentary Assembly's position on death penalties was very clear, Mr LOUCAIDES added.

Pending the abolition of the death penalty, he said that the Jordanian parliament should intervene to introduce a moratorium on executions.

Further developments included the adoption of a new law on children's rights and some positive changes which would improve the rights of children born to Jordanian mothers and non-Jordanian fathers, as well as the ratification by Jordan of the Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters – this was the first convention that was ratified by Jordan.

Mr LOUCAIDES concluded with his findings that the Jordanian parliament was committed to complying with the political commitments of a partner for democracy. Jordans authorities aspired to democracy and were committed to making the necessary progress for the future.

Patience was needed, as the change would take time, he said, and the process would be gradual. He recommended that the Parliamentary Assembly continue to support Jordan and make a new assessment of the partnership when appropriate.

He thanked the room for their attention.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU thanked Mr George LOUCAIDES and opened the floor to discussion.

She invited **Ms Petra STIENEN** to take the floor.

Ms Petra STIENEN joked that she had to raise a question about Jordan since her name was Petra.

She thanked Mr LOUCAIDES for the report and was very impressed by its findings.

She said she had lived in the Middle East for a very long time, and said Jordan was a country that they had to keep a close eye on, especially when it came to human rights, democracy, and rule of law.

Her question was whether Mr LOUCAIDES had investigated a sensitive topic – the position of LGBTQI+ persons in Jordan, where she knew the rainbow colours and flag were seen to be problematic, even though she noted there was a Rainbow Street in the centre of Amman.

Her observation was whether they as members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe could be more welcoming to colleagues from the Jordanian delegation. She noticed that anecdotally she saw them sitting in the back of the room during equality meetings, and wanted to be more engaged, but didn't know how, and since they were not a member of political groups, it might be more difficult for them. How could they help them out to be more active?

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU thanked Ms Petra STIENEN. She invited others to take the floor, before closing the speaker's list and inviting **Mr George LOUCAIDES** to respond.

Mr George LOUCAIDES thanked Ms Petra STIENEN for her question and remark.

He said that Jordan was of course lacking in safeguarding the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. Reforms needed to be made in this direction and situation as well – but he thought the situation was better for Jordan, as a Muslim

country in a very turbulent region, than in other countries in the region – and albeit not in comparison with Council of Europe standards.

The Parliamentary Assembly had to decide in general about the partnership status for all external members, who accessed this partnership for democracy status. He thought some members were disappointed by their participation, but he said most colleagues from Jordan were usually present, although they could not make it to this Standing Committee meeting. They followed the situation, and he thought they needed to be convinced that much more could be gained from their participation, and a discussion was needed to look at how to modernise and reform the partnership for democracy institution.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU thanked Mr George LOUCAIDES.

She closed the debate, and the Committee of Political Affairs and Democracy had presented a draft resolution to which no amendments had been tabled.

They voted on the draft resolution Document 15649 to be adopted, with a simple majority required. She asked those in favour and those against and those abstaining to vote.

The resolution was adopted unanimously. She congratulated the Rapporteur and the Committee.

c. Protecting the pillars of democracy during health crises

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU of Norway (EPP/CD), Vice-President of the Assembly, said that in absence of the rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, the report would be presented by **Mr George KATROUGALOS** of Greece (UEL). She allocated him 10 minutes of speaking time, to be divided into seven minutes for presentation time, and three minutes to reply to the debate.

Mr George KATROUGALOS thanked the Chair. He said he had the pleasure of presenting the report 'Protecting the pillars of democracy during health crises', prepared by their colleague Ms Marietta KARAMANLI.

He said the title showed both a topical issue and a challenge for tomorrow, its topicality being obvious. If, as hoped, the most acute phase of the COVID-19 crisis was now over, the pandemic was still around. And nobody could guarantee that there would never be a COVID-bis or another global disease. New crises, be they of sanitary or other origins, could happen again.

They had to be prepared for them.

From the very start of the outbreak of the pandemic, saving lives and protecting people's health had understandably been governments' top priority. Often, in order to protect the populations, governments introduced exceptional restrictive measures which, he said, seriously altered the ordinary course of things. As a result, he said that the pandemic had a major impact on all aspects of their lives and societies, including the way democratic institutions work. He said that new crises or emergencies could again prompt the public authorities to take exceptional emergency measures that called into question the democratic order and disrupt freedoms.

He said they also knew that democracy remained fragile. It was marked by a tension between the desire for security, and that of maintaining freedoms. He said this contradiction existed well before the pandemic. Studies showed that even before 2020, many European citizens already thought that other political systems would be as good – or even better – than democracy.

For their common commitment to democracy to remain alive, they needed to make sure that democratic institutions could continue to operate, and that fundamental freedoms were preserved in times of crises.

This is what the report was about. It called for vigilance to be exercised, and it reiterated the importance of ensuring that the key mechanisms and institutions of democracy functioned properly in times of crises.

It put the emphasis on four key elements of democratic environment: parliaments; elections; local authorities; civil Society organisations; and individual rights.

In first place, the report emphasised the place and role of parliaments as cornerstones of democracy. Parliaments were vital democratic institutions which played a crucial role in representing, deliberating, legislating, and overseeing government action. They ensured the legitimacy of the democratic system as a whole. The pandemic had severely tested the capacity of parliaments to perform some of these core functions.

As most would recall, he said, from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of their parliaments had to adapt to new realities and put in place new working methods. Actually, they in this Assembly had also had to introduce

new forms of work. The report pointed out the importance of ensuring the continuity of parliamentary work, and the full exercise of parliaments' powers during crisis situations.

The draft resolution made a few concrete proposals to this effect.

At the same time, the report insisted on the need to reconcile new "emergency" procedures with the traditional exercise of parliamentary activities and physical presence. The necessary adaptations – for example, switching from face-to-face to remote sittings, or arrangements to allow voting with a reduced number of members present – had to be specifically targeted and remain proportional.

The report further stressed the importance of maintaining effective parliamentary control over the action of governments, particularly where crisis management was concerned. It also raised the issue of the state of emergency regime, and the need to guarantee its truly exceptional nature. Exceptional measures should not be transposed to ordinary times, he said.

The second key element which the report dealt with was related to elections. The right to participate at regular intervals in free elections in the choice of the legislature was a fundamental human right. The pandemic disrupted the standard election timetable in several member States, which decided to postpone or suspend elections. In addition, the introduction of restrictive measures to curb the pandemic affected freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, which were vital to any electoral process.

In this context, the report recalled the principles devised by the Venice Commission in all these aspects. It also called on member States that had not yet done so to adapt or amend legislation on elections in advance, to allow the electoral process to continue during public health crises.

In particular, it advocated in favour of the introduction of new voting methods, in order to guarantee the genuinely competitive nature of electoral campaigns.

The report pointed out the special place and role played by local authorities during the pandemic, and the difficulties that these authorities had to face.

The pandemic also had a major impact on the functioning of local and regional democracy. It had brought about a shift in the balance of power between local, regional, and national levels. Several States centralised crisis management.

To reverse this trend, the report called for the autonomy of local authorities to be preserved and their means guaranteed.

Finally, the report also looked at the impact of the pandemic on civil society organisations. It stressed the important contribution of them to maintaining aid to the most vulnerable.

The report recalled that freedom of the press should be exercised freely and strongly during crises.

Finally, it seemed essential that the most fragile and least independent populations were protected by targeted measures and that people's health rights were respected.

Mr LOUCAIDES addressed colleagues and said that if democracy has shown its ability to resist the pandemic by adapting, then they had to share good practices, adapt wisely, and show that it was the best regime for reconciling security and political and civil freedoms in times of crisis.

He was confident that the report produced by Ms Marietta KARAMANLI was a valuable contribution to the efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly, with a view to ensuring that democracy could resist all crises and overcome them in all circumstances.

He called on those voting to support the report and to take it back to their parliaments.

He thanked the room for their attention.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU thanked Mr George KATROUGALOS and opened the floor for discussion, before closing the speaker's list, since there was also no need for a reply.

They proceeded to vote on the draft resolution in Document 15650, to be adopted with a simple majority. She invited those in favour, against, and abstaining, to vote.

The draft resolution in Document 15650 was adopted unanimously.

Ms SCHOU congratulated the Rapporteur, and the Committee.

15. Legal Affairs and Human Rights

a. The impact of the Covid-19 restrictions for civil society space and activities

Mr Tiny KOX introduced the debate on the report on the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions for civil society space and activities, from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. The report was going to be presented by Ms Margreet DE BOER.

Ms Margreet DE BOER stated that the findings of her report were based on the contributions by the experts and other studies recently published concerning the impact of the pandemic on civil society in member States. There were reports from the FRA and the European Economic and Social Committee.

Her report includes a compilation of the relevant work on that subject carried out so far by the Council of Europe, including their Assembly, and the state of individual applications pending before the European Court of Human Rights, some examples of national restrictions imposed on freedom of assembly, association, as well as other difficulties encountered by civil society in member States due to the pandemic or the measures to counter the pandemic; and finally, some good practices reported.

The conclusions of the report were as follows: the Covid-19 pandemic was a challenging time for NGOs. The majority of them reported a deterioration of their situation during the period, with restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedom of assembly which impacted more negatively on opposition movements and other groups critical of the authorities.

Some NGOs were unable to meet and had to cease their activities. Others were confronted with difficulties in accessing public information and were not consulted on laws and policies that were made in connection with the pandemic.

In some cases, constitutional norms and international human rights standards may have been breached as a result of disproportionate measures, as suggested by the recent judgment, in May, of the European Court of Human Rights on the general banning of demonstrations in Switzerland, which was referred to the Grand Chamber of the Court.

In some States, the Covid-19 situation highlighted or worsened problems that already existed before. The rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of movement and the right to respect for private life were also negatively impacted.

Despite those negative developments, many NGOs were flexible and adapted to the new circumstances, for instance by accelerating the digitalisation process and organising more meetings and communications online.

Moreover, some States took steps to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic, through financial support as well as showing some flexibility as regards institutional and reporting requirements for NGOs.

Given those findings, she suggested that the Assembly should therefore address some recommendations to the Council of Europe member States and to the Committee of Ministers.

In the draft resolution presented, it was proposed to make a call on member States to comply with international standards and previous Committee of Ministers' recommendations, avoid imposing unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on human rights of individuals and civil society actors on the basis of existing or future laws against Covid-19 or any other pandemic, repeal any legislation that is no longer justified by the pandemic and still interferes with their rights and ability to work, provide financial and other support to NGOs, and promote the use of online communication tools, among other issues.

In the draft recommendation it was proposed that the Committee of Ministers reflect and organise exchanges of views on these issues with civil society actors. It should give priority to the supervision of the execution of ECHR judgments arising from systemic problems concerning NGOs rights under Article 11 of the Convention, as well as those concerning measures taken against the pandemic. The Committee of Ministers should also establish a mechanism for monitoring and responding to attacks against civil society actors.

Ms Margreet DE BOER concluded by stating that irrespective of the Covid-19 pandemic or any other future pandemic, civil society actors such as NGOs and human rights defenders should be able to continue to promote

public awareness, participate in public life and foster the transparency and accountability of public authorities. Their active contribution is vital for the realisation of an open democratic society, the rule of law and human rights.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked the rapporteur for her presentation of the report.

Mr Damien COTTIER, as the Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee responsible for the report, thanked the rapporteur for the very good work.

He mentioned it was very interesting to discuss that issue. They also had a good discussion with NGOs, which showed the real impact in several countries, and he thought it was important for the future to look at that in other crises.

Mr Damien COTTIER reiterated his acknowledgment to Ms Margreet DE BOER, and also thanked the Secretariat for the tremendous work on that report.

Mr Tiny KOX closed the debate and proceeded to put the report The impact of the Covid-19 restrictions for civil society space and activities, to which no amendments were tabled, to the vote. A simple majority was required for its approval.

The draft resolution was unanimously adopted.

The President then put the draft recommendation, contained in Document 15654, to which no amendments were tabled, to the vote, and remarked that in that case, a two thirds majority was required.

The draft recommendation was unanimously adopted.

The President congratulated the rapporteur for having both her resolution and recommendation unanimously adopted, and thanked her for being present with them that day.

b. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on prison population in Europe

Mr Tiny KOX introduced the debate on the Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on prison population in Europe, prepared by Mr Givi MIKANADZE, rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, to be presented by Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR stated that following a motion for a resolution, Mr Givi MIKANADZE was appointed rapporteur for a report on the Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the prison population in Europe in April 2021. At the origin of this work was a concern that emergency measures taken in response to the pandemic within prison settings, should respect human rights and should never result in inhuman or degrading treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

As part of this work, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights held a hearing in Bern in September where they heard from Professor Marcelo Aebi, Professor Hans Wolff and Ms Triona Lenihan.

They shared their expertise and insights about the challenges for prisons in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as, more optimistically, some opportunities that the experience of the pandemic presented for using alternatives to detention and for improving telecommunications within prisons, in ways that would hopefully be of longer-term benefit to prison populations.

They also received responses to a questionnaire through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, the results of which can be found in the appendix to Mr Givi MIKANADZE's report.

From that, one can see the different, sometimes innovative, approaches taken by countries to respond to the challenges of Covid-19 in the prison context. They hoped that countries and prison services could learn from, and sometimes be inspired from, each other's experiences during that period.

In Mr Givi MIKANADZE's report, he recalled the important work being done in that field by organs of the Council of Europe, including the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Council for Penological Co-operation, as well as the informative studies produced by the Council of Europe and by NGOs. In particular, he called on States to implement the recommendations and principles of the CPT without delay.

Mr Givi MIKANADZE's report recommended important sanitary and health measures be put in place to help countries and prisons to plan for, and respond to, health crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Such measures should include medical screening, vaccinations and booster programmes, as well as general mental and physical health provision to ensure that prison health is prioritised as a part of public health planning.

The report and resolution emphasised the importance of ensuring appropriate priority is given to identifying and taking steps to protect at-risk groups in prisons.

The report in particular highlighted the risks caused by overcrowding in prisons, including that overcrowding facilitated the spread of disease.

The Covid-19 pandemic had, however, presented opportunities to facilitate steps being taken to reduce overcrowding, including through alternatives to detention. The resolution encourages States to better deploy those techniques for the future as one of a number of longer-term tools for tackling overcrowding in prisons.

In relation to the restrictive measures introduced in prisons in response to Covid-19, the report and its resolution highlighted the importance of clearly communicating the justification for such measures to prisoners.

Moreover, it is vital to ensure that any restrictions are limited to the extent and duration necessary, and that thought be given to ensuring that compensatory measures were put in place to the extent possible.

Such compensatory measures can be crucial to the mental health and well-being of detainees, which could otherwise suffer significantly under such measures.

In this regard, there have been some positive developments during the pandemic that had led to improved access to telecommunications for prisoners to maintain contact with family – however, that should not be seen as a replacement for meaningful human contact, which is vital to well-being.

The report also highlighted the importance of continued monitoring, which is essential to ensuring respect for human rights in closed environments.

Finally, it is important not to forget prison staff, many of whom had been working under very strained conditions during the pandemic – often spending extended periods away from home or in quarantine.

Appropriate measures must be introduced to ensure the welfare of prison staff which is a core element contributing to the overall welfare of all those within the prison system.

The report was adopted in unanimity and without any amendments by the Committee for Legal Affairs and Human Rights during its meeting in the October part-session. Mr Givi MIKANADZE was grateful to colleagues for their interest and support in considering that matter.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ began by thanking the rapporteur.

When he checked both reports, the previous one and the current one, he noticed not contradictions but some different information.

The current report touched on legislation on this issue. His country was also touched in it as those amongst where legislation was made to reduce the number of prisoners.

But somehow, the response to the questionnaire didn't mention the number. It was their mistake to fill that gap.

They made legislation to almost send many prisoners home for leave during the pandemic. They are still there. Excluding some crimes like terrorism, drug dealers, children pornography and assault, and things like that.

Almost half of the prisoners were sent home and one third of those in high security prisons were sent to light security prisons.

Thanks to that, there was no real wide spread amongst prisoners and amongst prison staff.

In the previous report, it mentioned some measures against civil society gatherings, demonstrations. It was so. He couldn't walk in the garden of his compound as well. Weddings were banned. It was not just against society. It helped to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

It was not just against civil society activities.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR mentioned that she found it a bit difficult to reply, because she felt that Mr Ahmet YILDIZ's comment was directed at the report of Mr Givi MIKANADZE and the report of Ms Margreet DE BOER was somehow contradictory, but she didn't catch how, exactly they were supposed to be contradictory. So she found that the statement just stood like that.

Mr Damien COTTIER thanked Mr Givi MIKANADZE, the rapporteur, and also Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR, who presented the report. It was an important issue that was actually sometimes out of the radar, out of focus of institutions and of the media and of the general population, speaking about the prison population. It was a sensitive issue, and they knew it also with the work of the CPT, how this population could be very easily and quickly affected by the reduction of freedom of certain facilities during crisis periods like the pandemic period.

It was important to focus on that issue. It was what was done in that report. He thought that the proposals were very useful for the work of the Assembly.

He concluded by reiterating his thanks to the rapporteurs and the Secretariat.

Mr Tiny KOX closed the debate and put the draft resolution in Doc. 15612 on the Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on prison population in Europe, presented by the Committee of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, to which no amendments were presented, to the vote. The draft resolution required of simple majority to be carried.

The draft resolution was adopted unanimously.

The President then proceeded to put the draft recommendation to the vote. A two thirds majority was needed for it to be adopted. No amendments had been tabled to the draft recommendation in Doc. 15652.

The draft recommendation was adopted unanimously.

The President congratulated the rapporteur and Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR for presenting the report.

14. Political Affairs and Democracy

a. Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe as a cornerstone of the European political architecture

Mr Tiny KOX presented Item 14 on the Agenda, which was a report from the Political Affairs Committee, Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe as a cornerstone of the European political architecture. How they could be so up to date as to dealing with that report there that day in Reykjavik.

They could find the report in Doc. 15651, from the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. In the absence of the rapporteur, Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ, the Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs, Ms Ingjerd SCHOU, was going to present the report.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU encouraged her colleagues to leave their phones and computers to have 7 minutes of Icelandic vacation because it was a really important and very good report.

She was very pleased to present the report presented by her colleague Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ.

She began by congratulating the rapporteur for an extremely timely and well-crafted report.

The draft resolution that was now in front of them was unanimously adopted in the Committee. At the heart of the report was the following question.

How can the Council of Europe, a long-standing cornerstone of the European political architecture, continue to play an important role in the new geopolitical reality we are facing?

Over the course of more than 70 years, the Council of Europe has achieved remarkable progress in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law through its standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation activities.

The organisation had embodied the concept of “unity within diversity”, promoting shared values that have brought together States from across the entire continent.

However, the notion of a Europe without dividing lines suffered an unprecedented setback as a result of the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine.

That war of aggression was antithetical to the core values of the Council of Europe, and therefore a direct challenge to them.

It came on the heels of other challenges to democracy and security in Europe, such as democratic backsliding, populism, organised disinformation, and lack of trust in democratic institutions.

But Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ's report correctly argued that it was exactly in these difficult times that they had to renew their commitment to what made the Council of Europe unique: the values, principles and standards of the organisation are more relevant than ever in the current historical context when they are openly flouted.

To that end, the draft resolution called on member States to recommit to those values, principles and standards at the highest political level.

Why did that matter? Because in doing so, the organisation would have more leverage on its member States, and therefore, would be better equipped to prevent the repetition of similar major infringements of international law and threats to peace and security.

Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ's report considered the role of the Council of Europe through three lenses.

First, its thematic focus. The Council of Europe has a unique profile in the rule of law, pluralistic democracy and human rights. The implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights must remain the top priority.

In parallel, the organisation should address emerging threats to democratic security and establish new standards to protect human rights.

Second, its geographical scope. The Council of Europe provides a unique forum for co-operation on equal footing between all European States who share common values. It is a forum to find responses to common challenges.

Even if the Russian Federation was excluded from the Council of Europe, the strategic objective should remain to establish a common European democratic space with no black holes. In this respect, engagement with human rights defenders and democratic forces in Russia and in Belarus should remain important priorities.

And the third lens used in the report was the institutional set-up of the Council of Europe, which is another unique strength. Further development of a meaningful dialogue between the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe would be important to elevate the strategic relevance of the organisation.

The draft resolution also emphasised the need to advance co-operation and synergies with other European and international institutions.

As the Assembly had already declared in previous resolutions, there is a need for a renewed impetus towards strengthening the strategic partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights should remain a priority.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is facing serious challenges, given its decision-making process and its membership. But it remains an important partner for the Council of Europe, with strong complementarities related to the human dimension, democratic security, conflict prevention and resolution.

Beyond Europe, the Council of Europe should aim to forge a stronger co-operation with the United Nations system.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU stated that when they considered the role of the Council of Europe going forward, they couldn't ignore the deplorable impacts of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. She concluded by highlighting two elements of specific importance, which were elaborated in the report.

First, the Council of Europe should support a comprehensive approach to hold the Russian Federation accountable. It should play a primary role to ensure that perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and possible genocide, along with the perpetrators of the crime of aggression, were held to account.

In particular, the draft resolution reiterated the Assembly's support for the establishment of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

Member States also had to support Belarusian democratic forces and contribute to establishing a special international tribunal for crimes against humanity committed against the Belarusian people.

Second, in the current context it was all the more important for the Council of Europe to be strengthened as a global actor.

In this respect, the Committee of Ministers's decision to hold a 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government next May should be welcomed. The Summit would offer a timely opportunity to recommit to the values that were the

foundation of democratic security in Europe and adapt the Council of Europe to the new political and security realities.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU mentioned that she looked forward to the Assembly's active participation in the Summit, and hoped that that report would contribute to their joint reflection leading up to the Summit.

Mr George KATROUGALOS agreed with most of the report. He had a remark that in a way echoed what Ms Petra BAYR said at the beginning, on how they should not make the mistake to consider juridical issues, and especially issues related to international courts, under just a political scope.

That remark was related to the proposal of the report to establish also a special international ad hoc tribunal for Belorussia.

His first remark was that when speaking about international justice and the necessity of not tolerating impunity, the first concern should be to reinforce the authority of the ICC. Not just Russia or China, even the United States had not signed or ratified the Statute of Rome. Exactly because those big powers do not want to be accountable for interventions of their military forces in different parts of the world.

It is not just them. When speaking about the crime of aggression, it should be borne in mind that half of their member States, members to the Council of Europe, have not ratified it. They were speaking of countries like France, like the United Kingdom, and unfortunately for his country as well.

So, his point was, first of all, that speaking about values, they had to be consistent and not hypocritical. They had to force and persuade their States to ratify the agreement for the modification of Article 8 of the Statute of Rome showed them the ICC did have jurisdiction over the crime of aggression for even eventual violations by their own States.

He thought that ideas concerning how the United Nations had to be involved, he heard from Mr Ahmet YILDIZ some interesting ideas, also from other colleagues in the Legal Affairs Committee, should be taken into account during their visit to the United States during the following week to be discussed.

But protecting the legal and moral authority of the ICC was something above conflicts of conjecture.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS saw Mr Damien COTTIER and Mr George KATROUGALOS's amendment. For him, being in Vilnius, 25km from the Belarusian border, and having all of the Belarusian democratic leadership like Tsikhanouskaya, who visited them and Mr Tiny KOX recently.

They listened to the report. They listened to the news, and they were the first country affected by the huge wave of terror that was not the same, but even more intensive than inside of Russia.

No way would they have Russia, and Mr Tiny KOX was going to try, until May, to bring Russia to accountability during the ad hoc tribunal looking to juridical techniques that were established until the Summit in Reykjavik.

But Belarusian terror of Lukashenko that had lasted more than 20 years against Belarusian people was many times bigger than Putin's war, before 24 February, against Russian people.

They had Putin's war against the Ukrainian people, but there was Putin's war against the Russian people, against democrats.

So, in the beginning, Lukashenko eliminated everything and everyone. And just the day before, Mr Frank SCHWABE, the speaker, and others, were mentioning that the leader of their sister party, Statkevich, the husband of Tsikhanouskaya, was in jail.

He annihilated all the education system in Belarusian language, all party system was annihilated by Lukashenko in the most terrible way.

Joseph Stalin's ideology was in place in schools instead of a free Belarusian education.
From the Belarusian territory they had that terrible Putin's invasion of the Russian army towards Ukraine.

Everything that was said after Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ's remarks, she had to go away to a European Union audit in Luxembourg, she asked not to make any possible amendments in this field, and he would keep Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ's direction to keep the text like it was, especially because they had an ICAO final resolution in Montreal about the stealing of the aeroplane from Athens to Vilnius and the kidnapping of the Belarusian opposition

guys, making fake bomb above Vilnius. Its resolution was crystal clear that it was a terror attempt by the Lukashenko regime. An international terror attempt.

In that case, he was going to be looking in the friendliest way to Mr Damien COTTIER and Mr George KATROUGALOS. He was going to be asking them, even though it was very difficult for him because he was their friend, to withdraw or not present the amendment.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU just wanted to say that she thought that that report would have very good debates going on. She thought they weren't finished with the questions raised there.

The report raised some questions that needed to be dealt with further on.

She also took note of the remarks from Mr George KATROUGALOS, that countries had to ratify and do some homework before they could join the statement in that report.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU had reviewed the report for only a few hours, and she thought it was not fair for the rapporteur who had worked a lot on that report and did a very good job.

The President stated that the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy had presented a draft resolution to which one amendment had been tabled, and called on Mr Damien COTTIER to support the amendment.

Mr Damien COTTIER mentioned that there was a political and a legal dimension there.

The political one, he didn't think, quite frankly, that their Assembly could call for a second ad hoc tribunal at that time. They were calling and pushing a lot about the international ad hoc tribunal on Ukraine. They needed to focus on that and not ask for a second one in the same period of time.

The legal dimension was mentioned by Mr George KATROUGALOS.

When speaking about crimes against humanity, we speak about the jurisdiction of the ICC, or about some countries that had universal jurisdiction. Actually, he was not sure why they spoke against crimes against humanity there. Probably the notion was broader. There were violations of human rights, clearly, in Belarus. But not only, or specifically, crimes against humanity.

We are always very careful when we define that. Genocide was mentioned before. These types of terms should not be considered too lightly. Even in the situation in Ukraine, they always tried to say probable crimes against humanity, because it was for a court to decide that, not a political assembly.

There, they established that there were crimes against humanity, and they were going to weaken the ICC. So, for those two reasons they suggested a broader formulation that could include that solution by the Political Affairs Committee or by the rapporteur, but not specifically mentioning an international ad hoc tribunal on crimes against humanity. The words "against the Belarusian people" would stay, just to make it clear in the formulation.

The President put the amendment to the vote and requested those in favour, against and abstaining from the amendment to show.

The amendment was carried.

He then proceeded to open the vote on the draft resolution contained in Doc. 15651 as amended, and he informed that for it to be adopted, a simple majority was required.

The resolution was adopted unanimously.

The President congratulated Ms Ingjerd SCHOU and Ms Laima Lucija ANDRIKIENÉ.

16. Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Securing safe medical supply chains

Mr Tiny KOX said that the report was to be presented by **Ms Selin Sayek BÖKE** of Türkiye (SOC), replacing the rapporteur of the Committee on Social Affairs, Ms Jennifer DE TEMMERMAN, who was no longer a member of the Parliamentary Assembly.

He allocated Ms BÖKE ten minutes in total to speak, seven minutes of which was for the presentation, and three minutes to reply.

Ms Selin Sayek BÖKE said that this report on ‘Securing safe medical supply chains’ became a critical issue at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, where they were struck at an early stage with shortages of medical supplies.

Over time, the effects increased dramatically.

Stockpiling, restrictions on exports, closed borders and lockdowns all led: to shortages of essential medicines in many member States.

Concerns were also raised as to whether the products that reached European markets in the early stages of the pandemic met the necessary standards for quality and safety. There were issues about quantity and the standards to be met.

She said that shortages in medicines and medical products now happened regularly since the pandemic, with a multitude of factors to blame.

Several causes combined and led to situations when the demand for a medicine could not be met by an adequate supply. To secure supply chains and make them more resilient, it was essential to understand the underlying root causes of such disruptions.

The problems of securing the medical supply chain stemmed from a combination of systemic factors in the health sector. They occurred throughout the chain of supply, ranging from the development of medical service provision to a lack of transparency and accountability.

This concerned multiple actors in the process: manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, pharmacies, hospitals, health professionals and patients. The sector was particularly exposed to issues of governance, but also of corruption. This issue had been dealt with in several of the reports over time in the Council of Europe, she noted.

Prevention efforts and the introduction of early warning systems and means of prosecuting transgressions had to be reinforced.

The Council of Europe also had a role to play in preventing and combating medical supply chain shortages. Its response to the COVID-19 pandemic provided the member States with tools and expertise to uphold their shared values and principles during the crisis.

The Secretary General called on the member States to introduce coordinated policies taking a human rights-based approach, including through existing conventions, such as: the European Convention on Human Rights; the European Social Charter; the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention); the Convention on the elaboration of a European pharmacopeia, and the Convention on the counterfeiting of medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health – the MEDICRIME Convention.

Ms BÖKE said that confidence was one of the critical pillars of society. In the sphere of health, it was even more critical to build confidence. It was important for all key players of the sector, including care staff on the frontline, but also for patients trying to access the service.

But in a sector that lurched from crisis to crisis, the sincerity of the players involved had to be verified. A series of recent scandals questioned the effectiveness and safety of the medical supply chain. Uncertainty remained, despite the willing attitude and sincere efforts of health sector players.

She said they needed reminding of the right to healthcare, which required a very high level of ethics to advance general well-being.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic had also impacted on the resilience of the health sector, in addition to recurrent scandals, sweeping reforms and liberalisation. Here, establishing once again a human rights approach promoted by the Council of Europe, was an asset which would allow for confidence to be built and strengthened.

The Assembly had to encourage parliaments to promote the implementation of such a human rights-based approach in the health field, ensuring quality, safety, and fairness in healthcare for all, as the Oviedo Convention and European Health Charter stated.

The draft resolution before everybody deplored the shortages of medical products which could lead to differences in treatment and to discrimination. It called for co-ordinated approaches to provide for a flexible response to unpredictable health crises, group purchasing of medicines, or a quick reaction to prevent bottlenecks that could disrupt the supply chain and have a significant impact on the health situation.

Such responses would help to make health systems more resilient.

The goal of securing medical supplies could involve measures that had been identified by the rapporteur in her report, such as: an obligation for laboratories to stock sufficient quantities of all medicines of major therapeutic value to cover the needs of health system users; to strengthening, in law and in practice, sanctions for laboratories that were negligent in their management of supplies for domestic markets; establishing if companies used public funding to relocate production sites to Europe, to be permitted only for operations concerning medicines of major therapeutic value, and notably concerning the medicines with demonstrated efficacy which were repeatedly in short supply; and finally, on measures of expanding public sector pharmaceutical production to ensure that manufacturing had a continuity, especially for products dropped by laboratories.

The report and the resolution called for the development of an uncomplicated and resilient health system, with a high level of integrity based on human rights, and also recommended taking the environmental crisis into account, which had significant health implications, and cutting emissions linked to purchases of medicines and medical devices, and taking action on waste and using digital technology in this respect.

In conclusion, the Council of Europe's rights-based methodology and peer cooperation could help to ensure that no one was left behind.

Shortages of some essential medicines had to be avoided through greater coordination among member States, and increased participation of the public sector in the production of basic medicines.

Finally, professional ethical standards had to be enhanced to restore patient trust in this area.

Ms BÖKE thanked the room.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Selin Sayek BÖKE. He opened the discussion, and then closed the speaker's list since there could be no responses.

Ms Selin Sayek BÖKE joked that she congratulated herself for the presentation, but added that she congratulated Ms DE TEMMERMAN for her significant contribution in this area, and said that this was a nice final touch to her significant contributions.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Ms Selin Sayek BÖKE and was sure that Ms DE TEMMERMAN would appreciate what she had said.

He said that the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development had presented a draft resolution on 'Securing safe medical supply chains', to which he noted no amendments had been tabled.

He proceeded to start the vote on the draft resolution, in Document 15653, and said a simple majority was required. He asked all those in favour, against, and abstaining to show their votes.

The draft resolution was adopted unanimously.

The vote was opened on the draft recommendation with a two-thirds majority, in Document 15653. He asked all those in favour, against, and abstaining to show their votes.

The draft recommendation was adopted unanimously.

He congratulated Ms Selin Sayek BÖKE.

17. Other business

Mr Tiny KOX introduced the item.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS asked to add to that day's protocol an issue related to Ukraine.

That day was the day of women rights. It was just a short time ago when all those terrible bombings happened. The Ukrainian Parliament, the Rada, passed the document for women rights, the Istanbul Convention.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS asked that day's protocol to reflect Ms Mariia MEZENTSOVA's presentation, together with other friends of the Ukrainian delegation, of the Istanbul Convention in the Rada. It was mostly unanimously voted in favour by the country that represented classical liberal democracy, and was in fact attacked by a classical chauvinistic country with a racist ideology against liberal democracy.

There were three votes. The last vote was almost unanimously by all parties that supported the Istanbul Convention.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS directly asked Mr Tiny KOX if he could add that to the protocol, congratulating Ms Mariia MEZENTSOVA with that real achievement that not all countries had approved and had voted in favour of the Istanbul Convention.

It was not only woman rights, it was also human rights of men and women, minorities.

For that issue, that country was fighting for their countries and the Council of Europe's human rights values and standards, to congratulate the head of the Ukrainian delegation, Ms Mariia MEZENTSOVA, with that last achievement.

Mr Tiny KOX thanked Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS for adding his compliments, compliments that they had already paid at the beginning of that meeting. But it was, indeed, an achievement that was history making, that they were able to decide under such hard circumstances that such an important Convention for them all was adopted.

They knew that Ms Mariia MEZENTSOVA played an important role in convincing the Verkhovna Rada to take that decision, especially on that moment.

The President considered the words spoken by Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS as words spoken on behalf of the Standing Committee.

18. Next meeting

Mr Tiny KOX said that he first wanted to express his gratitude to all of the participants that had made the current meeting possible, their colleagues from the Parliament of Iceland, the technicians, the interpreters, the staff of the Parliament of Iceland, the staff of the Parliamentary Assembly, who all looked a bit tired but also satisfied.

He gave his sincere thanks to the Icelandic delegation, especially to its Chairperson, Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, for their warm welcome and hospitality there in Reykjavik. There was still a programme to go. They were going to visit the National Art Museum, and there was going to be a dinner served for all.

The President was pleased to inform that the next meeting was going to be held on the 3rd of March of the following year in The Hague.

Ms Petra STIENEN expressed it was a great honour and a great pleasure to say that they were waiting for their attendance to the Standing Committee in The Hague.

There were many reasons why they wanted to have that meeting in The Hague. One of them, for sure, was the 75th anniversary of The Hague Convention.

If only they could bring them to the Court of Knights, where that event took place in 1948, but unfortunately they had a big renovation ongoing. But they had a great alternative, the Peace Palace, so they were going to have the sentiment of peace around them. They were going to have the meetings of the Presidential Committee, the Bureau, and the Standing Committee on the 2nd and 3rd of March.

She knew that Valerie and her team, and Mr Tiny KOX and his team, were working really hard.

One logistical request was that given that hotels in The Netherlands were extremely expensive, they were encouraged to book on time for them not to miss the options that were going to be arranged for them.

Ms Petra STIENEN mentioned how much she was looking forward to meeting them in The Hague.

Mr Tiny KOX closed the meeting.

APPENDIX 1

References to committees

1. Ensuring human rights compliant asylum procedures

[Doc. 15601](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Paul Gavan and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *for report*

2. Foreign interference: a threat to democratic security in Europe

[Doc. 15605](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Ms María Valentina Martínez Ferro and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report*

3. Immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic aging

[Doc. 15629](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Migration Refugees and Displaced Persons *for report*

4. Protecting human rights and saving lives in the North Sea and the English Channel

[Doc. 15630](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Fourat Ben Chikha and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *to take into account in the preparation of the report on "Missing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – a call to clarify their fate"* [and in the follow up to Resolution 2462 (2022) on Pushbacks on land and sea: illegal measures of migration management].

5. Sanctions of persons on the "Kara-Murza list"

[Doc. 15632](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Eerik-Niiles Kross and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for report*

6. Europe should stand in solidarity with the Russian and Belarusian anti-war movement

[Doc. 15633](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Kimmo Kiljunen and other members of the Assembly

Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *to be taken into account in the preparation of the report on "The arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation"*.

7. Preventing abuse of the right to veto in the Security Council: a perspective by the member States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

[Doc. 15628](#)

Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Dmytro Natalukha and other members of the Assembly

Consultation of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

APPENDIX 2

Declaration on the #RoadToReykjavik: towards a 4th Summit which meets Europeans' expectations

The Parliamentary Assembly, meeting today in Reykjavik as Standing Committee, welcomes the Committee of Ministers' decision to hold a 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023.

Faced with the brutality of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, Heads of State and Government should reiterate that rules-based multilateralism is the pivot of the international order, and firmly reject unilateral actions based on the use of force.

They should stand in solidarity with Ukrainians, who are facing unbearable suffering and paying the price of this aggression with their lives. They should give a clear political message in support of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including by backing a comprehensive system to ensure that the Russian Federation be held accountable for violating international law and for the damage it has caused.

At a juncture in its history and with a war raging on its territory, Europe needs to reaffirm, loudly, clearly and at the highest political level, its unabated and unanimous attachment to its most fundamental ambition: to strive for peace and prosperity for all in Europe by protecting and promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The core mission of the Council of Europe must continue to be Europe's compass.

The 4th Summit should lay the ground for a forward-looking renewal of the Council of Europe, which should be given greater political and financial means to contribute to realising peace, stability and prosperity for the benefit of all Europeans against the pressure and interference by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

A renewed Council of Europe should have the capacity to be a pioneer in human rights protection, setting standards in emerging areas of concern (such as artificial intelligence). It should take leadership in the area of climate change, as a healthy environment is the precondition for durable and sustainable peace and prosperity while continuing its pioneer work in the area of gender equality and in the fight against violence against women. It should be able to address the backsliding of democracy and rising inequalities, reinvigorate citizens' trust in democratic institutions and contribute to the continent's democratic security. By ensuring that execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in all member States is a priority, Council of Europe Heads of State and Government should safeguard and strengthen the Convention system, which has a direct and tangible impact on the lives of all Europeans.

The Council of Europe emerging from the 4th Summit should better respond to citizens' expectations in terms of openness, transparency and active engagement. It should also be a cornerstone of the European multilateral architecture, with greater political clout and impact on its member States; greater capacity to project its values and standards beyond its membership; and a deeper strategic partnership with the European Union, also in light of its prospective accession to the European Convention on Human Rights.

On the #RoadToReykjavik, welcoming the climate of co-operation and dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and other Council of Europe bodies, the Assembly stands ready to assume its responsibilities as a statutory organ of the Organisation, providing meaningful input to the Summit and contributing to its success, including through its report on "A fourth Summit for a renewed, improved and reinforced Council of Europe" to be debated in January 2023.

APPENDIX 3

List of participants / Liste des participants

President of the Parliamentary Assembly / Président de l'Assemblée parlementaire

The President	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
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Chairpersons of Political Groups / Présidents des groupes politiques

Mr Frank SCHWABE	Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC) / Groupe des socialistes, démocrates et verts (SOC)
M. Iulian BULAI	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) / Alliance des démocrates et des libéraux pour l'Europe (ADLE)
Mr George KATROUGALOS	Group of the Unified European Left (UEL) / Groupe pour la gauche unitaire européenne (GUE)

Vice-Presidents of the Assembly / Vice-président·e·s de l'Assemblée

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU	Norway / Norvège
Mr John HOWELL	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES	Spain / Espagne
Mr Ahmet YILDIZ	Türkiye
Mr Arkadiusz MULARCZYK	Poland / Pologne
Mr Darko KAEVSKI	North Macedonia / Macédoine du Nord
M. Bertrand BOUYX	France

Chairpersons of National Delegations / Président·e·s de délégations nationales

Mr Samad SEYIDOV	Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Mr Rik DAEMS	Belgium / Belgique
Ms Marijana BALIĆ	Croatia / Croatie
Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS	Estonia / Estonie
M. Bertrand BOUYX	France
Mr Frank SCHWABE	Germany / Allemagne
Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON	Iceland / Islande
Ms Franziska HOOP	Liechtenstein
Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS	Lithuania / Lituanie
Ms Petra STIENEN	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
Mr Darko KAEVSKI	North Macedonia / Macédoine du Nord
Ms Ingjerd SCHOU	Norway / Norvège
Mr Arkadiusz MULARCZYK	Poland / Pologne
Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES	Spain / Espagne
M. Damien COTTIER	Switzerland / Suisse

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ	Türkiye
Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA	Ukraine
Mr John HOWELL	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

**Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights /
Président de la Commission des questions juridiques et des droits de l'homme**

M. Damien COTTIER	Switzerland / Suisse
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Présidente de la Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable**

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE	Türkiye
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media /
Président de la Commission de la culture, de la science, de l'éducation et des médias**

Lord Alexander DUNDEE	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
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**Chairperson of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights /
Président de la Commission sur l'élection des juges à la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme**

Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN	Romania / Roumanie
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Rapporteurs of the Committees / Rapporteur·e·s des commissions

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH	Austria / Autriche
Mr George LOUCAIDES	Cyprus / Chypre
Ms Margreet DE BOER	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
Mr Alfred HEER	Switzerland / Suisse

Ex-officio members of the Bureau / Membres ex-officio du Bureau

Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON	Iceland / Islande
Ms Franziska HOOP	Liechtenstein

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

Ms Petra BAYR	Austria / Autriche
Mr Arben GASHI	Assemblée du Kosovo / Assembly of Kosovo
Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ	Croatia / Croatie
Ms Nina KASIMATI	Greece / Grèce
Ms Foteini PIPILI	Greece / Grèce
Ms Thórhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR	Iceland / Islande
Mr Birgir THÓRARINSSON	Iceland / Islande
Mme Catia POLIDORI	Italy / Italie

Invited personalities / Personnalités invitées

Mr Birgir ÁRMANNSSON	Speaker of Alþingi – Parliament of Iceland / Président de l'Alþingi – Parlement de l'Islande
Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR	Prime Minister and Minister for Equality / Première ministre et ministre de l'Égalité
Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð GYLFADÓTTIR	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chair of the Committee of Ministers / ministre des Affaires étrangères et Présidente du Comité des Ministres
Ms Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSDÓTTIR	Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland to the Council of Europe / Ambassadeur et Représentante Permanente de l'Islande auprès du Conseil de l'Europe
Dr María Rún BJARNADÓTTIR	Lawyer at the National Commissioner of Police and member of GREVIO / Avocate au Commissariat national de la police et membre du GREVIO
Mr Ævar Pálmi PÁLMASSON	Head of sexual offences investigative division / Chef de la division des enquêtes sur les infractions sexuelles

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 du Conseil de l'Europe

Mr Bjørn BERGE	Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe / Secrétaire Général adjoint du Conseil de l'Europe
Mr Gianluca ESPOSITO	Deputy Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe / Directeur adjoint du Cabinet de la Secrétaire Générale et du Secrétaire Général adjoint

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

Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU	Secretary General / Secrétaire Générale
Mr Mark NEVILLE	Director of Committees / Directeur des Commissions
Mme Valérie CLAMER	Head of the Table Office, Information Technologies and Events Department / Chef du service de la Séance, des technologies de l'information et des événements
Mr Sergey KHRYCHIKOV	Acting Head of the Private Office of the President of the Assembly / Chef ad interim du Cabinet du Président de l'Assemblée
Mme Isild HEURTIN	Head of the Secretariat of the Bureau of the Assembly / Cheffe du Secrétariat du Bureau de l'Assemblée

Mr Francesc FERRER	Acting Head of the Communication Division / Chef ad interim de la Division de la communication
Ms Sonia SIRTORI	Head of the Secretariat of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy / Cheffe du Secrétariat de la Commission des questions politiques et de la démocratie
Mme Rachel MOREL	Principal administrative assistant of the Table Office / Assistante administrative principale du Service de la Séance
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