

1558th Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
Strasbourg, 29 April 2026

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

Dear Chair of the Committee of Ministers Deputies,
Secretary General,
Deputy Secretary General,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to be here with you today. I know you have a very busy agenda today with difficult decisions to make, so I will try to be concise in both my presentation and answering questions.

The 2nd part session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) took place here in Strasbourg last week and it was yet another intensive, but also engaging and inspiring week, full of interesting debates and dynamic meetings.

I would like first of all to mention a debate on a report in which our Assembly called for universal ratification and full implementation of the Istanbul Convention, nearly 12 years after this unique landmark treaty to protect women against domestic violence entered into force. The report warns that organised disinformation campaigns and insufficient resources are undermining the impact of the Convention and contributing to the further backlash against the rights of women (as well as other discriminated

groups) that have been gained over recent decades. This backlash is yet another sign of how the disintegration of the global rules-based order accompanied with the rise of populism affects the lives of ordinary people and why it is important to deal with these geopolitical challenges in a holistic concerted manner.

The Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is unquestionably the most striking among those challenges and it is fully justified that it remains our key focus. On Thursday, we held a current affairs debate on "Accountability and justice: a call to step up efforts for the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine", during which we called to urgently step up efforts for the establishment of the Special Tribunal with a view to converting political commitment in operational reality. Any further delay is unacceptable, and I was happy to learn that more than 20 countries are now committed to join the tribunal. It is important to understand that while the rapid setting-up of this tribunal is most important for Ukraine, it is also crucial for Europe and its identity in the current geopolitical context marked by the increasing use of force and the disintegration of the rules-based order. The ad hoc tribunal will be a powerful signal that Europe continues to adhere to the rule of law and puts principles and values above political expediency. This will be a signal that Europe is ready and capable to lead the process that should end the disintegration of the rules-based international system. So I call on you, dear Ambassadors, to take all necessary steps to make this tribunal a reality as soon as possible.

In the same context, it is hard to underestimate the relevance of current affairs debate on the need for peace and stability in the broader Middle East, where we highlighted that without a solid political strategy, any military actions are doomed to fail and we all seeing how they bring anarchy and chaos that have serious implications all over the world.

Of course, this was natural that in relation to the situation in the Middle East, we have once again condemned the adoption by the Israeli Knesset of a law extending the death penalty in Israel in a way that has clear discriminatory effects against

Palestinians and urged Israel to repeal or invalidate it and definitely refrain from its implementation. These calls were made in the context of the debate on the universal abolition of the death penalty, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the Council of Europe's stance against capital punishment in all circumstances and all places, noting that any reintroduction of the death penalty by a Council of Europe member state would be incompatible with membership. That debate was extremely rich and included an extremely moving emotional statement by Antoinette Chahine, a human rights defender and former death-row prisoner, and remarks by Barbara Lochbihler, Commissioner at the International Commission against the Death Penalty.

Also, debates on tracking the proceeds of the crime denounced by Sergei Magnitsky, countering social dumping and labour exploitation, the effective enforcement of copyright, violence and hate speech against politicians, on protecting freedom of religion and belief in Europe and many others took place last week. We also discussed the procedure for electing judges to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Assembly adopted an opinion on the draft additional protocol to the Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism. In that regard, I wish to underline that the request for this opinion arrived with very short notice, which created an additional burden on an already overloaded Committee. It also made it very difficult for the Assembly to give a meaningful opinion which could still influence the text of the Protocol which is essentially finalised. Unfortunately, this urgency has become a trend. Sometimes, as with the Convention on the Claims Commission, it is justified, but in some other cases, we see no harm in being given more time to produce an opinion, but also in ensuring that this opinion is properly and seriously taken into account. I hope it will be possible to improve the current practice in the future with a view to having a real dialogue on the texts of the Council of Europe's treaties.

Also last week, the 2026 Council of Europe Museum Prize was awarded to the Young V&A in London and the 2026 Europe Prize went to the city of Reggio-Emilia in Italy. My sincere congratulations to them.

During the session, the Chairperson of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr Denis Bećirović and France's Europe and Foreign Affairs Minister Mr Jean-Noël Barrot addressed our Assembly and a traditional exchange of views with Mr Mihai Popșoi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, in his capacity as the President of the Committee of Ministers was held.

We also welcomed the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O'Flaherty who presented his annual activity report for 2025 and answered questions from the members of the Assembly.

I also wish to draw your attention that the second meeting of the Platform for Dialogue with the Russian Democratic Forces took place last Thursday. It was an extremely vibrant and productive gathering that helped us develop concrete proposals for the Platform's activities in 2026 and identify people who may lead each of them. I also understand that different channels of communication already emerge between the Russian Democratic Forces representatives on the Platform on the one side and political groups and national delegations on the other. In the near future, reflections will also begin on the setting up of a separate platform for the Russian indigenous people.

Let me also stress, that I am happy that you proceed with the political declaration on migration to be adopted in Chisinau mid May. As the PACE is an important stakeholder within the convention system, I very much regret that we didn't manage to make two small amendments about our contribution to the Convention system. We are the ones who elect the judges and if there is no case law, the court comes back to our reports and resolutions which of course also are tackling many important issues connected

with migration. This knowledge is not wide spread and I think it would have had additional value to mention it in the declaration, we forwarded a concrete suggestion for a respective wording.

Allow me to mention another issue of concern. We are witnessing that the degradation of our environment, loss of biodiversity and negative impact of the climate catastrophe is gaining speed. I consider this as one of my political priorities, to work on this and the future stand alone convention on the right to live in a healthy, save and sustainable environment is for sure the crucial key for this. I am aware the MC has agreed on the feasibility study on it and also already back in 2022 decided about a recommendation on human rights and the protection of the environment. With the Klimaseniorinnen decision the debate gained momentum and I was also very happy to learn that the Monegasque presidency will place more attention on the environmental challenges. We have already legislation in most of our member states on this, what are missing are common standards and the safeguarding of them. The protection of our global public good, an environment where everybody can live in a healthy and dignified way will be the common intelligence test of humanity during the coming years and I really hope the CoE can contribute to the positive outcome of this worldwide test as to whether mankind will have a sustainable future or not.

These are the main points.

Thank you for your attention.