

Extraordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)

14-15 March 2022

Opening remarks by Tiny Kox

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Madam Secretary General,

Deputy Secretary General,

Madam Secretary General of the Assembly,

President of the Council of Europe Congress

Ambassadors,

Members of the Assembly,

May I welcome you all, here in the hemicycle or online, in this extra-ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

In the early hours of 24 February, the Russian army, by decision of the President of the Russian Federation, illegally crossed the borders of neighboring Ukraine, and started its armed attack on the people and the State of Ukraine. Since then, thousands of Ukrainian people have been killed or injured and millions of Ukrainian citizens had to leave their homes, seeking shelter elsewhere in Ukraine or across the borders of Ukraine. May I please ask you to raise for a moment of silence, in respect of all these people who have become victims of this brutal war that never should have started and therefore should now immediately stop.

(A minute of silence)

By illegally crossing the Ukrainian border, the Russian Federation also crossed the red line of this organization which the Council of Europe formulated already in 1949 in its Statute. Articles 1 and 3 make it obligatory that *every member State of the Council of Europe must collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realization of the aim of the Council of Europe, which is to achieve greater unity between the members for the purpose of safeguarding the ideals and principles which are our common heritage.*

That is why our member State Russia was, within 3 days after the start of its armed aggression against Ukraine, suspended from its right to be represented in the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe, in this Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. I thank the Committee of Ministers and its Italian chairmanship as well as the leaders of our political groups, the chairpersons of our committees and the leaders of our national delegations that they were able and willing to act quickly and decisively, in exemplary synergy, together with the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe at the moment when it was needed most.

Since then, however, the military aggression of the Russian Federation, did not halt but did continue. Due to this, devastating destruction in Ukraine goes on and about 2,5 million citizens have already left Ukraine, seeking shelter in one of our member States. May I thank all member States for showing serious solidarity with the citizens of our member State Ukraine, by granting these refugees access to their territories and providing them with first aid to make them survive for the time being. I want to thank the authorities of our member States as well as their citizens for showing an immense concrete solidarity with those who are now seeking shelter. This weekend, I personally witnessed here in Strasbourg and its surroundings, ordinary people doing their utmost to collect

as much direct support as possible. It is heartwarming action – nevertheless, it is not enough. Much more aid has to be provided by our 46 member States and other States and international organizations. Today, tomorrow and in the future. International solidarity is needed now and will be needed in the years to come, as the humanitarian consequences of armed aggression will be immense and will last long. I know the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General are working hard to organize more support within their possibilities. I am sure that they will brief our Assembly later today about their attempts, their difficulties and their results.

As the Russian Federation did listen neither to our calls nor those of the rest of the international community, first and foremost the United Nations, further possible action has to be examined. That is why I have convened this extraordinary session of our Assembly in which we – representing the remaining 46 member States' parliaments - will thoroughly investigate the consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, as proposed by the five political groups of our Assembly.

After convening this session, I have received a letter from the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies, asking our Assembly to give, in accordance with Statutory Resolution 51 (30) a formal Opinion on potential further use of Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

Art. 8 says that

any member of the Council of Europe which has seriously violated article 3 may be suspended from its rights of representation and requested by the Committee of Ministers to withdraw. If such member does not comply with this request, the Committee may decide that it has ceased to be a member of the Council as from such date the Committee may determine.

Last Friday, the Bureau of the Assembly, having heard the Presidential Committee's advice, decided to propose to the Assembly to give this statutory Opinion during this extra-ordinary session, on the basis of a report that is now under preparation of our Political Affairs Committee. The Committee has elected our colleague Mrs Ingjerd Schou from Norway as its rapporteur. I wish the Rapporteur and the Committee well in preparing this most relevant opinion, which will be distributed later today to all members. I thank the Committee of Ministers for asking our opinion, in line with the statutory rules that govern of our organization.

Our debate will have two components. Today we will get information, directly from Ukraine, and from the Committee of Ministers and our Secretary General. Tomorrow we will debate, on the basis of all this – and other available – information, the draft opinion, prepared by the Political Affairs Committee. Our list of speakers is longer than ever before. I am grateful to our Secretary General of the Assembly that she managed to ensure that tomorrow's debate will already start at 09:30 in the morning and that we will be able to continue all day, until 8:30 in the evening. Together with my vice-presidents I will do my utmost to allow as many speakers as possible. I hope you will understand that I will be very strict on the 3 minutes speaking time, in order to allow all speakers to participate in this most important debate where we might have to take decisions which this Assembly until now was never asked to take in the past seven decades.

At the end of my opening remarks, I would like to especially welcome the members of the Ukrainian delegation, partly present here, partly connected online from Ukraine. I thank the Ukrainian delegation and its Chairperson Ms Mariia Mezentseva, for keeping me updated ever since the beginning of the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine about the consequences this aggression has. I also thank the Ukrainian authorities with whom we have been in contact during the past weeks and days. May I express the hope, on behalf of all of us, that this war will end, and peace will come as soon as possible for all our Ukrainian colleagues and all citizens of our beleaguered member State Ukraine. If you share this hope, please stand up and applaud.

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