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4 December 2020

Standing Committee

Minutes

of the meeting held by videoconference on

Friday 20 November 2020

from 09:30 to 12:30 and from 14:30 to 17:30

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

Mr Rik DAEMS (Belgium, ALDE, President of the Assembly): opened the meeting. I am particularly pleased, after almost a year, to be back here in the Hemicycle. You know that one of the great ambitions on my part and on the part of all of us is to be able to come back in person. When we are going to deal with the changes to the Rules of Procedure to enable us to have the plenary meeting from January onwards, we all hope that it will be in person as far as possible. Members of the Bureau and the Standing Committee know, in my personal definition of face-to-face, that means that those who can be with us physically in Strasbourg are welcome. The French authorities are making every effort to ensure that this can be done. Those who will not be able to join us physically in January will be able, on an equal basis, to join us by distance.

The first point on our agenda is the exchange of views with Michael ROTH, Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, I think it is a great opportunity to have you on board at the start of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It is the first opportunity in which we can discuss our cooperation and the synergies, the synchronisation, the cooperation with the Assembly. One of them is the so-called trilogue, where, together with the Secretary General, we seek to find solutions in a cooperative way to political issues.

The German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers also coincides – at least in part – with your Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We all know that these are challenging times. Since one of the core elements on the table at European Union is how to address human rights, the rule of law and democracy, I am sure that we can in some way have our works coordinated to support you also in your Presidency of the European Union, specifically given the fact that one of your priorities is to have the European Union accede to the European Convention of Human Rights. The Assembly has modified its working methods to be able to deliver some substance to the Presidency. We adapt or adopt a holistic approach, so we look at certain elements from different angles, which has been the case in one of our Standing Committees concerning artificial intelligence, which is one of the priorities of the Presidency. We do hope that they will be, or that they will have, an added value in the work that you want to do creating a binding legal instrument concerning artificial intelligence, which is obviously the work that has to be done in the CAHAI. We also know that the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights is one of your priorities. During the January part-session we will have several reports regarding this topic, so we hope that this will also contribute to your Presidency.

And last but not least, or maybe two elements, although it might not be so visible in the priorities. One is the connection between the environment and human rights. We will have a full-fledged, holistic approach to that during the April part-session. Another of our priorities is addressing and combatting violence against women. That this is one of your top priorities and we will have the 10th anniversary of the Istanbul Convention.

We are very pleased to welcome you. We hope that we can work very intensely together in order to achieve results because this is something that we from the Parliamentary Assembly think of being of paramount importance. It's not about just talking and exchanging views, it is also about delivering substance from the Parliamentary Assembly to the national parliaments and, more specifically, from the Parliamentary Assembly to the Presidency, which for the next six months, will be yours.

2. Exchange of views with Mr Michael ROTH, Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Mr Michael ROTH (Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe): It has been a long time since I myself was allowed to work in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

That was an important experience for me as a young member of the German Bundestag. You will also know how important the Federal Republic of Germany considers the work of the Council of Europe. This at a time when authoritarianism is growing, when nationalism is becoming stronger and democracy is coming under pressure. It is important that we strengthen the forums and institutions committed to strengthening and defending human rights, the rule of law and democracy. How difficult this is, as the President pointed out, is what we are currently experiencing in the European Union. In the Council of Europe too cooperation on the basis of common values, common principles has become much more difficult than it was perhaps a number of

years ago. That is why our main concern is also to strengthen the Council of Europe in its core competence. For despite all the criticism, the Council of Europe has important instruments at its disposal, above all the European Court of Human Rights, to protect citizens from arbitrariness in very concrete terms. The Council of Europe has been arguing for years about how we actually deal with the more difficult partners, where there are also problems in implementing the judgments of the Court of Human Rights. That is precisely why it is so important that we keep these difficult partners in our team, because that will bring added value for the citizens. I would also like to thank you personally, because I know, of course, that human rights monitoring is also very much the responsibility of the Parliamentary Assembly, of many highly committed members of Parliament who are also facing up to difficult missions and without whose commitment it is not possible to imagine the work on human rights.

And just how difficult it is, a state of health emergency, a serious pandemic which is raging throughout the world, but above all in Europe. What does that mean for us? It not only changes our meeting and our cooperation, which is incomparably more difficult. Many things cannot take place at all in the Council of the European Union, for example, unless we come together physically. You are affected by this in exactly the same way. I hope that you will be able to meet again in January, in whatever format – hybrid or physical or virtual – because we need you. It is very important because we need you.

We will certainly talk about the new sanctions' mechanism again this morning. We want to take it forward, even after many controversial discussions in recent months. But of course, we also need the Rules of Procedure to be amended, and for that we need a corresponding vote in the Parliamentary Assembly. I am naturally disappointed, as is my esteemed Greek colleague, who wanted to cope with the Presidency with great commitment but has been slowed down in part by the virus. I would also have liked us to really get the Athens Declaration off the ground unanimously, because it also makes it clear that the pandemic also has serious economic and social consequences.

The issue also has implications for the protection of human rights, for the role of families and for citizens. How responsibly do states deal with their human rights and democratic obligations even during the pandemic? What exactly do we have in mind? I will only mention a few points, because I am looking forward to your questions. As a convinced European, I have been working for years to ensure that the obligations arising from the Lisbon Treaty for the European Union, namely, also to accede to the Convention on Human Rights, are now finally brought to a successful conclusion. I know how complicated this is, and I also know that there are reservations in the Council of Europe along the lines of: now we have to create special rules for the European Union. I am very much convinced that it is also in the interests of those states that are not or not yet members of the European Union to accede to the Convention on Human Rights. We also want to give these negotiations 47 + 1 a new dynamic and we want to make every effort to move closer to the accession of the European Union. To achieve this, we need to create flexibility in the European Union, but we also need a constructive spirit in the Council of Europe as a whole, and if we can make a contribution there as bridge-builders, as moderators and as promoters. We will also be holding a series of conferences in order to make it clear what our core concerns are. On 9 December we will be holding a major conference in Berlin to mark the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights which provides an opportunity to talk about where the problems actually lie. The main one is that judgments of the European Court of Human Rights are not always implemented. That weakens us all, and the question arises as to what contribution we can make. We will of course always try, within the bounds of our possibilities, to help states to meet their obligations.

What are the great tests that we are currently facing? What does it actually mean to enforce human rights in the digital age? We want to make good progress on this, because ethical principles are also at stake and the nation state cannot regulate anything on its own. You mentioned one, that is artificial intelligence. We need a legal framework, a legal instrument, preferably a framework convention. That is what we want to work towards, a framework convention which commits all the member States of the Council of Europe accordingly. We also want to organise a conference on this in January. A second important point with which you have all no doubt had your own experiences, painful experiences, is hatred and lies on the net. So how do we deal with hate speech? Here too we need appropriate protection. Because you also mentioned the pandemic and the Istanbul Convention, we are concerned that States that support the Istanbul Convention and have acceded to it are considering withdrawing from it. We also want to encourage other States to accede to the important Istanbul Convention. It has been in force since 2017 and it is a very, very important benchmark, yet we all note the appalling figures. In times of a pandemic, domestic violence against women has increased significantly and we cannot, ladies and gentlemen, close our eyes to this.

Then I would like to conclude with another point, because Europe is supposed to be the place where we can all be different without fear, but unfortunately, we are not. We do not live up to our own aspirations and that is why human rights policy is always minority policy. As a rule, the majority society need not have much to worry about. But minorities are in demand, and there are two priorities for us. We focus on the minorities, who are

almost always among the losers, who are almost always the first to fall victim to discrimination and exclusion. We must make it clear here that LGBTI rights are not special rights or privileges; they are human rights. Then we will put special emphasis on the largest ethnic minority in Europe, the Roma - and twelve million people who are exposed to exclusion and oppression almost everywhere in Europe. We need a new start here. And here I would like to include the young Roma in particular.

The Council of Europe is not just an invitation to politicians or to non-governmental organisations. Above all, we see a special responsibility here to involve young people more closely. We are also in close contact with the Council of Europe's Youth Advisory Council to this end. We want to involve young people more in our work because we want to win young people over to commitment and to a fight for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Council of Europe should once again become the conscience of Europe in matters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

I admit very self-critically that in six months we will not be able to change Europe from the bottom up. You should be able to rely on us making our contribution to making things work better by being available as interlocutors, always trying to build bridges between the various institutions of the Council of Europe and by promoting ideas that are important to us.

We do not only want to meet our financial obligations. We also want to make a clearer financial contribution, but to be honest, we should not talk about the financial points in this way, because for me it is also a matter of course. Build on us, bet on us. Because I am my government's representative for this Presidency, we will have to deal with each other more often in the coming months. I look forward to working with you.

The President: Thank you Mr Michael ROTH for your interesting and comprehensive statement. You do touch a sensitive point, namely the fact that only meeting by video is not exactly the way that we can in a very efficient way have things move forward, for the simple reason that the essence of political debate is seeing each other physically and being able to persuade colleagues or be persuaded by colleagues. And we do see there is some kind of a video fatigue that might come up which is why we absolutely are prepared already, as of this instant, to have a physical meeting as of January. Obviously, it is not probably possible for all delegations to be able to be here, but those who wish to be present will be able to do so.

You do touch on another issue which is very important to us, namely the fact that the issue of human rights is not an issue of the majority. There is no such thing as the dictatorship of the majority. In certain instances, a majority abuses its power, neglecting the rights of minorities – however you might define them – so this is certainly an issue that we have on board in our work. It is true that you cannot change or build up Europe in a six-month period, but you can put a number of pebbles in the river that have the course of the river change slightly and if we build on that we do have an impact in a six-month period.

Just to give you one example, we believe that the Athens Declaration which has been forwarded by the Greek presidency is of paramount importance even in the sense that we have it on our agenda today. You touched upon the finances, and though we would not dig into it, we will see what it means afterwards, but it is interesting to hear this.

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group
Can you give us a timeline of the progress you foresee for CAHAI's work on this legal binding instrument regarding AI?" There is a fine line regarding personal data involved in AI and so the data governance structures are very critical. How will the data governance structures be made an integral part of democratic governance structures so that we ensure that there is no interference from states and big firms with privacy of data? The Council of Europe clearly has a value added in the areas of democracy and human rights and rule of law, can you give us a sense of how the collaboration is going across international organisations regarding AI? And lastly, the youth initiatives is extremely critical, is there any plans for integrating the youth in terms of the AI work that the Council will be progressing on?

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of The European People's Party / Christian Democrats

It should be noted that the management of the crisis by some States is leading to the weakening of democratic systems. It is time to strengthen the implementation of the rights and obligations enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. In this respect, the inclusion of the Court's judgments among your priorities is very important. How could the Committee of Ministers, which has real power in our Organisation, better give life to our recommendations and how could it enjoin countries to exercise their duties.

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE): on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

You know that the Council of Europe needs more than ever a dynamic and involved Presidency of the Council of Ministers, because this period is both a context of weakening of our meetings and our collective dynamic, but also a context of increasing risk. We were very concerned about what happened with all the efforts of the excellent Greek presidency when the last Athens Declaration was adopted. We think that this is a bad signal, at a time when we need even more commitment from the Council of Ministers, both in terms of safeguarding the acquis of the Council of Europe but also in terms of the way in which this is applied. We really saw a major difficulty. What are the political and practical consequences that you draw from the divisions within the Council revealed in the Athens Declaration?

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA): on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

You've set out very clearly some of the challenges faced by the Council of Europe and I appreciate the points that you've made there. But a number of us have been struggling to ensure that what the Council of Europe does is much more relevant to the lives of ordinary people across the wider Europe. You have suggested that we bring young people in, which is a suggestion that I agree with. But could you set out much more clearly how you think that we are going to make the Council of Europe much more relevant across the whole of Europe?

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL): on behalf of the Unified European Left

It's great to hear you and I very much agree with you that we should do our utmost to keep problematic members, too, in the organisation, because it's in the benefit of their citizens. I very much agree with you. We have a lot of them, but one of them is Turkey with record numbers of arrested imprisoned journalists, politicians, academics and with a clear refusal to execute verdicts of the courts, for example in the case of Mr Kavala and Mr Demirtas. How will you try to convince this problematic member State to live up to its obligation? You cannot be a member State of the Council of Europe for free. You have to implement the judgement of the Court and you have to respect fundamental rights and freedoms that are enshrined in our Convention. So, could you please tell us how in practice you will operate with these problematic member States?

Mr Michael ROTH: The paramount question is the one about the significance of the Council of Europe and how the Council of Europe can be strengthened as an instrument and as a forum for human rights and democracy and the rule of law. Of course, we also want to contribute with our Presidency increasing the visibility of the Council of Europe, also through public events. That is why, I know that some people are always very sceptical about conferences, but we want to organise a whole series of events. I readily admit that under the most difficult circumstances, but also to make it clear, that the Council of Europe is needed now. Perhaps more urgently than ever because we are also losing certainties in States which have always been regarded as unquestionably democratic and committed to the rule of law. We no longer have these certainties, and that applies not only at international level, but above all throughout Europe.

The role of young people has been mentioned. We will of course invite young people accordingly. We have also once again increased the Council of Europe's resources for youth work in order to find ways of involving young people more closely in our work. We must take them seriously, and we must invite them. Above all we must listen to them. When it comes to young people and this is the work that has been mentioned in connection with artificial intelligence, there is a feasibility study on the subject, which is to be adopted by the committee in December, and then we hope for a clever mix of legally binding means and recommendations. You know what that means, and I believe that this mix will also help us to become much better than we have been up to now. Young people are of course much more affine in this digital era. They are also much more natural in dealing with the tests of endurance, which is why we would be stupid if we did not make young people the focus of our commitment here, too. Digitalisation, including the new technologies, is for most young people a pure matter of course.

The most important question you have asked, though, is whether we are actually dealing with those states that do not implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the way they should actually be obliged to. Germany - and I would like to point this out - has already chaired the relevant Committee of Ministers' format for human rights in the past six months. The marches have made us very much aware of the implementation of judgments. Progress has been made in some cases, but there are also prominent cases such as Kavala, who has been mentioned, which is not being implemented. For us that means that we will not tire of this. We will not keep quiet. Instead we will always bring these cases to the attention of the public. We will also hold talks behind the scenes. Just to illustrate once again how things stand at the moment, I rarely deal with figures like this. Perhaps it will help to illustrate how the situation is at present in the Council of Europe. Turkey is currently implementing 80% of the judgments while Russia is currently implementing 40% of the judgments. Perhaps this will help to set the situation straight. Every judgment, that is not implemented is one too few.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS (Cyprus, EPP/CD): Many challenges remain. Of serious concern are Turkish illegal actions in the eastern Mediterranean, the recent moves of Mr Erdogan in the city of Famagusta are unacceptable and deplorable. Greek Cypriots, but also many Turkish Cypriots, have condemned this act. Turkey must abandon its expansionist policies in Cyprus and let the two communities build their common future on the basis of the agreed UN framework without interference. How can the German presidency urge Turkey to give peace a chance in Cyprus?

Mr Tony LLOYD (United Kingdom, SOC): I give a big thanks to Mr Michael ROTH for his presence, but also his early remarks on the the Roma, a group of people who are at a massive disadvantage across our continent. But can I turn briefly to Belarus: we know that the recent election was fraudulent and I pay tribute to the opposition voices led by Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya. I also very strongly welcome the decision of the European Union and my own country on the sanctions' regime. How far can he in this present role lead, beyond the European Union, those willing in the Council of Europe to bring proper pressure on Belarus for change? And whether Belarus would be a good example of one of those issues in Europe that would warrant a conference that the Minister spoke about leading over the next six months?

Mr Akif Çağatay KILIÇ (Turkey, NR): The deplorable terrorist attacks that happened in Austria, and unfortunately, some of which happened before in France: now we have information that the perpetrators of these terrorist attacks, these murderers, were sent back from Turkey, from the border, to European countries with the information that they affiliate themselves a terrorist organisations. However, they went into the streets and were able to do these attacks, so I think the security intelligence approaches of the European continent have to be looked at, what are your thoughts on that? Germany has been able to develop a coronavirus vaccine, as we hear from the press. How do you think that we will be able to share this this vaccine with other countries?

Mr Michael ROTH: Regarding the conflict in the eastern Mediterranean, the European Union is very closely involved in this issue. It has made it clear that there will be no military solution, but that there must be a political resolution of this conflict. And as part of its Presidency, Germany has also taken on a special task here, namely to develop a political thread of dialogue between the actors which will help to solve these problems diplomatically and politically. That does not mean, however, that we have nothing to say, but there are clear declarations of solidarity by the European Union, including towards Greece and Cyprus. We, of course, have an advantage in the Council of Europe because both Cyprus and Greece, as well as Turkey, are members of the Council of Europe. That means that we can come together within one institution to engage in the necessary dialogue. Once again, we view this situation with great concern, and we are always mindful of the dangers involved in one country not abiding by the rules. If we see provocation, then we all need to sit around the negotiating table and try to find a practicable solution.

Concerning the question on Belarus. Regardless of the clear desire of the people of Belarus for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights, it is clearly in Europe's interest to find a way forward. That Council of Europe has repeatedly made it clear that we stand alongside those people who stand for freedom, who stand for peace, who stand for understanding and for human rights. After all, in our declaration, we stated that the elections were fraudulent and that we do not recognise the president of the country. I am also very grateful that the outstanding representatives of the Council of Europe have condemned the developments there and have made it clear that violence against peaceful demonstrators must cease. I would like to single out the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, who has made a number of clear statements in this regard. We hope that the protests in the streets will lead to a political process that will culminate in democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Belarus. The Council of Europe, of course, has a particular role to play in this. We want to see a round table, as well as a constitutional process, involving both the opposition and civil society. The expertise of the Venice Commission could make a very important contribution here.

Reference has been made to the problem of returnees, i.e. those with an Islamist background. That is a test, a great danger for all of us in Europe.

We are delighted that we may well have an opportunity as early as December to protect people better with a high-quality vaccine, and our efforts, as well as those of the European Union, are geared towards ensuring that people everywhere have access to the vaccines. The European Commission has secured hundreds of millions of doses so that people everywhere have access to them. We will support this process because we all know that the virus has no passport and that it does not care about national borders. In other words, it is in our best interest for people everywhere to be protected, and we will do everything we can to make that a reality.

Ms Ingerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD): As you are taking over the chairmanship from Greece you are about to lose the German EU presidency. What is the potential, do you think, for closer cooperation between the two organisations with regard to the common values, human rights and rule of law and democracy? And more specifically now, could you update us on the status of the negotiations on accession to the European Convention on Human Rights?

Mr Georgios KATROUGKALOS (Greece, UEL): The question concerns accession by the European Union to the European Social Charter. The revised Charter has been recently ratified by Germany. Social inequalities have risen during the pandemic. I think that it is a very necessary step for the European Union. Indeed, conflicts should be resolved through dialogue. But dialogue, like tango, needs two. How are we supposed to react with players who do not abide by the rules and violate the national legality? Turkey is a first example, but it is not the only one.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC): I think it is very important that you mentioned the Istanbul Convention, which is the most effective instrument we have to avert violence against women, and also the fact that you mentioned the rights of LGBTI persons. I would be interested to know what kinds of resources and strategies Germany plans to use in this fight, and what we can do as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to best support you in ensuring that these human rights are not undermined.

Mr Michael ROTH: Cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe is a central focus for us in the European Union -- one that is reflected in the Lisbon Treaty -- and the EU is poised to accede to the European Court of Human Rights. I believe there are two problems here.

Firstly, the Court of Human Rights has created a hurdle with regard to the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Secondly, there is concern among the non-EU member States of the Council of Europe, who believe that special rules will have to be created for the EU. I believe that we can go some way to allaying those concerns, and it is in all of our interest, in addition to being a benefit to the European Union. We have to put a date on accession, not at some point in the future but as soon as possible.

And then there are other forms of cooperation, which are often going on in the background, but which are extremely important. For example, the Venice Commission, which is highly regarded for its expertise, it is not true that it only operates in countries that are not members of the EU. I can recall a number of conflicts concerning the independence of the judiciary or constitutional processes, and EU member States have turned to the Venice Commission which has come forward with mediation remedies and with recommendations. So the Venice Commission is an extremely important instrument for members of the European Union as well. I can only agree with the wording of the Social Charter, as the social consequences of the pandemic cannot yet be assessed. That is why we hold the work of the Development Bank in high regard and also very much support its work. It provides financial assistance to many social projects, especially in those countries and regions which do not have much in the way of financial resources.

Since you probably also insinuated a bit with your question about how things actually stand in Germany, I would like to pass on the good news that the Bundestag has been ratifying the revised Social Charter for some time now, but a few days ago the Bundesrat, Germany's second chamber, also ratified it, which means that we are now on the verge of concluding this very complicated and very lengthy ratification process in Germany.

Then a very central question was raised again, to which I am probably not able to give a fully satisfactory answer: what do we do about States that do not fulfil their obligations? And here we have been intensely discussing a new sanction mechanism in recent months. Germany has participated very actively in this process and we hope that the sanctions mechanism can be adopted at the January meeting. We also believe this new sanctions' mechanism should be applied where valid, and we will help to ensure its application. As you all know, Article 46 is a very heavy-handed instrument. I am not going to characterise it as being a nuclear weapon, but I believe it is more of a theoretical construct, but it is an option. That is why we hope that the sanctions' mechanism will also lead to greater discipline on behalf of the countries in sticking to their commitments.

The last question regards minorities. It is important, first of all, that we give minorities a platform, that we take their concerns seriously, that we treat them as equals, that we show them respect, and that we make it clear that the Council of Europe is taking care of them. Not in any kind of paternalistic way, though, but as a matter of course. They are citizens. And minority rights always mean protecting people, no matter who they believe in or whether they believe at all, and regardless of where they come from or where they live. It might sound provocative to some, but this is the basis on which the Council of Europe is built. We are in the 21st century and it is time that we perhaps fine-tuned the instruments we already have to improve the protection of

minorities. This is a vast undertaking, of course, which we will certainly not complete in six months, but we want to breathe new life into the process.

Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI (Italy, SOC): We have seen that the rule of law has now become central to the fight against the pandemic. Is it possible to think about a greater link between the European institutions, the Council of Europe, including the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to elaborate a reflection on how respect for the rule of law?

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC): The described situation in respect of human rights is difficult. But I believe that there are also opportunities to achieve a turnaround, perhaps now, against the background of the developments in the United States, and I believe that it would be a very encouraging situation for the Council of Europe if we did not lose member States, but actually gained them. And I think Belarus could become the 48th Member State, of course under certain conditions. And I think it would be a good thing if the German Presidency could perhaps call it that and push it forward accordingly. The organisation's red lines have been addressed and we do not want to lose anyone, but the red lines are to allow access to the country, to make monitoring possible and to implement the court rulings. We had the Article 46(4) procedure against Azerbaijan in the Mammadov case and it has certainly had some effect and it is no use if there are member States that do not want to implement definitive rulings, then I encourage the Presidency to talk about these variants. The last request: please take a look at the financial situation of the Council of Europe, this important institution, and do everything you can to strengthen it financially.

Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW (Sweden, UEL): I was very happy to hear some of the priorities that were mentioned especially when it comes to the priority on focusing on minorities and minority rights. I'm very happy that we are addressing the problems of the Roma because I think that is extremely important. In light of all the discussions that are taking place in regard to the Black Lives Matters movement and all the demonstrations that we have been having in Europe does the Presidency have any plans on focusing also on people of African descent? There are 14 or 15 million black people living in Europe, many of them in Germany.

Mr Michael ROTH: First of all, I am also grateful for the comment concerning the action with regard to other minorities. We all had the somewhat naive hope that racism would decline in a globalised world in which borders would also become less important. But we experience institutional racism, we experience social racism almost everywhere, that is a heavy burden and it is of course also directed at people who come from other continents, who look different and I think that we have to make it clear here that these issues are in principle the common thread running through the whole work of the Council of Europe.

Once again, human rights policy accepts, defends and strengthens the dignity of every individual human being, irrespective of his or her ethnicity, religiousness, sexual orientation and origin. I think we have to do this as strongly as we can, and perhaps you can help us in this.

Belarus is my great dream, but not just today and not just since the peaceful demonstration in Belarus; I was in the country several times when the EU lifted the sanctions against Belarus, and I was the first German government representative to travel to Belarus in the hope that we would also make progress in abolishing the death penalty. After all, we had the moratorium, and you all know that a country that still uses the death penalty as a punishment cannot join the Council of Europe. And that is of course one of the central demands, one of the central expectations, of a democratised, liberated Belarusian society committed to human rights. If in the coming weeks and months we were to enter into this dynamic of a constitutional process, then we could all become godfathers and godmothers of more democracy in Europe, and if we can make a contribution to this, that would of course be quite wonderful.

The difficult financial situation of the Council of Europe has been mentioned, and I know that there is a strict austerity policy. There is now the moderate increase with this technical term "zero real growth" and we will continue to work to ensure that the Council of Europe is adequately funded. On the one hand, we need the reforms to be continued, so that the Council of Europe really does concentrate on its central tasks and becomes more effective. It is already doing so to some extent. On the other hand, the relatively modest sums of money that are also made available to the Council of Europe by the member States should always be viewed very favourably. Germany does not want to rise above others here, we are just as good and just as bad as others, I always dislike it when I talk so proudly about our own resources, but after all we have had voluntary additional contributions for years. Over the years they were one million, now they are two million, and we want to increase them significantly again next year. I have also spoken again about youth work, which is very close to my heart, where we want to make an extra €400 000 available for the European Youth Centre with its locations in Strasbourg and Budapest and for the European Youth Office. These are all small contributions, but if other States perhaps also participate, we could improve the difficult financial situation.

The last question, on which I have already spoken several times, is the question of the rule of law. Who could have imagined that we would one day have a serious discussion within the EU about how the principles of the rule of law could be better observed? We now have in the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we will introduce two new instruments. We have just introduced the rule of law check, the dialogue on the rule of law, which all EU Member States must undergo by checking the state of the rule of law everywhere, looking to see where things are going well, where things are going less well and where there are corresponding ground for a legal action and - this is still a matter of controversy at present - also the rule of law mechanism, that is to say the possible reduction of EU funds if the principles of the rule of law are not observed.

I have already referred to the beneficial work of the Venice Commission, and I can well imagine that we might perhaps take a rather more systematic look again at how the two institutions, the two forums of democracy, can cooperate even more closely and interlink their work in a way that is also respectful of each other.

Ms Petra STIENEN (Netherlands, ALDE): I am very pleased to hear your priorities for LGBT Roma rights and especially the focus on the Istanbul Convention and gender equality. I have been the rapporteur for the report "Upholding human rights in times of crisis and pandemics: the right to equality and non-discrimination" and I am also the rapporteur for the report on "the Gender dimension of foreign policy". And, indeed, women's rights are human rights and no country can celebrate equality when the rights of minorities are not fully respected. Yesterday was International Men's Day. It's not as famous as International Women's Day. The focus was on better health for men and boys with the aim to make practical improvements for the health and well-being of the male population. I think this is very relevant because there is an over representation of men and boys, with many dying and suffering from COVID-19. How will you include in your focus on gender equality, the role, rights and responsibilities of men and boys in gender equality and how can we as the Assembly, and especially the PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, be of assistance.

Mr Hovhannes IGITYAN (Armenia, ALDE, President of the Assembly): How we can restore the reputation of Council of Europe? I think we need very urgently one success story. Many resolutions were adopted and are being discussed, we make them urgent, but it doesn't work. The question of implementation has been raised and we need very urgently a success story. For example, how we can force Turkey to respect human rights, not only inside of this country but also outside.

Mr Samad SEYIDOV (Azerbaijan, EC/DA): As a representative of the country in which we just recently restored internationally recognised borders, we quite clearly understand what terror occupation means along with other difficulties and problems. Unfortunately, we observed a great deal of violation of human rights in Armenia. How will the Committee of Ministers activate their efforts in order to preserve human rights and other issues in our neighboring country? After all, this is extremely important for the peace that we try to import to our region.

Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI (Estonia, ALDE): I also would like to stress the topic of youth. In Estonia for example, and in all of Europe, we have such a problem that many young people are not involved in employment and training and education. And I welcome your intention to provide such young people with a possibility to take part in such a process. And I think that the aim of members of the Assembly is to give appropriate information to young people in their countries.

Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO (Ukraine, EPP/CD): I have quite a rhetorical and quite a hard question about the world of international organisations. We know that international organisations, many of them, including the Council of Europe and its Assembly, are in crisis because the things that have been decided are not implemented sometimes at the member States. So, what mechanisms could, short-term and long-term, really ensure that the human rights protection is happening in the member States?

Mr Michael ROTH: I will be very frank, Mr President and ladies and gentlemen, because I have been astonished by some of the questions.

To be quite honest, do you seriously believe that the Council of Europe can stop massive human rights violations? The Council of Europe can stop the constant breaches of international law on its own? I cannot answer this question in this way. After all, something would be done if all the member States of the European Union were to adhere to exactly what they have committed themselves to. This is not a kindergarten event. I must tell you quite honestly that we cannot, we have no military capabilities. At the end of the day, there is only one thing left for us, and that is the word, that is the conversation, that is the exchange. And we have also found that in the end that is not quite enough. That is why you and all of us have tried to create new instruments through the new sanctions' mechanism, which we hope will also come into force at the beginning of next year. But I do not expect that this will solve all the problems. Something must change up here. The attitude must change. We are decomposed by authoritarianism, by nationalism, by populism. This is a worldwide movement.

If you think that you can satisfy nationalism by creating military conflicts, yes, then in the end the people suffer.

It's the same with young people; when I talk to young people, wherever they are, they don't just want jobs. They want freedom, they want to be able to live in dignity, they want to live as they see fit, they do not want to be constantly bullied, oppressed and marginalised. I could tell you quite honestly that we in Germany benefit from the brain drain, but that cannot be our answer. Without the young generation, no state can build a promising future for itself, which is why you need the people in your own countries. And democracy and the rule of law are also the prerequisites for financial commitment, for investment, for greater competitiveness, for social stability, for prosperity for as many citizens as possible. If the poison of corruption no longer flows as it does at present, if we fight corruption more vigorously, then young people will also regain confidence in their home countries, and that too should be an important aspect of the Council of Europe's work.

When I was asked about Men's Day, I was a bit surprised. Men are of course just as much facing up to the dangers and risks of this pandemic. But I also have a quite different focus. As someone who is committed to gender justice, I am currently fighting to take away people's concern that gender is a fighting concept. Gender is not a fighting term. We are currently having a discussion in the European Union about the fact that the term gender must no longer appear in documents. Gender does not mean that we leave patriarchy and then introduce matriarchy. Gender equality means that everyone is equally involved, that there is equality of rights and social equality.

We can be glad that the Council of Europe has the Istanbul Convention, which obviously still does not seem to be a matter of course in the 21st century, because violence against women, especially in the family and private sphere, is still not being outlawed, which is something we urgently need. But that too is a test and an obligation for all of us.

Without provoking I just wanted to point out the limitations of the Council of Europe. Because we too do not have a button we can press according to the motto "but now human rights apply everywhere, now everyone sticks to the rules, now we can pacify all conflicts". And the tragedy which took place between Azerbaijan and Armenia I could not look at in detail now. But I like to do it also on occasion.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the invitation, for the very open discussion, for the many questions and I am at your service.

The President **invited** those who remained on the speakers' list but was not able to take the floor given lack of time, to put their questions in writing and to transmit them to the Secretariat.

3. Exchange of views with Mr Robert SPANO, President of the European Court of Human Rights

The President welcomed Mr SPANO.

Mr Robert SPANO: I recently spoke before the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. However, this is the first time that I've had the honour of meeting representatives of the Council of Europe's parliamentary body. The Court is not and must not be an ivory tower. It is essential that the Court and its President have regular contact with all of the 47 member States and the bodies in the European human rights protection system. The Parliamentary Assembly is among the most important of these bodies. Allow me to structure my sort of initial remarks into three brief parts.

First, I will say a few words more about the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the convention system, as seen through the lens of the Court and myself as its President. I will then, secondly, give you an overview of the way in which the court has functioned over these past few months, facing the challenges confronted by the pandemic. Thirdly and finally, I will include some remarks about the risks facing the convention system moving forward in safeguarding the convention's fundamental rights and values.

The Parliamentary Assembly is the fundamental cornerstone of the Council of Europe's institutional manifestation of democracy, which is the only system of governance recognised under the European Convention on Human Rights. The Parliamentary Assembly is the Council of Europe's beating democratic heart, due to its direct representation by parliamentarians elected by the peoples of Europe to national parliaments. I must say I've been very impressed with the Assembly's endeavors during its recent meetings. The resolutions and recommendations such as the recommendation of on the principles and guarantees of advocates is crucial for the convention system. This has demonstrated your resolve and determination not to allow the pandemic to halt your important work.

Of course, from the perspective of the Court, the Parliamentary Assembly plays a particularly crucial and direct role in electing the judges of the Court, a task which you carry out under article 22 of the convention. The procedure for appointing judges to the European Court of Human Rights is long and complex, particularly at the domestic level. But without a doubt the most important stages in this process are first the important examination of candidates by the advisory panel for the election of judges and the hearing of the three candidates by the PACE Committee on the Election of Judges, which makes a recommendation. Then, finally, with your Assembly, which has the last word and which proceeds with the election as such. It cannot be said often enough: the quality of the Court depends on the quality of the judges who make up its composition.

At your next session in January 2021, I understand that arrangements have been made to fill the two judge posts that are and will become vacant. These are the judges elected in respect of Greece and Switzerland. For the well-functioning of the Court it is important that these elections take place one way or another, given the sanitary situation.

The role of the Assembly is by no means limited to the election of judges. Indeed, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is an important and very effective link between the Court and the national parliaments. What makes the Assembly special, a dual membership of a European Assembly and a national parliament, is absolutely essential. The members are best placed to provide the link between the organs of the Council of Europe and the national parliaments.

The role of national parliaments in the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights is important but relatively recent. It has grown considerably in recent years. It is at least a two-tier role. Firstly, an increasing number of parliaments have set up committees to examine the compatibility of draft legislation with the European Convention on Human Rights. Whether they are committees dealing specifically with human rights or committees dealing with traditional legislation, these bodies are indispensable if the convention and, above all, our case-law is to be taken into account in order to prevent future violations. It goes without saying that for these committees to function, a special effort must be made to disseminate case-law to national parliaments and to parliamentarians and train officials in parliaments.

I know that the Assembly has taken up this task and the Court has been pleased to be associated with these efforts to disseminate case law. This is essential and I attach great importance to them.

The second aspect of the role of parliaments is downstream of our judgments. A number of these judgments make legislative changes necessary. This is particularly the case when it is on law, that is at the root of the violation found. Who is then better placed than parliament to remedy this violation?

To sum up this second part, the role of parliaments is now crucial both upstream in preventing violations and downstream in ensuring that judgments are properly executed. The same goes for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which is a sounding board for our judgments. Although under the Convention's supervision of the execution of the Court's judgment falls within the competence of the Committee of Ministers, the Assembly plays as well well an essential role in this process.

I would like to inform you of how the Court has adapted to the unprecedented situation created by the crisis that has arisen from COVID-19. A number of adjustments have been necessary from the very beginning of the first lockdown in March. We took exceptional measures to extend the time limits for bringing cases before the Court. Our aim was to take account of the difficulties faced by parties while continuing to carry out our core activities. All the courts service has worked very well. From the beginning of the lockdown, teams were put in place to ensure the continuity of requests for interim measures under rule 39 of the Rules of Court. The work was done entirely remotely. It is interesting to note that more than 80% of the interim requests concerned issues related to the COVID-19 crisis. As ours is an international court, an important feature was the organisation of Grand Chamber hearings, which took place by video conference and which the outside world was able to watch online. This was a major technical challenge. We held four hearings in June and July and two in October. For most of these hearings the parties were not on site and yet everything went well. We were also able to guarantee the public nature of these hearings, thanks to their re-transmission on the internet. I know that they were very widely watched and we received positive feedback particularly from the national courts, which asked us about our way of working in this exceptional situation. During this period, new technologies have demonstrated how indispensable they have become. They have enabled us to continue working at a distance adopting judgments and decisions. By way of example, we have decided more than 33 200 applications since the beginning of the year. If we look only at the number of applications concluded with a judgment delivered by the Grand Chamber and the chambers, there has been an increase of 23% compared to last year.

We are a court of only 47 judges with approximately 270 lawyers, but the number of pending cases currently stands at 61 250. Seventy- five percent of these concern five countries. First of all, the Russian Federation is our largest provider of cases, with just over 15 000 applications, followed by Ukraine and Turkey, with around 10 000 applications each. Next come Romania with 8 200 applications and Italy with 3 500 pending applications. If I have to take stock of this extraordinary period of late, I can justify the claim that in these dramatic circumstances the Court has been able to adapt. This has been made possible thanks to the dedication of the judges and staff of the Court who have been able to cope with the situation. Their commitment has been exceptional. However it is clear that with our considerable backlog of cases, the pandemic has caused delays in some cases. Including at the Grand Chamber level, but we are working as hard and fast as we can. The Court is a human institution. It can't perform miracles and it can't solve all evils. It is first and foremost a court of law. It is not a policy or a political institution.

When we are facing now moving forward with a heavy pending case load but also external risks to the convention system and its fundamental rights and values. An efficient, impartial, and independent judiciary is the cornerstone of a well-functioning system of democratic checks and balances. The judiciary's role in a democracy is to guarantee the very existence of the rule of law. In a democracy, all persons and state authorities are bound by the law. Without the rule of the law there can be no effective democracy. These are the constitutional cornerstones of the convention system. This is a message I have consistently disseminated in my public speeches and during my discussions with those in power. No one, no man is above the law.

Allow me to clear up a misunderstanding I often hear. It is to consider judicial independence as sufficiently guaranteed under the Convention by formal legal independence. No, ladies and gentlemen, that is not sufficient. No less important is the actual or *de facto* independence of judges. Now, what does this mean? It means that governments cannot control the courts. The Convention does not tolerate such actions. No external pressure can be placed on judges while exercising their legitimate and constitutionally mandated functions. That includes political pressure and media campaigns against judges, as the Court has made clear in a number of judgments.

I think it is safe to say that none of us will ever forget the year 2020, mostly due to the unprecedented circumstances the pandemic has brought about, but also for other reasons. However, this year has been very important for the convention system culminating in the celebration of the 70 years since the European convention on Human Rights was signed in Rome on the 4th of November 1950.

But we live in uncertain times. We face dire challenges to the rule of law, human rights, and judicial independence, as I mentioned. I therefore use this opportunity to state the following in no uncertain terms: it is the duty, the responsibility of every member State of the Council of Europe to secure the fundamental values of the convention system. The European Court of Human Rights, the judicial body of the Council of Europe serves all the peoples of the member States, all of them, without question and has protected their human rights and fundamental freedoms for the last 60 years independently and impartially. Be sure that the court will continue to do so.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

We have some red lines, and one red line is the implementation of the Court's judgments. What you think about the situation in Russia? What do you think about the constitutional decisions which in the end result in non-compliance with judgments delivered by an international court? What do you think about the situation in Turkey? When can we expect new judgments on the cases of Kavala, Demirtas, and others concerning Turkey? As we have to respect the independence of the judiciary, I do ask to comment but rather put a question. Maybe you can give us some explanations to understand the purpose of your visit to Turkey which led to some criticism?

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of The European People's Party / Christian Democrats

For nine months, since 5 February 2020, we have been waiting for the verdict in the case of *Ástráðsson v. Iceland*. This is a very important, fundamental case about the abuse of executive power and its illegal influence in the procedures for appointing the judge. Why is it taking so long? For two years you have had complaints from Polish judges that are not being dealt with. Perhaps Rule 39 needs to be applied?

Mr Olivier BECHT (France, ALDE): on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

In the case of the COVID-19 crisis, are there any derogations under Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights and what is the Court's opinion today on freedoms that could be suspended as a result of the health crisis we are facing?

Sir Roger GALE (United Kingdom, EC/DA): on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

In your opening remarks you pointed out, quite correctly, that there are a number of countries that fail to execute findings of the Court on a serial basis. You also suggested that parliaments have a role to play in this, and I accept that entirely, except that, of course that is like asking the fox to look after the chicken coop, because the countries that are not implementing your findings, are the countries that are also controlling their delegation members to the Parliamentary Assembly. Is it not down to the Committee of Ministers, as well as the Parliamentary Assembly, to get to grips with this and take sanctions against countries that will not - because they choose not to - implement the decisions?

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL): on behalf of the Unified European Left

You spoke about more than 61 000 pending cases at this moment, the greater part coming from only five of our member States. Behind these numbers there are always people. One of these people is Selahattin Demirtas, who has been imprisoned in Turkey for four years now and as the leader of the third biggest party in the Turkish Parliament with millions of voters behind him. Justice delayed is justice denied. For him and for so many other people who are waiting before the Court takes a decision upon them, it becomes even clearer that that justice is delayed and therefore denied. What should we all do together in order to give justice in time to all these people? To Selahattin Demirtas, yet also to all these other people who are waiting for a verdict from the Court?

Mr Robert SPANO: Thank you very much indeed for these questions. Let me first make the following caveat: I am a president of a court. As a president of a court there are limits to the extent to which I can discuss pending cases. I hope the parliamentarians will accept that; but let me try to give an answer to all the questions that have been raised to the extent that I can.

The first answer to Mr Frank SCHWABE, and it goes to a question raised by others as well: the execution of the Court's judgments is a primordial concern of the Council of Europe. It is one of the bigger issues, and I also echo what was also mentioned by Sir Roger GALE, it is a fundamental issue for the legitimacy and authority of the Council of Europe.

It is under the Convention the role of the Committee of Ministers to see to it, using the mechanisms at hand, that judgments rendered by the Court are executed in a timely manner. But here I have to be careful – under the convention system, the execution of judgments is a political process. That is why it's in the Committee of Ministers and not in the hands of the Court, like for example in the Inter-American system. I am not in a position, and it would not be appropriate for the President of the Court, to give indications to you or to members of the Committee of Ministers on how that process should unfold.

My only message is: every member State of the Council of Europe has an unequivocal, unconditional obligation under international law to execute the judgments of the Court. There are no prevarications, this is not an *à la carte* system, you cannot pick and choose the judgments you want to execute – all of them have to be executed if you intend to show good faith to the system.

Question related to my visit to Turkey: let me say again, and again be very clear, the President of the Court is a president of a court not for five states, not for 20 states, not for 25 states, but for 47 member States.

It requires the President of the Court, which the President has done for decades, to have official visits within the member States to deliver robust messages about the work of the Council of Europe and the judgments of the Court. It goes without saying that the messages then produced are messages which derive from the case law of the Court. That was the purpose of the visit to Turkey and those messages were made clear. It is of course for others to determine how they perceive that to have happened, but that was the purpose of the visit and it was made with the full intention of bringing to bear and to make clear the problematic aspects of the judgments, and judgments which have not been executed by the member State in question.

On the issue of the independence of the judiciary, Mr Aleksander POCIEJ referred to the Icelandic case *Ástráðsson v. Iceland*. Judgment will be delivered on 1 December, in 10 days' time, by the Grand Chamber. The Polish cases referred to and cited by Mr POCIEJ have already been communicated. About ten cases on the independence of the judiciary were communicated. I hope that our judgement in those cases will be delivered next year.

With regard to Mr BECHT's question, ten member States have now notified the Secretary General of a derogation on the basis of Article 15, but the Court has not, at this time, delivered a judgment or has our Court given a framework of the principles that are being applied on the basis of Article 15 in the context of the pandemic. That takes time. It is now up to the national judges to decide, to deal with cases on the basis of

Article 15 in their own countries.

In relation to the question by Tiny KOX, let me just say again, I'm not in a position to discuss pending cases before the Court, but let me make a general observation, I can do that in relation to the case of Selahattin Demirtaş because I decided that case in chamber, where we found a violation of the Convention and required the release of the parliamentarian in question. The case was referred to the Grand Chamber. I am not in the Grand Chamber, as you can imagine, because I decided the case in chamber. The case is moving as fast as possible. There have been delays in the case due to the pandemic but we hope that a judgment will be rendered as soon as possible. Sixty-one thousand cases in the Court, as I tried to demonstrate during my intervention at the outset, in a human institution of limited resources, has an impact on how fast we can proceed. We are not miracle workers but we're doing the best we can to deliver justice to all the applicants before us in an expeditious manner.

Ms Kamila GASIUK-PIHOWICZ (Poland, EPP/CD): When can we expect judgments in some key cases of fundamental importance for the Polish judiciary system and actually for the European judiciary system too? In particular I refer to the case of Judge Tuleya against Poland. Just two days ago, Judge Tuleya lost his immunity as part of political repressions against the judiciary and he may soon end up in prison just because of rendering a judgment that didn't please the government. When can we expect the judgment in case *Xero Flor w Polsce sp. z o.o. v. Poland*? It concerns the status of the so-called standings of the Constitutional Court's members, appointed unlawfully by the governing party for a post already occupied. The Constitutional Court issued a month ago a barbaric judgment effectively banning legal abortion in Poland. The Polish judiciary is really counting on these judgments.

Ms Laura CASTEL (Spain, NR): We fear there is a disparity of criteria among Council of Europe member States concerning the length and timings of high instances at national level, which delays access to justice before the European Court of Human Rights for the victims. Some constitutional courts, for instance, often keep appeals for protection of fundamental rights ceased and forgotten, pending a decision several years, which blocks access to Strasbourg. This is particularly anguishing for victims in prison. Indeed, the rule of exhaustion of domestic remedies is a requisite to lodge an application. What could we parliamentarians do to harmonise these criteria for preventing procedural abuses, considering that justice delayed is justice denied?

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD): The Court of Human Rights is the cornerstone, as you mentioned, of our Organisation and reforming the Court has been important in order to reduce the number of cases pending before the Court. However, the caseload is still substantial, you mentioned more than 60 000 still pending. What is being done to reduce the workload and how can we parliamentarians contribute to this? Thank you.

Mr Robert SPANO: First, as regards the question from the Polish representative, I would revert again to the answer I just gave. We have in the past few months communicated a number of cases dealing with complaints related to the independence and impartiality of members of the Polish judicial system. They are now being dealt with as a matter of priority by the Court and hopefully, as soon as observations from parties have been delivered to the Court, the Court will begin dealing with each and every of these cases in the coming months. Now, actual timelines are of course difficult to give in individual cases. And as I mentioned before, with all due respect, I am of course not able to discuss individual pending cases, but in a general manner my message is this: cases that are being dealt with and communicated in relation to the question of the independence of the justice system in Poland are being dealt with as a matter of priority in the Court under our case processing mechanism.

Second question from the representative of Spain: the effectiveness of domestic remedies is a crucial aspect of domestic law and practice. If a remedy, like a constitutional court appellate system or a supreme court appellate system, contains backlogs and clogging in the system then it is of course for the national legislature and the national parliaments to reflect on how to make a remedy at national level more effective. There parliamentarians have a direct role. It is a perennial feature of most judicial systems today that are faced with mounting backlogs of cases. And there it is extremely important to identify the problem and to try to find ways with changes in legislation, changes in practice, to try to accommodate and find ways to open up more ready access.

As regards the third question presented by the parliamentarian from Norway: the backlog of cases in the Court has been a perennial problem for a decade. As you know, under the Interlaken process, which is now culminating and just recently was the subject of a declaration by the Committee of Ministers in Athens, we are now moving into the second phase of our reform process. That will mean that we will now try to focus as much as possible on immediate identification of priority cases, impact cases, cases that are relevant now at this moment for the European citizenry, so we can deal with them as fast as possible. But that we have to realise, will have an impact on other cases which are not identified as being of the same level of importance. This goes

back to the Court's prioritisation policy which has been in place for 12 years and that we are now in the in the midst of reformulating, so as to make the Court as impactful and relevant as possible for all of Europe moving forward.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR):

I participated in the meeting you had with the Speaker of the Turkish Parliament in Ankara. Your remarks were really educating to me as a new member of PACE. Some colleagues mention Turkey repeatedly in relation to non-implementation. The case of Demirtaş was also mentioned. However, I would like to urge the colleagues to remember that Greece does not implement a decision of the Court for more than one decade. This could be partially, at least when we are speaking about the Court and Court's decisions. On inter-State applications: they are increasing and the last decision on the application brought by Armenia was perceived in my country as politically biased. Do you have any plan to reduce the number of inter-State applications through legal criteria?

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH (Hungary, EPP/CD): We have discussed with Mr Michael ROTH that Council of Europe's intention is strong, that the European Union should accede to the European Convention on Human Rights. How do you foresee that? What do you expect from that process? Do you expect that the European Union is becoming more sensitive to human rights especially in those fields where they have not been until now, for example, the issue of national minorities?

Mr Georgios KATROUGKALOS (Greece, UEL): My question is a follow-up on the last one. It regards the accession of the European Union of the Convention. I would like to ask you if there are remaining legal, not political problems, taking into account former reticences of the Court of Justice for the European Union. And secondly, I would like to ask your opinion as a jurist, not as President of the Court since you lack the competence, regarding an eventual accession of the European Union also to the European Social Charter.

Mr Robert SPANO: The first issue in relation to the question posed by Mr Ahmet YILDIZ from Turkey. It relates as I understand to the recent decisions of the Court under rule 39 of the Rules of Court in inter-State applications or in relation to the inter-State conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is not for me to explain individual decisions of that sort. Only to say this: the Court has had a consistent practice going back to *Georgia v. Russia* in 2008 of being in a position to take a view on whether Rule 39 measures should be imposed so as to alleviate possible suffering during an inter-State conflict. The legal basis is Rule 39 of the Rules of Court and Article 34 of the Convention, the right to individual application. Those are the binding legal precedents for the imposition of Rule 39 in these types of situations. And Rule 39 measures are to be implemented and executed by all concerned parties.

As regards to the question posed on the EU accession issue by Mr Zsolt NÉMETH from Hungary, here I have to be careful because here I tread into a politically sensitive issue. I would then perhaps use this opportunity to answer Mr Zsolt NÉMETH's question also in relation to the question posed by Mr Georgios KATROUGKALOS. Are there from the perspective of the European Convention on Human Rights any legal problems for the EU acceding to the Convention? My answer is no. The EU acceding to the Convention is, as such, not problematic from the perspective of the application of Convention rules. Now, whether there are considered to be constitutional or technical problems on the EU side as viewed through the lens of opinion 2/13 by the European Court of Justice, that is for the European Union to assess, and I would not like to enter that terrain which is not for me.

As regards the EU accession to the European Social Charter, again, that is an issue which I would not like to comment on simply because of two things first: the European Social Charter is not a norm the Court is directly applying. As you may know it does so through the vehicle of the European Convention on Human Rights with its harmonious interpretation, but it is not as such a norm which we are competent to apply and interpret independently. So I would not take a view on EU accession to the European Social Charter.

Ms Alma ČOLO (Bosnia and Herzegovina, EPP/CD): In your last report I saw that the Protocol n° 16 gives the Court power to give an advisory opinion. The Court has delivered only one advisory opinion on the request of the French Court of Cassation. Do you think that a larger number of requests from the highest judicial authorities will enhance the cooperation between national courts and European Court of Human Rights, and will reinforce the understanding and the implementation of the Convention?

Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN (Russian Federation, NR):

How are we going to be able to come up with a solution to the problems mentioned with regard to the issue of the conflict of interest of judges at the European Court of Human Rights given the influence that is being exerted on them by some NGOs, which are political ones, for instance, George Soros' foundation?

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL): I want to use the opportunity here from Reykjavik, Iceland to congratulate you with your nomination in April, which is a great honor for Iceland. I, like many other members of the Assembly, are extremely worried about the backlash of women's rights in the Council of Europe member States. We see that firmly with the rulings of the Constitutional Court in Bulgaria on the Istanbul Convention and the opposition on that same Convention in Russia. But the most recent ruling of the Polish Constitutional Court on women's rights access to abortion is a serious threat to women's rights and life and health. I would like to hear from you if you can, speak about how the Court of Human Rights in any way can deal with those rulings in other ways than wait for formal cases from the citizens of Poland to the Court. Or, can the Court give some other direct messages to the member States to fulfill their obligation to the Convention they've undergone?

Mr Tony LLOYD (United Kingdom, SOC): On the subject of prioritisation of cases, could you talk us through how this is working in practice? Because, of course, the fundamental importance of the Court is that it does establish the regime for recognition of human rights across the whole of the European family. But could you also tell us what we can do to help you with this enormous backlog? Is justice delay, justice denied? Money of course is difficult at the moment as are the resource of more lawyers, more judges. What are the things that would materially help you and the Court to deliver the justice that we all want to see you deliver?

Mr Robert SPANO: First, as regards to the question posed by the parliamentarian Ms Alma ČOLO from Bosnia and Herzegovina, actually we have now delivered two advisory opinions under Protocol n° 16. As you mentioned the first was a request by the French Court of Cassation, and also recently a request from the Armenian Constitutional Court in which we have already delivered an advisory opinion. We now have two pending Protocol n° 16 requests from the Slovak Constitutional Court and also from the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania. So, all in all, four advisory opinions that are being dealt with. I think that shows that the system is up and running and it is one in which, in my view – I'm a strong supporter of the Protocol n° 16 mechanism – allows us to give advisory opinions on general issues of conventional law within a reasonable time to assist the national authorities.

As regards the question posed by parliamentarian Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN, I give the same answer that I have given and my predecessor Alexandre Sicilianos gave to the Committee of Ministers in May: there is no allegation which is credible, in our view, on any influence by non-governmental organisations on the work of this Court. The fact that judges of the Court may have in their previous professional lives had experience and have training in the field of human rights law through work in non-government organisations shows the diversity of background that is necessary for an international court. But the main issue here is that the Parliamentary Assembly elects the judges. The judges' Curriculum Vitae, with all of the background information about their life's work, is before you when you make these determinations. It is for you to decide the diversity of the group that is within this Court. I would simply say, I do not accept the allegations that have been made in this report and that is the same opinion that has been presented by my predecessor Alexandre Sicilianos.

As regards the question posed by my Icelandic colleague Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR, it is true that rulings are being made across Europe which you may as politicians find problematic. You must accept, I hope that I'm not in a position to take any deal on judgments that have recently been rendered by some constitutional court. I would say as a general matter, under the convention system an application can be lodged with the Court and it has to be an application that is lodged by a person or a group of persons that have standing as victims, to be able to allege the violation of the Convention. Now if that violation is alleged to transpire from a judgment of the Constitutional Court, that is perfectly possible, and when such an application, if and when, such an application arrives at the court, it will be dealt with as fast as possible.

The final question from the representative from the UK, Mr Tony LLOYD, I will again go to an answer that I gave some of your previous colleagues: how can parliamentarians assist the Court when it comes to reducing the backlog? That is by doing the job that member States are meant to do, and that is to protect human rights at the national level. That is done through legislation at national level that provides for an ability to deal with the human rights problem immediately in its infancy, to provide tools to protect victims of human rights violations, with reparations, with effective remedies. All of this is for national governments to create. The more national parliaments create a culture of human rights where the national parliaments take their duties of upholding the constellation of rights and values under the Convention meaningfully, the more it will reduce the backlog in the long run. The work has to be done at national level. That is where the people require the actual protection take place. That of course requires often a struggle at a national level between political forces. I understand that. But the final resolution of the evils of human rights violations can only, to a limited extent, be done many years later in the European Court of Human Rights. But when we get the cases you can be sure we deal with them as quickly and fast as possible.

The President: thanked Mr SPANO who agreed to answer in writing questions of members who were on the speakers' list but were unable to ask a question due to lack of time.

4. Examination of new credentials

The Standing Committee **ratified** the credentials of new members of the Assembly submitted by the delegations of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Latvia and the Netherlands (Doc. 15185).

5. Modifications in the composition of committees

The Standing Committee **approved** changes in the composition of Assembly committees (Commissions (2020) 09 and Addendum).

6. Request for a current affairs debate (under Rule 53 of the Rules of Procedure)

The Standing Committee **decided** to hold a current affairs debate on "The Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship on: 'Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law'" and appointed Mr Jacques MAIRE as the first speaker.

7. Agenda

The Standing Committee **adopted** the revised draft agenda (AS/Per (2020) OJ 08 rev2).

8. Minutes

Ms Petra STIENEN (Netherlands, ALDE): asked, in her presentation of the report "Upholding gender, equality and non-discrimination in times of crisis and pandemics", the words "older people" be replaced by "all the people".

The Standing Committee **approved** the minutes of the Standing Committee meeting held on 12, 13, 22 and 23 October 2020.

9. References to committees

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

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

Draft declaration on the parliamentary contribution to the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship on: "Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law"

The President said two more items were on the morning agenda: the current affairs debate on "The Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship on: 'Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law'" and the adoption of the draft declaration on the parliamentary contribution to the Athens Declaration. The current affairs debate will treat both as to the substance.

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE): opened the debate which concludes months and months of work, both on the side of the Parliamentary Assembly and on the side of the Council of Ministers. It is very important to see that, at a time when the pandemic crisis is putting all the institutions under a bit of general anesthesia, the Council of Europe is responding, and this statement by the Committee is really quite powerful testimony to that.

First of all, and this is important, our standards, those of the Council of Europe, are recalled very clearly as principles to which the action of States in an emergency situation must adhere. That is important because they are fairly simple principles, but they are really being undermined during this period. The measures that are taken during such states of emergency must be strictly necessary, proportionate, non-discriminatory, apply only for the period of time necessary and end once the situation is normalized. They have to be fully in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and other human rights obligations and must be constantly reviewed. This reminder of the declaration is important because we note that these principles are not applied

in a homogeneous or satisfactory manner in the territory of member States.

I would also like to share with you the key political messages of this declaration. First, the commitment of member States to the system of the European Convention on Human Rights. Indeed, this period justifies highlighting a real threat, and the declaration rightly points out that this threat affects certain categories of people in particular, not all of whom are affected in the same way. Some groups, such as young people, the elderly or the disabled, migrants or minorities, are more at risk than others, for various reasons, as the representative of the German Presidency just presented.

The response to the crisis will take into account this diversity of impact and, if not, it is likely that the risks of major human rights violations, which are already present in daily life, may take on the form of even more acute risks and realities for these categories.

Furthermore, the declaration addresses an important point which is disinformation or manipulation of information. As you know, this manipulation is now developing with COVID-19. Access to reliable information is crucial in the face of the fake news that is developing.

Another problem is the issue of new digital technologies and artificial intelligence, which is a challenge. It is like Aesopian language: it is both the worst and the best of things. They help us, in many countries, to fight the pandemic, but they also regularly harm our democracies.

Finally, we share the plea in the declaration for multilateral cooperation to combat the pandemic and its effects. We will see that very importantly through the work that we are going to carry out on access to vaccines, but also in addressing other contemporary challenges, such as the environmental crisis.

Overall, therefore, this is an excellent statement. We fully recognise it because it is also the result of active intra- and inter-institutional co-operation within the Council of Europe. We can, as a Parliamentary Assembly, welcome it, because we have fed into the thinking of our governments. I think it is clear to everyone that almost all the evidence I have just mentioned is relevant to the subject of the reports we have debated and adopted this year. I am therefore pleased that the work of our fellow rapporteurs has found political recognition from our governments.

Unfortunately, this declaration also reveals a major problem with our Organisation: we present the Council of Europe as an organisation based on common values and a shared vision of them, and from this point of view, the Athens Declaration is by no means a revolution. It is a clear and lucid analysis of the application of our principles in a context of crisis and yet this declaration has not been signed by all our member States. The point of disagreement lies in the reference to the Istanbul Convention. This is all the more deplorable given that violence against women is increasing dramatically in many countries with the health crisis. We therefore collectively renew our support for this convention, which represents one of the pillars of the Council of Europe's values and which cannot be denied.

Of course, this is not the first time that the Committee of Ministers has not unanimously agreed to adopt a common text. However, a growing number of disagreements on such fundamental issues raises the question of the sharing of our values and the vision of human rights by all our member states. It seems unacceptable to us that some states should call into question such important achievements of our institutions. Do we still have enough will and courage to rise above electoral considerations and populist temptations to renew our commitment to these common values?

When a government decides to play with the institution to provoke a crisis, it is not seeking to defend the interests of its people; it is not seeking to move the Council of Europe in a particular direction in terms of the protection of rights: it simply wishes to use the Council of Europe for its own domestic policy debate. That is regrettable and I very much fear that we may meet again in a very forthcoming presidency.

Finally, I wish to reiterate our support, including on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, for the initiative of our President for the parliamentary contribution to the Athens Declaration. This declaration is a useful exercise for us. First, it helps to situate our Parliamentary Assembly in the decision-making process within the Council of Europe. Secondly, it makes clear our contribution to the discussions at the level of the governments of our member states. Thirdly, we believe that this approach should be systematic in the work of our Assembly, including on other flagship subjects such as the link between human rights and the environment or the human rights dimension in the context of the development of artificial intelligence.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

The debate about the Athens Declaration is a source of worry, of doubt and of consternation not only because some countries used, or maybe I better say misused, the pandemic to declare a state of emergency and thus weaken parliamentary democracy and rule of law. It is also alarming as it puts spotlights on shortcomings of these countries to misuse the virus to further put particular human rights under pressure. I think about Poland and Turkey, who loudly discussed resigning from the Istanbul Convention, who want to extinguish LGBTI rights, and especially Poland, who puts additional pressure on women's rights by further diminishing their self-determination. I think about Hungary, who refused to vote for the Athens Declaration, together with Turkey and Azerbaijan, because of its reference to the Istanbul Convention. What does that mean for a country that wants to take the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe next year? I do not expect Hungary to ignore women's rights, not to recognise the Istanbul Convention as the most effective legal protection for women from violence we have. I do not expect this country to make LGBTI rights vanish by changing its constitution. We will not accept that member States do not uphold the core values, the basic principles and the fundamental human rights enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights. Especially, we will not accept that from a country that wants to be taken seriously in its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe next year. Hungary, please rethink your attitudes.

Ms Kamila GASIUK-PIHOWICZ (Poland, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of The European People's Party / Christian Democrats

Democracy dies in darkness. Now it dies in the darkness of the worldwide pandemic. Today not only people's health and lives are at risk, but in some countries also human rights and democratic institutions. COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge for human rights, for democracy and the rule of law. During the pandemic we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Convention obliges countries to take measures aiming to protect human lives. This imperative however is not a permission for countries to trample rights, suppress freedoms, dismantle democracy or violate the rule of law. Especially in my country, in Poland, a government with a solid record in violating the rule of law starts to enforce new bills that threaten civil and human rights. Within just a few months we faced an attempt to cripple presidential elections, a political campaign against the LGBTI community, hundreds of new prosecutions against independent judges, ongoing illegal efforts to take control over the Ombudsman office, and last but not least, unprecedented barbaric rulings of the Constitutional Court with unlawful elected judges that ban abortion in case of lethal fetal defects, and violence of police against women who peacefully demonstrated against it on the streets. Abusing women's rights is not a Polish issue only. Tackling increased risk of violence against women and their dignity is a serious challenge for all member States. The Convention shall protect and guarantee the dignity and identity of all human beings without discrimination and it shall promote respect for the integrity and other rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals. On the other hand, it is very important that we raise the ethical, legal and practical considerations concerning the health of citizens. The COVID-19 pandemic and other potential similar crisis that may occur in the future should not be taken as a justification for the adoption of emergency legislation introducing restrictions on freedom of information that go beyond what is lawful, necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory. Citizens confidence in public authorities and democratic institutions and process is essential in times of crisis. Curtailing public debate and restricting the functioning of the democratic system may not only undermine democracy as such but also damage people's utterance to it and reduce the effectiveness of any emergency action taken to address the causes of the crisis and protect the population. Let me close by quoting the words of Poland's first non-communist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, leader of the Polish democratic opposition and the United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. This exceptional man said one time "freedom is like air, we appreciate it mostly when we start being short of it". In the last months we have witnessed how true these words are. We need to make all possible efforts so that our acquired freedoms and human rights do not erode and their applicability returns back to normal as soon as possible.

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA): on behalf of the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

Mr Jacques MAIRE put a very clear message across to us. These pandemics will continue to happen. Crises will continue to happen. The Athens Declaration sets out in many ways what we have to do in a crisis. Every country in Europe in some way, some more than others, we have heard from speakers, has had to suspend part of their democracy. They have put back elections, big changes in the way that parliaments operate, whatever it may be. And I think that is acceptable. What is quite rightly not acceptable is when we get a draconian way of certain countries using it to either subject minorities to unfair procedures, or they use it to affect their entire population. A point that was also made is the role of social media. You can call this AI, you can call it whatever you want, but the false and fake news that we now get is endemic: anti-vaccination, people who believe in conspiracy theories, these are not just within the Council of Europe, this is across the world. And they are incredibly dangerous. And they undermine not just countries, they undermine people. And the situation we have with the vaccine which will affect every country in Europe and every country in the world, regardless of size or where it is, is crucial. We must make sure that the vaccinations, when they are available,

by whatever country, by whatever company and by whatever means, are distributed equally across not only Europe but the world. And if we don't, not only do we let down our own people, we let down the people of the world. And that is something we have to be hard on. On the Court of Human Rights, it is the right of every human to be able to have a life that they wish to lead within the parameters of government of their country. What we need under the Athens Declaration, which I think is being put forward, is that this ability is not only just enshrined for the short term, but I think we need to look enshrining more for the longer term. The point of what has happened is that in these eight months we've had to change the way we operate. At no time in human nature has this gone the way it has, because of the speed of communications, because of our ability to communicate as we are now: instantly. We need to be able to enshrine much more this, and human rights needs to take that on board. Not only we did hear from the German Minister, although I couldn't hear most of what he said because of the translation problems, but also we heard from the President of the Court of Human Rights, that respect comes with a responsibility, not just of the citizen but of the people.

Mr Georgios KATROUGKALOS (Greece, UEL): on behalf of the Unified European Left

As has already been said by the other colleagues, the Athens Declaration is a very useful document, not because it's a revolutionary one, but exactly because it summarises the basic stance of our Assembly, not just vis-à-vis the pandemic, but also vis-à-vis the more general problems of protection and defence of human rights. It stands in defence of human rights, multilateralism and also international legality. And it is also very important that it stresses that national security and public safety can only be effectively protected in a democracy which fully respects the rule of law. Taking into account that exactly this document represents the lowest common denominator among our countries and our political groups, it's really sad that some countries have chosen not to sign it. They risk isolating and alienating themselves, not just from a juridical document but from the common European legal culture, the European *acquis* of human rights. And especially taking into account that their opposition is based on their reaction to the Istanbul Convention, one of the most important legal instruments of recent years of our organisation, that stresses the necessity to defend women's rights. Regarding other positive aspects that we see in this declaration is the reiteration of commitment to the rule of proportionality regarding the measures of the pandemic, the necessity to be in full conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights, and it has also been under constant review. We find also very important and useful that paragraph 10 of the Declaration stresses also the need to safeguard social rights and not just the right to health for all, but also all other social and economic rights, and it makes a specific reference to the European Social Charter. It's exactly because the period of the pandemic was not just a period of, let's say dire trial for individual freedoms and political rights, but also for social ones, taking into account the explosion of social inequalities that took place.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL): I think we all should be very happy that, in times of crisis, our ministers were able to come up with this Athens Declaration, and I think that is of main importance that today our Standing Committee will welcome that statement as well, and to confirm that we agree with the main issues that were mentioned there. I am especially happy that there is a full commitment to both the European Convention on Human Rights by our ministers representing the governments and to the convention system: you may recall that recently I wrote a report on the convention system ever since the founding of our Organisation and overall we should be very happy that now the ministers clearly say, "Yes, we do adhere to this convention system." Another issue that is, I think, very important is that our ministers were able to limit themselves in this Athens Declaration to times of crisis. We see a lot of member States taking exceptional measures and it's understandable, but all these exceptional measures should be limited: limited in time, limited in proportion, limited in the field to which they refer. The Assembly already adopted, after the Bataclan massacre, a report that I proposed that, in times of crisis, our answers should always be in conformity with the fundamental rights and standards of the Council of Europe. This Athens Declaration emphasises that again, and I'm most happy that the ministers representing our governments clearly state the role that our Assembly plays in this crisis, with the production of very relevant reports on the Covid crisis, but also overall. I think it shows that after a period in which the cooperation between our ministers and the Assembly was not as good as it should be, it has improved, even during this crisis. So I want to thank the ministers that they were able to come up with this declaration. It is a real pity that there are a few member States which still did not sign this Declaration, but I hope that they will do so as soon as possible because the Athens Declaration deserves to be a declaration of all 47 member States.

Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS (Greece, EPP/CD): First, I salute the fact that our Council of Europe and our Assembly in particular has continued its work, it's valuable work, in the midst of an enormous crisis. This is very important for what we discuss here in the Athens Declaration. Now we have the chance to recommit ourselves to the high ideals of our institution in the midst of an unprecedented crisis created by the pandemic. In this way we send the most powerful signal that human rights and the rule of law are even more important and precious today. We do not backpedal from our work; we recommit and we restrengthen that work. I would not refer to the naysayers in general as an esteemed colleague of mine did just before. I will restrict myself only to a reference to Hungary as I wonder if this is really what the proud and historic Hungarian nation wants to be

associated with: to be on the same side when it comes to democracy and freedom with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Is this really what the ancestors of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán fought for back in 1956, and what he and his people tried to achieve back in 1989? I cannot help but wonder. Finally, I conclude with a mention to the vaccine and to the struggle and challenge we have ahead. Science has done its duty, we have a vaccine but a vaccine on its own won't save anyone. Only vaccination will and can do that. So, after science comes the politics. I asked all my colleagues to keep this in mind. After the vaccine we need vaccination and the policy that will deliver it effectively to all of our people all across Europe.

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH (Hungary, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues, two colleagues have mentioned the name of Hungary. Hungary was, yes, among the countries who could not vote for the Athens Declaration. I would like to clarify the Hungarian position. We do support the whole spirit, the wording, but there was a drafting problem in the declaration. The Hungarian permanent representative suggested that we should add two words: "Istanbul Convention" and "relevant national measures" are welcome to fight protection of women. So, this adding of "relevant national measures" could not pass for some reason in the dark drafting process. Some countries, like Hungary, have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention. For that reason we don't want to give the impression that we don't care about women's rights. We do. We are ready to open the Hungarian system for investigation. There may be a system of conventions where some countries ratify and some countries don't ratify certain conventions. I think it would be a big mistake to draw the conclusion that those countries are not recognising human rights and democracy. Especially, it would be a big mistake to draw the conclusion that that country is not able to chair the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, as Ms Petra BAYR did. I think we should distance ourselves from such kind of conclusions, early conclusions, because they harm the work of the Council of Europe in general, in order to political party bash certain opponents. I think we should distance ourselves from this kind of attitude.

Ms Valentina MARTÍNEZ (Spain): I would like to make the point that in Spain right now, the situation is rather difficult unfortunately when it comes to the rule of law. This is something that not only my own political party, the Popular Party, would say, but it's something that has also been found by the Venice Commission as well as by the Justice Commissioner of the European Commission. There are four things that my party is particularly worried about. For six months now, we've not had any really parliamentary oversight. Secondly, there is a draft law on appointments to the general council of the judiciary which is the judges appointment body, which is going to go from a qualified majority to a simple majority. The third is the appointment of the state public prosecutor. This is a former member of the Socialist Party, switching from being the minister of justice to the position of the state prosecutor simultaneously. Fourthly, there is a proposed bill that has just been tabled on disinformation that has derived from this issue on fake news and on the pretext of freedom of information and freedom of the press. These are four issues. I know that Spain signed up to the Athens Declaration, but I wanted to raise these issues in this forum because I think it is important to realise the high level of protection for the rule of law that Spain and other European Union countries enjoy and that we should continue to maintain. Obviously we live in exceptional times and extraordinary measures are required, but at the same time we must maintain our standards and we must remain strong and make sure that these extraordinary circumstances do not lead to the deterioration of the rights of our citizens.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR): The position of my country on this declaration is distorted by some speakers and the remarks by Greek colleagues amounted to hate speech unfortunately. Let me repeat here that Turkey has no problem with this Declaration, we appreciate it, we accept it. In the Committee of Ministers the problem was about adoption procedures. We defended that the body should stick to established rules on the adoption procedure, that's it. My delegation and I personally support this Declaration and I congratulate Greek colleagues for this good job.

The President said he had been present in Athens during the debate. The way I interpret what happened is that a country or a number of countries basically had the idea that by approving the Athens Declaration that they would be perceived or in reality would also approve a number of conventions that they had not yet approved or would not have approved or did not even have signed. We had some declarations by other countries saying so and they did approve the Athens Declaration.

11. Draft declaration on the parliamentary contribution to the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship on: "Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law"

The President presented the draft declaration (Appendix 2). The Athens Declaration is a document by the Committee of Ministers which has been, in large part, based on the five Assembly reports on COVID that we have made. Many of the issues developed in the works of the Parliamentary Assembly have been taken on in the Athens Declaration. Once the Athens Declaration debate would be over in the Committee of Ministers,

it could be taken by the Parliamentary Assembly. The Assembly does not approve the Declaration but only welcome it. What I may understand from the interventions of our Turkish and Hungarian colleagues, is exactly what they said: that they approve the content. It is important that the Parliamentary Assembly, by welcoming the Athens Declaration, have an expression as to adhering fully to the content and not getting into the debates of the fact that one would or would not adhere to whatever. In the course of the current affairs debate, we basically promote and strengthen parliamentary action and support the implementation as to the Athens Declaration standards. We also highlight the importance of parliamentary scrutiny of all measures taken by the authorities when addressing the pandemic. I want to go into this issue, because the Committee of Ministers, so the ministers, acknowledge that the scrutiny by the people of measures being taken in extraordinary situations is done by the parliament. From my point of view, welcoming the Athens Declaration as well as the tool kit of the Secretary General, both of them, is an expression of the content of this declaration and of the tool kit which allow us, in a further stage, to elaborate on it in our workings and also to take it on board when we head out to national parliaments to explain. I do hope that all of the delegations can adhere to the welcoming of the Athens Declaration.

The draft declaration on the parliamentary contribution to the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship on: "Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law" was **adopted** by 26 votes in favour, no one against and no abstentions.

The meeting was **adjourned** at 12.30 pm.

12. Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs

Modification of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure on alternative arrangements for the organisation of Parliamentary Assembly part-sessions

The President opened the meeting.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC, Rapporteur): We had the last plenary session in January of this year, so it's long past. The goal is to meet again physically as soon as possible so that we can all start talking to each other. In the meantime, however, it is necessary to prepare ourselves to ensure that our organization remains fully capable of acting, and that includes elections, for example. With this report, we are creating the conditions for us to meet in video mode or in hybrid mode, but again, the aim is of course to meet again as soon as possible and to meet in Strasbourg accordingly. We have ensured that the technical prerequisites are in place. I have reached agreement on this and am also talking to those in our organisation who are responsible for this. It is a challenge to do this, I have learnt, but everything will probably be possible. We can assume that, if we change the rules here accordingly, we will be able to meet according to these new rules. How will we meet or how can we meet? First of all, physically, which is still the preferred way, secondly in a video format, so now remotely, and the third possibility is a hybrid form of meeting. But this hybrid form of meeting should not be what we are aiming for, because we should have a level playing field if possible. But this version has been included to prevent the possibility of abuse, that some people might get the idea that we can't come to Strasbourg and that we could run it for a very long time. And in order to prevent this, if in the end it would only be up to one, two or three states, then we could also consider such a hybrid form. It is expressly not the aim. If we adopt the report today - and this is particularly important to me to emphasise once again - we will then have to take the appropriate decisions in December in the office, in the Bureau, whether we should then, for example, make a video version of the report on the appropriate days. We will also have to decide how elections are to be conducted. Whether we do it by postal vote or by electronic voting. In any case, I would prefer electronic voting because of its practicability and the feasibility and speed of results, and I think that is a broad opinion in our organisation. What I want to emphasise, for all of us - in order to make this clear to ourselves, in order to make it clear in our national parliaments, in order to make it clear to our colleagues in the delegations - is that we must do everything possible, in terms of procedure and rules of procedure, to prepare for this sitting in January. But we must also do this for ourselves personally in organisational terms. It will not work if the normal meetings in the national parliaments all run in parallel. We have often done that now, and so have I myself, I am sitting in the German Bundestag here in Berlin. But I am sure we will not be able to organise a proper meeting in January if we do everything in parallel. It will not be possible to have a whole week of sensible committee meetings, group meetings, reports, important guests with whom we want to talk, and to do all this at the same time as the parliamentary procedure at national level. So please, please make sure that we really do prepare this week only for the Council of Europe. Finally, I would just like to say something about the practicability and capacity for action of the committees. My main intention is to make it possible for the Assembly to meet in all forms, including the committees. My basic opinion is that we do not need any special additional quorums - this has not proved to be impracticable in one committee meeting or another where certain decisions have not been taken in the past. That is why my original proposal - and this is again

laid down in an amendment – was that we should no longer have any quorums at all, at any rate no additional forums for video formats. I have learnt, though, that some people do have concerns about no longer having any form of quorum at all, which is why there will subsequently be an amendment proposing not to have no more quorums at all, but to reduce them from one third to one quarter. From what I have seen in the past few months' sittings, this one quarter has actually always been achieved, and so I believe that this is a practicable compromise proposal that everyone should actually be able to live with. That is why I, for my part at least, will accept this compromise proposal at the end, and in the meantime, thank you very much for your attention.

Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI (Italy, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

The pandemic has also had a heavy impact on the activities of our Assembly. We were able to react quickly by allowing meetings to be held remotely and still ensure continuity in the work. However, it is undeniable that there are some problematic profiles. First of all, replacing the sessions with meetings of the enlarged standing committee created a problem of representativeness. Because only the members of the committee can vote. Then we failed to elect some very important positions for the life of the Council of Europe. The report introduces amendments to the Rules of Procedure to allow the Assembly to hold plenary sessions in hybrid or remote mode in exceptional circumstances. It is very important to take this opportunity to introduce useful rules that will safeguard the functioning of the institution even in the event of future problems or emergencies. I would like to highlight two elements that I think are useful. The first is that the structure of the regulation is not altered. Alongside the ordinary rules, there is a rule applicable in exceptional situations. The other element, which is very important, is that the application of these special rules must be established by the Bureau for defined timescales, from time to time for sessions and for precise timescales for commissions. So, if the hybrid mode is chosen, I am fully aware that delegations that cannot be physically present in Strasbourg will have fewer opportunities to report than those who will be present. However, the working methods will be the same for those who work remotely and those who work in attendance. I therefore feel I can reassure some of my fellow Members who expressed concerns about the democratic nature of the new system during the examination in the Committee on Rules of Procedure. I believe that accepting meetings in hybrid mode does not weaken our organisation but, on the contrary, strengthens it. We are living in a time of great urgency and uncertainty, we have a duty to show the citizens of Europe that we are doing our job to the full. We all prefer to work in presence and meet. However, until this is possible, we must not block the institution or suffer the blackmail of easy exploitation.

Mr Andreas NICK (Germany, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats

I was one of the first, I believe, who, in the summer when it was foreseeable that we would not be able to return to our regular operations in September or October either, urged that we should create the conditions to enable us to continue our work under online conditions. We have been working very effectively in the committees since spring, also online, in terms of content. As I said, we have now reached the point where we have to ensure that we can reconstitute our Assembly next year, 2021. We do this in January every year in order to maintain the functioning of the Parliamentary Assembly, and we must ensure that we as a Parliamentary Assembly can fulfil our statutory rights and obligations as an organ of the Council of Europe. This applies in particular to the elections for judges at the Court of Human Rights and the elections of the Council of Europe's officials. We cannot delegate these to any other body, unlike we can do for reports or other matters. In this respect, this report is of central importance for the future ability of the Assembly and the whole organisation to act. We will do so today, under whatever conditions, so that in January we can convene our Assembly in plenary mode and fulfil our statutory rights and obligations. I believe it is particularly important that, when we hold elections, it should be ensured, even in hybrid or online mode, that only those who are genuinely entitled to vote cast their votes and, at the same time, that secret elections can also be held in secret. In particular, we must also ensure that we do not conduct split procedures, for example in a hybrid session between those who are physically present and those who vote online, but we must also ensure a level playing field there. If we do this today, I believe we have created the best conditions for us as an Assembly to continue to be able to carry out our task, our function. I believe that the proposal for a reduced quorum for the committees is appropriate, and I, too, would support it if we were to follow this proposal afterwards, as well as approving the report as a whole today so that we can decide on its practical implementation in December and meet virtually or physically in Strasbourg in January in whatever appropriate form under the pandemic conditions.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, ALDE): on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

We do indeed need to have this important reform of the Rules of Procedure because we really must adapt our procedures, otherwise we will simply condemn the Parliamentary Assembly to stagnation. The ALDE Group therefore supports the draft resolution adopted by the Committee on Rules of Procedure, which is truly the fruit of serious and constructive work. I congratulate Mr Frank Schwabe once again on the quality of this report. We need to consider a new type of plenary session because it is indeed necessary to adapt. We need to be able to debate and make appointments that are long overdue. Like many, I would much prefer it if we could be sure that we will be able to meet in Strasbourg in the coming weeks as before, but, even if encouraging signals

are coming our way about the development of vaccines, it would be inconsistent for us to wait for months on end for a normalisation of the health situation in Europe to take place "gently". The options opened up by the resolution and adopted by a large majority may not be exciting, but they are, in any case, realistic and relevant. They offer a glimpse - at last - of the Parliamentary Assembly taking back control of its prerogatives. As far as I am concerned, and I am not the only one to think so, the prospect of hybrid sessions allowing even partial resumption of what is at the heart of our Assembly is the option that we should favour. It will not lead, contrary to what one sometimes hears, to the creation of delegations with differentiated statuses, except to consider that in normal times the members present and those not coming to Strasbourg have different statuses. The proposed amendments will enable everyone to exercise their right to speak and vote, whether they are in Strasbourg or in front of their screens. This is really a positive contribution of technology to the continuity of parliamentary life, especially as we will all vote the same way – the rapporteur mentioned that when he mentioned electronic voting. The choice before us today is that of an alternative between, on the one hand, adaptability to particular circumstances for a given but necessary period of time for parliamentary debate and, on the other hand, procedural conservatism synonymous with immobility and delegitimisation over time, or even the disappearance of what we represent. I would also like to say, in this connection, that I agree with the rapporteur that we should really be in PACE, whether we are face-to-face or virtual, and I also agree with the principle of the quorum, which should be lowered when we have virtual meetings. Also, true to our principles, we in the ALDE group support the will to make PACE work again on a collegial and deliberative basis, while adapting to the health context.

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC/DA): on behalf of European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

The first thing I would like to say is that anybody who's a parliamentarian would like to come to Strasbourg in January. One of the biggest problems we will face is that at the moment all British MPs are banned from travelling, not by the government, but by the speaker of the House of Commons. Therefore, at this precise moment it would be impossible for us to come. We would like to be there, but we can't. A hybrid system for us is basically the only way forward. Now, there is nothing in what the rapporteur has put forward that parliaments are by large not doing. Most parliaments are voting online, most parts are doing committees online, most parliaments are actually doing the job of the parliament online as we at the moment seem to be doing as well. I come onto the voting as the voting is crucial. We do have two sets of facts or three technically which we've got to get through. I will check with others to make sure this happens. It is nothing clever about this. There are plenty of ways of doing it. It isn't difficult, and therefore I'm delighted we're going to have it. Also, on the format in the future, there is no guarantee as Ms Nicole TRISSE said that the vaccine will be ready in time for anything. It is going to take an enormous amount of time to vaccinate enough people across Europe to make this work well. If we set up the parameters now, it means that whatever happens in the future, it can be January, it can be the next session in April, at least we have an opportunity to have some sort of realism in this. I think that's the most important thing because the quorum and all the rest of it is right. I didn't have any problems with this. I think the most important thing is to give the flexibility to parliamentarians. None of us have a crystal ball. If you'd said to any of us in February this year, would we be in this position? Of course, we would say no, absolutely not a chance, we would just carry on doing what we're doing. Look at us now. You cannot believe in that small amount of time everything that we have tried to work for through democracy, through rule of law, etc., has changed so dramatically in that period of time. Therefore, I would say that this is absolutely right. Please don't, Mister President or anyone else, just presume that countries who want to be there and can't be are using it as an excuse not to be. I'm afraid that's not always the case and certainly not in our case. Therefore, flexibility must be there to be able to do both systems. There's nothing clever about this. Actually, if at the end of the day if there is political will, the secretariat under Wojciech can supply all the rooms and all the spaces that they have safely to do so, then we must have that flexibility.

The President of the Assembly: The rules we're making are for the exceptional situation. So, from the moment we do not have an exceptional situation, we go physical full-fledged. I'm saying this because I wish to avoid it at the end of the day in the future we might have a situation where certain delegations would like to be in a hybrid model, though it's not necessary.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL): on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left

It's now time to look forward as well and therefore we have to modify our rules of procedure with regards to hybrid or remote meetings of our Assembly and its committees. Proposals are presented by Mr Frank SCHWABE and we as the UEL group fully adhere to his proposal. The same goes for the additional modification of some rules proposed by Ms Ingjerd SCHOU. We do endorse her proposals wholeheartedly. I thank both rapporteurs for the work done in such a short time. Being so creative and so practical deserves our applause, I think. At the end of the debate I intend to propose an oral sub-amendment to the only amendment made with regards to the draft resolution. I'm very happy that the rapporteur is agreeing to this proposal. This proposal will be made by me on behalf of the whole of the Presidential Committee. We reached, I think, a practical agreement on this.

Ms Ingerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD): Covid-19 has, once again, shown how fragile democracy, rule of law and also human rights are. As of the crisis we also see fundamental values and principles being challenged. We have seen political leaders using the ongoing crisis to extend their power and also influence, sidestepping democratic processes. We have also seen basic human rights, such as freedom of expression and assembly, being challenged and limited, explained by the need to protect public health. We also have seen that in times of crisis the work of the Council of Europe as watchdog of democracy is of utmost importance. It is therefore our duty to do what we can to enable the Assembly to meet internally and ensure that the organization is able to fulfill its statutory obligations. Due to the exceptional circumstances of Covid-19, the Assembly has not met in the plenary since last January. The modifications of the Rules of Procedure as proposed by the rapporteur in this report will enable the Assembly to hold a remote or hybrid plenary session in January as well as the extraordinary situations in the future. With the adoption of the report we are well on our way to open the 2021 session in January and hence also elect judges to the court, as well as high ranking officials of the Council of Europe. I congratulate the rapporteur on his excellent work. As chair of the Rules Committee I have witnessed great dedication from him and from the Secretariat, a clear focus on detail and the utmost respect for the serious and complicated nature of the questions, and I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of the draft resolution.

Mr Sergey KISLYAK (Russian Federation, NR): I'm also very grateful to the rapporteur for the great deal of work he put into introducing these exceptional rules of procedure for our work. However, I do harbour a number of doubts, which mean that I will have difficulty supporting these rules as set out in the report. First of all, the circumstances we find ourselves in are indeed exceptional, and this means we must adopt exceptional working methods. More or less, we figured out how to work in this context. However, the report and the draft resolution are based on the idea that these rules can be used in any exceptional circumstances and the definition of such a situation is rather broad. It includes natural disasters, political unrest, and acts of terrorism. Thus, I wish to underscore just how exceptional this emergency is. After all, we all find ourselves in almost the same boat. In terms of the impact it has had on us, our ability to travel, including travel to Strasbourg. So, for this, for the current situation, these rules are workable, in my opinion. Next, I have a lot of doubt about the hybrid mode and whether the hybrid mode can allow equal working conditions for all members of our organisations: those who are going to be in the room versus those who are going to be working remotely. This is not the first time we've discussed the issue of elections. Every single time I hear different versions of how the voting is going to take place. The root of this problem is the report because the report does not contain the principle of equality, equality of participation for all members of our organisation, be it via hybrid or remote mode or any other mode. That's the second thing. The third source of concern, in my view is the fact that we are lowering the quorum threshold because the legitimacy and the quality of the decisions we are taking under these exceptional circumstances is dropping. We understand that and if we lower the quorum threshold, quality will fall further and we will lose legitimacy in the eyes of our constituents.

Lord Richard BALFE (United Kingdom, NR): Can I firstly say that we're in a transition phase and at the beginning of next year we might still face a situation in which different countries have different rules, both for travel and the quarantining after travel. So, we have to look at the transition period and that means that some people will work remotely and others will be able to be there. Now, we've had this situation in the House of Lords for the last two months and we can be made to work and you can as remote voting works. I think we have to concentrate on having an interim system, shall we say. If I could make one positive suggestion: if we're going to stick to people in the Chamber, are we going to have a distance between them which is greater than it is at the moment? If so, I wonder whether the Secretary General would like to talk to the European Parliament, because their hemicycle is almost twice the size of ours. It would be possible to get many more people in there with a greater distance. Before we get too proud of things, may I remind the members of the European Parliament met in the Council of Europe Chamber right up until the turn of the century. So there is a question. The next point I'd like to make is some people will want to shield longer than others. I think we have to allow a certain amount of discretion certainly in the first meeting or two that people can choose whether they take part in a hybrid or other things. I'm fairly clear that the Speaker of the House of Lords, if there was going to be a meeting in Strasbourg of the Council, would allow the UK delegation to attend. I know that he has wound up frustrated with the whole business, but, clearly, he wants to keep things going. My very final point: Lord Simon Russell, who is one of our delegation has been taking charge of an overseas procedure during the pandemic. I'm sure if he did, he'd be very happy to talk to the authorities of the Council about actors in other countries, that is if you don't already have the information.

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD): This is very quick, excellent work. Of course, possible due to excellent work of the staff of the committee. I must also underline the excellent cooperation of the Presidential Committee and the excellent atmosphere which allowed us to react quickly. I was probably the first one during the Presidential Committee as the President of the Group of the European People's Party to put forward this idea of a hybrid meeting. Of course, I fully support this report and the ideas that we can find in this report.

Of course, as the President just underlined, this shall be the ultimate and temporary remedy, but we have to have it. For that reason, I call to all parliamentarians to do their utmost in their respective countries to do everything to allow as many as possible parliamentarians to come to Strasbourg. That also, and this is probably the call to our German colleagues, is to allow anybody who wishes to go to Strasbourg by car to be allowed to go there. I must underline once again that for example in Poland because I heard what our British colleagues and our Russian colleagues are saying, but any holder of a diplomatic passport can travel without any restriction. Just a few days ago we had a summit of the European Union, and it was absolutely not a problem to gather people who are running the European Union together because this is so important. Human rights and democracy are as important as the economy and political decisions. We shall gather together physically, everybody who can.

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ (Spain, SOC): We are in a time of crisis. All our national parliaments have had to take measures. Measures that allow us to continue with our parliamentary work. Similarly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe must do the same. We gave le rapporteur a task. This task was not an easy one by any means. We're talking about modifying the rules in order to allow us to continue with our work. And as for the outcome of that work, I would like to commend the rapporteur. It really is a fantastic work he has done on this. The proposal is balanced. It is very structured. It is very clear. I think it will allow us to move forward and to continue with our work as a Parliamentary Assembly. On behalf of the Spanish delegation I would also like to make a further comment. We are referring to the possibility of simultaneous interpretation into languages other than the working languages or official languages of the Council of Europe. This might be a technical issue, but we would really, as the Spanish delegation, like to make sure that this can be organised and that we can have simultaneous interpretation into these other languages too. It is very important for us and for our work. The Spanish delegation will, with that in mind, support these proposals.

Mr Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC): Now, it is clear that all of us would like to do the Assembly in attendance as soon as possible and we hope to be able to do it in January. However, this is not in our hands. It is clear that, if the epidemic continues at the current rate, we are not sure whether the conditions are in place to attend the Assembly in January, and we must therefore have flexibility. I think that the proposals put forward are very timely and appropriate. They take account of an exceptional situation and, in some respects, they also structurally correct the limitations of our work. And so I believe that we must stick to these proposals and we must, with sufficient flexibility, ensure that the work of the Council continues to work, as the President, I thank him, has endeavoured to do in recent months. And in relation to the events, then consider whether we are able to call a meeting in the presence of the assembly or whether we should go to a meeting that adopts a hybrid system and allows those who can be there and those who cannot, through digital links, to be there. The only doubt, not a certainty, the only doubt I have, concerns the lowering of the quorum in decisions. Because the lowering of the quorum risks offering the right to those who want to challenge them. If a member country of the Council of Europe violates human rights and we adopt a resolution of reprobation or at any rate of censorship that calls on it to respect human rights and change its behaviour and is adopted with a quorum that is not the majority of the Assembly, it will be easy to say to the authority of that government that this resolution does not interest us and we are not bound to respect it because it does not even have a majority of the Assembly that has expressed it. Therefore, in this sense, I would still evaluate the question of the quorum very carefully, checking exactly how we can ensure that our decisions have a strong value and no one can challenge their legitimacy and at the same time, of course, take into account the fact that we take these decisions in a more complicated regime, also from the point of view of numbers. Today, I believe that the resolution will be adopted, I hope that it will be adopted. It contains some very useful proposals, so we must approve it. Let us check the quorum again to see if there are any other ways in which we can mitigate the risk that I have mentioned.

Ms Petra STIENEN (Netherlands, ALDE): As the leader of the Netherlands delegation, I am very pleased with the work of Mr Frank SCHWABE and Ms Ingjerd SCHOU. This is giving us a road map for the next coming months. I hope it's not longer than the next coming months. In Arabic there's a beautiful saying that says "trust in God, but tie your camel". So, I think we are working with a very good base to be secure that we can continue our important work and many speakers before me have complimented the team in Strasbourg, the rapporteurs. I would also extend my compliments to you, Mister President, the team, the Secretary General, all the interpreters because of what task you have and had over the past couple of months and will in the next coming months. Depending on Corona, we will be able to meet, hopefully, in a hybrid form. I think that's the maximum we can aim for. There are two issues which are of concern to my delegation. Like in the UK, our Parliament has issued a decree that members of parliament are not allowed to travel under the present circumstances. Members of the Senate are allowed to travel for necessary travel. So, we will benefit from a hybrid solution. It might be helpful, after we have accepted both the draft resolutions, if maybe you can inform the speakers of our parliament about this decision and encourage them to be as flexible as possible in allowing the members of our parliaments to travel. It might be helpful for us also as delegation leaders to negotiate maneuvering space for our delegation members.

Sir Roger GALE (United Kingdom, EC/DA): Congratulations to the rapporteur, he's done a tremendous amount of work. I know I am going to have to disagree with some of it. It's surprising and it's probably the first and maybe the last time it's ever happened to say that the rapporteur has managed to unite myself and Mr Sergey KISLYAK. I am concerned about the qualification for exceptional circumstances. I think that one of the things that we need to look at is putting a sunset clause into this so that it is applicable for the pandemic, but not necessarily ongoing although we, of course, can learn from the experience. My second concern relates to the hybrid meeting in January. I don't think that there is a reasonable chance of a lot of us being able to attend Strasbourg in January. I'm concerned about the fact that if we do, and people come from all over the wider Europe to Strasbourg, what happens if as happened to you when you went to Moscow, there is an outbreak of Covid within the delegation? Is the entire Assembly going to be quarantined? How are you going to handle this? If a lot of people decide they can turn up and do turn up, how are you going to socially distance in a Chamber that is too small already anyway? I'm not certain that this is going to work and I agree with Mr Piero FASSINO. I think we have to maintain flexibility and be prepared to say, and not be too grand to say: actually, we can't do this physically in January. In the hope and expectation that with vaccinations we might be able to do it in April. I think we have to be ready to pull the plug in January. The final issue, and again I agree with Mr Sergey KISLYAK on this, and others with whom I have spoken, I don't believe we should lower the quorum. I do think that would be a retrograde step, and I think we must maintain the quorum it is. With those fairly severe caveats, I nevertheless thank the rapporteur, and I hope that we can make some, if not all of this, work.

The President of the Assembly: A few remarks on the sunset clause. It is indeed in there because the Bureau of the Assembly has to decide in every instance which mode of convening will be used. So, it is basically a continuous sunset clause in there for the simple reason, again, that the Bureau of the Assembly has to decide at any instance. I don't know whether we can show the hemicycle and you can see that the social distancing is already organised. There is pretesting for any colleague and staff coming in, so basically you would have to have a test before you would be allowed into the meetings and the test obviously has to be negative. Heading back home, we offer a test again in order to comfort homebase that you didn't get anything down here. Is it 100% foolproof? Nothing is. Again, these are the elements that we are working on and are already in place, but we will view more information coming January.

Mr Frank SCHWABE (Germany, SOC, Rapporteur): It is maybe not the most important report in our Assembly but for sure it is a necessary report because it brings us into the situation to deal with the Covid-19 situation and with whatever will happen. I'm quite sure that we will not misuse it. It was especially Mr Sergey KISLYAK who raised some concerns about it. I think that's the normal risk of misusing it. For sure I would like to say as well thank you to the President, the chairs, to the Secretariat and all the staff and the interpreters. We did it very well in this specific situation and there are some other international organisations that have more problems to proceed with their work. Like Mr Aleksander POCIEJ and others mentioned I would like to thank the Presidential Committee as well for agreeing on this including the question of the quorum. We just tried to balance it between those who think like me, we should not have a special quorum in remote meetings, and others who think we should have quite a high one. So I think 25%, one-fourth, is really a good compromise that lets us work very well due to the experience we had in past months. Mr Sergey KISLYAK raised some concerns. I mentioned it already, but I really think we will not misuse it. I think it's not too broad what we describe as an extraordinary situation. I think if there were really a majority to misuse this, to have a kind of remote meeting when it's not necessary, then we have other problems with this organisation when there was a majority for this. About the quorum I spoke already. It's based, I think, just on the experience of the last month. To make it possible to work and to prevent that kind of misuse. Lord Richard BALFE, you spoke about the EU Parliament. For sure, Mr Aleksander POCIEJ, the Secretary General and others always prove it but the problem is we are always depending on the decision from the EU Parliament, not from the president of the parliament there. At the end we should try to be, in a way, as independent as possible, if it's necessary in a specific situation. We are prepared to check it, for sure. You spoke about the health situation of some members and for sure for this we will provide, as well as a kind of hybrid meeting possibility. On the sunset I think the President clarified already. Sir Roger GALE mentioned we already have a kind of sunset situation because we always have to decide on whether the next plenary session should be in a remote way or just in a normal way like before. So, at the end, again thank you so much and I hope we can agree as well on the question of one-fourth so we have a very broad agreement in our Standing Committee.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Chairperson of the Committee on Rules of Procedures, Immunities and Institutional Affairs): the rapporteur has done an excellent work on this complex report on a very complex issue. The report has been debated twice in the committee and has received strong support of a majority of committee members. Adopting this report is crucial for us to fulfil our obligations. As we are entering 2021 and as Chair of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, I strongly encourage you to vote in favour of this draft resolution.

Amendment 1 to the draft resolution was presented by Mr LEITE RAMOS.

Mr Tiny KOX (Netherlands, UEL): proposed an oral sub-amendment to replace in Amendment 1 the words: "second, fourth and fifth sentences of rule 42.7 and rule 40.3 shall not apply. A committee may deliberate and take decisions when one third of its members are present at the beginning of the meeting" by the following words, "second, fourth and fifth sentence of rule for 47.2, rule 47.3 and rule 47.4 shall not apply. A committee may take decisions when one-fourth of its members are present".

Oral sub-amendment to Amendment 1, presented by Mr Kox, to which no objection was made, was **adopted** with 21 votes in favour, 5 votes against and 3 abstentions.

Amendment 1, as sub-amendment, to which no objection was made, was **adopted** with 26 votes in favour, 3 votes against and 3 abstentions.

The draft resolution "Modification of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure on alternative arrangements for the organisation of Parliamentary Assembly part-sessions", as amended, was **adopted** with 29 votes in favor, no one against, and 5 abstentions [Resolution 2349 (2020)].

Modification of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): The draft resolution simply intend to amend those provisions in the Rules of Procedure which need to be supplemented or reviewed in order to better correspond to our parliamentary practice. I therefore hope that the members of the Standing Committee will support them.

The draft resolution presented today contains proposals regarding: the procedure of periodic review on member States' compliance with their obligations as implemented by the Monitoring Committee; the procedure for examining amendments in committee and plenary sittings; the procedure for electing the President and the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly; the criteria applicable to the re-election of committee vice-chairpersons; the number of current affairs debates allowed during a part-session or a Standing Committee meeting.

The first and most important issue relates to the procedures implemented by the Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee's terms of reference were changed by Resolution 2261 in 2019 and Resolution 2325 in 2020. This was in order to strengthen the periodic review procedure of member States' compliance with the Council of Europe's obligations, as a complementary mechanism to the full monitoring procedure and the post-monitoring dialogue. The Rules Committee was invited by the Bureau of the Assembly to assess the conformity of this new periodic review procedure with the Rules. And in January 2020, the Committee approved an opinion to the Bureau and made critical comments with regard to this periodic review procedure. In particular, it considered that the same procedural formalities should apply in an identical manner to all procedures covered by the terms of reference of the Monitoring Committee. A reference to the committee should be validated by the Assembly when it prepares a periodic review report, in the same way as a report on a "classic" monitoring procedure or a report on the functioning of democratic institutions in a member State. On 5 March this year, the Bureau took note of the committee's opinion and asked the committee to make changes to the Monitoring Committee's terms of reference accordingly. Paragraph 3.1 on the draft resolution presented today proposes to harmonise the relevant provisions of the terms of reference of the Monitoring Committee. This is to make it clear that any decision on the Monitoring Committee to open a periodic review procedure in respect of certain member States shall require the approval of the Bureau in accordance with Rule 26 of the Rules of Procedure and ratification by the Assembly. The same clarification shall also apply to another procedure mentioned in the Monitoring Committee's terms of reference: that of the issue-based, cross-country monitoring. Any reference to the Monitoring Committee for a report on a cross-country thematic issue must also be validated by the Bureau and the Assembly.

The second issue dealt with in my report relates to the procedure for examining amendments in committee and in plenary sittings. Members might recall that at the June 2019 part-session, the Assembly and the Rules Committee had to reorganise their work due to a considerable number of amendments tabled for one particular report. In addition, members of the Assembly regularly express their dissatisfaction with the limitation of the number of speakers able to speak in a debate because of the large number of amendments tabled, forcing the list of speakers to be cut thoroughly. It is therefore proposed that Rule 34 on the procedure for examining amendments in committee and in plenary sitting be modified in order to strengthen the competence of committees when taking a position on amendments tabled. And paragraph 3.2 on the draft resolution proposes that amendments rejected by the committee seized for a report by a two-thirds majority shall not be taken up in plenary and shall be declared as definitively rejected, unless ten or more members of the Assembly object.

And three, the third issue. It is also proposed to simplify the procedures for the election of the President and

Vice-Presidents of the Assembly. These procedures should follow the Assembly's ordinary election procedure, as applied to the election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights and high-ranking officials of the Council of Europe. The procedure laid down for the election of the Vice-Presidents, which was unused for a very long time, was implemented on the occasion of the ballots held during the October 2019 and January 2020 part-sessions. This experience has shown that the procedure is unnecessarily complicated and no longer appropriate in view of the Assembly's practice. The procedure for electing the President of the Assembly is also the subject of the same remark. Proposed changes are suggested under paragraph 3.3 of the draft resolution.

And so the fourth issue. Another proposal relates to the candidatures for the office of chairperson or vice-chairperson of the committee with regard to members who have already held such offices. Current Rules provide for a period during which a former chairperson may not stand for re-election to the same office. However, while former committee chairpersons are permitted to stand for election as chairperson or vice-chairperson (subject to a four-year waiting period for the same committee or after the expiry of a two-year period to stand for election to another committee), these conditions do not apply to outgoing vice-chairpersons. The criteria applicable to the re-election of committee vice-chairpersons has led to misunderstandings in some committees which had difficulty in finding candidates who met the regulatory requirements. Paragraph 3.4 of the draft resolution suggests that outgoing committee vice-chairpersons are given the same waiting periods as outgoing committee chairpersons.

And lastly, the fifth issue. The Rules stipulate that the Assembly or the Standing Committee may hold only one current affairs debate during an Assembly part-session or a Standing Committee meeting. The flow of events of recent months has mobilised members' attention, and several proposals for current affairs debates were made so that the current issue could be debated at the meetings of the Standing Committee. In this context, the limit of one debate per Assembly part-session or Standing Committee meeting imposed by the Rules of Procedure appeared to hinder the possibility to discuss a greater number of subjects. Paragraph 3.5 of the draft resolution aims at allowing the Assembly and the Standing Committee to hold more than one current affairs debate during a part-session or a meeting.

And lastly, I would like to mention that since my report was released, some members had made additional proposals – some interesting ideas indeed – but these ideas have not yet been presented to the Rules Committee and I would like to thank in particular Mr Ahmet YILDIZ for his interest in our work.

The Rules Committee should be able to properly debate the pros and cons of any new suggestions before making proposals to the Assembly. The Committee will no doubt follow up on these ideas in the framework of a next report on the modification of the Rules of Procedure.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

I would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Ingrid SCHOU, very much for this report. I think it is a further development, and it also brings clarity. As the former chairman of the Monitoring Committee, I can only say that these clarifications will strengthen the Monitoring Committee and clarify a number of things, because we have had a few debates on this over the past two years. This is therefore a good solution, and even if decisions of the Monitoring Committee are also supported by the Office and the Bureau, I think that is right and proper. Secondly, this is the area concerning the changes in the President and Vice-President in the Assembly. I think that is also very right and proper, a good clarification. It is a good thing that paragraph 3.5 will also enable us to have various current affairs debates in future. I think that is often referred to the political situation and its current affairs. As far as the elections to the office and to the offices and committees are concerned, it is also a clarification of how things stand with the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons.

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ (Poland, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats

I would like to thank the rapporteur for the quality of her work and her proposals. This report deals with an issue that is at the heart of our concerns as Members of this House. I fully share the objectives sought: performance, efficiency and clarity of the rules. The Monitoring Committee will have greater autonomy to carry out a periodic review. I agree with the proposal to unify the four procedures: the monitoring procedure *stricto sensu*, the post-monitoring dialogue, our reports on the functioning of democratic institutions in member states and the periodic reviews. I consider that the Assembly must play a central role in this process. I also agree with the proposal regarding transnational thematic monitoring. I think it is an excellent idea to engage the Bureau of the Assembly, which could refer the matter to the Monitoring Committee to prepare a report on a transnational theme. We have many cases in which such a procedure could be very effective. The procedure for considering amendments in committee and in plenary is a key issue from the point of view of efficiency. Indeed, the massive tabling of amendments leads to obstruction. In view of the timetable and the very limited number of sessions, the best solution must be found to deal with the subjects in an efficient way and to

guarantee the quality of the work delivered. I also fully agree with the current affairs debates. We cannot limit ourselves to a debate on the situation in the world. The rules on the election of the President and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly should be regulated. We all agree that elections take too much time. Finally, I thank the rapporteur for raising the issue of elections of committee chairpersons and vice- chairpersons. The rules are so complicated that it often causes hesitation or confusion.

Mr Iulian BULAI (Romania, ALDE): on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
The ALDE supports the following elements of the report. The election of President and Vice-Presidents, the election of vice-chairpersons of committees and the number of the current affair debates. However, we have reservations on the proposed proposal concerning the Monitoring Committee. So let me be very clear. We, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe strongly believe that monitoring of the respect of commitments by member states that we all call country monitoring is one of our biggest and most important tasks in the Assembly. I'm continuously surprised by the fact that such a useful instrument of parliamentary overview and assistance has come to be portrayed by some colleagues as a punishment against a member state. It's not a punishment. Our monitoring procedure has greatly evolved since its creation. Today we believe that being part of the Assembly means accepting the monitoring procedure. No state should seek to be shielded by its status, size or financial contribution. That is why the committee has introduced periodic monitoring. That is also why the committee seeks to evolve more committee members into this exercise. As many of us as possible should be aware of what it takes to be the monitoring rapporteur and represent the monitored country. While we hear the rapporteur who declares a wish to avoid the risk to see a development where the periodic review procedure may replace the strict monitoring procedure, we believe that the rapporteur's proposal creates new and perhaps greater risks. Indeed the Monitoring Committee has now quite a detailed description of the selection procedure it intends to follow. This includes input from other committees and Council of Europe monitoring bodies as well as a very concrete procedure of vote and establishing the list of countries that will be invited for a periodic monitoring. The rapporteur now proposes to subject the decisions taken through such a multi-step and multi-level procedure to the Bureau of the Assembly's political approval. Yet this political theatre goes against the committee's effort to take its selection procedure into a more criteria-based drill. Because the Bureau of the Assembly and our Assembly are highly political in nature we are afraid that our decisions with regard to the monitoring will depend not so much on objective criteria but on political and geopolitical concerns, on alliances the countries will be able or unable to build during development. I will finish by saying that the monitoring procedure is not at all a punishment but an opportunity to all of us, so the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe will abstain.

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU (Norway, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thanks for the comments and also the affection from my colleagues. It's very necessary to hold this periodic monitoring and it's also a help for the countries, not a punishment and still there is a possibility to decide on the monitoring, but it has to be agreed by the Assembly and the Standing Committee.

The draft resolution "Modification of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure" was **adopted** with 22 votes in favor, no one against, and 6 abstentions [Resolution 2350 (2020)].

13. Equality and Non-Discrimination

The gender dimension of foreign policy

Ms Petra STIENEN (Netherlands, ALDE, Rapporteur): Margareta WAHLSTRÖM, the former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, who led the way with Swedish feminist foreign policy, said: "Gender equality is not a separate women's issue, it benefits everyone. Research shows that gender- equal societies enjoy better health, stronger economic growth, and higher security. It also shows that gender equality contributes to peace and that peace negotiations in which women have taken part have a better chance of being sustainable." 2020 was supposed to be the year of big anniversaries of events that were crucial in the work for the promotion and protection of women's rights, equality and non-discrimination. Indeed, the key elements of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, with of course most notably SDG 5 that calls for achieving gender equality and to empower all women and girls worldwide. In 2020 we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Beijing platform for action for gender equality. We are also celebrating the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council 1325, the normative framework for women, peace and the security agenda. Well, when I say celebrating, indeed some progress has been achieved in the fields of education for girls, better healthcare, more job opportunities for women and political participation. But it's not a complete celebration because in the 21st century no country has achieved full gender equality and the 2020 context shows a lot of reasons for concern as well. We see attacks against women's rights worldwide. There is a going backlash throughout the world, and a continued threat against sexual and reproductive health and rights. And the Covid-19 pandemic has seen an increase of violence against women. Therefore, it saddens me that even in this organisation we hear voices against the Istanbul Convention, a legal framework that is designed to prevent and combat this horrible

terror behind the front door. So looking at the state of affairs, looking at the backlash, and the impact of the pandemic, it is clear that we need an inclusive and coordinated international response that reaffirms the importance of women's rights as human rights. In my report, you will see that including a gender dimension in foreign policy is instrumental in dealing with that backlash and improving gender equality and ending discrimination. We base our findings on extensive research on countries that are, like Sweden, leading the way and including gender dimensions of foreign policy. Think of Canada, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK. We met with a delegation from Japan. We also had a number of hearings, webinars, and a country visit to Sweden and the Netherlands. I would like to thank the support and inspiration of the members of the PACE Equality Committee, the Secretariat of the committee. There are 3 key messages that we can take away from my report.

The first message or lesson rather is that the gender dimension of foreign policy is a question of power and leadership. Giving priority to the promotion of equality and inclusion and ensuring a diverse participation in decision-making depend on political will and courage. I think Margareta WAHLSTRÖM has really shown this as well. Making gender equality a priority in foreign policy sends a powerful message. It reaffirms that women's rights are human rights. It sets the tone for making equality a political priority at international and national levels, because to promote gender equality abroad, but to forget about this at home, is not walking the talk. And this demands leadership by women and men at all levels, also here in our own organization. And I'm happy to see more and more male leaders who proudly call themselves feminists, like Minister ROTH did this morning, when he set out the priorities of the German presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The second message we can take away from my report is policies and responses to international crisis will be more efficient and beneficial and sustainable to all, when a gender dimension is included in foreign policy decisions. As long as full equality is not a reality, we need to take specific measures. This is essential to ensure the participation of women in decision-making, crisis management, and peace operations. And I think this will also be relevant for upcoming work in the PACE on climate and human rights. And we should be aware that gender is not only about women. As I already mentioned this morning, yesterday, the 19th of November, was international men's day. I noticed that not everybody was aware of this. The 8th of March, international women's day, is on our agenda. But the international men's day should be an important day as well, because it's a day that is celebrating the positive value men bring to the world, to their families, and communities. But this day also reminds us of the importance to look at all what we call harmful norms of masculinity that are hindering gender equality and good crisis responses. And as the minister said this morning, gender equality is not about replacing a patriarchal system with a matriarchal system. No it's about a society that is inclusive and equal for all genders.

The third lesson, the third message is: a gendered foreign policy or feminist foreign policy should be inclusive and intersectional. The diplomatic world should not and must not be accessible only to the "boys clubs", or only to the white women from middle and high-income families who have access to political and diplomatic networks. Promoting the participation and inclusion of persons from multiple backgrounds in all sectors of foreign policy, including in the diplomatic service and international organizations, should be at the core of the gender dimensions of foreign policy.

So how can we implement these lessons?

From the case study and country visits, we can list a number of good practices and measures to ensure a gender dimensions and foreign policy. In a way they're very similar to the four R's of the Swedish feminist foreign policy: rights, resources, representation, and realism. I will give you my shopping list and I think I hope that the shopping list will inspire all of us in the next coming years. What we need is an implementation of the assisting human rights frameworks, including the Istanbul Convention. We call for a targeted allocation of resources and gender budgeting. We need to ensure diversity in panels, we need to provide trainings on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. We also highlighted the need for the institutionalising of gender mainstreaming. We should strive for the equal participation of women and men in diplomatic services, but also in trade missions, and promote networking and mentoring between women leaders and politicians, including young women in politics and leadership. We need to develop policies and legal measures to support a work-life balance, also in international organisations, also at the Council of Europe. We need to promote balanced participation in political and public decision-making. And we need, and I emphasize on this point, we need to proactively engage men and boys in these transformative policies and to work closely with male role models and champions for gender equality. To conclude, we also believe that a real gender impact assessment can be a useful tool to evaluate the progress in implementing the gender dimension in foreign policy.

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group
As was noted, these are dire times for gender equality. Indeed gender inequality has been and continues to be a major barrier to human progress and unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic has only made it worse.

A backlash to women's rights is on the rise. We need deliberate efforts to overcome this barrier and we need to counter the backlash. Gender-based discrimination in health, in education and political representation, in labour markets, is pervasive as was noted. Violence in a patriarchal system is on the rise and continues to hit women hard in their most intimate relations. Therefore, this clearly points out to the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach to tackle this issue. We need to bring gender equality into the forefront of all of our policy frameworks: economic policy, social policy, political security, political systems, foreign policy. A comprehensive framework is needed, and I think this is why this report that we are now debating is very critical. A feminist foreign policy first and foremost acknowledges the need for this comprehensive policy framework, and it says that we need to put that gender equality into perspective in whatever we're dealing with. It acknowledges that gender inequality is not a problem in vacuum, it's indeed intertwined with what we would call hard foreign policy, such as issues of national security. But it also acknowledges that foreign policies are also a political tool to promote equality, inclusiveness and a rights-based world order. I'd like us all to think of foreign policy for a second. It includes trade policies, it includes humanitarian aid, it includes migration, it includes defence efforts, and all of these clearly have implications for gender equality and therefore should be tackling the issue. All experiences point to the need for a strong political leadership in this matter. This is where our organisation plays a critical role. As the rapporteur has rightfully mentioned, this cannot be only an issue of women's leadership. It has to be one where women's rights are acknowledged as human rights and where the quest for equality becomes a common goal for all of us. We need to walk the talk. We need to ensure that equal gender representation is indeed applied in policymaking and in representation. Only 15% of the world's ambassadors are women. Out of the 47 Council of Europe member states only eight have women as foreign ministers. Clearly, we need change and we need to break the glass ceiling together. We need not only to make foreign policy content gender-equal but we need to ensure equal representation in foreign policymaking.

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE): on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

This work is of great importance since it is in line with our work. Indeed, when we talk about the gender dimension, we are referring to an inclusive and non-discriminatory policy and, beyond that, a policy that respects human rights, a concept that is dear to the Council of Europe. I wanted to recall the definition of feminist diplomacy: to promote, through diplomatic relations, ideals and good practices to achieve gender equality and to guarantee all women and girls the enjoyment of their fundamental rights. When we look at what many women around the world are facing, we can only welcome the fact that some countries, and you mentioned them, have decided to devote energy and financial resources to them. Celebrations of international days, such as the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November. And finally, International Girls' Day on 10 October shows the interest that we all, leaders and parliamentarians alike, have in these issues. But we still need to give them meaning through strong actions. Integrating a gender dimension into foreign policy means giving importance to the promotion of women's rights through our diplomatic representations. Signing inclusive conventions means considering that equal access to education, fair respect for women's bodies, professional equality, the right to live in peace in a favourable environment should be the norm, and allocating budgets to NGOs or government programs that respect the rights of women and girls means building a future for them and ensuring a better world for future generations. Finally, awarding Nobel prizes to actors in the struggle for the respect of women and girls, such as in 2014 to Malala Yousafzai for her actions in favour of girls' education, and in 2018 to Nadia Murad and Dr Denis Mukwege for the protection of women during conflicts, is a clear sign that international bodies wish to be proactive in these areas. In order to apply the gender dimension principle to foreign policy, it is first necessary to apply it internally, by giving positions of responsibility to women whose appointment is relevant. Allow me to point out that Monaco has appointed eight ambassadors and ten women ambassadors. You said, and this will be my conclusion: "It is not a question of excluding men, but of sharing responsibilities, influence and decision-making power, and ultimately working to make gender equality a global reality".

Ms Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART (France, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats

The 21st century must finally be the century of equality between men and women, but gender equality is far from being a reality today. Inequalities remain, whether at school, at work, in politics or in families. Violence against women is still as high as ever; violations of women's rights are still as numerous as ever. Much work remains to be done, so this motion for a resolution calling on states to launch foreign policies that promote gender equality and inclusion is a step in the right direction. I would like to thank the rapporteur for her work and welcome her initiative, which makes both precise and broad recommendations. One of the major recommendations in this text is to promote women's access to diplomatic careers. As was pointed out in the report in 2016, the Committee on Gender Equality noted that the number of countries that had reached the minimum target of 40% of women diplomats was still very low. On average, only 12% or even 13% of ambassadors are women. There is a glass ceiling in the diplomatic sector, especially as women working in the diplomatic sector are still often confined to lower- ranking positions. However, they must be able to access the

positions of public decision-makers, without any distinction other than that of merit and talent. They all have their place in governance and political action in order to contribute their contribution, skills and qualities. The report has also rightly noted the pernicious consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on women, not only because they represent the majority of health professionals but also in terms of economic well-being, safety and security. In several countries, violence against women and domestic violence had increased significantly during confinement. Preventing violence against women, protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators is essential. In this respect, the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which is one of the most advanced treaties on violence against women in Europe, must be promoted. Equality between women and men is essential so that everyone can benefit from a balance and so that all human rights are respected.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL): on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left I want to congratulate the rapporteur her report and I fully agree with the rapporteur that this report is very timely. Of course it's always timely and necessary to address the gender issues here in the Assembly as elsewhere, but in the year 2020 we are remembering many international milestones of the fight for gender equality as the rapporteur mentioned: the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action for Gender Equality, and 20 years since the 1325 resolution Women, Peace and Security agenda was adopted. As the rapporteur mentioned women's rights are unfortunately under attack and there is a growing backlash against women's rights both worldwide and in the Council of Europe's Member States. As both the rapporteur and Mr Michael ROTH mentioned today, Covid-19 has brought to light an increase of violence against women. And as both a representative of my political group and also head of the Icelandic delegation I must mention the Scandinavian way, or the Nordic countries' way, because when it comes to gender equality Scandinavia is often praised for leading the way towards greater equality between women and men in different fields. The fact that the strong position of the Nordic countries when it comes to gender equality is not a coincidence. The Nordic countries' model of its societies are in general based on a strong culture of welfare state politics and that is one of the main reasons why the Nordic countries have been historically, culturally and socially frontrunners when it comes to implementing gender equality.

Those are strong welfare states where everyone should have the same opportunities in life. I am very happy to see the quote of the rapporteur to Margareta WAHLSTRÖM, the former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, who led the way with framing the Swedish feminist foreign policy which I have been very impressed by and have talked about and suggested here in the Icelandic Parliament that we should adopt in our foreign policy in a more precise manner. I want also to mention as a vice-chairperson of the Committee of Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons that the need for a gender dimension in foreign policy whereas it comes to women as migrants, is necessary and my upcoming report on gender mainstreaming of migration policies is about that, so there we have a common ground of these two reports. Women's rights have never been given to women, they have had to fight for them. Gender equality does not come by its own, there has to be a collective action and solidarity of women and human rights defenders as we are here in the Assembly and there must be a political will and tools such as legislation and gender budgeting and quotas. Also, I fully agree with the rapporteur that bringing more women and more equality to the table when it comes to conflicts and peace resolution always brings about more effective solutions. That I want to agree upon and congratulations to the rapporteur once again for her good report and I suggest we agree upon the report.

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ (Turkey, NR): I wish you had come to Turkey when I was deputy foreign minister to give an opinion about the Turkish example on diplomacy. Let me give you some numbers and ratios. The ratio of political officers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey is 34%. The number of mid-level diplomats is 31%. The rate of ambassadors, lady ambassadors, 25%, and the number of young female diplomats is increasing year by year. I am also in NATO, but I hear the reports there about the participation of women in peacekeeping missions as a success story. They are wanted very much. We have the same experience as Turkey when we expanded our diplomatic missions to Africa. We are now I think the fourth biggest diplomatic representation in the world. When we appoint lady ambassadors and other lady diplomats to Africa, they are very successful in reaching out to disadvantaged communities, to the roots of the communities and prove to better communicate on technical assistance and humanitarian assistance. It is really a success story. This encouraged young students to prefer diplomacy.

Ms Alma ČOLO (Bosnia and Herzegovina, EPP/CD): No Bosnian woman had a chance to participate in the peace negotiation process after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. No Bosnian woman participated in the process of creating our constitution which is a part of the Dayton Peace Agreement. I agree with the rapporteur that women rights are human rights. Equal participation of women in decision-making, peace operation negotiation, crisis management, is the key to achieving a just society. Men and women and our children deserve a just society. I think that gender equality is not only related to women.

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France, ALDE): As a former diplomat, when I returned to the Quai d'Orsay in the early 1990s, there were women colleagues but very few women ambassadors, perhaps one or two at the time.

Today, there are 40% of them in French Foreign Affairs and this has fundamentally changed the face of our diplomacy. When we send, for example, a mission of women in parliamentary diplomacy, as I recently did to Niger – where I am the chairman of the friendship group – this parliamentary mission of French women MPs who go to an African country does not have the same mission, or even the same meetings, as a male mission or a mixed mission. There is really, I would say, a low visibility or an under-visibility of women as actors of change in many countries. And from this point of view, indeed, if women do not play a role in this diplomatic action, I would say that it is diplomacy that is hemiplegic. Another element that is mentioned is the question of development aid. One of the very important issues is still the education of young girls in many countries. We know very well that early pregnancies lead to poverty, malnutrition, underemployment and migration. The education of young girls is obviously an absolutely central issue. The fact that, as you have mentioned once again, 50% of the funding of the French Development Agency by 2022 will be directed with a gender component is an essential element. For all these reasons, the notion of feminist diplomacy must not be perceived as a form of provocation or a posture, I would say, of distancing oneself. It is really a consideration of what the different means and channels of evolution today must be for diplomacy, for development aid, to ensure that we are more effective and that we can address 100% of the world's population.

Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW (Sweden, UEL): I'm very proud to be part of the Swedish delegation, where in Sweden we have this gender dimension in foreign policy, and have inspired this report, too. As we have seen, and as many of you have said, there are growing attacks and backlash against women's rights in many of our member States. That's why this report is timely and urgent. Feminism. My daughter once told me feminism is the radical idea that men are equal to woman. She emphasizes "radical" because she was being ironic. Adopting a gender dimension to foreign policy reaffirms that women's rights are human rights. How radical is that? That's supposed to be obvious for all of us in this Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. It means building a society that is inclusive, that provides possibilities for all genders. This should be obvious. It also means that we as members of this Parliamentary Assembly would do our job, because that is our job: promoting human rights. I want to thank the rapporteur for this initiative. It is long overdue. I hope those of us that identify as men would play our part in achieving this goal. We need to go from words to action. It is time and it is long overdue.

Ms Petra STIENEN (Netherlands, ALDE, Rapporteur): This was wonderful to listen to and there were so many new ideas and observations. I will pick two. One, Mr Ahmet YILDIZ, thank you very much for pointing out about the Turkish situation. When I was a young diplomat I did my internship in the embassy in Ankara and I actually had to write a report on the directorate general on women's affairs, in 1992. So I learned a bit of my feminism in Istanbul. Maybe this is why I'm such a big fan of the Istanbul Convention. Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR, I once interviewed an ambassador from Iceland, a female ambassador. She told me that her young son asked her after 17 years of a female president: "Mummy can a man become a president as well?" You can't be what you can't see. This was a very important example. I would like to conclude with a quote from a friend of mine who was also a member of the European Parliament. As you might know the European Parliament recently adopted a resolution on gender equality in the EU foreign security policy. Samira Rafaela, a member of the Renew group in the European Parliament made a very important comment about the place where we now are on the gender dimension of foreign policy in response to Covid-19. I quote. "Women are different. There is not one group of women. Women are facing different challenges because of who they are and where they come from. Intersectionality in our policy proposals and legislation is extremely important so that we leave no one behind". So with this in mind I want to conclude rather than a feminist foreign policy I think we could go even further and call for an inclusive foreign policy. Indeed, a policy that will be instrumental in protecting the human rights of all of our citizens of all genders.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination): A policy that puts equal treatment, inclusion and the protection of human rights, including women's rights of course, high on the agenda is not a policy for fair weather. If we have no other problems, then let us just do equal rights; no, this is a policy for every day, a very important policy. Gender equality, the guarantee that women can live free from violence, that they are empowered, must be a central basis for all political action and must go hand in hand with shared power and shared positions. This means that women and men must also have equal influence in society, equal opportunities, equal power in the end. It must go hand in hand with inclusion and permeability. Of course, this also applies to such important policy areas as foreign policy, because the proportion of women at the negotiating table, especially in peace negotiations. Ms Alma ČOLO of Bosnia-Herzegovina said it first. It is precisely the proportion of women in negotiations that is absolutely essential to the outcome, who represents a country, what data is obtained in the course of foreign policy, is decisive. Also, who implements international law, who evaluates the effects of law, of politics on weaker groups, is absolutely decisive for the result of how politics reaches the people, women and men alike. To conclude, feminist or gender-sensitive policies are essential to ensure that everyone really does have a right and that all rights are really respected. I would also like to thank the rapporteur very much for this wonderful report, which has opened up a whole new dimension for many. I hope that many more reports of this kind and quality will

follow. I would also like to thank the Secretariat of the Committee on Equality for the great work and cooperation, and also the whole committee. We had many hearings and discussions. There was a great deal of impact and a great many ideas, all of which the rapporteur has put into this report. I hope that we will now implement it in as many countries and at as many levels as possible together.

The draft resolution on “The gender dimension of foreign policy” **was adopted** by 26 votes in favour, no votes against and no abstentions [Resolution 2351 (2020)].

Mr Sergey KISLYAK (Russian Federation, NR): said he wanted to abstain, but his vote was registered as being in support of the draft resolution.

14. Culture, Science, Education and Media

Threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe

Mr Koloman BRENNER (Hungary, NR, Rapporteur): It is a particular pleasure and honour for me to present this report here today, because I believe that academic freedom is a very important issue. Admittedly, I am somewhat biased as a long-standing academic director of the University of Budapest and a linguist myself. But I think that in the 21st century, in the century of knowledge and information, academic freedom and autonomy in higher education is a particularly important issue. Admittedly also because, in my opinion, it is particularly important for the Council of Europe, because it is also in some way a mirror of the extent to which democratic conditions are reflected in society. Similarly, for example, in the area of freedom of the media, freedom of the press or freedom of assembly. Education in general and higher education in particular are, as I have said, actually a mirror of society and they are common goods that should then be accessible to the whole of society. Unfortunately, I also have to note in my report that there are still a number of Member States of the Council of Europe that have perhaps not yet realised the special and irreplaceable importance of education and higher education. And I would like to point out that in March the Global Public Policy Institute, the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Scholars at Risk Network and V-Dem Institute then published a new Academic Freedom Index. The states mentioned by name in my report, namely Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, unfortunately rank at the bottom of this Academic Freedom Index, Annex 113, 135 and 137. And my country, Hungary, has the worst ranking among the EU Member States, I am sorry to say. And these facts underline the importance of this report, which is very broad, that would be my next thought. The subject is incredibly complex, and I would like to urge the members to read this report in detail, I hope you have read it in detail, because it is a very complex subject. Namely, the dangers that academic freedom and university autonomy are facing. These dangers are not only necessarily to be found in undemocratic tendencies, but also in those tendencies, of course; however, in my report I have refrained from calling on individual states to take certain measures. Not because I do not believe that this is necessary, but because I believe that we should first create a generally applicable umbrella organisation for this issue. We must ensure that monitoring academic freedom and a corresponding set of sanctions rules are in place, and then it would be fair to call on certain individual Member States.

There are very many kinds of danger here in my report, for example the commercialisation of higher education to the greatest possible extent or the pressure of public opinion on academic researchers and professors, which very often leads, for example, to self-censorship by university lecturers and so on and so forth.

I particularly welcome the fact that, after 20 years of the first measures in these areas for the academic freedoms of the institutional order in higher education institutions, we have now finally, on 19 November, been given a valid definition by the Council of Ministers of the European Higher Education Area; what is academic freedom? Proposals for amendments to this effect will then be available in my report. It is also important because otherwise, until now, we have only had certain decisions from the European Court Human Rights, which have formed a certain legal basis here, but I would like to emphasise that this decision by the European Court of Human Right was of course based on Article 10, namely on freedom of expression, in other words not directly on academic freedom. I believe that we in the Council of Europe must now take the first step and at last really draw up a European Convention together for the academic freedom and institutional autonomy of higher education institutions. And I think that this report already contains a small specification, and I think that we have a modest contribution to make to this great body of rules.

I believe that one particular problem is the problem of commercialisation, which has already been mentioned. For a long time, in the European tradition, most classically represented in German culture by Humboldt, science and research were a joint journey by professors with their students. In recent decades we have unfortunately observed that commercialisation has increasingly taken place, where students simply appear as buyers of a

diploma, so to speak. I believe that this has led to negative tendencies, especially in the humanities, for example, as is also described in detail in my report.

I would like to mention another important subject, namely the subject of university rankings. We have to note that the quality of university education is not always congruent with the democratic conditions in the country or university institution concerned, and I believe that we, as the Council of Europe, as the institution which wishes to preserve human rights and democratic foundations in our Member States, must take this into account.

I would like once again to express my thanks to all the experts who have worked on this, and I would particularly like to mention Professor KARAM's excellent empirical contribution here, which I commend to you. I would also like to emphasise that I myself have carried out a great many fact-finding missions to Croatia, to Romania, in Hungary myself I have held talks; and I am really sincerely sorry that my approved and planned fact-finding mission to Russia could not take place because of the pandemic. But I think that those who have read this entire report, including the annex, have hopefully found that it is a balanced report that is fair to the complex issue.

I would like to ask the members of the Standing Committee not to attempt to defend the states mentioned in the discussion because, as I said I did not even include individual states with my recommendations and requirements in my report, I think it is important to hold up this mirror in front of us now and support this enormously important issue for Europe and for the world, academic freedom and university autonomy.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD): on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats

I would like to thank the rapporteur for having been able to adapt his words, taking into account the effects of the 2019 pandemic, a crisis of unprecedented violence at global level. This is where we realise how important it is for our researchers to work together, as mentioned in the report. I fully agree with the flexibility of adaptation needed so that, for example, basic and clinical research can dialogue for greater effectiveness. Hence the importance of cooperation and transparency, as emphasised by the rapporteur. The autonomy of higher education institutions and their responsiveness enabled teachers to keep in touch with their students at the height of the crisis, especially the most vulnerable or those who could not afford to follow online teaching. The rapporteur has rightly emphasised the human relationships that are irreplaceable in learning courses, and all this has been done in accordance with the instructions and constraints of our respective governments. Covid-19 has caused deep trauma and we will no doubt have to devise resilience mechanisms for young people, left to their own devices, sometimes far from their families, sometimes in another country. Today we are in the midst of the second wave and it calls for great vigilance. I have noted how much our rapporteur was concerned about freedom of expression, and that is why I would like to take this opportunity to say a moving thought about the teacher who was beheaded in France while giving a lecture on freedom of expression. The social networks that linked this atrocious crime are incriminated, but we all know that on the Internet the best rubs shoulders with the worst. To come back to our subject, institutions must be able to organise their research activity according to their own organisation, which can sometimes prove to be complex. Here again, it is a question of dialogue, of getting the best out of each other, and at the same time, of simplifying. Cooperation between institutions must be facilitated, but not at the expense of the principle of autonomy and free organisation, according to which the scientific strategy of institutions is determined by their board and governance. All academics must have access to the best training to protect their rights in terms of academic freedom, so that they can work serenely for the success of as many students as possible.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC): on behalf of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

If you look into a society and then there are two twins, which tell you what the level of democratic standards and the democratic society is. One hand is the freedom of media and the other is the academic freedom and autonomy of the higher education institutes. And both are very important. And this report by the rapporteur shows us very, very clearly what is the problem, for what we have to take care and what are the worries. And I know there is one amendment and I ask now in my speech not to vote in favour because the rapporteur named four countries which are by the academic freedom index on a very low level, and we should not delete their names. And also the Covid-19 times showed us how important is to go on with the freedom of academic teaching. I also share the concerns about external funding and accommodation. This shrinks the freedom of academic while the academic freedom is also a fact of support by the public and also for the public responsibility. Maybe the rapporteur comes from a country where a whole university - the teachers, the students, the staff - are now refugees. Refugees in a central European University came in totally to Vienna. I know some employees from Council of Europe which went to this fantastic university. And I'm very, very sorry that the climate of freedom of academic support in Hungary is so low, that the whole university is now a refugee.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC/DA): on behalf of European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

I too would like to congratulate the rapporteur on his report. I think we are all in favour of academic freedom and I say that as somebody who was, in a former existence, a research fellow within a university. So I have experienced this from both sides. There are two points that I would like to make. The first one relates to the arguments against commercialisation. And I would just put down a marker on this, that I do accept the commercialisation can have a bad effect on universities but just look at the research that is taking place on a vaccine for Covid-19 and the extent to which that is linking together commercial companies and universities. In a university near to where I live - at the University of Oxford - they are working with AstraZeneca to produce a vaccine for Covid-19 and that is showing the best of what commercial inputs can do. The second point I'd like to make is one relating to anti-Semitism because universities have to show themselves worthy of academic freedom and we have seen universities in my own country and across Europe that do not really support the idea of taking a stand against those who are trying to silence discussion of the Holocaust or allowing people with a Jewish faith to say what they want to say. And we've seen many students' organisations stopped from speaking in that situation, which I think is quite scandalous. Now I do also accept that universities are in a bit of a cleft stick on this. In my own country there is there is one university named after a medieval knight, Simon De Montfort, and the university is being asked to change its name, because - as was typical at the time - he persecuted some Jewish people. So you can't have it both ways. You are trapped between these two extremes but it is absolutely crucial to allow students - as in their freedom of expression - to have Jewish groups and to take those arguments forward.

Mr Hişyar ÖZSOY (Turkey, UEL): on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left

I would like to first congratulate the rapporteur for this very timely and much needed and wonderful report and resolution. I myself was an academic before I joined formal politics so that's why I very carefully read every single sentence a couple of times. It seems that the report does have two main arguments. On the one hand it is the argument about the commercialisation of academic institutions, a process whereby knowledge becomes a commodity. By commodity I mean something like Kentucky Fried Chicken or a McDonald's burger or a smartphone, right? It is something that you buy, you sell and buy in the market. It may not sound that bad when you say this but, when you think that every passing day, fewer and fewer people have access to quality higher education this is in fact a very very big problem, because now universities, applying a business model, they are functioning like companies. Students are customers or consumers, knowledge itself is the commodity and academics or more like salespersons. In fact, I mean, I was in Academia between 2002 and 2015. Over those 12-13 years I personally have felt that I was no longer an academic, actually, because we were forced to sell courses mainly. So this is, of course, undermining the institutional autonomy of higher education because the idea here is not some public good, it is profit maximization. That is why the market does business, right? It is producing and selling knowledge as a privatized commodity in order to maximise profits. The second big problem is that authoritarian states and governments are more and more undermining institutions of higher education. I totally share the argument of Mr Stefan SCHENNACH who said that authoritarian governments target the media and the academia, why? Because they are scared of critical inquiry, I should say. For both the market and the states, what is important is not critical thinking it is useful knowledge. By useful I mean, for the market, what is useful? Anything that could help you make more money. For the authoritarian states, what is useful? Anything that would help you maintain your political rule. I won't go into the case of Turkey, which is my country, I mean the situation is quite bad there. There is also a kind of appendix at the end of the report. But let me finally raise this issue: we truly need a very specific Council of Europe convention on academic freedom or, alternatively, as suggested by the rapporteur an additional protocol on academic freedom to the European Convention on Human Rights and it is not just to draft a convention, but we need also to install a very powerful monitoring and enforcement mechanism in order to assure that the convention is implemented by Member States.

Mr Olivier BECHT (France, ALDE, chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media): on behalf of the committee, that I wanted to congratulate the rapporteur on his report, to say that he has sounded a resounding warning signal to all those of us who tend to regard academic freedom as a second-class right for teachers and academics. Yet it is not a minor right but, on the contrary, it is one of the pillars of our democratic societies and even a factor in sustainable development. That is why our committee wished to highlight its inclusion in the draft resolution before us for adoption today. The message that we must send to legislators and governments must be unequivocal, because we must protect academic freedom and institutional autonomy through the legislation of the regulations of our national administrative practices. We must also build the framework that makes academic freedom and institutional autonomy effective. In this respect, of course, money is a determining factor in the effectiveness of all our key national policies. Unfortunately, as far as higher education is concerned, funding remains a stumbling block. I also wanted to say that the rapporteur had the courage to mention a number of states where academic freedom seems to be under threat. He also had the audacity to include his own country in this list. I should therefore like us all, in the tradition that we have today, to be able to take a step or a gesture to accept these criticisms and to ensure

that we can improve academic freedom and the autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe overall. I have put forward three oral amendments of a technical nature to bring the draft resolution up to date.

Mr Andrey EPISHIN (Russian Federation, NR): The definition of academic freedom was adopted by ministers of Education just yesterday. Although we were told not to discuss specific countries, there is Hungary, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia in the lagging category. How can that be if there is no case law or implementation of this definition of academic freedom? Furthermore, the report is underpinned by a definition which is not authoritative and cannot be seen as the basis for international monitoring of academic freedom. The assessment of academic freedom in Council of Europe member states is underpinned by double standards. For instance, paragraph 6 of the draft resolution states that universities play a key role in maintaining cultural and linguistic heritage. The example of Romania says that Hungarians have trouble getting access to higher education in their native language. However, there is no mention made to the fact that Russian speakers are unable to access such education in the Baltic states and in Ukraine. Also similar comments can be made regarding what is being done regarding national languages in Ukraine and the South Caucasus.

Ms Hajnalka JUHÁSZ (Hungary, EPP/CD): Fundamental rights in fields of education and science enjoy a constitutional level of protection in Hungary. Protecting and preserving academic freedom and institutional autonomy are essential and core values for the Hungarian government. Firstly, I would like to propound the issue that it is typical in the practice of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that the rapporteur analyse its own country within the country examples, and this raises the issue of lack of neutrality in this part of the report. In my opinion, it is against the code of conduct for rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly. Article 1.1.4 of the code of conduct for rapporteurs contains that undertaking to refrain from any act which may cast doubt on their neutrality, which raises the issue of the breaching of the rules. The rapporteur is member of the Jobbik party, which is an opposition party in Hungary, so in order to be able to avoid the violation of the code of conduct for rapporteurs, I suggest deleting the whole chapter on Hungary, appendix point one of the report. Secondly, the national Higher Education Act of Hungary contains detailed provisions for foreign education institutions who wish to comply within and operate in Hungary. Its revision was based on the finding of the education authority in the course of the detailed inspection that revealed several irregularities. The amendment intended to ensure that only high-quality foreign universities function in Hungary. The modified act required that the operation of a foreign university shall be based on an international treaty between the host country and the country of origin, and the institution must also genuinely offer higher education in the country concerned. Currently, there are 16 foreign institutions operating in Hungary with headquarters abroad. The criteria were not impossible to meet; for example, China, Thailand, Malaysia treated the amendment as a technical issue and the institutions did not disapprove of the new regulations either. Consequently, no foreign institutions can be granted access in status, otherwise, Hungary would be in violation of Article 14 of the European Convention. Finally, it shall be known that the rapporteur has raised the important issue of the medical and pharmaceutical University of Târgu Mures. Romania, namely, deliberately ignored its legal liabilities stemming directly from the Romania law. So in this section, we will fully support the relating finding of the report.

Mr Killion MUNYAMA (Poland, EPP/CD): I would like to congratulate the rapporteur for the important report that he has put forward. I've been an academician for 27 years. I have the experience to actually talk about what academic freedom is all about. The report is indeed timely and I would like to just point out five important issues of academic freedom that we need to abide with. First and foremost it means that a political, religious and philosophical beliefs of politicians, administrators and members of the public cannot be imposed on the students or faculty of universities. Secondly, academic freedom gives faculty members and students the right to challenge one another's views but not to penalise them for holding them. Third, academic freedom establishes a faculty members right to remain true to his or her pedagogical philosophy and intellectual commitment. It preserves the intellectual Integrity of educational system and vast public good. Fourth, academic freedom is also very important in teaching means that both faculty members and students can make comparisons and the contrast between subjects taught in course and any field of human knowledge or period of history. Fifth, academic freedom gives faculty members and students the right to seek redress or request a hearing if they believe their rights have been violated. Without these it leads to demonstrations in universities through actually

Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI (Estonia, ALDE): I would like to respond to one remark of the Russian colleague. He mentioned in his talk that also Baltic countries have some problems with academic freedom and I would like to say that he is wrongly informed and Estonia does not have problems with academic freedom and autonomy. So this is a very important remark from my point.

Mr Koloman BRENNER (Hungary, NR, Rapporteur): Allow me, first of all, to thank all those who have given words of praise for my report. Thank you very much for that support. I would like to respond very briefly to Mr HOWELL regarding the marketisation of research. You very rightly said that, for example, when it comes

to research — for instance, research during the current pandemic — in relation to the vaccine against Covid-19, applied research is of course carried out in conjunction with economic or financial interests. There are companies involved in this kind of research. That is absolutely true and what you say is accurate, but when it comes to basic, fundamental research — and fundamental research is of particular importance because very often we cannot actually know what kind of results will be yielded by basic research and what results will be useful for commercial purposes at a later date. That is not something that is foreseeable when you are talking about basic research. So that is why I wanted to pick up on your point; yes, you are right, but basic research is just as important. I agree with the Turkish colleague; yes, even socially disadvantaged groups must have access to higher education. And finally, I would like to thank once again all those who have contributed to this report, all the experts and all the staff who have supported me in this.

The oral sub-amendment, presented by Mr Olivier BECHT to replace in the draft resolution paragraph 4 the last sentence by the following sentence: “It therefore welcomes the adoption by the Rome Conference of Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) of 19 November 2020, of a common definition of academic freedom and encourages the further devising of appropriate benchmarks that would enable systemic monitoring and assessment.”, to which no objection was made, was **adopted** by 18 votes in favor, one vote against and three abstentions.

Amendment 1, presented by Mr Sergey KISLYAK, to which Mr Stefan SCHENNACH opposed, was **rejected** by 5 votes in favour, 18 against and 3 abstentions.

The oral sub-amendment, presented by Mr Olivier BECHT to delete, in the draft resolution, sub-paragraph 12.1, to which no objection was made, was adopted by 14 votes in favour, 3 against and 5 abstentions.

The draft resolution “Threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe” was adopted by 25 votes in favour, 3 votes against and no abstentions [Resolution 2352 (2020)].

The oral sub-amendment, presented by Mr Olivier BECHT to replace in the draft recommendation sub-paragraph 5.1, the words 'to be' by 'as' and the words 'in November' by 'on November 19' so the amended sentence would read, '5.1 Adhere to the use of the definition of academic freedom as adopted by the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) on 19 November 2020.', to which no objection was made, was adopted by 25 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 1 abstention.

The President **decided** to postpone the remaining items until the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

The meeting **was closed** at 6 p.m.

APPENDIX 1

Decisions on documents tabled for references to committees

A. REFERENCES TO COMMITTEES

1. **Track and trace applications: ethical, cultural and educational challenges**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Olivier Becht and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15165](#)

Reference to the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media *for report* and to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for opinion*

2. **Combating antisemitism in Europe**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
[Doc. 15168](#)

Reference to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination *for report*

3. **Raising awareness of and countering Islamophobia in Europe**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
[Doc. 15169](#)

Reference to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination *for report*

4. **Closing the digital divide: promoting equal access to digital technologies**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
[Doc. 15170](#)

Reference to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination *for report*

5. **Which measures can States legally take under the European Convention on Human Rights in order to crack down on Islamic extremism?**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Pieter Omtzigt and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15175](#)

No further action

6. **Protecting the pillars of democracy during health crises**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Ms Marietta Karamanli and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15176](#)

Reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report*

7. **Pushbacks on land and sea: illegal measures of migration management**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
[Doc. 15180](#)

Reference to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *for report*

8. **European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum: a human rights perspective**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
[Doc. 15181](#)

Reference to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *for report*

9. **Humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan**
Bureau decision

Reference to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *for report*

APPENDIX 2

Draft declaration on the parliamentary contribution to the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship on: “Effectively responding to a public health crisis in full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law”

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its action and contribution towards efforts responding to the Covid-19 health crisis and its consequences, including its supporting efforts at national and Council of Europe levels to find viable and sustainable solutions to contain the pandemic.
2. The Assembly draws attention to the reports, recommendations and resolutions it adopted on various aspects of the crisis in June and October 2020, and calls for their full implementation:
 - a. [Lessons for the future from an effective and rights-based response to the Covid-19 pandemic](#)
 - b. [Democracies facing the Covid-19 pandemic](#);
 - c. [The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on human rights and the rule of law](#)
 - d. [Upholding human rights in times of crisis and pandemics: gender, equality and non-discrimination](#)
 - e. [Humanitarian consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for migrants and refugees](#)
3. The Assembly reiterates its commitment to continue providing input to the important work carried out by the other Statutory Organ of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers, including through the preparation of four additional reports focusing on Covid-19:
 - a. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education and culture
 - b. Impact of Covid-19 on children’s rights
 - c. Towards a Covid-19 vaccine: ethical, legal and practical considerations
 - d. Overcoming the socio-economic crisis sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic
 - e. Protecting the pillars of democracy during health crises
4. The Assembly stresses the importance of a human rights, rule of law and democracy centered approach in responding to the pandemic challenges.
5. Furthermore, the Assembly urges governments to ensure that all measures taken are gender-responsive, and special attention is placed on tackling increased risks of violence against women, including domestic violence, as well as on full respect of children’s rights.
6. The Assembly stresses the need for parliamentary scrutiny of all measures taken by the authorities when addressing the new waves of the novel coronavirus.
7. The Assembly welcomes progress as regards vaccine development and underlines the need to ensure equitable deployment to ensure its efficacy. It will debate this very issue during its January 2021 part-session from the ethical, legal and practical angle.
8. Taking into consideration all the above, the Assembly welcomes the Athens Declaration by the Committee of Ministers Chairmanship, as well as the “Secretary General’s Toolkit”, and resolves to continue working in close coordination with the Committee of Ministers to support the implementation of the standards, measures and policies contained therein.
9. Finally, the Assembly invites its Observers and Partners for democracy delegations to join forces with the Assembly in this regard.

APPENDIX 3

List of participants / Liste des participants

President of the Parliamentary Assembly / Président de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Mr Rik DAEMS Belgium / Belgique

Chairpersons of Political Groups / Présidents des groupes politiques

Mr Frank SCHWABE Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC) /
Groupe des socialistes, démocrates et verts (SOC)

Mr Aleksander POCIEJ Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD) /
Groupe du Parti populaire européen (PPE/DC)

M. Jacques MAIRE Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) /
Alliance des démocrates et des libéraux pour l'Europe (ADLE)

Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance
(EC/DA) / Groupe des Conservateurs européens et Alliance
démocratique (CE/AD)

Mr Tiny KOX 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

Sir Roger GALE United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN Finland / Finlande

Mr Gusty GRAAS Luxembourg

Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS Lithuania / Lituanie

Ms Susanne EBERLE-STRAUB Liechtenstein

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ Spain / Espagne

Mme Nicole TRISSE France

Mr Andreas NICK Germany / Allemagne

M. Petr TOLSTOI Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO Ukraine

Mr Akif Çağatay KILIÇ Turkey / Turquie

Ms Inese LIBINA-EGNERE Latvia / Lettonie

Mr Alvis MANIERO Italy / Italie

Chairpersons of National Delegations / Président-e-s de délégations nationales

Mr Ruben RUBINYAN Armenia / Arménie

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA Austria / Autriche

Mr Samad SEYIDOV Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan

Ms Alma ČOLO Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine

Ms Marijna BALIĆ Croatia / Croatie

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS Cyprus / Chypre

Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI Estonia / Estonie

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN Finland / Finlande

Mme Nicole TRISSE France

Mr Andreas NICK Germany / Allemagne

Ms Dora BAKOYANNIS Greece / Grèce

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH Hungary / Hongrie

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR Iceland / Islande

Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN Ireland / Irlande

Mr Alvis MANIERO Italy / Italie

Ms Inese LIBINA-EGNERE Latvia / Lettonie

Ms Susanne EBERLE-STRAUB	Liechtenstein
Mr Gusty GRAAS	Luxembourg
Mr Emanuel MALLIA	Malta / Malte
M. Vlad BATRINCEA	Republic of Moldova / République de Moldova
Mr José BADIA	Monaco
Ms Petra STIENEN	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
Ms Ingjerd SCHOU	Norway / Norvège
Mr Arkadiusz MULARCZYK	Poland / Pologne
M. Petr TOLSTOI	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
M. Marco NICOLINI	San Marino / Saint-Marin
Ms Anna ZÁBORSKÁ	Slovak Republic / République slovaque
Ms Suzana LEP ŠIMENKO	Slovenia / Slovénie
Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ	Spain / Espagne
Ms Boriana ÅBERG	Sweden / Suède
Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ	Switzerland / Suisse
Mr Ahmet YILDIZ	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Yelyzaveta YASKO	Ukraine
Sir Roger GALE	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Ex-officio members of the Bureau / membres ex-officio du Bureau

Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS	Greece / Grèce
Mr Andreas NICK	Germany / Allemagne
Mr Zsolt NÉMETH	Hungary / Hongrie
Mr Alvis MANIERO	Italy / Italie

**Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy /
Présidente de la Commission des questions politiques et de la démocratie**

Dame Cheryl GILLAN	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights /
Président de la Commission des questions juridiques et des droits de l'homme**

Mr Boriss CILEVIČS	Latvia / Lettonie
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Président de la Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable**

M. Luis LEITE RAMOS	Portugal
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons /
Président de la Commission des migrations, des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées**

M. Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ	Switzerland / Suisse
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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**

M. Olivier BECHT	France
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination /
Présidente de la Commission sur l'égalité et la non-discrimination**

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

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU	Norway / Norvège
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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 Volker ULLRICH Germany / Allemagne

Rapporteurs of the Committees / Rapporteur-e-s des commissions

Ms Siebel ARSLAN	Switzerland / Suisse
Mr Viorel-Riceard BADEA	Romania / Roumanie
Mr Koloman BRENNER	Hungary / Hongrie
Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR	Iceland / Islande
Ms Sevink FATALIYEVA	Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Mr Domagoj HADJUKOVIC	Croatia / Croatie
Mme Alexandra LOUIS	France
Mr Frank SCHWABE	Germany / Allemagne
Ms Ingjerd SCHOU	Norway / Norvège
Ms Petra STIENEN	Netherlands / Pays-Bas

**Other members of the Parliamentary Assembly, Observers and Partners for Democracy /
Autres membres de l'Assemblée parlementaire, Observateurs et Partenaires pour la démocratie**

Mr Hovhannes IGITYAN	Armenia / Arménie
Mr Andrea EDER-GITSCHTHALER	Austria / Autriche
Mr Eduard KÖCK	Austria / Autriche
Mr Stefan SCHENNACH	Austria / Autriche
Ms Nigar ARPADARAI	Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Mr Tural GANJALIYEV	Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Mr Kamal JAFAROV	Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Mr Asim MOLLAZADA	Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan
Mr Fourat BEN CHIKHA	Belgium / Belgique
Mr Jaroslav KYTÝR	Czech Republic / République tchèque
Mr George LOUCAIDES	Cyprus / Chypre
Mr Raimond KALJULAI	Estonia / Estonie
Mr Urmas REITELMANN	Estonia / Estonie
Mr Raivo TAMM	Estonia / Estonie
Ms Vilja TOOMAST	Estonia / Estonie
Ms Inka HOPUSU	Finland / Finlande
Ms Anne-Mari VIROLAINEN	Finland / Finlande
M. Bertrand BOUYX	France
M. François CALVET	France
Mme Marie-Christine DALLOZ	France
M. Bernard FOURNIER	France
Mme Martine LEGUILLE-BALLOY	France
M. Frédéric REISS	France
Mme Laurence TRASTOUR-ISNART	France
Ms Jennifer DE TEMMERMAN	France
Mr Matern von MARSCHALL	Germany / Allemagne
Mr Kakhaber KUTCHAVA	Georgia / Géorgie
Mr Anastasios CHATZIVASILEIOU	Greece / Grèce
Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS	Greece / Grèce
Ms Nina KASIMATI	Greece / Grèce
Mr Georgios KATROUGKALOS	Greece / Grèce
Mr George PAPANDREOU	Greece / Grèce
Ms Hajnalka JUHASZ	Hungary / Hongrie
Mr Joseph O'REILLY	Ireland / Irlande
Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI	Italy / Italie
Ms Deborah BERGAMINI	Italy / Italie

Mr Piero FASSINO	Italy / Italie
Mr Andrea ORLANDO	Italy / Italie
Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS	Lithuania / Lituanie
Mme Brigitte BOCCONE-PAGES	Monaco
Mme Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO	Monaco
Ms Margreet DE BOER	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
Ms Reina DE BRUIJN-WEZEMAN	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN	Netherlands / Pays-Bas
Ms Lise CHRISTOFFERSEN	Norway / Norvège
Ms Kamila GASIUK-PIHOWICZ	Poland / Pologne
Ms Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA	Poland / Pologne
Mr Killion MUNYAMA	Poland / Pologne
Ms Edite ESTRELA	Portugal
Mr Carlos Alberto GONÇALVES	Portugal
Mr Viorel Riceard BADEA	Romania / Roumanie
Ms Iulian BULAI	Romania / Roumanie
Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN	Romania / Roumanie
Mr Aleksandr BASHKIN	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Andrey EPISHIN	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Sergey KISLYAK	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Ms Alfia KOGOGINA	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Vladimir KOZHIN	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Vladimir KRUGLYI	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Maksim KUDRIAVTSEV	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Sergei PAKHOMOV	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Ms Irina RODNINA	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Roman ROMANENKO	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Shamsail SARALIEV	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Ms Laura CASTEL	Spain / Espagne
Ms María FERNÁNDEZ	Spain / Espagne
Ms Marta GONZÁLEZ VÁZQUEZ	Spain / Espagne
Ms Carmen LEYTE	Spain / Espagne
Ms María Valentina MARTÍNEZ FERRO	Spain / Espagne
Mr Adnan DIBRANI	Sweden / Suède
Mr Thomas HAMMARBERG	Sweden / Suède
Mr Momodou JALLOW	Sweden / Suède
Ms Ola MÖLLER	Sweden / Suède
Ms Carina OHLSSON	Sweden / Suède
Mr Roland Rino BÜCHEL	Switzerland / Suisse
M. Jean-Pierre GRIN	Switzerland / Suisse
M. Christian LEVRAT	Switzerland / Suisse
Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Mehmet Mehdi EKER	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Yunus EMRE	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Emine Nur GÜNAY	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Hişyar ÖZSOY	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Serap YAŞAR	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Zeynep YILDIZ	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Sergiy VLASENKO	Ukraine
Ms Lesia ZABURANNA	Ukraine
Mr Duncan BAKER	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Lord Richard BALFE	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Mr Jeremy CORBYN	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Lady Diana ECCLES	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Lord George FOULKES	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Mr John HOWELL	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Mr Tony LLOYD	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Baroness Doreen MASSEY	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Ms Kate OSAMOR	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Invited personalities / Personnalités invitées

Mr Michael ROTH	Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Special Representative of the Federal Government for the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe / Ministre adjoint chargé des Affaires européennes au ministère fédéral des Affaires étrangères de l'Allemagne, Représentant spécial du Gouvernement fédéral pour la Présidence allemande du Comité des Ministres du Conseil de l'Europe
Mr Robert SPANO	President of the European Court of Human Rights / Président de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme

Secretaries of National Delegations / Secrétaires de délégations nationales

Mr Georg MAGERL	Austria / Autriche
Mme Sonja LANGENHAECK	Belgium / Belgique
Ms Adisa FIŠIĆ-BARUKČIJA	Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine
Ms Maria YANEVA	Bulgaria / Bulgarie
Ms Martina PETEK-STUPAR	Croatia / Croatie
Ms Gabriella MARANGOU D'AVERNAS	Cyprus / Chypre
Ms Veronika KRUPOVÁ	Czech Republic / République tchèque
Ms Kamilla KJELGAARD	Denmark / Danemark
Ms Eva VALIUS	Estonia / Estonie
Ms Gunilla CARLANDER	Finland / Finlande
Ms Maria FAGERHOLM	Finland / Finlande
Ms Marjo RANTASOLA	Finland / Finlande
M. Xavier MOAL	France
Mme Claire MOISSET	France
M. Laurent SAUNIER	France
Mr Aleksandre RAMISHVILI	Georgia / Géorgie
Mr Michael HILGER	Germany / Allemagne
Mr René JOKISCH	Germany / Allemagne
Ms Klara SCHEIDECK	Germany / Allemagne
Ms Juliane THAMM	Germany / Allemagne
Mr Dan TIDTEN	Germany / Allemagne
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Ms Panagiota MICHA	Greece / Grèce
Ms Voula SYRIGOS	Greece / Grèce
Ms Foteini TSOUNI	Greece / Grèce
Ms Judit GOTSCHALL	Hungary / Hongrie
Ms Bylgja ÁRNADÓTTIR	Iceland / Islande
Ms Eileen LAWLOR	Ireland / Irlande
Ms Fabrizi BIENTINESI	Italy / Italie
M. Federico CASELLI	Italy / Italie
Mr Piero GAMBALE	Italy / Italie
M. Andrea MICOZZI	Italy / Italie
Mr Giuseppe TREZZA	Italy / Italie

Mr Martins OLEKSS	Latvia / Lettonie
Ms Sandra GERBER-LEUENBERGER	Liechtenstein
Ms Selija LEVIN	Lithuania / Lituanie
M. Yves CARL	Luxembourg
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Ms Jovana KOVAČEVIĆ	Montenegro / Monténégro
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Mr Eric CHRISTENSEN	Norway / Norvège
Mr Artur ZANIEWSKI	Poland / Pologne
Ms Ana GUAPO	Portugal
Mme Rodica IOVU	Republic of Moldova / République de Moldova
Ms Alina ILIE	Romania / Roumanie
Ms Carmen IONESCU	Romania / Roumanie
Mr Ravzan TANASE	Romania / Roumanie
Ms Anna KUCHERESKAYA	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Ms Elisaveta GROMOGLASOVA	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
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Mr Luis Manuel MIRANDA	Spain / Espagne
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Ms Anna Lea GNAEGI	Switzerland / Suisse
Mr Daniel ZEHNDER	Switzerland / Suisse
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Mr Arda OZANSOY	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Ayşegül SAKA	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Oğuzhan TEKİN	Turkey / Turquie
Mr Borys KOLISNYCHENKO	Ukraine
Mr Iaroslav ZHYDENKO	Ukraine
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Mr Nicholas WRIGHT	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
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M. Youssef AIT ZEDDIB	Morocco / Maroc

Secretaries of Political Groups / Secrétaires des groupes politiques

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Ms Denise O'HARA	EPP/CD / PPE/DC
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Ms Maria BIGDAY	ALDE / ADLE
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Mr Francesc FERRER	Deputy to the Head of the Communication Division / Adjoint à la Cheffe de la Division de la communication
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Mme Martine MEYER	Administrative assistant of the Standing Committee / Assistante administrative de la Commission permanente
Mme Rachel MOREL	Principal administrative assistant of the Table Office / Assistante administrative principale du Service de la Séance
Mme Annick SCHNEIDER	Assistant to the Secretary General / Assistant to the Bureau Assistante du Secrétaire Général / Assistante du Bureau
Mme Aurélie HAUG	Assistant of the Table Office / Assistante du Service de la Séance

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Council of Europe / Conseil de l'Europe

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Ms Geneviève MAYER	Deputy to the Secretary to the Committee of Ministers / Adjointe au Secrétaire du Comité des Ministres
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Mr Matthias HEINZ	Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent representation of Germany to the Council of Europe / Représentant permanent adjoint, Représentation permanente de l'Allemagne auprès du Conseil de l'Europe
Mr Hannsgeorg BEINE	Deputy to the Permanent Representative, Permanent representation of Germany to the Council of Europe / Adjoint au représentant permanent, Représentation permanente de l'Allemagne auprès du Conseil de l'Europe