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Standing Committee

Minutes

of the meeting held in Rome

**on Thursday 25 November 2021 from 15:00 to 18:30 and
on Friday 26 November 2021 from 10:00 to 13:00 and from 14:30 to 17:30**

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1. OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Mr Rik Daems, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, **opened** the meeting of the Standing Committee at 10 am. He thanked Mr Roberto Fico for hosting the meeting in the Italian Chamber of Deputies and reiterated his gratefulness for his hospitality and the warm welcome they received. He also expressed his gratitude to Ms Marta Grande, the chairperson of the Italian delegation.

The President then went back to thank Mr Roberto Fico in person for his participation and contribution to the Assembly's High-Level Panel on Environment organised in the September session, which provided an opportunity to elaborate on how they could join forces to make progress on the recommendations unanimously adopted by the Assembly. The President of the Committee of Ministers was going to have to take that into account. He now had 47 countries, 600 members of parliament, opposition, majority, all unanimously saying that he had to move on environment.

The Parliamentary Assembly was looking forward to closely working with the Committee of Ministers, with the Italian authorities, and in particular with the Italian Parliament, towards the achievement of the priorities of the Presidency, which Mr Fico would present. A top priority for the Assembly in the near future was to follow-up on their recommendations, including environment. They could obviously counted on its support.

2. WELCOME ADDRESSES BY MR ROBERTO FICO, PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, AND MS MARIA ELISABETTA ALBERTI CASELLATI, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

Mr Roberto Fico greeted Ms Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati, Mr Rik Daems, Mr Luigi Di Maio, all the parliamentarians and the other participants. It was a great pleasure for him to welcome them to the Chamber of Deputies for the meeting of the Standing Committee, which was being held as a meeting in person and took place in an historical complex time. The coronavirus pandemic affected everyone, but particularly and disproportionately vulnerable groups. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had continued its work and to fulfil its fundamental missions: to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law throughout Europe.

Mr Fico welcomed Italy's six-month rotating presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, 20 years after its previous chairmanship, and outlined the priorities of the Italian Presidency starting with the strengthening of the founding principles and values of the Council of Europe, paying special attention to the promotion of women's empowerment and children's rights and minorities. It was also important to address the new challenges posed to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law by new technologies, and in particular, by the new development of artificial intelligence.

Issues such as those, which had a huge impact, could not be tackled effectively if they were tackled by a single state. They needed to have a collective and coordinated response. That was what Mr Roberto Fico wanted to draw their attention to.

International cooperation was of paramount importance if they were to meet the great global challenges of their time. They had to say it again: multilateralism was no longer an option, it was a necessity. It was precisely in that spirit that Italy intended to carry out its 6-month Presidency of the Council of Europe.

They had done that in connection with the hosting of other international events that year. The pre-COP and the G20 were hosted that year, on occasion on which the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic organised several important parliamentary conferences that were widely attended by delegations of all over the world. They needed to, of course, look at all the different activities and what they shared in common, and what they could do.

Mr Roberto Fico went on to quote Mr Winston Churchill, who in his speech in the University of Zurich on 19 September 1946 first advocated the establishment of the Council of Europe. He had an insight, that "the only remedy for conflict should be to rebuild the fabric of Europe and provide it with a structure in which it could live in peace, security and freedom. The first concrete step will be the establishment of the Council of Europe, whose structure will be such as to make the material strength of a single state less important. The small nations will count as much as the big ones, and they will be able to give themselves credit by contributing to the common cause."

Italy was one of the ten founding countries of this organisation which was set up in 1949 with the aim of fostering the creation of a common democratic and legal space in Europe.

Currently, with 47 member countries that represented some 840 million citizens, the Council of Europe was unique in the world. By focusing on rights and universal freedoms it had a unique role to play. That was ever more important if they looked at the complementary relationship and almost osmosis that had developed with the European Union.

If, for instance, the monitoring procedures of the Parliamentary Assembly and a member state's compliance with its obligations arising from their membership of the Council of Europe were considered, those had often been used by the European Commission as a yardstick for assessing the progress of candidate states in their accession process for joining the European Union.

In that context, the irreplaceable role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as a free forum for debate and discussion and issues of the protection of rules and rights, was testified by the topics they were discussing.

Those concerned the issues of migrants, combating corruption, marking the anniversary of the Istanbul Convention, and they had dedicated a few days and events in that particular room to that.

There were also issues related to migrants, in particular between Belarus and Poland. Those were issues of fundamental importance. Mr Roberto Fico added that migrants didn't have to be used as political pawns. Those were issues of fundamental importance.

Mr Roberto Fico was certain that the meeting would provide very important insights. They needed to base themselves in the paradigm of Europe and the paradigm of unity. They couldn't act on their own, they needed to manage those very complex phenomena together, such as migration. That complexity was something that couldn't be resolved by countries alone. They needed to have a solution in which they all worked together.

Mr Roberto Fico had no doubts that their meeting would be providing them with important insight to which they should pay the utmost attention. He concluded by wishing the audience the very best for their meeting.

The President recalled that the day marked the international day for the elimination of violence against women and stated that it was a subject that had a very high degree of importance for their Assembly. They had already been discussing together the progresses and challenges ahead in what he called zero tolerance on the issue, and ending violence against women once and for all, during events that were hosted by the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. He was impressed by the commitment of both Chambers for having kept the issue high on their political agenda, and thanked Ms Elisabetta Alberti Casellati for her leadership in that regard.

As he had mentioned the day before in the event in the Senate, the President remarked that members of parliament had a very important role to play in ensuring the effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

The President finally expressed that they looked forward to hearing Ms Elisabetta Alberti Casellati's views on working together towards ensuring the success of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and responding to the issues and priorities in the parliamentary agenda at both national level, be it in the Chamber or Senate, and at the level of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Ms Elisabetta Alberti Casellati, President of the Italian Senate, extended her greetings to the personalities present and to the members of the Parliamentary Assembly. 2021 had been a particularly important year for Italy's international outreach. Italy successfully chaired the G20 meeting and partnered with the United Kingdom in the presidency of COP26 leading expertly crucial multilateral processes. Significant results were achieved both in advancing dialogue on the most difficult challenges, and also on building international consensus on common strategies and actions to be adopted in many different fields.

That role of facilitator of political processes was now finding its natural continuation in the start of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

After all, commitment to multilateralism was the only method and the most effective tool for tackling increasingly complex and integrated global challenges.

The emergence of the pandemic crisis, sustainable and inclusive growth, climate and environmental balance, as well as the security and stability of various regions of the world, were priorities that Italy, with a full and

active involvement of Parliament, had placed firmly at the centre of its foreign policy agenda that was shared with its European and global partners.

Those priorities were combined with what Ms Alberti Casellati called the genetic code of their continent, on which the work of the Council of Europe focuses on by promoting democracy and human rights.

The work carried out by the Council of Europe to strengthen the quality of pluralist democracies, to guarantee freedom of opinion, to defend human rights, to combat racism and discrimination, and to promote gender equality, was an invaluable asset not only for Europe but for the whole international community. The progress made so far in those areas was unquestionable, but could not be taken for granted especially in times of prolonged economic crisis and changing geopolitical scenarios. The state of democracy and fundamental rights deserved the utmost attention. There were unmistakable danger signs and backsliding in those different sectors and areas.

That day, the 25th of November, was a special day. It was the international day for the elimination of violence against women, an issue which laid particularly close to her heart. Violence against women continued to be a widespread scourge throughout the world. Ms Alberti Casellati referred to the situation in Afghanistan. They could not forget about that. It was their institutional and political duty to act with determination to eradicate that phenomenon which violated fundamental human rights and was one of the main obstacles for achieving gender equality. That scourge had not been healed. As with other forms of violence, it tended to worsen in times of crisis, such as with the pandemic, when domestic and family tensions that often formed the backdrop of that were often exacerbated. The forms in which it manifested itself were diverse: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, occupational, or digital violence. In far too many cases it led to the ultimate consequence of femicide. They needed to be more aware of the proportions of such a serious phenomenon.

That's why Ms Elisabetta Alberti Casellati saluted the work of international bodies such as the CSW, the UN Conference on the Status of Women, as well as the work of GREVIO, the Council of Europe's independent Group of Experts (on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence), which monitors the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the leading international legal instrument against domestic violence and violence against women.

However, progress in that field was not going to be achieved through legislation alone. It was through education, through childhood, that they needed to start in order to develop non-violent gender relations. They needed to abandon the stereotypes that sometimes unconsciously hindered the choices and lifepaths of many women. Those same stereotypes still conditioned the lives of far too many men who were incapable of having respectful and equal relationships with women at work, in their emotions, and in everyday life.

They were called on to make a major cultural change, involving the media, schools, and training centres, religious communities themselves, and places where people lived together. They wanted to bring about a change in their perception of women and the relationship between sexes. Mr Rik Daems had been talking about tolerance zero. She agreed to that term as the right one to use. The approach with which that issue was being addressed, and which she was delighted with, was very significant in that context. It precisely underlined the very important active role that both men and boys played in raising awareness about how urgent it was to eliminate gender-based violence.

Parliaments could make a decisive contribution to that fight. In the Italian Senate, for instance, the commission of inquiry into femicide and all forms of gender-based violence carried out excellent work in analysing and identifying best practices for combating this phenomenon. It was also an effective forum for dialogue between the relevant institutions. Among the numerous documents produced by the commission, there were also reports that analysed in a comparative way the frameworks that existed in countering violence in different countries in Europe and the world. These were particularly useful for co-operation between parliaments. A report on the judicial response to femicides was adopted only the week before.

There was still a huge amount of work to be done and there was no room for complacency. To the institutions they represented and, in particular, to the bodies of the Council of Europe, Ms Alberti Casellati renewed her encouragement and her wish that they continued to succeed in their valuable work. She had no doubt that the Italian Presidency would give further impetus to the achievement of the common objectives of peaceful coexistence, democracy and rights which underpinned their mission.

The President thanked Ms Alberti Casellati for her address and showed his gratitude to Mr Luigi Di Maio for participating in the exchange of views. It was the first opportunity to discuss co-operation and his upcoming agenda as they entered the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. Italy was a founding member of the Council of Europe and it remained as one of the most valued partners of that organisation.

The COP26 had already ended, and everybody recognised the need to act fast and firmly to protect the environment. That was something that was close to his heart and to the Assembly's heart given the recommendations it passed in a unanimous way. The question of the environment cut across all the core values of their work: human rights, democracy, rule of law. It went without saying that they could not enjoy their intrinsic human rights if they did not live in a clean, healthy, safe, and sustainable environment. That was Article 2 of the Convention, which said, "the right to life". So, what was life worth if it could not be enjoyed in a decent environment.

On that topic, and indeed, on the many other challenges facing member States, and on a global level, they really counted on the continued good cooperation between the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. New ways of working had been installed. One of them was the triologue. He reassured himself of the progress all three of them could make, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General, to defend the same values. It was something that he had been stressing for so long. They had the same agenda and defended the same values: protecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and democracy.

3. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH MR LUIGI DI MAIO, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, ITALIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Mr Luigi Di Maio issued his thanks for being invited to that session of the Standing Committee. That gave him the opportunity to highlight to the audience the priorities of the Italian Presidency of the next six months. The Italian Presidency began on 17 November 2021 and was returning, 20 years later, with commitment, pride and a very strong sense of responsibility. That had already been said by the President of the Chamber and the Senate that year. His country had been at the centre of the international agenda. First, as presidents of the G20, and secondly as partner of the UK in COP26. At present, with the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Mr Luigi Di Maio went on to say that Italy was more committed than ever to strengthening international cooperation in the face of new global challenges. Multilateralism was not an option, but rather a requirement.

The pandemic had clearly shown that no country could do alone. There was more to gain from effective common rules than from not having them. They therefore needed more multilateralism, both at global and European levels.

More than 70 years had passed since the founding countries, including Italy, decided to establish the Council of Europe in 1949. Since then, other states had joined over the years, accepting its founding principles and values.

It was currently their duty to remain committed to that European house which represented the most inclusive forum for dialogue and harmonisation on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law on their continent.

The Council of Europe played a crucial role in promoting security and stability in Europe and in the wider multilateral architecture. Thanks to its unique framework of conventions and legal instruments which also attracted non-member States.

Within the Council of Europe system, the Parliamentary Assembly was an extraordinary tool for dialogue and discussions.

In his recent meeting with Secretary General Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić, they underlined the relevance of the Assembly and the particular activism that characterises it even compared to other international parliamentary bodies.

The role of the Parliamentary Assembly had evolved over time from the purely consultative functions of its very early days. The main added value of the Assembly laid in its pluralist attitudes, in its ability to reflect the variety of national parliaments, thus also giving substance in international forums to the voice of political minorities.

During their presidency, they intended to further enhance the role of that parliamentary body. Including by strengthening the interaction with the Committee of Ministers. They were therefore going to continue to practice what they believed to be a virtuous practice: regular meetings between the Committee of Ministers and the

President of the Parliamentary Assembly, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, with the aim of the organisation being enabled to speak with one voice on major issues whenever it was possible.

To that end, the role of the joint committee as a forum dedicated to coordinating activities between the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly was extremely useful.

Mr Luigi Di Maio went on to speak about multilateralism. He stressed it was the driving force behind their presidency, which had prompted them to develop an ambitious programme that included more than 30 events over the six months, with the aim of advancing the work of the Council of Europe.

The Italian Presidency was going to focus, in particular, on three priority areas.

Their first objective was to encourage a renewed commitment to the shared values of the Council of Europe, starting with the protection of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Those were of course the founding principles of the organisation. Underpinning the decision of member States to join the Council of Europe. They had to be nurtured and protected, and never be taken for granted.

With that in mind, Mr Luigi Di Maio argued that they intended to take particular attention to those areas that could foster dialogue and inclusiveness, and strengthen the organisation's common feeling.

Among those, Mr Luigi Di Maio also wanted to mention firstly the protection of cultural heritage as a tool for promoting their shared identity, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

Social rights were also a cornerstone of European integration and one of the founding principles of Europe. According to Mr Luigi Di Maio, Italy intended to contribute to strengthen the European Social Charter signed 60 years ago in Turin.

They were sure that there would be tangible results achieved by the recently appointed ad hoc working group in view of the May 2022 ministerial conference.

The second priority area concerned the promotion of the rights of women and young people, who were particularly exposed to violation and discrimination even more so in the context of the pandemic. The aim was women's empowerment and equal participation in social, economic and public life.

Italy was always strongly committed to those issues. They always played a central role in their presidency of the G20. They spared no effort in combating gender-based violence and domestic violence, underlining the importance of the Istanbul Convention in any context.

Mr Luigi Di Maio wanted to once again take the opportunity on the international day on the elimination of violence against women to encourage other accessions and ratifications of that legal instrument which was undoubtedly the most advanced one in that field at a multilateral level. It was their obligation, their duty, to protect children's rights. But also, to prepare children to develop an aware and responsible relationship by promoting appropriate youth policies.

During their Presidency they would launch a new Council of Europe strategy for the rights of the child. They were going to organise a forum on democratic citizenship which young people from the 47 member States were going to be invited to.

Combating discrimination in all its forms and promoting inclusion was also going to be a part of their programme thanks to dedicated initiatives and events.

Their third line of action was to veer towards building a people friendly future.

The Council of Europe had often been at the forefront in addressing challenges posed by new technologies through its ability to read them from the angle of the rights of the individual.

Mr Luigi Di Maio recalled the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime which was now a global reference point on which they intended to focus during that semester with the opening for signature of the second protocol.

Mr Luigi Di Maio explained that currently the Council was examining the impact and risks that the development of new artificial intelligence may have on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

They were building on the initial impetus provided by the Finnish Presidency and the achievements of subsequent presidencies, including the decision taken at the Hamburg ministerial meeting in May 2021 at the end of the German Presidency.

Italy was going to strive to ensure that negotiations aimed at defining a legal instrument to regulate the development and use of artificial intelligence, while respecting human rights and democratic principles, could be launched under their Presidency.

Building a future on a human scale also meant promoting a citizen friendly judicial system. Rule of law and the independence of the judiciary were the basis of effective democracy and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In that perspective it was very important that the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights was enforced, and that the effectiveness of the monitoring system was properly ensured.

Italy saw the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights as a key element in order to make the European system of human rights protection more coherent and more comprehensive.

At the same time, Italy considered a priority the reaffirming of the function of punishment for the rehabilitation of the offender, but also the moment of reparation of the victim. That was going to be the theme of the ministerial meeting of justice ministers on the following month in Venice.

In addition, as part of their efforts to promote the independence of the investigating judiciary, they would be organising a meeting of all the prosecutors general of the Council of Europe member States in Palermo in May.

It was going to be an opportunity to mark an important anniversary for their country 30 years after the murder of judges Falcone and Borsellino. Their painful sacrifice gave commitment, determination, and awareness to the fight against mafia associations.

Those were the three main macro areas of priority for their Presidency: fundamental values, the rights of women and young people, and a people friendly future.

With that in mind, during their six-month Presidency, they had planned a number of initiatives aimed at bringing young people in particular closer to the reality of the Council of Europe and the values and principles of which it is both guardian and promoter through its institutions such as the Court and the Parliamentary Assembly.

During the course of their Presidency, they were going to carry out different activities with that in mind. Through those initiatives, they wanted to call to promote the values and principles of the organisation, which was a guarantee of the relevance of the Court and the Parliamentary Assembly.

Mr Luigi Di Maio explained that the commemorative stamp they had on their tables was a tangible example of the attention paid to disseminating the image of the organisation. It was a special issue made by the Italian Post Office with the intention of celebrating their Presidency and also underlining how the Council of Europe was now part of the daily lives of their citizens. It was a heritage that had to be protected, cherished and shared.

Before concluding Mr Luigi Di Maio expressed his great satisfaction that the consensus-based adoption the day before of the Council's budget for 2022-23 under their Presidency.

That was a very important result, which was one that could have been taken for granted. Two years ago, a vote had to be held on that. It was the first time the budget of the Council of Europe had been adopted from the point of view of a four-year programme cycle which gave more coherence, more stability and greater predictability to the activities of the organisation.

Furthermore, the adoption of the budget based on the criteria of ZRG, zero real growth, had to be seen as an impetus to pursue with even greater determination the path of reform that the organisation undertook with a particular regard to boosting the efficiency of its working methods and optimising the use of its resources.

Mr Luigi Di Maio concluded by thanking the Italian delegation for that first opportunity to have that important meeting.

As Italy they hoped to work with the Parliamentary Assembly throughout their Presidency in a fruitful and constructive manner. They wanted to advance the programme he had just outlined and achieve their common

goals. Their contribution would also be crucial to ensuring the necessary link between the principles, objectives, instruments, and results.

It of course went without saying that the Presidency was going to end with a meeting of all foreign ministers which they hoped was going to be able to outline the progress made during their Presidency and the lines of action they were going to leave as a legacy for future presidencies.

Ms Marta Grande began by thanking the President and thanking the Minister Mr Luigi Di Maio for his statement. The objectives of the Italian Presidency were fully in line with keeping the values and ideals underpinning the Council of Europe. They stood at an historic crossroad. Women's rights were constantly under attack. Furthermore, they had seen some rollback on the values and principles they subscribed to. Thus, as part of their Presidency, they were going to be working to strengthen those values.

She explained that they also chose as a priority the rights of young people. That opened the door to young people that were calling for a more sustainable future. Youth was currently asking for an environment in which they could live, so they could protect nature. They wanted greater protection for human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That was what young people were calling for. Many young people were facing discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Those priorities that they had chosen for their Presidency meant that they, as politicians, were going to be speaking on the key items of the agenda in their societies.

Ms Marta Grande concluded by asking the Minister and the rest of the audience how they could keep up with the times and how could they maintain their relevance so that they could ensure greater visibility of the Council of Europe's objectives.

Mr Piero Fassino explained that over the past two years they had constantly been talking about the protection of human rights. It was once again a priority both in the international arena and in the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe had a wonderful mechanism. Whenever they had an issue with a given country, they sent a mission that issued a recommendation and there was then a follow-up and a request for opinion from the Venice Commission. So they had a wonderful mechanism for dialogue. But that was very much at odds with the sanctions mechanisms that were deployed by the EU.

Mr Piero Fassino's question was if the Minister didn't think that it would be worthwhile during the Italian Presidency to implement that Council of Europe mechanism through a dialogue with the European Union so that they used that very positive and proactive mechanism, the Council of Europe mechanism, much more than the sanctions-based mechanism which often created stumbling blocks to the protection of human rights. That meant that there was less respect for human rights at the end of the day.

Mr Piero Fassino also said that they had 47 countries there at the Assembly. They had the Russian Federation as well as Turkey. Those states were very active in the international arena. He believed they needed to strengthen ties with those countries as well as between those countries and other institutions such as the EU.

He then asked what the position of the Italian Presidency was.

Mr Aleksander Pocij expressed his gratitude for being there where the Republic was born in 509 b.c, and where, unfortunately, the Republic died 500 years later. It was very instructive. He heard from their distinguished hosts about the situation on the Belarusian border, but he didn't hear the answer on what to do.

That day many foreign affairs ministers of Europe, the Secretary General of NATO, and the President of the European Union, condemned that terrorist mission, that hybrid attack. But they had to probably bring something more general as an answer because the situation was completely different.

The Geneva Convention was established 70 years ago when the walls were built by the communists to stop people from escaping from the Eastern prison. Now the situation was completely different, and unfortunately, they were building walls to stop people coming to democracies and to the places they wanted to go to for better lives. Italy also had the experience of the previous years. They had to find something probably in between.

His question was what the Minister's agenda for the future was.

Mr Emanuelis Zingeris mentioned that they had just passed their Resolution 2404 with great support from the Italian side in the Assembly. The Assembly proposed the declaration within the Council of Europe of a

permanent group of their body on the human rights situation in Belarus, one of the tasks of which was the monitoring of the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from Belarus.

Two days ago, they observed the Italian ambassador and other ambassadors who kept silent on the proposal to establish an ad hoc committee for Belarus and for the human rights situation. At the same time, as just mentioned by his colleague, artificially created tensions and a hybrid war was not the same than what they had on the Italian border or the Greek border.

That artificial attack's target was to change their foreign policy towards the last dictator, Lukashenko.

Mr Emanuelis Zingeris stressed that they would not change their policy towards a dictator. In Vilnius they had the leadership of the democratic organisation, Ms Tsikhanouskaya. They would ask him to have expertise about the constitution just sent from the Belarusian democratic side, Ms Tsikhanouskaya's side, to the Venice Commission and have results about the proposed constitution draft on how they saw the situation.

Mr Emanuelis Zingeris' question was about the Minister's behaviour during the Italian chairmanship. They were all thankful for his great contribution. They were behind women's rights and all the standards that had been mentioned by him. They were supporting him, but he pledged to be told how it was possible that some governments were failing to include Belavia, a company of the Belarusian regime, involved in illegal immigration, in the sanctions list.

Mr Luigi Di Maio begun by talking about women's rights and the Istanbul Convention. He believed they should be working together in the most inclusive fashion possible so as to promote as much as possible the ratification of that Convention.

The work they were doing at the Council of Europe was what Mr Fassino said earlier. What they were doing was finding a way, a method of obtaining their objectives. That method had to be underpinned by dialogue, engagement, as well as attempts to achieve common positions of countries that are members of the Council of Europe. That was what the President had said earlier.

Mr Luigi Di Maio said they had common values on which the Council of Europe was built. He believed that the Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Istanbul Convention, was a Convention that concerned all Council of Europe's member States whether they were founding members or whether they joined later on.

Mr Luigi Di Maio remarked that they also had follow-up mechanisms on the European Union side. Yes, they had a more sanctions-based mechanism rather than a follow-up mechanism or monitoring mechanism. But as they knew, the Council of Europe was bigger, had more members. They had a number of members there at the Council of Europe with whom they had an ongoing dialogue even if they sometimes disagreed.

Mr Luigi Di Maio believed those to be the broad brushstrokes of the way forward. They had ongoing constructive dialogue, not dogmatic dialogue.

Turning to the issue of Belarus, which was flagged by a number of speakers, Mr Luigi Di Maio stated that as things stood, they had an initiative they had prepared. The Commission of Human Rights went to Poland a few days before. That trip was a milestone for part of the efforts they were implementing at that early stage.

That phenomenon they were seeing was not a migratory phenomenon. That year Italy had already received 60.000 migrants. They arrived in Italy crossing the Mediterranean. But what they had seen on the border between Poland and Belarus was not a migration crisis. What they were seeing were human beings being instrumentalised in order to wage a political attack against another country. That was unacceptable.

Italy didn't have to be dragged into that debate, the debate about what was happening on Belarus' border. Those were completely different issues.

Mr Luigi Di Maio really wanted to underscore that. The Council of Europe was the best possible platform to involve various countries in that discussion, countries that were members of the Council of Europe that could influence Belarus and could help them achieve their ultimate objective: ending what was happening.

Mr Luigi Di Maio thought that all of them had been following the tragic events in the headlines. For instance, the Syrian children who lost their lives attempting to cross the border into the EU.

When they deliberated those issues, they probably remembered what happened a few years before with Alan Kurdi, who washed up on a European beach.

Regardless of what was happening, he reassured them that Italy stood convinced that it was a good idea to adopt the second sanctions package targeting Belarus. They did that at the EU with staunch supporters for that measure.

But there at the Council of Europe they could perhaps be a bit more daring, they could do more moving beyond sanctions.

It was true, sanctions were a part of the EU's modus operandi. At the Council of Europe, they conducted follow-up, monitoring, ongoing checks, and that had to be applied to what was going on on the Belarus border.

Ms Tsikhanouskaya, the head of the Belarusian opposition whom he met in a number of occasions and had fruitful discussions with, in Italy as well. It was in fact absolutely clear that what laid at the heart of that issue were people, whether they were nationals of Belarus or from other countries. Any initiatives put forward by the Committee of Ministers were going to be fully supported.

Mr Tiny Kox began by saying that he couldn't agree more with what the Minister had just said. Effective multilateralism was not an option but a necessity. The fact that he said it indicated that not everybody was fully aware that multilateralism was indeed a necessity. He asked the Minister what he would say to the leadership of those countries that had, for good or bad reasons, doubts about effective multilateralism. What was a convincing argument for all the leadership of those countries to express that multilateralism was indeed the answer, not an option, but a necessity.

Mr Frank Schwabe announced he was going to make one remark and one question. The remark was in relation to the budget the Minister mentioned. Mr Frank Schwabe just wanted to say that that Parliament which they saw a little bit of, was very nice. If he came to Strasbourg, he would see that the building there was not so nice. They needed some more money there. It wasn't that much money they needed for that organisation. It was quite a small budget, but he wanted to say that in Germany, he (Mr Frank Schwabe) was German, they had a new government with maybe a colleague from the Green Party very soon who was aware of it. She was a member of the PACE, and maybe there was a chance to come around that situation of the budget for the future.

The question was about the most important part of their organisation, the European Court of Human Rights. They had a very worrying situation where more and more countries didn't respect the judgements. They saw a decision by the Constitutional Court of Poland the day before that concerned them a lot. That day and the following was going to be the Committee of Ministers. He (Mr Luigi Di Maio) had the chairmanship. They discussed the case of Osman Kavala in Turkey.

The question to the Minister was what he thought about the situation and how could they bring the countries closer for them to respect judgments, as well as what would he do as President during the following half year.

Mr Jacques Maire started off saying that Rik Daems embodied a liberal presidency at the Assembly, but it was coming to an end. Throughout that liberal presidency he managed to garner consensus on some of the themes, one of which they attached great importance to: the relation between human rights and the environment.

Currently if they were to draft the European Convention on Human Rights from scratch, environmental rights would be seen as fundamental rights. That approach was discussed recently with the involvement of many eminent personalities: the Pope who was not there, they also had the UN Secretary General speak to that... The Committee of Ministers also issued a communication calling for a feasibility study to see whether they needed a legally binding instrument in that field.

Mr Jacques Maire stated that he completely agreed with many of the priorities the Minister listed. He, as well as his colleague Ms Nicole Trisse, supported all of the various priorities he listed including some of the priorities that were particularly important for their two countries. It was true, it was a historic moment to have their two countries meeting there. It was a very strong signal.

Mr Luigi Di Maio mentioned that as the country that hosted the Presidency at the Committee of Ministers, they were working to ensure the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights' judgements. Of course, that spoke to human rights in many areas.

First and foremost, they wanted to shore up the authority of the European Court of Human Rights. They were doing everything they could to shore up its credibility and part of that process was contributing to staff reducing the backlog of European Court of Human Rights' judgments.

As part of its work during their Presidency, they were going to do everything they could to ensure that court judgements were implemented. That was keeping with what he had said earlier. There were some countries which had strayed from their fundamental values. They needed to bring those countries back into the fold and ensure they were on the right track. That was to be done through the various initiatives they were deciding on and were working on hand to hand.

Over the last few years, they had been working on that, but one of the founding members... They had to say they had seen it before. They had seen presidents that had not implemented European Court of Human Rights' judgements. That meant that some individuals didn't have their rights upheld.

Following those presidents, they managed to achieve what they were after, using that mechanism which involved both the Assembly and the Presidency.

They could count on Italy because Italian public opinion gave the utmost importance to the judgements handed down by the European Court of Human Rights.

On top of the various governmental initiatives, there was also public opinion. Public opinion believed that those judgements were credible. That was applicable to very specific cases as well. Furthermore, Mr Luigi Di Maio added that they stood convinced that they needed to keep on believing in multilateralism. It was thanks to dialogue that they would be able to make headway.

Italy was going to use all its arrows in its quiver and make every possible effort. They stood ready to work with every possible country to achieve their stated objectives. That applied to all cases including the Kavala case, which was of great concern. That was in fact something he highlighted during the inaugural meeting of the Italian Presidency that was held in Strasbourg.

The Kavala case is something they were going to continue talking about. They were going to continue to engage in dialogue with the relevant countries, specifically Turkey, to ensure that the rules were upheld.

Regarding the environment, Mr Luigi Di Maio expressed that at the various multilateral fora held that year, they discussed that on a number of occasions pinpointing the close link between the environment and human rights.

It was true that in the past, sometimes, they had ignored the repercussions of climate change. In many parts of the world, they saw human rights undermined as a result of environmental rights not being protected. Many countries were hard-hit by climate change. Some of those countries' terrorists gained ground. They've seen governments' authority undermined, they've seen radicalisation, the targeting of women, children and young people first and foremost.

Therefore, what they needed to do was to continue taking forward vital initiatives. What came to his mind was the work that was being done in the Council of Europe including the handbook on human rights and the environment. That was something that was being drafted and the Committee of Ministers was going to examine it. They were going to be paying special attention to that as well.

Furthermore, they needed to find the best possible response to initiatives to update existing instruments. Perhaps they also needed to come up with new ones.

Mr Luigi Di Maio also explained that they would be fostering inter-institutional dialogue between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers.

Ms Petra Stienen begun by mentioning that as a rapporteur on the role of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence, she called on all of the men in that room to speak up when they saw violence against women happening. Jokes, even well intended ones, but other forms of violence as well.

There was a provision in the Istanbul Convention under Article 12.4 that actually called on men and boys to speak up and act as role models and agents of change.

Ms Petra Stienen's question to the Minister was how he himself, personally, in the Committee of Ministers was going to be a role model and an agent for change and actually put those beautiful words into action in the Committee of Ministers meetings.

Mr Zsolt Németh greeted the Minister on behalf of the former Hungarian Presidency and wished him a successful Presidency which was just starting. As it was asked before him concerning the feasibility study on

environment, he wanted to draw the Minister's attention to another important priority of the Hungarian Presidency, which was national minorities.

Concerning national minorities, they had been able to adopt the Kovács report in the Parliamentary Assembly. In the Committee of Ministers, they had been able to establish through the Antidiscrimination Committee a national minority working group that had to prepare a recommendation on the political participation of young people on behalf of national minorities.

Italy definitely had a lot of experience in the field of national minorities because of Alto Adige, South Tirol and so on. The Minister was also aware of the fact that the youth was an important issue, as he had just developed.

Mr Zsolt Németh asked him to follow the issue closely and to find an appropriate answer to that challenge, because for the Balkans, for Eastern Europe, for Central Europe, that was an ongoing challenge. They hoped that his Presidency would be a success in general and in that particular field as well.

Ms Maria Mezentseva started saying that the Minister was definitely winning the hearts of the Ukrainian delegation by emphasising on youth policies and on the new strategies for the rights of children.

The Minister had numerously mentioned the aim of dialogue. Her question was how they could go on with dialogue if one of the member States who returned to the Assembly for dialogue was now violating human rights via hybrid tactics by using migrants and troops next to the EU border as well. What did they have to do and how did they have to react?

Mr Nicos Tornaritis asked about how determined the international community was, including the Council of Europe, to pass from words to deeds and impose restrictive measures against Turkey in relation to its illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and unilateral steps in Famagusta that compromised the prospects for the resumption of negotiations on the Cyprus problem.

Similarly, they could not tolerate the instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees for political purposes. Neither from Belarus nor from Turkey or anywhere else. Double standards result in the fragmentation and uneven application and protection of human rights. Therefore, it was imperative to avoid it. It was a matter of relevance and credibility for their organisation. He wished to have the Minister's comments on that.

Mr Luigi Di Maio started his reply to the questions by pointing the fact that two comments were made with regards to the rights of children.

He passed his best wishes to the parliamentarians from Hungary because a few days before, in Strasbourg, they had the transfer of the Presidency with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary. He paid tribute to the work of the Hungarian Presidency in the past six months. He also reassured that he would do the utmost to continue with the good work started by the Hungarian Presidency. That work really needed to be properly implemented.

Their aim, as far as violence against women was concerned was to work as much as they could to ensure that all member States signed and ratified the Istanbul Convention.

He insisted on repeating it once again. He knew it was the 25th of November, an important day, of course. What he was saying then was of added importance. They wanted to do everything they could.

Mr Luigi Di Maio apologised if he was being repetitive, but insisted that the Italian Parliament, with the support of the Italian Government, signed and ratified the Convention quite some time ago. In their own domestic legislation, they continued to make amendments to ensure that the Convention was properly implemented.

They were going to do that as part of the work of the Italian Presidency. They wanted to have a proper monitoring mechanism and initiatives to be taken in different member States. They were going to continue with that by undertaking monitoring visits, by implying the provisions of the Convention both in Italy at a bilateral level, and also elsewhere.

Mr Luigi Di Maio stressed that they wanted those aims to be met.

As it stood that day, it was very much their duty to work closely with young people. It wasn't simply respecting the Convention. It wasn't simply a matter of signing up to and ratifying instruments and conventions. They needed to take it one step further.

They had a great responsibility regarding the rights of children, the rights of young people, the education of children. It was their duty to do everything they could to ensure that more and more so, the young generations were made familiar with the work carried out by the Council of Europe.

A number of initiatives could be taken and were going to be taken to heighten the awareness of the citizens of Europe both in terms of their rights and in terms of their duties as well. Several events were going to be organised under their Presidency to involve very young children, not just teenagers.

They were going to be implementing initiatives that heightened the awareness of the youngest generation, that made them aware of the values that they championed at the Council of Europe.

That was ever so important if they wanted to make a headway in different member States and if they wanted to ensure that public opinion really bought in to those conventions, and that member States all signed up and ratified the Convention as a result.

Regarding the subject raised by their Ukrainian colleague, they did have one advantage if she liked. That was that they could look at the results of the sanctions mechanism applied by the European Union with regards to human rights violations.

The Council of Europe format was a different format to the European Union one. Mr Luigi Di Maio asserted that they were very firmly convinced that sanctions needed to be applied if they had been handed down, but they also needed to use all the mechanisms they had through multilateralism, he thought that they knew that better than he did, to encourage the right results to be achieved.

Those results should be geared towards protecting the human rights of all people, in particular individuals who were having their human rights violated. There were so many cases of that that they also needed to act to continue to work to ease the tensions and make sure there was a de-escalation of the situation in regions such as Ms Maria Mezentseva's.

They were absolutely convinced of the importance of multilateralism and its advantages. They could see the results of multilateralism. Mr Luigi Di Maio turned to the Mediterranean by mentioning that if they looked at the fact that if a number of parties had felt that they had something to lose resorting to multilateralism, more so the United Nations... If they looked at all these bodies that seemed to be losing out, in fact they were now achieving very strong victories in terms of human rights and brought about de-escalations in violence.

Mr Luigi Di Maio thought that they needed to be proud about what they had achieved in the past years. They needed to be convinced of the importance of the mechanisms they had. Their Presidency would do everything they could to promote and carry out initiatives, as Ms Marta Grande had just said, that complemented the work of the organisation and achieved the aims that they had set.

Mr Luigi Di Maio reaffirmed that he did believe in dialogue. Dialogue was not only just a nice word, but dialogue was also all about diplomatic ties and achieving concrete results. If they wanted to encourage a frank, open and honest discussion with their counterparts, even if they didn't share their views, that was certainly one way of achieving their aims. They could feel convinced of that.

Italy had always believed in that and had always played its part in fostering dialogue in its foreign affairs.

One thing they had noticed with regards to Cyprus and what was happening in that part of the Mediterranean, was a subject that they had certainly looked at in occasions in Italy. It was a situation in which there was a mechanism which was in place. There were parties that were scoring up to each other in that region. Mr Luigi Di Maio thought that they needed to try and ensure they had better and more effective results by promoting exchanges between Greece and Turkey, and by promoting a format through the United Nations that fostered dialogue on the issue of Cyprus.

They didn't have to forget there was the Turkish-Cypriot issue which was not recognised. One could see what was happening there as well. On those different points, there had been some major progress made already.

With regard to the issue of migration, the Minister exposed his thoughts as a member state of the European Union, and as a member state of the Council of Europe. Within the European Union they signed up to an agreement with Turkey on migration. The approach was not necessarily the same when it came to other questions.

The President thanked the Minister Mr Luigi Di Maio and expressed that he was looking forward to cooperating closer with him in the coming months and to contribute to upholding, defending and extending the values that

they all cherished. The President also extended his gratitude to all the speakers and to all those who took part in the Q&A, and also appreciated those who liberated their time to take part in the Standing Committee.

4. EXAMINATION OF NEW CREDENTIALS

Doc. 15407

The Standing Committee **ratified** the credentials of new members of the Assembly submitted by the delegations of Croatia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway and Ukraine.

5. MODIFICATIONS IN THE COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

Commissions (2021) 08
Commissions (2021) 08 Add.

The Standing Committee **ratified** the modifications in the composition of Assembly committees in respect of the delegations of Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway and Ukraine, and in the composition of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), in respect of the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group.

6. REQUEST FOR A CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE (UNDER RULE 53 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE)

The President announced the Standing Committee that a request for current affairs debate had been tabled by the five political groups on “The situation of migrants on the border of Poland and Belarus”. At its meeting in the morning, the Bureau of the Assembly had decided to recommend the holding of this current affairs debate and appointed Pierre-Alain Fridez as the first speaker.

There being no objections, this was **agreed**.

7. AGENDA

The Standing Committee **adopted** the revised draft agenda (AS/Per (2021) OJ 03 rev3).

8. FIRST PART-SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (24-28 JANUARY 2022)

The Standing Committee **took note** of the draft agenda of the first part-session of the Parliamentary Assembly (24-28 January 2022).

9. OBSERVATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN MOROCCO (8 SEPTEMBER 2021)

The President informed that the report on the parliamentary elections in Morocco would be presented by Mr Antonio Gutiérrez Limones (Spain, SOC) in the absence of the rapporteur Mr Alberto Ribolla (Italy, EC/DA), who was now on an observation mission in Kyrgyzstan. The report was approved by the Bureau in the morning.

Mr Antonio Gutiérrez Limones presented the report and took the opportunity to thank his colleagues who participated in the observation mission and who had done a very good job. He additionally thanked the Moroccan authority and the Council of Europe office in Rabat for their assistance. In 2011, the Moroccan Parliament became the first non-European legislative body to obtain the status of “Partner for Democracy”. Since then, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has observed all legislative elections in Morocco.

A constitutional monarchy, the kingdom of Morocco had a new constitution approved in 2011, representing an important step for democracy, increased powers to parliament, and autonomy for the government. He said that the balance of power remained strongly in favour of the monarchy, nonetheless. He noted that these elections had to face important challenges. Firstly, the legislative, local and regional elections were held on the same day for the first time and under a modified electoral framework. Secondly, the campaign period happened during the peak of the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which bore a number of risks and raised concerns about abstentions.

He said that this concurrence of multiple elections ensured that the final turnout was just above 50% of the electorate, which was seven points up compared to the previous elections. The elections had the highest number of registered voters in Morocco's electoral history, with about 2.3 million voters more than the previous elections. Morocco's parliamentary elections marked the defeat of the ruling Justice and Development Party, which won only 13 of the total 395 seats in parliament. The party lost its position as head of government to the National Rally of Independents.

He shared some observations and recommendations. The voting in the polling stations observed was overall very well organised. He said the members of polling stations were, in most cases, very co-operative with observers. The voting process was transparent. His teams noted a few cases of non-compliance with voting procedures, but otherwise it ran smoothly and peacefully. He welcomed the professionalism of the responsible state authorities and the courtesy of the members of the polling stations.

He said that although many efforts had been made to include more women into the election, he hoped that in the next elections more women would be chairing the polling station committees. With regards to female participation in politics, they noted with some satisfaction efforts of the Moroccan authorities to include more women in politics. To this end, they hailed the introduction of the new regional list, which was specially created to boost the representation of women in the parliament. He called this a very positive beginning. He called upon the new government and political parties to work on improving women's overall status in the society.

On the other hand, he shared his regret that the amendments to the electoral legislation were adopted late, only a few months before the launch of the official campaign, which was not fully in line with the Council of Europe's recommendations on electoral practices.

He noted that the electoral campaign took place in a very atypical atmosphere affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. He said the government imposed drastic measures in order to safeguard the electoral process. In this context he said it was normal that the campaign moved online to social media, which raised some concern over the accessibility of the campaign to all categories of the population.

The final point he wished to raise was his long-standing concern about the possibility of Moroccan citizens abroad being able to exercise their constitutional right to vote. The diaspora communities are the main contributors to Morocco's foreign currency reserves and an important economic actor, who could also positively impact the voter turnout. He therefore renewed a call on the Moroccan authorities to find the possibilities for future elections for Moroccan citizens abroad to vote.

He also regretted that the exercise of the right to vote remained denied to several categories of the Moroccan population, including the police, the military, people in hospitals or in pre-trial detention. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe delegation therefore urged the Moroccan authorities to make further improvements to ensure the right to vote of all its citizens.

The new authorities would have new opportunities now to restore public trust in the political system.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was carrying out a number of co-operation projects to support the parliament and to engage its capacity to perform in different fields that supported the role of parliament in consolidating democracy in Morocco.

Both the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission also remained available to help further improve the legal framework and electoral practices in Morocco and to contribute to their implementation.

Mr Emanuelis Zingeris said it was not intentional but was about going through the points of the future agenda of the January session. His point of order was related to the current situation which they wanted to discuss in relation to the Memorial organisation and the liquidation of the biggest NGO in Russia, at least today amongst other business.

Mr Zingeris said some members of parliament and leaders of delegations wanted to do that, while some delegations would officially also put changes in for the January session. He wanted to raise issues related to the mentioned topic today and tomorrow, alongside other businesses.

The President said the agenda had been approved and that a bureau was happening in Paris on 10 December. He said any decision concerning the issue that Mr Zingeris had raised was postponed. He said as to procedure, the discussion could not be today or tomorrow. He said politicians knew how to indirectly make their point, to deviate to include their points in a discussion. He suggested taking it up at the bureau on 10

December on the occasion to make modifications. He thanked him again for the remark as the subject had to be followed up on very closely.

Mr Allal Amraoui, chairperson of the delegation for Partner for Democracy for Morocco, said he was delighted to be present. He had spent five years with the organisation. So far as his political activities were concerned it had always been something of huge importance to him, and one way of furthering political action. In all of the debates he had attended, he had felt very enriched, indeed, and the number of subjects that had been addressed was of huge relevance. He agreed with the rapporteur that the elections in Morocco had been held under completely normal conditions but within the context of the pandemic, which had had an impact on Morocco.

They had taken courageous measures, wanting to avoid worst-case scenarios. With the vaccine rollout more than 75% of the Moroccan population had been doubly vaccinated, while the third doses were starting to be delivered in the last two months. They ensured that even the most underprivileged sectors of society were covered by the vaccination so as not to increase the precarity of the situations in which they lived.

Covid-19 had had a huge impact on Morocco's society and economy. In these exceptional and unprecedented circumstances, Morocco decided not to postpone the elections as some countries had done. He conceded it was tempting to do so given the health crisis and the emergency. The two-fold challenge was to maintain elections and factor in the special situation caused by the pandemic, in guaranteeing the health and safety of people going to vote.

Secondly, it was important to ensure that all different steps of the electoral process were to prepare the campaign, to hold the voting. They did not want the virus to spread and for the health situation to become worse.

This was the first time, he said, that the public authorities, human right defenders and democratic mechanisms and rule of law mechanisms had sought to organise an election in which it was important to respect civic and political rights and also, through the threats posed by the pandemic, to respect the right to life.

They organised local and parliamentary elections on the same day with an overall positive assessment considering the elections took place in exceptional pandemic circumstances; he said a number of measures were taken to make this possible.

Legal measures also enabled political representation of society to be enlarged through electoral quotas which, on a very large scale, promoted representation of smaller parties and strengthened and promoted women: 25% are female members. This resulted in a boost of turnout of more than 50%.

Morocco has an independent judiciary, and it was the only body that was able to take decisions with regards to challenges of potential irregular procedures, which can occur through error or deliberately. The judiciary needed to hand down a decision and be responsible for that.

This was the 11th term that Morocco had in parliament. He hoped, along with the President and Secretary-General, to continue to further the Partnership for Democracy with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Mr Aleksander Pocij recognised the efforts undertaken by the kingdom of Morocco on the path to democracy. Morocco had made considerable efforts to implement the mechanisms underpinning European values and democracy as they saw it on the continent. He asked: to what extent was Morocco important for Europe? He cited an example: that Spain and Morocco had differences, and the extent to which Morocco's stability was essential for the continent. He hoped that in the future when it came to their co-operation with the African continent, that Morocco would remain just as stable and as close to Europe as it did at present. The situation in Belarus demonstrated that it was absolutely vital for the stability of the European continent. He applauded the fact that the elections in Morocco were so well administered. It was commendable. It went without saying, he said, that it was not perhaps 100%, but it was a step in the right direction. He thus applauded Moroccan colleagues for making every effort to inch closer to the European continent and European values.

The President fully agreed and said that when he visited Morocco as part of strategic priorities discussed this morning, the situation was very similar in all Council of Europe countries.

Ms Nicole Trisse said that Morocco was a wonderful observer at the Council of Europe. It was recognised that Morocco was stable. Both Mr Gutiérrez Limones and Mr Amraoui had said that as time went on, Morocco was inching closer to European values. The fact that Morocco had introduced quotas, not to everyone's liking, she said, but it was a system to enhance women's representation. It was absolutely vital to underscore this

currently. She said they awaited Morocco's signature on the Istanbul Convention, a wonderful way to, once again, attest their commitment to women's rights.

Mr Gutiérrez Limones said a document with some observations had been received the previous week from the Moroccan delegation. The effort was noted and appreciated, but he did not think they needed to take action on it. He said they could accept adding a technical correction to paragraph 41, about citizens abroad after "the resident" in the following end of the sentence: "albeit the specially dedicated website". He finally wanted to add that the voting process was very transparent in Morocco. He referred to his early statement about the few cases of non-compliance in the voting proceedings, and said these were not intentional. A number of polling stations were not accessible for people with physical disabilities, which was regrettable. He said that this could be observed in European countries as well. He said that the Moroccan people should be praised for these elections, which ran smoothly and peacefully.

10. RULES OF PROCEDURE, IMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Revision of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly: introducing the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct

Ms Thorhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir presented the report of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs. She was honoured to introduce the express prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct within the Assembly on that symbolic day in the struggle for gender equality. It had been a long, extensive process, which she was proud to have been part of since 2018.

In recent years, the Council of Europe had been a leader in the area of standards setting to prevent and combat violence against women in all its forms and domains. The former President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Madame Liliane Maury Pasquier, launched the #NotInMyParliament initiative to raise awareness about the alarming level of sexist behaviour, harassment and gender-based violence found in national parliaments in all of our member States. In order to respond to the need to fight against and prevent sexism, harassment, sexual violence and misconduct, numerous legal instruments had been adopted.

The Assembly Resolution 2290 Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality noted that the Assembly had adopted a firm political stance against all forms of violence against women. It further confirmed its commitment to promoting anti-discrimination policy by establishing the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence. The network contributed to the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention with its members playing a major role in promoting its ratification by their respective national parliaments.

She noted that the Assembly's general rapporteur on violence against women also made an essential contribution to raising awareness on the issue of violence against women. Ms Ævarsdóttir pointed out that in 2019 she was the rapporteur on resolution 2274 on Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment. When the Assembly adopted the resolution, the clear intention was demonstrated: to set standards in order to prevent and combat any form of sexism, harassment, sexual violence and misconduct not only for member States but also for their own work and functioning.

Resolution 2274 called on the Committee of Rules and Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs "to modify the Code of conduct for members of the Assembly with a view to introducing the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct, as well as the obligation to take account of the Council of Europe rules on the protection of dignity and to co-operate with the relevant mechanisms and take account of the decisions that might be taken as a result of a harassment procedure", and furthermore, "to ensure that the recommendations of the Commission against Harassment and/or decisions of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe resulting from the application of Rule No. 1292 can be followed up by the Assembly in the context of the Code of conduct."

The current draft resolution made concrete proposals to introduce the explicit prohibition of any form of sexism, harassment and sexual violence and misconduct in the Assembly by amending the rules of procedure as well as the obligation to take into account the existing or future Council of Europe anti-harassment procedures and to co-operate with the relevant mechanisms.

The present draft resolution also recalled the need for parliaments of member and observer states, as well as partners for democracy to draft and revise codes of conduct for their members with a view to setting out the explicit prohibition of sexist speech, sexist acts and sexual harassment, introducing sanctions for breaches of this obligation and to introduce complaint mechanisms to prevent and sanction any form of harassment, sexual violence and misconduct.

Ms Ævarsdóttir outlined the details of the proposed changes to the Code of conduct for members of the Assembly:

First, an amendment would be introduced to the section “general principles of behaviour” in the Code of conduct for members of the Assembly. Considering that the general principles found in the Code of conduct were aspirational in nature and made it possible to avoid loopholes, every time members faced a new situation or a call to act in new circumstances, paragraph 5.1 of the Code of conduct were to be amended as follows: it was suggested to add the sentence “with due respect to human dignity, as well as integrity and honesty” to point 5.1 of the Code of conduct. This was to ensure that members of the Parliamentary Assembly would carry out their duties responsibly, with due respect to human dignity, as well as integrity and honesty, while performing their mandate as members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Secondly, Ms Ævarsdóttir suggested an amendment to the section “rules of conduct” taking into account that the Code of conduct had to be flexible enough to deal with new situations that might emerge and should give proper consideration to various cases, which might require special interpretation in light of specific circumstances, a new paragraph, after paragraph 7, had been added, which stated, “members shall refrain from any form of sexism, harassment and sexual violence and misconduct”. That was the new explicit prohibition being introduced to the rules, which was of paramount importance to her report.

Ms Ævarsdóttir noted that there was no definition of the term “sexism, harassment and sexual violence and misconduct” in the suggested changes because the Committee wished to leave it to interpretation for further guidance and elaboration by those applying the Code of conduct, which in the Assembly’s case would be, amongst others, the Rules Committee.

Ms Ævarsdóttir stated that a final amendment had been introduced to section “observance of the Code of conduct”. She reminded that resolution 2274 called on the harmonisation of the Assembly’s procedure, with that of the Council of Europe mechanism. As noted in resolution 2274, the Assembly had been informed of the planned revision of the Council of Europe’s own rule, Rule 22 on the protection of dignity at the Council of Europe with a view to enhancing its effectiveness. It was thus proposed to introduce a clear collaboration between the two systems and in that context a new paragraph after paragraph 18 was proposed, where it stated: “for all of the cases concerning any form of sexism, harassment and sexual violence and misconduct that involve members of the Parliamentary Assembly, a recommendation or decision taken under the Council of Europe procedures in the framework of its anti-harassment policy, shall be forwarded to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs for final determination of the case.”

Ms Ævarsdóttir drew the Assembly’s attention to the fact that for the time being a special mechanism was in place within the Council of Europe to ensure the protection of human dignity: the Commission against Harassment. This Commission had investigative powers similar to those applicable to internal investigations and gave its opinions independently so that all persons within the organisation, including parliamentarians, could turn to the Commission for the protection of their human dignity. She reiterated that the Council of Europe should have a new Code of conduct policy on dignity and respect, speak up policy and policy on diversity in place by 1 July 2022.

Ms Ævarsdóttir noted that it was believed that reform would include modern and the appropriate practices and safeguards in the area of fighting against all forms of harassment, and in any case, the Assembly stood ready to assess the future applicable Council of Europe procedures with a view to suggesting their improvement, if appropriate.

Ms Ævarsdóttir concluded by highlighting that in the draft resolution the Assembly welcomed the publication by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) of a comprehensive set of guidelines to combat sexual harassment and violence against women in parliament. She remarked that the Assembly also noted that its mechanism and procedure should be guided by the fundamental principles proposed in the IPU guidelines, such as, confidentiality, responsiveness to complaints, fairness to all parties, thorough, impartial and comprehensive investigation and timely adjudication.

Ms Ævarsdóttir highlighted that 25 November had been designed as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. She explained how one of the day’s aims was to raise awareness of violence against women as an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. She went on to remark that the Assembly had the opportunity to contribute to the work being done by the Council of Europe and to strengthen standard setting in preventing and combatting violence against women in all its forms and in all areas, and in particular, in the Assembly’s own work space.

She thanked the Assembly for its attention and looked forward to the discussion and hoped the draft resolution would be supported.

Mr Tiny Kox thanked the President and rapporteur for the important job she had done for her organisation because rules of procedures were there to protect both the Assembly and members of the Assembly. He commented that protection did include members being free to pronounce themselves, to operate as full-fledged members of the Assembly and forms of sexism and harassment and violence limited the possibilities of members involved but also members in general.

Mr Tiny Kox commented that it was therefore serious business and he thought that Ms Ævarsdóttir and the Rules Committee had dealt with it in an appropriate way since it was now formulated in a functional way. He thought it would be wise that definitions had not been created as it was up to the Assembly and its organs to fill in when there were complaints.

He felt that it was also important because member parliaments were also asked to ramp up their effort to combat sexism, harassment and sexual violence. Now the Assembly was putting itself as an example and he believed that leading by example was best.

Ms Petra Bayr thanked and congratulated Ms Ævarsdóttir for her important report and thought that the suggestions she had made on the Code of conduct and to combat and prohibit sexual harassment and sexual violence in all its forms were an important building block also for more participation of women in politics in general. It was rightly said, she commented, that it was also a recommendation to all national parliaments but especially for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

She noted that while listening to Ms Trisse's report on the participation of women, the following argument was frequent "women simply do not want to engage in politics". She stressed that there might be reasons for that. There might be reasons they did not want to fight personally against sexual harassment, hate speech in all its forms, and violence however it appeared. She highlighted the importance of the report as another important step to really change the culture of PACE and of national parliaments and to make parliaments a decent working place.

She pointed out that Ms Ævarsdóttir's report and especially the Code of conduct suggestions were an important compliment to give PACE's politics more gender equality, more gender balance. She concluded by mentioning that the campaign #NotInMyParliament was an important first step but the campaign alone did not change anything, work was still needed for the coming years to really overcome sexual harassment, sexual violence in structures such as parliaments.

Mr Aleksander Pocij thanked Ms Ævarsdóttir and commended her for her devotion to the topic and noted how she had brought a lot of work over the last year on the weapons to fight against any harassment. He remarked that he had one problem. As she had noted, there was no definition in her report and he strongly believed this was a huge weakness, because as a lawyer –and he pointed out there were plenty of lawyers in the Assembly– to have any legal basis, and to have the legal norm, what the Assembly called a wrong-doing needed to be designated.

He asked the Assembly to imagine if the road code were to stipulate that driving a car too fast would lead to being punished and banned from driving. Mr Pocij stressed the need to define. He commented that he would take the report as the guideline for a better future but if the Assembly really wanted to understand what behaviour could offend or be classified as harassment, the Assembly should also –in this report maybe– classify what should be considered a wrong-doing. Mr Pocij pointed out that it was from his position as a lawyer that he had to make that observation.

Ms Petra Stienen thanked Ms Ævarsdóttir for her very important report and as other colleagues had also commented, she believed that a safe working space was a human right for everybody. The Assembly sometimes had to set norms, which could be done in a very legalistic way, but when someone was on the receiving end of sexism, harassment or racism, they very often knew that something was wrong and it might not be legally wrong but it could impede that person from going to their workplace any longer.

She noted that in the Netherlands during the campaign for the elections many of the candidates were harassed online and offline. The female candidates were subject to sexism, were called witches –which she believed could debatably be a badge of honour– but the attacks against the female candidates were such that her party leader, Sigrid Kaag, had to go to a judge and file a complaint and people commented, "It can't be that bad". Ms Stienen invited them to read the reports of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on how it was for young women to work in parliaments and how it was for older women to work in parliaments. It was everywhere.

Ms Stienen thanked Ms Ævarsdóttir once again and questioned whether the hashtag #NotInMyParliament should be changed to something else, maybe “a safe political space” because they were saying what they did not want but she believed they should be telling each other what they did want.

She concluded that she would ask the minister how he could be an agent of change and a role model and she would definitely bring, as a delegation leader, the report to the speaker of the parliament in the Senate in the Netherlands and ask him how they could learn from Ms Ævarsdóttir’s report.

Mr Davor Ivo Stier started by thanking the President and the rapporteur for her important contribution, which could be called leading by example. He noted that it was very timely, not only because it was the Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, but also because the Croatian parliament was debating a new code of conduct. He believed that the report was a very important tool that he would take back to the Croatian parliament to introduce this very specific point. He also believed that Mr Pojiec’s comment was a constructive contribution in going even further, and that it was worth considering but that the overall idea was that essentially the Assembly was very much supportive of the initiative.

Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly, took to the floor to make a clarification in relation to the question raised by Mr Pojiec. She stated that there was no reference to a specific definition in the report but there was a definition offered in the Council of Europe’s rules that was introduced by the Secretary General in 2010. The first definition of “sexual and psychological harassment”. Of course, the other terms referring to the resolution did not have precise definitions in order to allow the Assembly to be able to adapt to new situations. She commented, as the rapporteur had already said, there would be a revision of the regulatory framework by summer 2022 but she understood that the definition would not be modified.

Ms Ævarsdóttir started by thanking the colleagues who participated in the discussion. She agreed with Mr Kox that sexism and violence limited the freedom of members to participate in the Assembly’s work and that since the Assembly asked member States to explicitly prohibit sexism in their code of conduct so it should be prohibited in the Assembly itself. She remarked that her only regret was starting the work in 2018 and that it was only being brought to completion now, a whole five years after the beginning of Me Too. She believed that the Assembly was moving quite slowly when it came to gender equality, but she was happy it was being concluded. It was a great moment and a symbolic day for it to be happening. but it should have been done a lot quicker.

Regarding Ms Bayr’s comments, she agreed that it was a very important building block so that more women could participate within the Assembly and it was part of the reasons that women did not want to participate in politics. She remarked that she had experienced herself how women were subject to much more vicious, personal attacks on their physique, personality, attitude or voice. She had been called “excited” rather than “rational” in an ethical opinion of her own parliament because she used legal terminology that they disagreed with. Women faced threats to their safety and integrity to a much larger extent than their male colleagues. It was therefore a very important safety feature for the participation of women in politics.

As for Mr Pocij’s comments, the problem of not having a definition, as the Secretary General had pointed out, there were some indications of a definition in the report as to what constitutes sexual harassment. It highlighted that the most important part was the unwantedness of certain sexual advances or behaviour. She put it to Mr Pojiec and all other –especially male– colleagues that as a lawyer, and indeed as citizens, everyone should know what classifies as sexual violence. This was our duty, she noted, as citizens not to commit acts of sexual violence; therefore she did not believe it was necessary to add a definition of such. She believed that everyone should know what constitutes sexual violence.

As a lawyer, she also argued that it was for the legislature to set standards and it was for the adjudicator, and in this case, the Committee of Rules and Procedure, to interpret the standards. She realised that there might be doubts as to what constituted sexism and that many men believed they had this problem because what was considered acceptable banter, was now rightly considered sexist speech. She remarked that it was a learning curve for many gentlemen members, but she believed that the most important –for those who were still confused– difference between sexism and funny jokes was the willingness to listen and to learn from female colleagues. If they were to bear that in mind, they should be fine.

She was honoured that Mr Stier and Ms Stienen would bring the report to the attention of their speakers and their parliaments and she was grateful to hear that the work would have an impact outside of the Assembly and she looked forward to adopting it finally.

Regarding Mr Pocij’s question, **the President** recalled that Article 40 of the explanatory report of the Istanbul Convention did have a definition of sexual harassment.

Ms Ingjerd Schou, Chairperson of the Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, noted that as politicians, parliamentarians should settle some norms and guidelines and that if you had experienced harassment, you knew it when you saw it and you felt it.

She thanked the President and the Secretary General for reminding the Assembly of the definition. She also thanked Ms Ævarsdóttir for preparing the important report and for the draft resolution on behalf of the Rules Committee. The Committee expressed strong support for her work in the last meeting at the beginning of November and the draft resolution was unanimously also adopted. She noted that her work had also been very important in following up the Resolution on promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment adopted by the Assembly in 2019 so this was a continuation. The fact that through Ms Ævarsdóttir's suggestions, her amendments to the Code of conduct would explicitly prohibit sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct was significant. She added that it was overdue with the pandemic having also showed the need to progress in this report.

Now that the Assembly finally had the report and the draft resolution, with its adoption, the Assembly would serve as a model and a reference to all national parliaments, and it should also be a reference to the parliamentary in the code of conduct for members explicitly banning sexism and sexual harassment. The Council of Europe had been a leader in the field of setting standards for preventing and combatting violence against women in all of its forms and in all areas and with the adoption of the draft resolution, it was taking responsibility in that field. She was proud of that fact.

She strongly encouraged all Assembly members to draw attention to the report in their parliament and national parliaments and that the work to ensure that all member parliaments had codes of conduct for parliamentarians prohibiting sexual harassment and misconduct.

In the follow-up, Ms Schou advised to consult the guidelines adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union for combating sexual harassment and violence against women in parliaments.

She closed by thanking Ms Ævarsdóttir for her diligent work and encouraged everyone in the Assembly to vote in favour of the draft resolution and the modifications to the Code of conduct.

The draft resolution on the "Revision of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly: introducing the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct" (Document 15402) was **adopted** unanimously.

11. MARKING THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE ROLE OF MEN IN STOPPING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The President announced the special event marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. He welcomed Mr Michele Nicoletti, Professor at the University of Trento, former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and thanked him for being present in his role as a member of the Italian Academic Network on the Istanbul Convention.

He also welcomed Ms Simona Lanzoni, Vice-President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe), commonly known as GREVIO.

He said violence against women was one of the most flagrant violations of human rights, an issue which concerned all countries in the world, which touched women from all walks of life, irrespective of cultural, religious, economic, social and geographic backgrounds.

He said sadly enough, it happened everywhere, in the safety of women's own homes, at work, in the streets and in the media.

Amongst others, the Council of Europe estimated that one in four European women experienced physical acts of violence at least once during their adult lives. Between 10% and 15% found themselves in relationships with domestic abuse. More than 10% suffered sexual violence. He related a quote from an event the day before, from the World Bank he thought, which gave a terrible figure and known fact that 140 women a day die as a result of domestic violence.

To put it simply, he said, as members in the room who sat together, there were women somewhere on the planet being beaten to death by a man in a domestic context.

The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence marked an important step forward in international efforts to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. He said it was the first legally binding instrument in Europe on violence against women, and the most far-reaching international treaty in this field. For the first time, it could not be considered that violence against women through this Convention and domestic violence could not be considered a private matter; states had an obligation to prevent violence, protect victims and punish the perpetrators.

He said the event today was to focus in particular on the important role of men and boys in preventing violence against women, indeed, in stopping violence against women and domestic violence, as the Istanbul Convention underlined and that Ms Petra Stienen had pointed out earlier.

Half of humanity could not stay on the sidelines of this. Men and boys had a very important role to play to end violence against women. First and foremost they could be role models; engage other men, friends and communities to promote and advocate equality between women and men; to change behaviours and attitudes; and to promote relationships based on mutual respect and not based on power.

He said that men too could speak up and challenge all forms of violence against women. Men could tackle negative attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes that fed into gender-based violence. Men could partner with women to share decision-making power and family responsibilities.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was putting added focus on the role of men and boys in combating violence against women. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination was preparing a report specifically on the subject of men and boys' role in eliminating violence through recommendations providing a comprehensive set of guidelines for increasing and enhancing their influence and action.

He announced that the video that they would watch later had been produced by the PACE Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence. It was designed to raise awareness of members of parliament as well as the general public as to how men and boys could help, and be helped, in stopping violence.

Men and boys could be victims of violence themselves, he said, which was also explicitly mentioned in the Istanbul Convention. As the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had recently strongly reaffirmed, men and boys were also victims of gender-based violence as so-called honour crimes perpetrated within families, in particular combined with homophobic attitudes.

He said parties to the Istanbul Convention were encouraged to extend its application to everyone at risk or affected by domestic violence, including male, child, and elderly victims, in recognition of the fact that men also experienced some of the forms of violence covered by the Convention. He said it was quite clear that it happened less frequently and often in less severe forms.

An animated video featuring a male and female narrator was played about challenging harmful stereotypes and attitudes about men and women.

The video shared research about men speaking out and with each other to change attitudes, as well as how women are represented in the media.

It advocated challenging outdated stereotypes broadly, as well as online. It shared misconceptions about violence, and offered tips for how to use influence whether it was politicians making policies and needing to use inclusive storytelling, or the role employers had.

It shared research of the estimate of the cost of gender based violence: 366 billion euros a year across the EU; and violence against women was 72% of this cost. It made economic sense.

It referred to the role of childhood trauma, and the role of men as homemakers with safe spaces at home and in the school system. Time or money could be donated to helplines, refuges or crisis centres, it suggested.

Dialogue could be fostered, as well as understanding, especially for men and boys in the role they could play free of stereotypes, and in listening to women's narratives. Boys could play a role in taking care of themselves and respecting others.

International lawmakers had a role, too, with the Istanbul Convention underlining how to prevent forms of gender-based violence. The Europe-wide platform at the Council of Europe, Network Women Free from Violence, brought together members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, campaigned for the ratification and full implementation of the Istanbul Convention to free Europe from violence against women.

Ms Marta Grande, Chairperson of the Italian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, said the issue which was about to be addressed affected the largest audience in the world: the majority of the population. She said it touched and destroyed lives and human relationships to the core. She said it undermined and crushed women's expectations and aspirations and their future. She described violence against women as an act of cowardice and an act of coercion which could manifest itself in various forms: verbal, physical or economic.

In Italy it had been estimated that 31.5% of women aged between 16 and 70, in other words 6 788 000, had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. The European Institute of Gender Equality put the rate at 33% across the rest of Europe. Three out of ten women in this very room, she said, would have experienced violence, statistically speaking.

As well as drastically undermining societies, she said this violence had a cost of an estimated 290 billion euros per year, at a European level. She described it as a tragedy which could only hypothetically be quantified, because the acts generated an avalanche disrupting the lives of communities of which women were an integral part. She said that women's rights, secured by fighting for them on the streets and which were built up piece by piece, were again under attack.

When there was chaos or when people wanted to backtrack on principles of equality and human rights, women's rights were the first to be questioned as was happening with the Istanbul Convention, the most important and well-known political act drafted in the Council of Europe as well as with attacks on the rights of women, their autonomy, and the decision making on their own body.

She noted the topical discussion on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

To conclude, in words as well as actions, she remembered the many women –sometimes friends, sometimes sisters– who had been victims of some form of gender-based violence.

Mr Michele Nicoletti said it was a great honour and pleasure to have the opportunity to share some thoughts on the Istanbul Convention. He remembered that just a few years ago in this room the Italian delegation had hosted a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly Equality Committee. Mr Mendes Bota had played such a huge role with regards to the preparation of one of the most wonderful conventions of the Council of Europe in this field. Italy was amongst the first countries to sign the Istanbul Convention; its ratification was the first act to be unanimously carried out by the Chamber of Deputies in June 2013.

The unanimity of this decision was something he was delighted to remind people of because, unfortunately, as things stood today, the ideological polemic and political exploitation had begun to operate in a clumsy manner in the field of violence against women. He also noted this, unfortunately, in some countries on the European continent.

When the Istanbul Convention was originally drafted, he said it had appeared to everyone without any reservations for what it was: one of the best legal instruments for combating a phenomenon that, tragically, as the President and Ms Grande had already said, showed no signs of diminishing.

He underlined the fact that despite theoretical conversations that could be had about it, the Istanbul Convention had a legal framework, and represented a real achievement, in that violence against women was not a private matter, but belonged to the sphere of human rights violations. There was no possible social or cultural justification for such violence, he said, nor any relationship between sexes or power relations within the domestic field. There could not even be the slightest legitimate justification of resorting to force or coercion to re-establish an alleged natural, cultural or social order. Violence against women was recognised as dehumanising and, therefore, an inhuman phenomenon.

The significance could not be underestimated of the change achieved, as with all rights, by the unprecedented power of the victims, to turn their suffering into a transformative action for their own selves and for all relations. It was a real, extraordinary revolution, he said. Power structures were rooted in structures of thought, in the centuries-old power of words, in material, social and political relations, and were not miraculously dismantled by legislation. They were important but not enough, he said. Change required a huge effort to rethink and to learn what everyone had now discovered themselves to be.

He said the time had come to look, in more detail, into the role played by men with regards to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Men really needed to be aware of this extraordinary cultural revolution taking place, he said.

The first point of a revolution was an awareness of the fact that people were moving away from a patriarchal society designed over centuries with clearly defined roles and in which most people lived in destructive power relationships which simply reproduced asymmetric relationships based on power. He said that men had a role of protection but also of command: if a man was not obeyed, he was not “good”.

He said it was to the credit of gender studies that investigations were being carried out on the history of relationships and the construction of male and female stereotypes, which were functional to a social model and not immediately derived from biological nature. This revolution could be seen because of the fact that these models were secular; most of them had been learned from one’s own family experience.

A second revolution had occurred, he said, which was related to violence as an instrument of power. Criticism of not only male violence was needed, but interpreting power and politics was seen as the ability of one person imposing their will onto someone else, and in using this as an instrument to confirm one’s own identity and set one’s superiority, and bend one’s will to their own, seeing the other as an inferior being, who would be met with violence and put into place if they tried to assert their own desire. He said it was down to everyone to criticise this violence, including violence in the political world.

He quoted something that Leela Gandhi, daughter of Mahatma Gandhi, had said about the Istanbul Convention when she herself was visiting the Chamber of Deputies. It was very interesting. There was a need to give thought to an alternative practise, of non-violence, and the relationship between humans and social and political relations based on that. The idea of a relationship based on power and conquest needed to be jettisoned. The other person, be they man or woman, needed not to be seen as prey. Love or affection based on conquest was very much part and parcel of romantic culture, and had been instilled as a value. She thought that this idea of having love based on conquest could be used, provided it did not give rise to support violent relationships. A huge amount of work still needed to be done, he said, on this subject.

This was why some years ago the Italian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly to the Council of Europe sought to make the same contribution to preventing violence against women with the creation of an academic network or a university. This network was set up to defend and apply the Istanbul Convention. It brought together Italian, and hopefully one day other European universities, to rethink, redraft and instil a new non-violent culture amongst human beings.

He said that the network had gone from having student ambassadors of the Istanbul Convention to an aim of working with male and female researchers, gathering and collecting data about violence against women, which was very important but quite tricky. The network wanted to go further and incorporate this into university curricula and programmes, and bring in professionals and experts working in the field. He hoped the significant contribution would continue to play an important role.

They wanted to achieve a link between the institutional world, the parliamentary world and, indeed, the Parliamentary Assembly in particular, which had an important role to play in creating links with the academic and educational world. Doing this meant finding the best ambassadors to defend and champion these values and ideals, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe could play an important role in this specific matter.

Legislation could be adjusted. Social and economic policies could ensure effective and efficient protection for women, who paid the hardest price during the pandemic.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe could help make its contribution to a cultural transformation which everyone wanted to achieve and which could bring an end to this tragic phenomenon.

Ms Simona Lanzoni, Vice-President of GREVIO, said that talking about GREVIO was a tricky exercise, when it came to identifying and recognising the role played by men. She said that GREVIO was working towards a common vision of the future, to have gender equality, a situation of parity between men and women, and also to eliminate violence against women, which was a form of discrimination.

She repeated that it could be tricky to include men into this discussion and referred to Mr Nicoletti’s speech: for centuries, men had been the beneficiaries of discrimination against women as such, and had been able to take advantage of women being sidelined due to power relationship. This gender imbalance had had a detrimental impact on women and caused violence.

She called it a real honour and a privilege to be able to, hopefully, bring an end to these forms of discrimination and this form of imbalance, and to have a discussion. She described it as an integral part of the culture of transformation that the Istanbul Convention wanted member States to bring about.

If men and boys called themselves into question about the role they should play, also as the bearers of masculinity when belonging to a society, it was not easy, she said. This was why they were having a monitoring report.

The Istanbul Convention flagged up one point in particular: prevention, to enable cultural transformation, but it was also promoting respect between sexes, gender parity, and combating discrimination. It also had a series of articles, she said, providing examples: Article 13 highlighted information campaigns; Article 14 mentioned education in schools. The convention also mentioned working with mass media and companies, even developing programmes with the perpetrators of violence.

All of these were actions designed to ensure men had an important role to play and were involved in discussions around the subject. She said they encouraged men to play a fully-fledged part in eliminating violence against women.

As a body responsible for monitoring the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO very often advocated urgent action to be carried out, including a much more urgent response on the part of men to move towards gender parity.

She wanted greater involvement from men, but said she often came up against quite strong resistance on their part, which she did not think should be denied or overlooked.

She said a lot of work still needed to be done in all different sectors covered by this, when it came to awareness raising campaigns or educational measures, as new answers needed to be developed. She expressed her hope that these answers could be contributed through the recommendations and through monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in different member States.

There were instruments which existed to support the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, making it more effective, efficient and including the involvement of men in debates on this cultural transformation, to eradicate violence.

She said the mass media should do more, and be more greatly involved, to avoid old stereotypes from being reproduced and old gender roles from being replicated.

The mainstream media belonged to the private sector and, generally speaking, tended to hide behind audits rather than behind the provisions of conventions such as the Istanbul convention. So, it was hard to get them involved.

Change was slowly, surely, and gradually being brought about in companies, which were taking a keener interest in both men and women working there to bring about a change in mindset, cultural transformation, and ending violence against women although it was difficult to instil change in the corporate world.

Changes within the educational system were the most important point, as the Istanbul Convention had very often been misinterpreted and subject to attacks and criticism. Its Article 14, related to education, called for provisions and educational measures to be made available within schools, depending on the target group age and their ability to understand, to promote gender equality and gender parity, and to teach about violence against women. In an educational setting, it could help teach current and future generations about the importance of the subject, whether they were boys, girls, men or women, to respect each other and to combat violence by coming up with a new way and means of living together.

She said that there was no doubt that GREVIO would continue with its struggle and commitment to the Istanbul Convention.

It published its first recommendation the day before, she said, which supplemented the existing instruments for combating violence against women and domestic violence. It related to online violence in particular as the internet was a brand new area which was often a forum for violence. Violence was often being reproduced online. An instrument to combat this was needed to add to or supplement existing provisions in the Istanbul Convention. She added this point as it was quite important. There was a difference between men and women when it came to a prevalence of violence, also online.

She expressed a wish in future to be given more information about campaigns and activities carried out by the different countries, with the involvement of men, regardless of their age. The aim, she concluded, was to have more preventive work and to combat violence effectively.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir thanked the speakers for the very interesting debate on this Day of the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women. She wanted to point out that this unprecedented limitation of the freedom of movement that governments had put in place during the pandemic, the extensive and repeated lockdowns that our governments had ordered to keep the public safe from the pandemic, to give us refuge from the pandemic – this home that we were put into – was for many women more dangerous, and even deadlier than the pandemic itself. The demonstrable surge in domestic violence against women during lockdowns was not inevitable and it was not unpredictable, she pointed out.

It should have been something taken into account in the decisions of governments to detain women in their homes. And it should have played a much more fundamental role in the evaluation of the proportionality of these extensive lockdowns. And at the very least, it should have led to comprehensive actions to prevent violence against women at home, to react to violence against women and to combat domestic violence during lockdowns during the pandemic. She believed it was a lesson that we should take into the future seeing that the situation was continuing. There were no more excuses to look past it. She believed that the Assembly had an obligation to act in a much more decisive way than we had done when it came to domestic violence against women, especially for sexual and gender-based violence. Since the discussion was regarding the responsibility of men to combat sexual violence, she put it to the Assembly to never put the idea of a man's possible lack of, or loss of reputation when accused of a grave sexual crime, because somehow it always became about the man and his possible loss of reputation and not about the woman who was violated. She pointed out that it often becomes about how he would lose his job or have a difficult time, or maybe lose some friends, and not about the woman who lost her job because of the effects of the violence that he subjected her to. Not about the woman that could not go to certain places anymore, who doesn't trust being in public and cannot live a normal life anymore because of the violence she was subjected to.

The level of discussion, she noted, was usually such that we should be careful about the reputation of men, but experience showed that their reputation ended up just fine. It is seen repeatedly. She pointed out that men did not lose their jobs. They did not lose their positions. If they did, they would get another one quite quickly, but the effects of sexual violence on women lasted a whole lifetime. She stressed that that should be the talking point and not the very sensitive egos of the perpetrators. She stated it was our duty as members of the public. If we were to see people do that, we should try to put the focus where it belongs: on the effects that the violence had on the persons subjected to it, not the fact that the violence is being talked about and that is somehow in itself a crime.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva started by thanking the President. She commented that Ukraine had joined the International Day of combating violence by announcing 16 days of combating violence in Ukraine with very concrete action plan for regions, cities, villages. She noted that anyone could join this action. Education was of utmost importance. She realised that the Assembly was talking about adults, but the smallest members of our society – children – were often forgotten. In Ukraine, she added, this problem was viewed not only as violence against women, but also violence against men and children. A very public speech of the prosecutor general of Ukraine had been given, who supported the convention. Ukraine had various round tables when the judges are calling to ratify the Istanbul Convention by Ukrainian parliament.

She reminded the Assembly that 10 years ago, Ukrainian lawyers were co-authors of this beautiful international instrument, which protects not only the people in the countries, but also around the globe, giving an international dimension. She noted that they were still committed. And her colleague Oleksandr Merezhko was heading an inter-parliamentary group in the Ukrainian parliament for the ratification of this Convention. Ms Mezentseva that a massive event would be held in the coming week next to the President's office and the Ukrainian parliament to persuade those who are still relying on their religious, dubious view of this document, which they had never read unfortunately. They would debate, discuss and persuade with facts like 100 people would die every day or 600 persons in Ukraine every year as a matter of their responsibility. She reiterated that Ukraine was committed and hoped that if not by the end of this year, then the beginning of next year, they would follow the ratification.

Ms Petra Bayr noted that for more than 20 years, there was a multi-party group on sexual and reproductive rights and health at the Austrian parliament. In preparation of the 16 days of action last week, she commented that they met in front of the parliament during the budget meeting and held 27 candles: one for every woman murdered during this year, only in Austria. She remarked that even if she were to post this picture on social media today, it was history because it represented 29 femicides that had taken place in a small country like Austria with nine million inhabitants and the country was among those with the highest share of female victims of murder.

That concerned her a lot because she knows that Austria about 10 years ago was a forerunner; it was the example of how to tackle violence against women. The country had a very progressive legislation and many countries looked at Austria and copied its approach, which was still a good approach. She wanted to point out

that even very successful countries in this regard, returning to have a gender-based violence problem could happen very quickly. She believed it was part of a more holistic culture everyone was living in at the moment. For example, more and more people were simply ignoring scientific facts when it comes to coronavirus. More and more people really follow conspiracy theories combined with antisemitism and other othering of people, or a racist approach towards people, which was something that frightened her and combined with the facts.

She knew that from the Europe barometer – only for the European Union member States – the call for a “strong man” as a leader and the need for democracy, is increasing. She felt that we are really called as politicians, in general, to really make, and clearly transport that they made evidence-based policies and that they made it very, very carefully. She urged the Assembly to start working on the various imbalances that there were; these increasing imbalances of economic, possibilities of wealth, income, social standards. She really believed that much more work on that was necessary.

She concluded with a positive story. She commented that Israel was about to ratify the Istanbul Convention and believed it was a very good sign. And for the ongoing debate about violence against women, she hoped to hear more male voices here in this room.

Mr Nicos Tornaritis noted that it was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Thousands of women and girls around the globe, he highlighted, would be subjected to a form of violence. In all probability, it would be perpetrated by their partner or a close family member. It would not be reported. It would be repeated, and it would certainly scar them for life.

The Council of Europe stood at the forefront in the global efforts to prevent and stop all forms of gender-based violence, especially in regards to its member States, by setting the highest standards and through numerous recommendations, tools and activities reiterating firm support for the Istanbul Convention while supporting global awareness raising campaigns, such as the most recent around the world and violence against women now were important building stones of our common strategy to tackle this phenomenon. However, he noted, any policy aimed at long-term results must be centred on the acknowledgement of the pivotal role of men and boys in changing the gender-based attitudes and norms that fuelled women's violence. He urged the Assembly to base its strategies on engaging men and boys across all ages and all levels of society and refocus agendas on promoting preventative intervention, fostering empathy, and above all, demanding accountability.

Mr Ólafur Þór Gunnarsson stated that gender-based violence was one of the worst obstacles that should be eradicated to obtain full gender equality in the world. He commented that it was known that it discouraged women from full participation, and as long as it were there, it would continue to influence all participation of women, in particular, in public life. They must not stand tightly and hope the matter sorted itself out. They must act. The Icelandic parliament held a barbershop meeting in 2018: a full day of discussions on the issue. And parliament had a training session this year with role play. Obviously, this was not going to solve the world's problems, but it was a start. Rather than in examining their hearts, their own hearts and minds, he commented that they must ensure that legal systems were not biased towards sweeping matters under the rug and that victims were listened to and supported. Where legal system, legal codes were insufficient, we must revise them to encourage victims to seek justice. Culturally, also do away with turning a blind eye and men should not be afraid to intervene when observing other men's language and behaviour directed against women, which was especially important in public life. He urged men to speak up.

Mr Tiny Kox thanked the President and the introductory speakers who had emphasised on a very inconvenient truth: that during centuries, here, there, and everywhere, in all kinds of cultures we had been educated to believe that men were allowed, accepted, understood if they used violence against women. In many cultures, for many centuries, it was also taught that violence against women was needed – under circumstances, under rules – but that was part of a culture. And at the same time, women were educated that this was also a needed, acceptable, part of culture. It was only very recently that society started to realise that this was a horrible shame and that this inconvenient truth should be removed. That, of course, not us, but the societies, they were responsible for what happened before.

He commented that we were often proud of histories, but this was also part of history, like slavery was part of history. This using violence against women was not because the good Lord created men and he decided that they should hit women, it was because it was part of a culture and part of society. That was the bad news. And that should be considered.

The good news was that if people could be educated to learn the wrong things, they could also be educated to learn the right things. On a personal note, he remarked that he came from a big family, five boys, five girls, and they were educated with the idea violence was never allowed under any circumstances. He noted that his father and mother were not professors, nor geniuses. They were very, very simple people, but they realised that violence was counterproductive. He believed that if his parents could come to this real truth, then society

as such could also do so. So the good news was – and that was why it was so important to campaign – it was not about telling people things that were not understandable. He believed that it could be explained that violence against women was still too often excused by cultures, religions, ideologies. And that was wrong and it completely was against the rule of law. The rule of law cannot go along with violence against women. He therefore believed that it was so important that the Council of Europe put so much emphasis on educating society and what was being discussed today, was especially that man and boys should be educated. Men should educate themselves that using violence against women was not acceptable. It was not understandable. It was not excusable, and it was never needed.

If emphasis were put on all of this, on this education, he was quite sure that in the end we could succeed. This was not an impossible struggle. This was a struggle of modernisation of society. And what happened in the past should not be guidance for the future.

He thanked the two speakers once again because their speeches were putting the issue into history, giving context to what happened and why things were still happening and why we could overcome them, which was very much important. He wished the Assembly a lot of success with the campaign to promote the Istanbul Convention as it was at one of the finest pieces of art of our convention-building system.

Ms Fiona O'Loughlin started by thanking the President and complimented the speakers and the video, which she thought was excellent and that everybody should receive a copy of it. The shadow pandemic that we have had since Covid-19 started, has been growing, and there was no doubt that we needed a global collective effort to stop it and essential services such as domestic violence shelters, and indeed those different support services had absolutely reached capacity. She commented that there was a lack of support for many that needed it in Ireland but that same day, in terms of helping support this growing shadow pandemic, had committed half a million euros to all of the different organisations around the country that provided support, be it physical shelter or counselling to victims of domestic violence.

She pointed out that there was a very difficult societal change where women were not safe on the streets and many of them sadly were not safe at home. She urged that it was absolutely critical to combat not only the individual instances of violence, but also to look at it from a society: violence occurs more often in society and in a society that condoned and encouraged it. She therefore noted that it was imperative that they try to combat systemic forms of violence. She commented on the challenge given by Ms Bayr earlier during the day. She believed that every man here should take up that challenge in terms of taking responsibility for their power and taking action in relation to this.

Apart from the horrific cost to every woman and child that was impacted both in terms of physical, emotional, and mental impact research showed us the range of negative consequences for society at large, she reported. They included an increased burden on the healthcare system associated with injuries and long-term health problems, under achievement in work, in education and decreased worker productivity, as well as homelessness and the figures that we were shown earlier in the video in relation to 366 billion in 2019 and they were just for the EU member States. So the fact that this Assembly is almost twice that size showed the huge impact on society and on our economy. She invited her colleagues to imagine if that money could be spent in a very positive way to improve the lives of women and their children.

Men as fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and public advocates, as well as public representatives had an absolutely crucial role to play both in speaking out against violence and against any situation where they could identify destructive stereotypes. Men had to be powerful change agents and to take the lead and to influence their peers, she stressed.

Ms Nicole Trisse started by commenting that a lot had already been said about violence against women and that national parliaments were tackling the issue more or less in France. That very day additional beds had been provided for women fleeing violence, and a decision had been made that all complaints would be followed up even if a woman were to decide to withdraw her complaint. Furthermore, women could also lodge a complaint at the hospital, if a woman ended up in the hospital following a beating. Also if a woman didn't dare complain, sometimes, the medical services or firefighters could go and see her at her home.

She wanted to talk about harassment out in the street, also known as catcalling. In France, a poll result showed 80% of women are being harassed in the street and at least once they had received sexist comments. The country took measures to offer women greater protection. She noted that fines for such sexist behaviour had been adopted in 2018. It was now an offense in the books. She believed that France was the first country to introduce sanctions for catcalling and it was important, as it addressed the issue of some men who did not understand the implications of their acts and of what they say. Fines were as much as €1,500. She added that there had been over 1,000 catcalling complaints since the law was adopted. She commented that it did not

seem many, but it did show that there had been a change in mindset. It also highlighted the fact that these dangers could be addressed not necessarily linked to violence, but to harassment and catcalling.

She flagged that it was important for educational programmes to be run in schools. In France, they were thinking about dedicating a week in school to this particular theme and such would become increasingly vital in many countries.

Ms Petra Stienen commented that it felt as if they were having an expert meeting for the report she was writing and was receiving very good input. During the General Assembly in New York, their Prime Minister, Mark Rutte called violence against women, “a shadow pandemic”. She said she understood why Ms O’Loughlin had also used this word, but she did have a bit of a problem with it because a pandemic was a disease and violence against women was a serious human rights violation. As Mr Nicoletti said, perpetrators were very often men, and she believed that the reason for such should be analysed. She noted that these men were husbands brothers, friends. She understood Ms Trisse’s statement about street intimidation, but very often the men who killed women, as Margaret Atwood said, “Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them”. They were often intimate partners.

She also thanked the GREVIO for being so critical towards the Dutch government, because for a very long time, it looked at gender-based violence as something neutral, but they really needed to differentiate in data to understand why this was happening. She noted that in the report, she was going to write she wanted to look at terminology and legal definitions or social definitions, and questioned why domestic violence is called such. In Dutch, its *huiselijk geweld* and *huiselijk* also means “comfy”. She urged for it to be called what it was: terror behind the front door. It was intimate terrorism. And when dealing with terrorism, they really looked at root causes, very good analyses of what was happening. She thought the video was so excellent because they showed the mental, psychological, physical cost, but also the enormous €300 billion a year.

She stated that it was not just a matter to be discussed by women, it was a responsibility that had to be shared. She offered an example of healthy masculinity: the Don’t Be That Guy campaign by Police Scotland. They made the clip after Sarah Everard was murdered by a policeman and they really had their own guys speak up by saying, “No, we should not be doing this”.

She wanted to end with a positive note. She commented that she always mentioned being nominated as rapporteur and sometimes she received a few nice remarks, but this time she was so pleasantly surprised when she said that she was going to be the rapporteur on the report of the role of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence because she had men reaching out to her asking if they could help. She called on all men, but also women. She said it was not about them without them. She urged them to be involved in the report they were writing. She called for insights and information.

Lastly, she thanked Mr Rik Daems, the President of the Assembly. She commented that he had been an amazing role model for gender equality and the way he had put the Istanbul Convention and the importance of the Istanbul Convention on the agenda in all of our 47 countries, was deserving of an applause.

The President thanked the two guest speakers and all of the colleagues who had given some input to Ms Stienen’s report.

Friday 26 November 2021 from 10:00 to 13:00

12. LEGAL AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS Fighting corruption – General principles of political responsibility

The President welcomed Ms Marta Cartabia, Italian Minister of Justice.

Mr Sergiy Vlasenko presented the report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights which had been adopted on 5 November 2021, by a large majority. He also thanked Ms Marietta Karamanli and the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for an excellent opinion, he said, adopted on 3 November 2021. The amendments proposed during this process had been included in the draft resolution.

With this draft resolution, he said the Parliamentary Assembly was continuing the fight against corruption, which had begun in previous resolutions of the Assembly. He cited the following resolutions as examples amongst many others: 2130 of 2016, 1881 of 2012; 2216 of 2018.

He then explained the context of the report and the resolution. Four journalistic investigations - Laundromat, Panama Papers, Paradise Papers and Pandora Papers - had all listed notorious names of beneficiaries of companies and accounts in different offshore zones. Those names included many politicians and public officials from Council of Europe member States. All had been mentioned as active users of offshore operations, allegedly to conceal assets and incomes. The financial records revealed a system of hidden interests, which shocked public opinion, raising credible suspicions against politicians of being involved in corruption and money laundering. These suspicions were reinforced with every scandal.

Some member States had reported progress following the first three scandals. Unfortunately, he had not seen a proper political reaction; the impact of the last Pandora papers investigation remained to be seen. So far, he observed that some of the politicians mentioned in these investigations continued to wield power despite serious suspicions. They undermined the public trust in the democratic institutions and the rule of law. It was apparent that fighting and preventing corruption and money laundering might have failed in this respect. Thus, the resolution proposed to answer this failure from the perspective of political responsibility. It reiterated that the fight against corruption was one of the priorities of the Council of Europe and quoted all relevant instruments adopted by the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers, GRECO, MONEYVAL, and the Venice Commission. These all spoke about the negative effects of corruption, money laundering and offshore schemes on democratic institutions, the rule of law and human rights and they also said that politicians should display the highest standards of ethical behavior in public and private life.

If suspicions of corruption were proven beyond any reasonable doubt, politicians should face criminal charges. Moreover, the politicians were politically responsible for such actions. He wanted to emphasise that this report focussed solely on the political responsibility that a politician should bear in relation to the serious allegation of corruption activities and offshore scams. This was not about criminal, administrative or civil responsibility, nor did the resolution aim to undermine the criminal justice system of member States, or the idea of the presumption of innocence in criminal proceedings.

This resolution only considered political responsibility as a non-criminal sanction – which he repeated and underlined – as a non-criminal sanction. It did not constitute a violation of a presumption of innocence, according to the European Court of Human Rights. The resolution invited member States to improve mechanisms on declaration of interests to include offshore interests. He said this should not be perceived as an infringement on the right to private life.

He cited Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights: everyone had a right to respect for one's "private and family life, his home and his correspondence". This idea was supported by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Von Hannover versus Germany, 2004. He quoted: "A fundamental distinction needs to be made between reporting facts – even controversial ones – capable of contributing to a debate in a democratic society relating to politicians in the exercise of their functions for example, and reporting details of the private lives of an individual".

So far, the resolution adopted by the committee reiterated that: "It is an obligation for all member States of the Council of Europe to fight corruption, money laundering and tax-related offences. In this context, any credible suspicion against politicians must be promptly investigated and subjected to a trial within a reasonable time frame and in full compliance with national law and international standards. Politicians should include offshore assets into their declarations of interest. Otherwise, they must be held immediately responsible for the breach of public trust in democratic institutions. They also should withhold using offshore schemes to conceal revenues or evade paying taxes in their own countries. All politicians had an ethical duty to resign pending investigations, when the alleged misconduct is serious, and the allegations are credible" - Mr Vlasenko underlined this and repeated it - "when the alleged misconduct is serious and the allegations are credible. On the other hand, governments, political parties, and national parliaments, should take actions against politicians involved in the offshore schemes and corruption scandals."

Accordingly, the Resolution as adopted by the committee made the following call: "Member States of the Council of Europe must ensure effective response to corruption through their criminal justice system; They should safeguard independence of the anti-corruption bodies; The recommendations and standards of the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe - in particular GRECO and MONEYVAL - should be implemented in full.

Political parties could induce the suspected politicians to step down from their public functions in view of preserving public trust; GRECO and MONEYVAL should encourage good practices of sanctioning politicians and public officials suspected of breaching public trust; In the end, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe could nominate a General Rapporteur on fighting corruption, money laundering, and offshore schemes, according to the rules."

He stressed once again that the resolution was not about the criminal responsibility of corruption, but political responsibility, and only in the “cases where the alleged misconduct is sufficiently serious and the allegations are sufficiently credible”.

Mr Zsolt Nemeth presented the opinion of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy on the report “Fighting corruption”, on behalf of Ms Marietta Karamanli, who unfortunately could not be present. Corruption was a major societal problem and a serious threat to the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which they were working to protect and promote, both in the Parliamentary Assembly and in their respective national parliaments. He said that corruption affected governments’ ability to govern in the public interest, whilst political corruption undermined the credibility of both political and public figures, as well as democratic institutions. This led citizens to be disengaged from democratic processes and provided ground for populism. Therefore, it was essential for policy makers to address corruption and to take the necessary dissuasive measures to prevent, combat, detect and sanction it effectively. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy therefore supported the conclusions and proposals of Mr Sergiy Vlasenko’s report. It additionally wanted to highlight three issues:

Firstly, the Parliamentary Assembly should support and promote the work of the Council of Europe in the field of corruption: thus, member States should fully implement the recommendations and standards of the relevant Council of Europe bodies, such as GRECO and MONEYVAL. Secondly, member States should protect whistleblowers in law and in practice, who played a key role in casting light on corruption scandals, against any form of reprisal. Finally, they should implement measures to raise awareness of the harm caused by corruption.

The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights had taken on board all of these issues which were now included in the draft resolution. On behalf of the rapporteur for opinion and the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, he thanked the rapporteur. He hoped they would be able to send a strong message to member States about the zero-tolerance policy of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe towards corruption, by adopting this resolution.

The President introduced Ms Marta Cartabia, Italian Minister of Justice. He welcomed her as a friend with great knowledge of the Council of Europe. Her contribution to the work of the Venice Commission was also valued. The Council of Europe would benefit from Ms Cartabia’s personal expertise, especially since Italy was taking over the presidency of the Committee of Ministers. He saw the organisation of the Conference of the Ministers of Justice on “the role of restorative justice in Europe”, organised in Venice on 13 and 14 December 2021, as a highlight of the presidency. He gave the floor to Ms Cartabia emphasising that he was looking forward to strengthening cooperation.

Ms Marta Cartabia, Italian Minister of Justice, was very glad to address the Standing Committee. It was a great opportunity to renew their engagement and commitment to the work of the Council of Europe and each of its organs and institutions. She reiterated that she was honoured to invite and convene the Conference of the Ministers of Justice of the Council of Europe in Venice for a reflection, and to work on a chapter that she considered to be very relevant on both national and international levels “Restorative justice in the criminal fields”.

In that session, they were addressing a topic that was the bedrock of their democracies: combating corruption and the general principles of political accountability. She congratulated the rapporteurs for the work that they had carried out to present this very important document to them. The President of the Republic, Mr Sergio Mattarella, recalled not long ago that in a healthy democracy “the institutions first and foremost must fulfil their duty to uphold the value of honesty”. Institutions ranged from mayors of small municipalities to supranational bodies such as the Council of Europe, including all representative institutions.

It was now an accepted fact that any form of illegality and any lack of transparency, prerequisite for the spread of corruption, would generate mistrust among citizens, would alienate them from participation in public life, and would create a distance between citizens and institutions, thus undermining social cohesion. Corruption was a real betrayal of the principles underlying the rule of law, which was one of the three pillars indicated by the Venice Commission as an area of action of the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The Venice Commission had stressed this since its first report on the rule of law, published in March 2011. Exploring the implications of the concept of the rule of law in his 2010 book on the topic, Lord Tom Bingham pointed out inter alia “the need for political leaders and public officials to be able to take the lead in the development of the rule of law and that they must exercise the powers conferred on them in good faith, fairly, for the purpose for which the powers were conferred” – end of quote. Article 54 of the Italian constitution— an article far too often forgotten – in essence enshrined: “Citizens entrusted with public functions have the duty

to perform them with discipline and honour". With discipline and honour, there was no room for corruption and no room for opacity. No room for any form of illegality.

All institutions within the Council of Europe— the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers, and bodies such as GRECO, MONEYVAL, and the Venice Commission – had played a fundamental role over the years to promote and help member States to adopt legislative measures and best practices to bring their national systems into line with the best international standards. This was done in a common commitment to protect and promote the ideals and principles that were their common heritage and to foster their economic and social progress, as was stated in Article 1 of the Council of Europe, adopted in London in May 1949. One thing was for certain: transparency was lacking where corruption flourished, and economic and social progress was stifled. Pope Francis tirelessly repeated that corruption was a cancer that, with the illusion of rapid and easy gains, in fact was impoverishing everyone. There was no social and economic prosperity of the people where the poison of corruption was rampant.

Italy had paid particular attention to the Council of Europe's guidelines when building the regulatory system to prevent and combat corruption. The GRECO report of December 2019 acknowledged the satisfactory implementation of the largest number of recommendations addressed to Italy, on the subject of criminalisation obligations arising from the 1999 convention. Italy was ready to share, in international fora, its extensive experience in the fight against corruption with the conviction that an approach based on multilateralism was the only useful and effective approach. In this regard, she recalled a recent commitment made by Italy under the leadership of prime minister Mr Mario Draghi, during the G20 presidency. Special attention was devoted to the issue of anti-corruption in the final declaration; this reaffirmed its central role in the agenda of the global forum.

Among the documents approved was the adoption of the High-Level Principles on Corruption related to Organised Crime, supported mainly by Italy. Investigations showed that corruption was often the preferred means for criminal infiltration. There was a need to continue to provide their legal systems with the instruments to better equip them to combat a phenomenon that was serious in itself, as well as for links with organised crime. As of the following week, she announced that Italy intended to proceed as soon as possible and make up for its delay in transposing the European Union directive on whistleblowing. It had to be protected to encourage shedding light on any possible opacity in any structure, especially in the public sector.

The attention that the Council of Europe was paying to the subject of that day's meeting — corruption, the phenomenon of money-laundering and tax evasion involving the holders of elected office and political functions— was entirely worthy of support. Such conduct, she said, undermined not only the credibility but also the very integrity of democratic institutions. Those who carried out public functions took an oath, often very solemn, of loyalty and respect for the law and the constitution. The first to be called upon to respect these rules included women and men in the institutions, from an administrator of a small municipality to those with the highest political responsibilities. All were called to answer – including criminally – for violations committed in the exercise of their duties.

Constitutional safeguards that assisted the holders of elected public offices in terms of legal responsibility should not be forgotten. These prerogatives guaranteed democratic institutions, not privileges. Guarantees that aimed at providing that in the dialectic of democratic life, allegations – even specious ones of unlawful conduct – could be used for the purposes of political gain. Thus, anti-corruption rules and respectful safeguards and guarantees had to always be carefully calibrated. Italian legislation provided for the removal from office of members of parliament, but only after a final conviction. In the case of certain elected positions it also prohibited those who had been convicted of corruption from standing for election.

Both the Constitutional and the European Court had examined and considered these as precautionary measures, not as sanctions. It was her profound conviction that when fighting against these phenomena, their actions had to be aimed above all at prevention. It was no coincidence that GRECO also focused on that: promoting the integrity of parliamentary institutions, the transparency of their functioning and the trust of citizens in political representation.

Prevention required rules, but it also required cultural or education and training related work. Systems of rules were useful to have, which, by contemplating specific cases of ineligibility or disqualification, in case of incompatibility with the parliamentary mandate, guarantee – while respecting the presumption of innocence— the integrity of legislative assemblies. Italy had embarked upon this path in 2016, when it adopted a code of conduct for members of the chamber of deputies, and with the establishment of an advisory committee on the conduct of members of parliament. The Senate had started on a similar path.

These measures were designed to create and spread amongst parliamentarians and voters themselves a culture of legality and transparency, which was the most effective barrier to the spread of corruption. She then quoted a warning from the President of the Republic in 2017:

“Corruption can only be fought through the firm, ethical and cultural involvement of everyone in society aimed at affirming, without hesitation or timidity, the premise of legality, since criminal enforcement is not exhaustive”.

Not only rules and enforcement instruments, therefore, but also a widespread and generalised cultural action, which she said were capable of permeating through all the folds of social life. Rules were important, but could only be truly effective if they were accompanied by a cultural renewal that passed through educational agencies first and foremost.

She concluded by affirming the central, decisive role that could be played by the Council of Europe in this important field, in building a mentality and mindset that was resistant to attempts at corruption. She said the Italian presidency was ready as always to play its part, and thanked the room for their attention.

The President thanked Ms Cartabia for the interesting thoughts she had shared. He reiterated that he would be happy to be present in Venice at the ministerial and he hoped to have fruitful discussions there. He said the most important element was how to join forces on so many issues that had to be tackled together, under the Italian presidency. He again reiterated his confidence that they could do that together based on her experience with the Council of Europe.

(Mr Andreas Nick, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the chair)

Mr Tiny Kox thanked Mr Vlasenko for his report developed with the Rules Committee on a most important item. International institutions and several secretary generals of the Council of Europe – Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić – had warned them that if they did not combat corruption, they would allow a cancer that could eat away their core values of rule of law and democracy. Corruption, he said, was an enemy of these core values.

He pointed to Mr Vlasenko’s report and the examples it provided of corruption not being a theoretical problem, but a problem of politicians letting their actions be influenced by corruption. This meant democratic processes did not function and rights weren’t protected in an appropriate way; rule of law would become a cynical wording instead of a guarantor of their way of life. Mr Vlasenko’s report presented the next step in combating corruption.

He echoed Ms Cantabria’s conclusion, that the Council of Europe could and should play a leading role in this respect, especially with institutions like GRECO and MONEYVAL. They had the ability to increase awareness in member States that if they did not combat corruption in an appropriate way, they would be harming themselves and their citizens in a most aggressive way.

It was important that in this report, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called on the national parliaments to improve awareness at home that corruption was there and relevant in each and every member state, as well as to ask national parliaments to take the necessary measures to make it possible that political corruption was combated. The report was timely and it deserved the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe’s support.

Some amendments made the report a bit more precise, about when actions should be taken. As the Rapporteur had already mentioned, this was important because there was presumption of innocence for everybody, if politicians were as equal as ordinary citizens, but at the same time, they could not wait until everything was arranged. There was a political responsibility next to the criminal responsibility.

Ms Nicole Trisse thanked Mr Vlasenko for his report. She said he was absolutely right that they had to set an example in fighting corruption, because it ate away at democracy. She echoed Ms Cartabia’s words that it was absolutely vital to talk about this and to fight corruption in each and every one of their parliaments.

She had a comment about the names listed in the report. She had noticed a colleague’s name, a serving MP in France, whose story had hit the headlines. The accusations had been levied, because someone had taken his passport and stolen the identity, a person who had worked with this man in the past decade. This was an example of a case which wasn’t absolutely clear, this MP’s identity had been stolen. However, she thanked Mr Vlasenko nonetheless for his report and said that corruption had to be fought until the end.

Mr Oleksandr Merezhko said that he felt the need to explain why he would be voting against the report and the draft resolution. While there was no doubt that the topic was extremely important and very timely, he believed that such reports should not be used as political tools in an internal struggle to settle scores with

political opponents. He said that the rapporteur had named his political opponents in the report, in connection with the Pandora and Panama scandals, and found that he had conveniently forgotten to mention his own political leader. He offered to share an article from The Guardian in case there was any doubt about this. This was the reason he was voting against, he said.

Mr Davor Ivo Stier said he supported the report and also thanked the rapporteur. He echoed two of Ms Cartabia's points: first, corruption was not just a question of money, but of social ethics and the credibility of the democratic institutions; second, the avoidance of any manipulation of the fight against corruption for political purposes.

In that regard, the committee had introduced some amendments, such as trials being concluded at a reasonable time so as not to be used to eliminate political opponents. The rapporteur had accepted the amendments, which had been introduced in the text. He thanked him, because it was a contribution that made the report even better. He reiterated that he supported it.

Ms Petra Stienen commended the rapporteur and also the rapporteur for the opinion on behalf of the Dutch delegation and said the report was extremely important. She referred to a report from the day before on the new rules on sexism, corruption was another thing that politicians had to look at. She would take it back home and would ask the speaker of the parliament and the senate to see what they already had in place, and whether this report actually needed adjustments in their own rules and regulations.

Mr Samad Seyidov said the report was very important and hoped that another report on political corruption would be presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in the future. It would deal with misusing the values of the organisation for political purposes. He thus agreed with Mr Merezhko that corruption should be fought – they had seen what had happened in the Council of Europe two years previous – but it was much more dangerous, sometimes, to use values for political purposes. This could be called political corruption. The attempt to stand behind the curtain of values of democracy, rule of law and human rights created more obstacles and problematic issues than corruption itself. Corruption could not only be fought with that angle, it was a much wider and problematic issue, which was very essential and very important. He repeated that the experience of the organisation had given them a lot of proof of that. Lastly, he advised that they should also take into account the reality of what else existed.

Mr Frank Schwabe thanked the rapporteur for the important report. He was sorry to say that Mr Seyidov had mixed things in order to hide something that had happened, especially concerning Azerbaijan. He had brought the organisation there with corruption around Azerbaijan. He said that they had paid people there, in national parliaments and the Parliamentary Assembly, which was totally different from the discussion Mr Merezhko had started.

It was known that the accusation of being corrupt was used on a national level and that the difference had to be made clear, they had to be careful. Therefore, they would speak about one amendment, where the wording could perhaps be slightly changed to make very clear that an accusation of corruption by itself was not corruption. That did not mean one should not work anymore when it comes to this.

There was corruption and corruption had to be faced, since in the end corruption destroyed democracy. If people in their member countries thought they were corrupt, they would lose everything, every power, everything to rule their countries and this organisation in a good way. Therefore, he wanted to underline the need to be careful with the accusation of corruption, but the report was very important. It was not going to be the last one, they had to deal with this question and it would never stop, they would have to speak about it. Control mechanisms had to be implemented.

He reminded the Assembly that he was working on a report for the Rules Committee about having a body to deal with the question. He concluded by saying he supported the report, understood that there were concerns, and asked colleagues to support it.

Mr Sergiy Vlasenko thanked everyone for participating in the debate, also for being critical of the report. He agreed with some of the messages. He agreed with Mr Schwabe on this not being the last report and on the need for new reports. The fight against corruption had to be developed, and that should be strictly looked at. He also understood the situation with national delegations whose politicians were mentioned in the memorandum, but he had already said that many politicians were involved in that; in offshore scams, corruption, and so on. He understood that countries and political leaders did not want to be mentioned in that, but there was a need to be fair. It had to be said if a person had an offshore company that hadn't been declared, even if they were the leader of a country, a President. This ruined public trust and the belief of taxpayers, it was a key question.

He understood the situation with the French parliamentarian who had their passport stolen and would double check the situation, and make an additional comment on that if it was necessary. However, all other information in the memorandum was double, even triple checked, and corrections were made when any information was received by national delegations. He again stressed that the report and draft resolution was not about legal matters, but ethical matters, and political responsibility. Not even the presumption of innocence, because they were talking about ethical matters. One of the main proposals in the draft resolution was the “call to national parliaments and governments which must improve or adopt the code of ethical conduct of public officials”, saying that all offshore companies should be declared, that that should be transparent to the public.

If it wasn't done, then political responsibility should come, he said. He again quoted paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, which did not talk about any case of corruption, but a situation “where the alleged misconduct is sufficiently serious and the allegations are sufficiently credible”. Therefore, the discussion was only about these cases and not all publications in the media, on the internet, and so on.

He again quoted, “where the alleged misconduct is sufficiently serious and the allegations are sufficiently credible”. Political responsibility should only come in those situations, he said. This was what the draft resolution was about, not about criminal, civil or administrative responsibility, but only about the ethical and political responsibility.

Mr Boriss Cilevičs, Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, agreed it was very important to keep the subject of the report in mind. It was not about criminal justice concerning those guilty of corruption, but complementary, interim measures. Case laws of the European Court of Human Rights showed that the level of protection for public figures and politicians' level of protection of private life was lower than for ordinary people who were not public figures.

As many speakers had pointed out, this was crucial for the credibility of the whole political system, of power. Something had to be done in addition to criminal trials and investigations, as it was well known that they took a long time. This was why it was important to have other tools and commitments, which politicians would voluntarily undertake. He strongly disagreed with his good friend Mr Tiny Kox, because the presumption of innocence was not applicable there, since it was a concept of criminal justice. Nor was there a discussion about possible sanctions in the case of any cases coming from political opponents. Legally speaking, there had to be sufficiently reliable evidence that allegations were not completely ill-based. In the meantime and in anticipation of criminal proceedings, some measures had to be applied, because if these credible allegations were in place it would be completely wrong not to restrict whatsoever the ability of politicians, also in the future, to take important political decisions which were likely determined by corrupt interests.

In the cases where there was no criminal substance, but politicians did not comply with ethical principles of good policymaking, they also had to do something even without clear violations of criminal law, of administrative law, established by courts. This was what the report was about. He understood this might cause some discomfort for many colleagues, but it was a common responsibility and they were in the same boat. It was not about the prestige or reputation of politicians and political parties, but the prestige of European politics as a whole which was at stake.

They had to demonstrate their willingness to improve transparency, to improve responsibility, and this was what underlined the substance of the entire report. He concluded by commending the rapporteur, Mr Vlasenko, for his important work and urging colleagues to support the report and the draft resolution.

The Vice-President announced that three amendments had been tabled.

Ms Marta Grande said she would speak to all of the amendments, which they had submitted in order to highlight a key component of the report. They had moved these three amendments from the Italian delegation to demonstrate their support for the report and the principles underpinning it. Nonetheless, they could not underscore the wording that was used, although they were procedural matters.

The report, in a number of paragraphs, used the words “credibly suspected”. In other words, credible suspicions of involvement in corruption schemes. This left a lot of room for ambiguity in interpreting what was actually happening, which not all states would be happy with. Therefore, they were aiming to change the word “suspicion” so as not to act based on suspicions, but to wait until there was a “conviction”. They needed a decision to be taken before the measures called for in the report were brought to bear. In the view of the Italian delegation, “suspicion” was not enough; this implied certain restrictions in place in parliaments in different countries.

Next came the code of conduct, which they supported and wanted to implement, but it was quite different, a separate matter. They were convinced that unless they changed the text and included the amendments they

had moved, they feared that the report would be less effective. Because, at the end of the day, it wouldn't be properly implemented in the various parliaments in tangible terms. This was the rationale for the three amendments that Italy had submitted and she insisted on them.

Mr Cilevičs spoke against the amendments. He said that apparently, the committee had not considered these amendments and so he could not present the committee's opinion. However, very similar, almost identical amendments had been tabled when the committee adopted this report and they were rejected by a large majority.

Very briefly, he explained why, with the deepest respect for the Italian hosts. He reminded the room that the presumption of innocence was not applicable here because they were not speaking about criminal punishment. In fact, there were many other areas where the presumption of innocence did not apply and restrictive decisions were taken on the basis of credible allegations. For example taxation cases, where one had to prove their income was legal and the legal origin of one's assets and, if not, they were punished. This, he said, was a sort of reversal of the burden of proof.

To the best of his knowledge, Italian legislation also enforced and envisaged the same provisions in cases related to corruption, mafia and so on. In fact, it was quite contradictory and changed the very substance of the report to a considerable extent. He said, once again, that they were speaking about additional, complementary measures, about a sort of self-regulation that politicians had to do, in addition to criminal and administrative justice, to fight corruption among themselves. He regretted being strictly against these amendments.

Mr Schwabe said he saw the conflict and had some concerns as well about the wording, but he did not want to go as far as saying that a clear judgement was needed, since it could sometimes take five years in some countries. He asked whether another way could be found to make it clear it was not just an accusation and he proposed something like "clear evidence of corruption" in whatever case it was, though he knew it was difficult as well. This could be a kind of agreement to not say "definitively convicted" in the amendment, but "in case of clear evidence of corruption" as a bridge.

The Vice-President responded that he thought they were in a bit of a difficult situation, as these amendments had not been adequately dealt with in the committee. However, given the political sensitivity of the issue he thought it would be helpful to come to a compromise that would allow it not to be voted for with a narrow majority one way or the other. He suggested a five minute recess to recommend the rapporteur, Mr Schwabe, the chair of the committee and the mover of the amendment to get together and find a joint position to put to the vote.

FIVE MINUTE RECESS

Mr Vlasenko said the oral sub-amendment to Amendment 1 had been discussed. Amendment 1 with the oral sub-amendment would be as follows: "The prosecution and the courts use legal means to suspend / to bar politicians in the case when there is clear evidence of corruption and related offences from holding public offices". He strongly supported this proposal of Mr Schwabe.

Ms Grande could not support this proposal because the idea of clear evidence could be seen in different ways. Again, it could be used internally for political parties, as a moral suasion between parties, in one's own party, but not in general. They could not take away immunity from a politician because of "clear evidence", which did not mean anything – it could be a picture or a newspaper article saying something else. For them it was not acceptable and they were worried about the instrumentalisation of this kind of "clear evidence".

Mr Kox as a point of order, noted that a solution had not been produced between the mover of the amendment and the rapporteur. He asked if it was possible to postpone the vote on the report until January 2022, as he believed an answer could be found and they did not differ too much. He did not think it would harm things to move the vote by two months and hoped for a unanimous decision on the report.

The Vice-President responded saying it would make sense to move the vote to the afternoon or after the current affairs debate, if those involved could come up with a common wording. Otherwise, it would have to be resolved by voting on the proposal that was on the table.

Mr Vlasenko, as a point of order, pointed to what the head of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights had said. They had already discussed very, very similar amendments that were represented as oral sub-amendments during the hearing of the Legal Affairs Committee. These amendments had been declined by a large majority of the committee. Therefore, the committee had already talked through this issue. They did

not have a formal decision of the committee on that particular amendment, but very similar amendments had been voted through the committee and they failed by a large majority.

Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis pointed out that when Mr Vlasenko talked about the legal affairs meeting – and the chairperson could confirm it – the many technical problems meant the votes that took place that day were not taken in ideal conditions. They could neither postpone it to January nor to the afternoon, as some people might have left, so the proposal of the President to postpone it to after the current affairs debate was the best one. If there was no way of reaching any compromise, they could directly go to a vote. She thought the chair of the Italian delegation could speak.

Ms Grande said Mr Kox's idea was the best idea so far. The amendments she had put forward proposed modifications and she felt some sort of common ground could be reached. However, they needed enough time to go through it. Talking about amendment proposals, they had had the response from the rapporteur, who did not agree with them. Her fear was that the next hour was not enough to agree on something. It would not work. She was afraid that the sub-amendment did not solve the situation

Mr Schwabe asked to go to the vote. He understood that the Italian delegation would be against the sub-amendment, but maybe in the end they would not be against the amendment, because it was better than the sentence before. He thought they would not find out before making it complicated and it should be put to a procedural vote.

Ms Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis said the sub-amendment had to be supported by the author of the amendment; otherwise, they could not take it. This was a problem.

Mr Vlasenko said these were, after some discussion, two different approaches. The approach proposed by the mover of the amendment was talking about criminal responsibility. The draft resolution was not talking about criminal responsibility, but about political responsibility, which was totally different. They could go ahead and vote because his feeling was that there would be no compromise. There were two different concepts and the mover of the amendment was against a compromise when they tried to find one. Therefore, he now saw no field to find a compromise.

They could move with the vote on the amendment now, one way or the other, and then to adopt the draft resolution or not.

The Vice-President still hoped that common ground could be found to give a better message to the outside world, and he felt a compromise was in the air but if people were not willing to work towards it, he could not force it. It could be resolved by vote. It was not politically the best way to deal with a sensitive situation, but a clear proposal was needed. He asked if there was a way to formally agree that they vote on the sub-amendment to give the committee a fair chance other than just rejecting the amendment in the first place.

Ms Grande said they wouldn't vote in favour of the sub-amendment.

The Vice-President stated that procedurally there was an agreement that the mover of the amendment would not object to the sub-amendment being put to the vote, without agreeing in substance. This would at least technically give them a chance to resolve this in a proper fashion. They then needed a clear wording of the sub-amendment to put to the vote.

Mr Vlasenko repeated: "The prosecution and the courts use legal means to suspend / to bar politicians in the case when there is clear evidence of corruption and related offences from holding public offices".

*The oral sub-amendment was **accepted** with 23 votes in favor, 1 against, 7 abstentions.*

The President put Amendment No 1 as amended to the vote.

*Amendment No 11 as amended was **accepted** with 21 votes in favour, 1 against, 7 abstentions.*

Ms Grande presented Amendment No 2.

Mr Cilevičs drew member's attention to the fact that the wording of the original text was practically identical to the sub-amendment approved by the majority. It spoke of "credibly suspected", which was the same wording that was suggested. When speaking of "codes of ethics", ethics was different to "criminal justice", so "waiting until the final conviction of the court" when speaking about ethical codes in the parliament did not sound logical to him. He said they had to act proactively and have higher ethical and moral standards, which were not defined by the court judgement, but by their concept of parliamentary ethics, so he was against this amendment.

Mr Vlasenko said they had already looked at a similar amendment on the Legal Affairs Committee. However, they could try to find some compromise as during the arguing of the first amendment. They could use a similar approach and, for example, put an oral sub-amendment: instead of the words “definitively convicted of offences related to”, they could put the wording “when there is clear evidence”. Therefore, it would be the same wording as in the previous amendment. They could do it that way or they could reject the amendment, and he was happy with both.

The Vice-President asked if there was a proposal for a sub-amendment.

Mr Vlasenko said yes, if they could find a compromise.

Ms Grande said no, this amendment did not in fact satisfy their request for an amendment, so they could not agree to it.

The Vice-President asked if they did not agree for the sub-amendment to be put to the vote.

The Amendment, as it stood, was put to the vote.

Amendment No 2 was rejected with 6 votes in favor, 13 against, 7 abstentions.

Ms Grande presented Amendment No 3.

Mr Cilevičs said he was confused because the amendment suggested something different from what had just been explained. The text suggested by the rapporteur offered a political party to exert pressure on its members when “credible allegations” became known. The amendment suggested doing this only when politicians were convicted, which he said could already be too late. When a court has convicted a politician after several years, his political party only then would start to exert pressure. It was certainly too late. It was a matter of political ethics and this pressure had to be exerted much earlier, for example, in order to facilitate cooperation with the investigation with the courts and so on. In his view, it absolutely changed the very idea and was not compatible with the way in which responsible political parties should act. He was strongly against.

Mr Vlasenko agreed with the view of Mr Cilevičs and of the Legal Affairs Committee and was strongly against.

The Vice-President put Amendment No 3 to the vote.

Amendment No 3 was rejected with 2 votes in favor, 22 against, 5 abstentions.

The Vice-President put the draft resolution to the vote, as amended.

The Resolution was adopted with 24 votes in favour, 3 against, 3 abstentions.

The Vice-President congratulated the rapporteur on the completion of the work.

13. CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE

The situation of migrants on the border of Poland and Belarus

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez opened the current affairs debate. He mentioned that following the request from Mr Rik Daems and the Presidential Committee, he went to Poland on the 19th and 20th of November together with Ms Anne-Mari Virolainen from Finland and Ms Maria Ruotanen, director of commissions. It was part of a monitoring mission on the situation on the border between Belarus and Poland. Ms Anne-Marie Virolainen was a rapporteur in September, when they had the debate, on the situation on the border between Belarus, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. He was also the rapporteur on pushbacks at land and at sea. He went on to thank the Polish authorities and the Polish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, especially Mr Mularczyk, for the support and assistance they provided as part of that urgent mission.

Unfortunately, they couldn't access the border itself, but they did manage to meet the Polish Commission for Human Rights, various representatives of the Helsinki Committee, Amnesty International, various ambassadors, and the officer responsible for fundamental human rights at FRONTEX, the Minister of the Interior, as well as General Jakubaszek, who's in charge of the border at Bialystok, including the colleagues from the Polish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly.

All of these exchanges were frank and instructive, they integrated a deal about the situation and heard different, often divergent and contradictory, views about the situation and solutions that had to be adopted.

On Friday the 19th, they went to the border area. They were able to visit a border checkpoint. Unfortunately, they couldn't reach the border itself, nor could they see with their own eyes the situation because they were stopped at the exclusion zone. The border area couldn't be accessed. It could only be accessed by the Polish ombudsmen. Even FRONTEX was not present in the area. Throughout that mission, they circumscribed the issues they raised to humanitarian ones. Although some of the Polish officials they met often spoke about the political aspects of that issue. In their view, there is to a large extent an organised migratory phenomenon, actively organised by the Belarusian authorities. Their actions can be characterised as hybrid war.

What they were focused on in the Migration Committee was the terrible fate of those men, women and children who were being held hostage for falling victim to those political games which were being played at their expense.

Thousands of people were hiding in those forests, in those bogs. The situation was terrible. It was very cold. The sanitary condition was deplorable. It was only going to get worse as the winter went on. There was snow. Temperatures were very low. They had no shelter. They were scared. The situation was very alarming.

The inhabitants of bordering villages stood in solidarity, but they couldn't work miracles. They saw sorted actions undertaken by one government. They were pushed back on the other side. President Lukashenko stood behind all of that. That was patently obvious. Indeed, other countries were collaborating by sending planes to Minsk. Yes, Poland was under attack, and had condemned all the actions behind that.

Indeed, some migrants who were there at the border were probably economic migrants that wanted to move on, not just stay in Poland. Nonetheless, Poland had to respect international asylum rules. It needed to look at each specific case regardless of whether the person crossed the border irregularly, regardless of whether the person in question was instrumentalised for political purposes.

It was unacceptable to deem a migrant ineligible for the right to asylum. That was a universal right. They had to be able to lodge their applications, and those applications had to be considered in keeping with the laws in the books.

That was a very difficult situation. There was a deadlock. People were dying. To date, according to the information they had, 11 people had lost their lives. That might have been just the tip of the iceberg.

In the short term, they suspected that the worst-case scenario was still to be. They saw men, women, and children who were absolutely exhausted physically and mentally. They saw many harrowing scenes, including at border checkpoints.

The Polish offices that worked there were doing an outstanding job. Some of them were at the end of their tether, as they were working in very difficult conditions.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez mentioned that they met with families including a Kurdish-Iraqi family. There was a man there. He had five children between the ages of three and 14. The family was treated with dignity by the Polish officials, having undergone terrible ordeals.

They saw families. For instance, a woman who was pregnant. She lost her child and lost a lot of blood as well because of the inhumane conditions she was subjected to in that forest. Her husband was absolutely devastated to learn that his wife was probably going to die. He had his wife with him. She was pregnant as Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez had already said. He had other children and was absolutely desperate, if not, he wouldn't have embarked on this perilous path.

The border region was now in a state of emergency. However, the state of emergency could only run until the start of December. Legislative amendments were being discussed in the Parliament, and it was possible that an extension was going to be granted.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez said they believed they needed to restore access to the border. They needed to do that as soon as possible so that the HCR could access the area.

They had to support Poland using best practices to ensure that migrant's rights were upheld, and they were offered the best possible protection, especially to the most vulnerable, women and unaccompanied children in particular.

If necessary, they needed to open a humanitarian corridor. Time was of the essence. Those people were in dire straits, and they all had to act swiftly without taking into account other considerations. They needed to protect them.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez stated that they needed to encourage all member States to stand in solidarity with Poland. If was needed, they also had to stand in solidarity with the Baltic countries if the crisis persisted. They had to be prepared to receive those migrants in their countries. They needed to reach out and lend a hand to those poor people so that other countries didn't fall victim to that phenomenon, specifically Poland. They were very moved by what happened in Poland. What they saw in Poland was similar to what he saw when he visited the camp on the island of Lesbos.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez called on his colleagues alluding that their values were at stake. They were seeing barbaric acts being committed. They were seeing injustice. Those were at odds with the values of the Council of Europe.

Mr Arkadiusz Mularczyk begun by thanking Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez for his report. He also thanked him for his visit to Poland. They needed to start looking at the smuggling situation in the big picture of what was going on then at the Polish-Belarusian border. They needed to understand that Belarus had the Lukashenko regime. He lost the last election and now he was taking revenge because the European Union put sanctions on his regime.

As they spoke, dramatic events were taking place on the border between Belarus and Poland. Thousands of migrants were being pushed by the police and secret service of the Lukashenko regime against the barbed wires protecting a sovereign state. Those people were flown into the Belarusian capital in an orchestrated march from Iraq, Syria, and other countries in difficult situations, lured by Lukashenko's false promises of a better life in Europe. They were then placed in busses by Belarus' services and taken to the border where they were pushed against the fences and forced to attempt crossing or camp in the cold or the swamps in the forest.

Thousands of women, men and children were used as slave munitions in Lukashenko's attempt to destabilise the situation on the border with Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and the European Union. That was the origin of what was becoming a serious humanitarian and security crisis on the EU's eastern border. In that context they had to be remembered who the perpetrator was and who was the target and who were the innocent victims.

They had to not fall into the trap of confusing the rules and creating a false narrative. Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania were going to continue to protect their sovereignty and their borders against any potential attacks and threats.

That ad hot be clearly stressed and well understood by all the member States of the Council of Europe, especially in the context of relatively recent experiences of hybrid attacks in some parts of their continent.

At the same time, Mr Arkadiusz Mularczyk assured them that the human rights of the people cynically used by the regime in Minsk were at the centre of their attention. Poland had always abided by its international human rights and humanitarian obligations. Their border guards and police were now working for several months under consistent pressure and in extremely difficult conditions. They were doing the utmost to observe human rights obligations very strictly.

Mr Arkadiusz Mularczyk said they were convinced of their priority to protect Polish and European security as well as territorial integrity, which had to be reconciled with the highest standards of human rights protection of all persons who found themselves on Polish territory.

Mr Arkadiusz Mularczyk assured that Poland was going to continue its efforts in that regard. They noted and welcomed the interest of the Council of Europe, including the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Parliamentary Assembly in the situation on the border with Belarus.

Commissioner Mijatovic visited Poland last week and witnessed the complexity of the whole situation on the ground. As she expressed after her visit, dealing with the current situation did not have to just fall on Poland's shoulders. It was a European issue which required a human rights response based on solidarity and European values and standards.

In that period, they believed that the Council of Europe and its member States had a role to play *inter alia* through a strong and decisive call on the Belarusian authorities to cease the worrisome activities conducted on the border. The EU had to allow the immigrants to return to their homes as soon as possible.

Finally, Mr Arkadiusz Mularczyk appealed to his colleagues from all delegations for the Council of Europe to actively engage in the situation to prevent the trafficking of innocent people from their home countries to Belarus.

They were convinced that in that situation they had to work together as the Council of Europe to once again prove their relevance and ability to tackle a difficult situation under the Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia border.

Ms Sunna Aevarsdottir began by arguing that the events they were seeing unfold on the border of Belarus were a humanitarian crisis. They had to do their utmost to ensure that the human rights of those migrants were upheld and respected. They had to do as much as they possibly could to assist those in need at the border. As the wife of a Polish man, she expressed that it was also very important that Europe stood up and showed solidarity with Poland in a way that Poland could accept and believe. She was distinctly aware of a rather unsettling mistrust that Poland had towards the rest of the continent based on their history. Based on the history of the Second World War, Poland had felt abandoned by Europe during times of conflict.

There was a certain type of mistrust towards the solidarity that Europe would show them when they were now feeling under attack. It was very important that the leaders in Europe took that seriously and tried to build trust with the Polish authority and with the Polish nation so that they could deal with that problem in a humanitarian and appropriate way in European solidarity.

If that was done, in a sense of the way, with respect and reference to history, it could be a unifying moment for Europe. It could be a way to bring Poland closer to its European allies again, especially in the European Union. Ms Aevarsdottir knew they weren't sitting there at the moment but should Europe deal with that problem in solidarity with Poland, with respect to the history that had already taken place, they would have a much more successful resolution of that problem. They might have even had a more friendly relationship between Poland and the rest of Europe as a result.

Ms Aevarsdottir knew that her husband felt very worried about what was happening at the border. He lived in a different country from his own, but he felt like those were very worrying signs seeing the military of Russia moving closer to the border. There were worries that that was going to be used as an excuse for an escalation of violence.

There were very worrying signs they had to be considering when discussing that humanitarian crisis, but they also had to look at it as an opportunity to show European solidarity, to be able to come together and solve the humanitarian crisis, but also defend Europe as a whole.

Mr Tiny Kox began by thanking Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez and his colleague for their fact-finding mission to the border area between Belarus and Poland at the request of the Presidential Committee. It was important they were at the spot when things went out of hand. In the past months they had seen a sharp increase of migrants from countries like Iraq and Afghanistan via Belarus in the direction of Council of Europe member States.

Mr Tiny Kox thought that the President of Belarus had not made a secret that he opened his country to those migrants in order to put pressure on the European Union over the sanctions imposed by the European Union on Belarus. He thought that it should be clearly stated by the international community that it was unacceptable to use the needs of migrants, the needs of human beings, to achieve political goals. The international community had to stand united in that respect.

Belarus was a member state of the United Nations and had to respect international law. One of those international laws regarded the Refugee Convention. Belarus was now playing with its obligations, so it was important that they made a clear message to the government in Belarus that that was unacceptable and that it had to end. It had to end immediately because they could not use human beings to achieve political goals.

The member States of the Council of Europe who were directly confronted with that, especially Poland, but also the other Baltic states, rightfully claimed that they had the right to protect their sovereignty. They were being attacked in one way or another, in a hybrid way, by a neighbouring country, and that they were entitled to defend themselves. That was of course true.

At the same time, the right to protect their sovereignty didn't create a right to not live upon their obligations under international and European law. That was happening as well.

They had seen that people were forced back that were trying to enter member States of the Council of Europe to apply for asylum.

Mr Tiny Kox thought that was a huge responsibility for not only the bordering member States of the Council of Europe, but for the whole Council of Europe, that they could not walk away from the obligations under the Refugee Convention that anybody who claimed to seek for asylum had to have the right to an individual assessment of the protection.

As Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez properly stated, it was a realistic assumption that quite of those who now wanted to apply for asylum would in the end turn out not to be under the protection of the Refugee Convention and had to leave the territory of the country they entered.

But until that was made clear, all those people had the right to have an individual assessment. Mr Tiny Kox thought that it was their obligation as the Council of Europe to help those member States to live up to their obligations. He understood that countries like Poland said that it was not fair that they should carry all the burden in a conflict that was not really a conflict regarding Poland but the whole of Europe.

Mr Tiny Kox argued that what they now needed was the protection of those people who were at the border area. Secondly, the willingness of all involved states. The solidarity of all European member States of the Council of Europe. Readiness to respect European law, and the need to reflect on how the Refugee Convention needed to be protected in the near future.

They were celebrating 70 years and the future was now at stake. Once again, Mr Tiny Kox called on Belarus to respect its obligations, but also to the members states of the Council of Europe to do the same regarding their obligations.

Mr Emanuelis Zingeris reminded the room that the conflict was artificially created by the Belarusian dictator, whom we refused to call president, because there were no free and fair elections. He argued it was a created coup against the Belarusian people who assembled by the millions on the streets of Minsk, Grodno, and other cities to say no. They elected Ms Tsikhanouskaya. Now all the political parties' leadership were in prison.

Mr Zingeris called, looking at his social-democratic friends in the room, on Christian democrats, on the leaders of liberal parties, especially Mr Rik Daems, to be involved in the liberation of the dismantled political parties inside of Belarus. They were responsible, in the European political family, of the fate of those incredible brave men and women who were now in prison. He asked the President if he could imagine 888 political prisoners that were now being tortured inside of political prisons in Belarus.

Mr Zingeris then switched to the artificially created crisis on their borders for the reason they were protecting social-democrats, conservatives, Christian-democrats and other parties inside Belarus. They were punished for the protection of democracy inside Belarus for that huge migration crisis.

They had to understand that a dictator who usurped power and tried to change their policy line towards him, and then he would stop. But having had opposition leaders from Russia in Vilnius, opposition members from all parties, including Ms Tsikhanouskaya in Vilnius, who were then under their umbrella of a free country of the European Union and NATO, they were not going to change their policies.

Mr Zingeris asked Mr Rik Daems if he could imagine that the people who were artificially brought and invited to Belarus through illegal agencies of Lukashenko were now forced by the Belarusian army to the border. If they refused to go, they were punished. They were forced. It wasn't the same as the immigration waves in the south of Europe, there in Italy, or in countries like Greece or Spain that were subject to a natural flow of immigration and had to of course still be related to international obligations and conventions. It was an artificially created huge traffic of immigration trying to change their policy and forcing them not to support democracy in Belarus and probably in Russia.

From Mr Zingeris's point of view, he tried to say thank you for the creation of the resolution supported by all of them, the last resolution about the immigration crisis. They had to understand that the crisis was politically and artificially created, and that was the truth.

They absolutely had to support the lives of those poor immigrants. But they had to settle clear measures to help the Belarusian democracy be at the heart of Europe and to be supported by all of them.

Mr Jacques Maire thanked Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez for his report which was always very fascinating and powerful. He was very struck about what he had to say, and he was very sensitive to the fact that Europe and the European Union had remained united behind Poland during that difficult period which wasn't still over in fact.

This wasn't the first time that there had been exploitation of the misery suffered by refugees from a political point of view. Even though Poland... That wasn't the most brutal and violent example. Now Italian and Romanian colleagues and other colleagues had fully experienced the difficulties related to that, including their Spanish colleagues, with regards to the migratory flows that had been experienced from the East.

Mr Jacques Maire didn't want to go across what happened with Turkey and Morocco. Not long ago there were 8.000 migrants that arrived at the coast in 24 hours after they were given the green light by Morocco. He was simply mentioning that because later that afternoon they were going to be celebrating the 1951 Refugee Convention. That enshrined fundamental principles that were currently being questioned: non-discrimination, non-criminalisation, and no pushback. Also, minimum standards that were set out on dealing with refugees

Unfortunately, in light of the downfall of what was happening in Belarus, the principles of that 1951 Convention were being called into question. The 1951 Convention was unfortunately ill equipped to deal with that sort of instrumentalization.

What did they have to do? Mr Jacques Maire didn't think they had to question the principles of the 1951 Convention. They had to ask themselves to what extent they could draft and implement additional provisions for humanitarian crises and urgency.

They had one very unfortunate example. That was that the European Union itself set up mechanisms to deal with such crises. Mr Jacques Maire was thinking, in particular, of the 2001 Directive on temporary protection. That was adopted, in fact, at a time when Iraqi and Syrian refugees were streaming in. But that was never implemented.

There was also something that was planned by the Dublin mechanism that was a rapid alert mechanism, the preparation in crisis mechanism. All those were decided, but unfortunately, they were never activated.

They could not fail to note that as a result of that lack of action or lack of an ability to be effective with those instruments, they had the need to underline the importance of taking multilateral action within the Council of Europe and with the European Union. They wanted to ensure that there were effective and additional mechanisms that could cope with that serious crisis situation.

Mr Jacques Maire thought that was the lesson they could draw from that, and the price they had to pay if they wanted to ensure that they could continue that common fight which was the protection of refugees as laid out in the 1951 Convention in Geneva.

Mr Petr Tolstoi begun by marking that the humanitarian situation was indeed terrible. Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez told them all about that. Unfortunately, it was not the first time. Why did those people become refugees? Who was responsible for that? Who pillaged their countries? Who bomber their countries under the pretext that they would introduce democracy there? How could they, colleagues, say that the situation couldn't be compared to what had happened in the south of Europe, Turkey, Cyprus, or Morocco? How could they not compare it?

Those were the very same people. It was in fact a business. A business. Transporting migrants for example from Belarus to Germany. It had been going on for years. There would be Polish people driving migrants from Belarus to Germany. Belarus had been boycotted by the EU, and hence they had the situation on their hands.

Polish border guards were not just pushing people back into Belarusian territory. The border guards whose humanism Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez had just told them about had water blasted in an absolutely freezing temperature. They also used tear gas on those refugees. That was what those Polish border guards were doing. They also bet up women and children along the border line.

It wasn't Lukashenko's regime that was doing that. It was an EU member state engaged in those activities. That was something they needed to know about.

The only way to resolve the situation was through direct talks with the President of Belarus, President Lukashenko, who was lawfully elected. There was no other way out of that situation. No other puppet policies applied to the situation on the Belarus-Poland border could help tackle the situation. Mr Petr Tolstoi hoped they could understand that, at least the majority of them.

Those politicised characterisations of Belarus in that situation didn't help them attend to those more vulnerable out there in the forest.

Mr Petr Tolstoy stated that the day before 27 migrants had lost their lives in the Channel. They died in freezing waters. Nobody was talking about Mr Emmanuel Macron or Mr Boris Johnson being responsible for their deaths. Everybody was talking about Lukashenko. They had to avoid politicising that issue.

Their organisation had to be trying to save people, to protect human rights. After all, those were matters of life and death. That was what Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez told them. Their organisation didn't have to be involved in sticking political fig leaves over those problems. That didn't bring things closer to resolving that crisis.

Mr Ahmet Yildiz manifested that as emphasised on their latest resolution on that matter, they, as Turkey, showed concern for Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia on irregular migration. They had faced a similar problem for a decade. Only that year they had handled more than 138.000 irregular migrants. Of course, the Belarusian approach could not be tolerated. It was sad to see those necessary measures in terms of preventing the illegal crossing of third country citizens to those three countries were not taken. That crisis could tear down the international protection system which originated from the Convention related to the status of refugees on its 70th year commemoration. They were going to talk about it later.

However, they shared information with those three countries and declared their sympathy and solidarity. They warned Belarusian authorities on that. They offered some assistance and expertise as a country that was dealing with the same issues.

Mr Ahmet Yildiz however equally blamed those in that organisation, in some member countries, who were trying to draw parallelisms between the Syrian refugee issue and that issue. It was either ignorance of the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, the most tragic hot conflict and the plight of those people, or it was a pretext to legitimise the pushback practices of some countries. They could not tolerate those standards applied to some EU countries or to non-EU countries.

To help decrease the tensions, Turkish Airlines took some measures like stopping and reducing flights and stopping the emission of tickets for the citizens of some countries, and also suspending the quota sharing agreement with Belavia. Up in the checks, it was seen that the number of those who went to Belarus and couldn't return with Turkish Airlines was just 200. It seemed that they were flying from their countries with other airlines.

Turkey hoped that would be solved in a legal and legitimate way. They were ready to help those three countries with that.

Mr Oleksandr Merezhko tried to quickly answer two classic questions. Who was to be blamed for that artificially created migration crisis, and what was to be done?

He would have called the situation a double instrumentalization. By that he meant that that crisis was used as a political tool, a political instrument, by Lukashenko and his regime against Poland. But at the same time, Lukashenko himself was not independent. He was not in control of the Kremlin. He was used in his turn as a political tool, as an instrument, by Putin to punish Poland for its firm support of Ukraine and for its solidarity with Ukraine. That was obvious to him.

What was to be done? He recognised that handwriting by Putin. He vividly remembered when Russia invaded Crimea, in one of his press conferences, Putin dared to describe his tactics. He said that first they would put women and children, and behind them, their troops. That was exactly what he was doing in that situation against Poland. That was the bottom of cynicism, and it was also obvious.

What was to be done? He thought that if they wanted to stop that crisis, they should use more sanctions. Not symbolic sanctions, but serious sanctions against Putin and his regime.

He assured them that if they started using those serious sanctions, that crisis would stop. What could be done to Belarus, to free the people of Belarus? First, what happened to the ad hoc commission to Belarus? Where was it? They had to create it immediately. They could also support Belarus by sending the draft of the constitution which was prepared and drafted by the free people of Belarus in exile. They had to send it to the Venice Commission. Those were steps that could help Belarus, and those were steps that could stop that migration crisis.

Ms Laima Liucija Andrikiénė begun by thanking their colleagues that went to Poland, Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez and others, for their work. In its resolution in September, the Assembly already expressed its concern over the unfolding situation of hybrid attacks by the Belarusian authorities resulting in increased migration and asylum pressure at the Belarus border with Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The Assembly condemned any instrumentalization of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers by states for political purposes.

Nevertheless, the situation of migrants on the border with Belarus was getting worse and worse. They fully acknowledged and understood that. They condemned in the strongest terms those actions of the Belarusian regime. Putting people's lives in danger, braking international law, disregarding fundamental human rights to which Belarus had committed, and threatening international security. The instrumentalization of human beings for political purposes had to stop immediately.

In order to avoid tragedies and prevent humanitarian crises on the territory of Belarus, they had to call on competent international actors to engage with Belarusian authorities in order to organise humanitarian and medical assistance for third country migrants who were currently in the territory of Belarus. She stressed again: in the territory of Belarus.

It was of crucial importance that relevant international organisations helped illegal migrants to return to their countries of origin. Again, she stressed: to return to their countries of origin, provide them with necessary assistance and take active steps to prevent the flow of illegal migration across the European Union borders.

Finally, Russian authorities, the Kremlin, had to stop supporting Lukashenko. Lukashenko is not a legitimate president. To her understanding, it wasn't only her opinion, the International Criminal Court in the Hague was crying for him.

Mr Kimmo Kiljunen stated that since last September, it was the fifth time they were discussing Belarus, and there was a reason for that. It was also the second time they were discussing in their Assembly, plenary Assembly meeting or Standing Committee, the situation on the border. What was very clear for all of them was that it was not primarily a migration problem. It was very clearly a security problem, and more and more, a humanitarian problem. A serious humanitarian problem.

Mr Kiljunen visited the border of Lithuania and Belarus a few months before, and he interviewed with some of those migrants who illegally crossed the border. He asked them why they were there, what was their aim and their process. They answered that they had heard in the countries from which they came, that there was now an open door to Europe via Minsk. From Minsk they would have open access to the Schengen area. They very clearly stated that they were not interested in asylum there in Lithuania or in Poland. Their aim was to go to central Europe, to Germany, to France, to the UK. That was their very clear aim.

It was a very serious situation in terms of the European Union because it was their common European Union border. That's why it was a very serious matter for them to consider.

Mr Kimmo Kiljunen marked that there were currently around 7.000 immigrants who crossed the border illegally in Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia. They didn't know how many of them were in Belarus. Maybe close to 10.000. The Belarusian police reported a week before that there were 7.000 of them.

What was the situation? The WHO regional director for Europe said that 60% of the people on the border needed help, medical help, immediately. They were thirsty, they were obviously cold, they were hungry, and they were obviously lost. Many of them were very much lost.

Mr Kimmo Kiljunen strongly stated that those people were actually the first victims of the Belarusian hybrid war. They were the first victims. They had to recognise that.

So, what should they do? There were a few points Mr Kimmo Kiljunen wanted to touch upon very quickly.

Firstly, not to be standing about the responsibility of Belarus. They could not, as civilised people, members of the Council of Europe, abandon those migrant people. They could not leave them there. They had to give humanitarian access to organisations to help those migrants. That was the minimum.

Secondly, they had to show strong solidarity with Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, with technical and humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, they obviously had to demand the Belarusian authorities to stop utilising and instrumentalizing migrants. That responsibility, on those terms, was obviously on that side. They had to try to create a certain double dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and also neighbouring countries in the broader process.

Mr Kimmo Kiljunen was aware that he was heading the process of the inclusive national process in Belarus, and he was the rapporteur there at the Assembly. Dialogue seemed to be going further and further, but that was the only thing they seemed they could do: to try to create a basis for proper dialogue to solve that problem.

Mr Nicos Tornaritis begun by underlining that they all agreed that what was going on at the border between Poland and Belarus was chaotic to say the least. From a political point of view, that was deplorable. What was even more tragic was the toll on human life and suffering. Migrants and refugees didn't have to be exploited for political gains.

Whether that was happening in Poland, Greece, or Cyprus, refugees and migrants did not have to be used as pawns for whatever reason, and they had to certainly not be abused or mistreated. Europe had to strike a fair balance between meeting humanitarian needs and protecting national interests.

Mr Zsolt Németh quoted his colleague, Ms Aevarsdotir, who said that that was an opportunity now to rebuild solidarity with Poland. He also drew attention on what was the most important aspect at the moment. Poland was under attack, and some people tried to use that tragedy to attack Poland and find a good minute to demonstrate that Polish authorities were responsible. They had just witnessed it, that they were responsible, that they were water-gunning and teargassing and attacking. Mr Zsolt Németh believed it was ridiculous to attack Poland at that moment and to say that they were not humanitarian or sensitive enough on the refugee problem. That was the real question.

Did they understand there was a country attacked in the nastiest way they could imagine? If they understood that it was a very serious form of attack on a colleague member state in the Council of Europe, they would be able to find the right answers. But if they didn't understand the character of the challenge, they could be misled.

Mr Zsolt Németh thought that was a new situation they had never experienced, that human bodies, mothers, children, were used for a hybrid war. They had never experienced that. It had nothing to do with the Turkish precedent. There was no parallel. That was the first time in history that a state organised human beings to attack another state. They needed to look at that from that aspect.

Yes, they needed to find the right balance between the humanitarian dimension and the security dimension, but when they solved the problem, yes, they had to, because they were talking in the end about human beings. But that was fundamentally a security challenge. For that reason, they needed to use proper means.

Mr Németh brought their attention to instruments in the field of security that had been utilised in the past.

Now they were talking in a different way about physical fences, than how they did in the last six years. They seemed to support the physical fences in that case. They were now donating support to those countries to build their physical fences. Were fences okay or not? They believed that was an important component of the security dimension of the solution. Fences needed to be built and they needed to support them.

The European Union should give up on the approach of not giving appropriate financial support and help in that regard. In Hungary they invested 2 billion euros to build physical fences. It was an important component of the legal solution. They also needed to have a legal protection system. Many important components were mentioned.

Mr Németh concluded by reiterating that it was the right moment to rebuild normality, solidarity and elementary reflexes for self-defence together with solidarity towards Poland.

The President noted that it was obvious that that was an item that would not disappear from their agendas in the following weeks or months. He believed it was their duty to try to contribute to find a solution.

14. JOINT DEBATE

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Geneva conventions: the contribution of the Council of Europe to the increasing synergy between International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights

MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

70th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention: the Council of Europe and the international protection of refugees

The President welcome Ms O'Hara, UNCHR Director for international protection who joined the Assembly to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Convention. He noted that the UNCHR had been closely involved in the preparation of the report and noted that the Assembly valued the work on the UNHCR in the

most challenging contexts to save the lives of millions of refugees and displaced persons worldwide. He commented that he was looking forward to having her take the floor during the debate.

(Mr John Howell, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the chair)

Lord Richard Balfe presented the report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. He commented that when the motion for the report had been tabled in 2019, they were celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. The 1949 Geneva Conventions codified the humanitarian law, i.e. the law of the conduct of war. International humanitarian law was codified because of the awful lessons learnt during the Second World War, a most murderous and destructive conflict, though not the worst in history. That was the First World War.

The overwhelming desire to avoid future conflicts by preserving peace with and between nations was the motivation for the UN to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, a declaration incidentally that was strongly influenced by Eleanor Roosevelt, who was Truman's nominee as US representative at the United Nations.

In Europe, 1949 was the year the Council of Europe was founded and in 1950, the Council adopted the European Convention on Human Rights. When the Council of Europe and the European Convention on human rights paid an inestimable role in maintaining peace and stability on the European continent, armed conflict had not gone away and military intervention was still an instrument of national policy, Lord Balfe commented. Armed conflicts, in other words, still existed. This was the case in Europe. He noted that in recent years there had been armed conflict on a worldwide basis.

He remarked that the report was not about any particular situation, country or conflict. It was about legal principles. The central issue was about how to resolve the inconsistencies between certain provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Both are, in the end, intended to protect basic human dignity, he stated. The main distinction between them is that humanitarian law is a special law for armed conflicts. But, human rights do not cease to apply during armed conflict, rather their application was heavily conditioned by the circumstances and in certain circumstances both international humanitarian law and international human rights law are in play at the same time.

The question is how to reconcile the application of principles that had the same basic purpose but differed in their wording and detail and how to ensure higher standards of respect for human dignity and minimising unavoidable human suffering even during armed conflict. Although the international court of justice had contributed to resolving said issues, the greatest advances, he pointed out, had arguably been made by the European Court. In a series of judgements, the Court had reaffirmed the basic principle of the co-existence of the two areas of law. It had explained how preventative detention, which was permitted under international humanitarian law, would also be permitted by human rights law during armed conflict. This meant that the procedural guarantees of human rights law would also apply to preventative detention and this reinforced the overall protection given to individuals during armed conflict by international law as a whole.

The Court had also explained the limits of states' obligations to respect human rights during armed conflict in the heat of battle. At that time, by definition, there was no authority exercising control and so no one had any jurisdiction.

All the report could do, he pointed out, was advocate a pragmatic approach which did not mean that individuals have no protection under international law but international humanitarian law still applies though it must be accepted that when a battle commences and soldiers are effectively acting as killers, it is rather difficult to maintain particular adherence to the human rights of the citizens caught in between.

The draft resolution therefore tabled by the Legal Affairs Committee put forward these legal concepts. He noted that they were important because they defined states' obligations to respect human dignity, but are of little value in themselves if they are not implemented by states and their armed forces. That is why the Legal Affairs Committee's report contains a practical package of four recommendations:

1. Being aware of the latest developments in the law, in particular the case of the law of the European Court.
2. States should ensure that all personnel who may be involved in armed conflict, including private contractors, as well as official and judges, are aware of the content and application and their duties under the relevant law.
3. The State should provide effective remedies for victims of violations of the law.
4. They should report on the implementation of said measures on a regular and voluntary basis.

In conclusion, the Legal Affairs Committee presented a deliberately technical draft resolution covering an important area of international law. It recognised the contribution of the Council of Europe and it encouraged concrete action by member States to fulfil their obligations. He accepted that it is a difficult area. What had been accepted as war had changed enormously in the last hundred years and will carry on changing. The end objective of them all must be to end wars, which are based on killing one another because until that was reached, the report aims to give a framework within which responsible conduct could be encouraged.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez presented the oral opinion of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, the rapporteur for opinion, Mr Gouttefarde, being not able to attend. He commended the work done by the Legal Committee and the rapporteur, Lord Balfe, with a view to commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Conventions which were drafted in the aftermath of the peace agreements signed in 1949. This anniversary was celebrated in 2019 and the ECRC was applauded for its relentless efforts for ensuring the protection of victims of armed conflicts both international and national, whether dealing with war-wounded, prisoners, refugees, civilians or other non-combatants.

Today, they were also celebrating a landmark date, Mr Fridez noted, in the field of international law: the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Convention on refugees. He reiterated the Committee's staunch support to the international organisation co-ordinating its implementation, the ECRC.

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons met on 24 November in Strasbourg supporting staunchly all of the messages contained in Lord Balfe's report, such as the need to guarantee two legal regimes, which were complimentary and consistent. He noted that there was a need to ensure consistency between the two legal systems. He commented that the word synergy often bred controversy; it is often used to conceal ulterior motives but they must remember what the word really meant. Synergy means interaction or co-operation giving rise to a whole that is larger to the sum of its parts. It means that international protection afforded to a person should be greater if both systems of international law are applied. However, he pointed out, it was apparent that the two protection systems overlapped, as Lord Balfe said, only in instances of conflict and it was then that said protection was heavily undermined. He also questioned if synergies should be sought where there was no conflict. Attention should also be given to the fact that the legal protection offered in periods of peace, for example, as contained in humanitarian law, should only be applicable in times of conflict or its aftermath.

He believed that they could agree and support the system of protecting rights, the protection guaranteed by humanitarian law and they wanted such to be elevated by the system of protection of human rights. In the 21st century, we have no other choice, he noted. There are conflicts that can't be resolved unless the parties there do begin adopting guarantees offering heightened protection.

Mr Fridez remarked that it is not about working hand in hand within an established status quo. They should be trying to establish synergies whereby international humanitarian law and international human rights law are elevated instead of being whittled down to the lowest common denominator.

The Committee completely agreed that they should work hand in hand with all relevant stakeholders including military companies and private security companies to ensure that their staff undergo training on international human rights law and international humanitarian law. There is also a need to ensure procedural guarantees that IHL and IHRL are fully applied in the context of armed conflicts.

Lord Leslie Griffiths presented the report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, devoted to refoulement – push back. He commented that he should have been in Strasbourg the day before for a Committee meeting but since he had not yet learnt how to be in two places at once, he missed the debate on the voluntary relocation of migrants in need of humanitarian protection and voluntary resettlement of refugees. That was the latest in a steady flow of reports that had come from the Committee down the years for ratification by the Assembly. In their various ways, all the reports had offered development of the ideas codified in the 1951 Convention, as indeed other recommendations put forward in his own report. He noted that it would be easy to play down the cardinal importance of his report in favour of one or another of the pressingly urgent matters before them.

Since the completion on his report, he commented, so many worrying events had commanded the news: the displacement of people following the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, the instrumentalisation of refugees along EU frontier countries by the Belarussian government, the ongoing legal proceedings against 180 aid workers by 13 states on charges including fraud, money laundering, human trafficking and espionage, the death of 27 people whilst we were gathering here in Rome – deaths that took place in waters between England and France, men, women and children in search of safety and a better future.

He noted that his report should stand as a reminder not only of the letter of the Convention, whose anniversary was being celebrated, but also the spirit in which it was launched. The Convention exuded a sense of responsibility towards the frontline states which dealt most directly with the displacement of people and spoke of the need for generosity, humanity, and even offered encouragement to go beyond the merely contractual commitments contained within the texts of the Convention. The report also laid great emphasis on the collaboration from the very outset with the United Nations high commission for refugees, the Council of Europe's twin sister or twin brother in setting a human rights agenda for the stark world that followed the Second World War.

His conversations with UNHCR officials in London, Strasbourg and Geneva had convinced him – as in the future as in the past – much would depend on how the two bodies work together. For without any doubt whatsoever, they are currently facing the biggest threat to the agreed ways by which they had approached the protection of refugees over the last 70 years. The Council had already spelled out a series of recommendations for the active involvement of parliamentarians in addressing these needs. Chief among them was the global compact on refugees put out by the United Nations, which since its launch in 2018 had already been endorsed by 181 nations, as well as civil society organisations, NGOs, the private business sector, faith groups, scholars and city mayors. The objectives of the global compact were simple, urgent and stark. They were intended to ease pressure on host countries, to enhance refugee self-reliance, to expand access to third country solutions and to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. The compact is a breakthrough that offers a legally non-binding readily accessible framework document written in plain language under which states agree they will share equitably the responsibility for refugees. In considering this report and hopefully endorsing it, the Council would want to wish those gathering next month at the high-level meeting, a fair wind in the hope that it would inject energy and focus into the process moving forward.

Lord Griffiths believed that they should all understand how necessary the energy and focus were required at this time. He therefore commended his report to the Standing Committee and looked forward to any responses it might generate.

Ms Grainne O'Hara apologised on behalf of the High Commissioner who was currently travelling in the Americas. She extended the sincere appreciation of UNHCR for all the work that had been done in preparing the draft resolution, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the 1951 convention and acknowledging the benefits and its enduring validity in the complex world in which we live today, characterised by ever-increasing numbers of forcibly displaced refugees and internally displaced persons and unfortunately ever-decreasing numbers of those finding durable and lasting solutions either through voluntary repatriation or resettlement. This means that the vast majority of refugees are still being hosted in large numbers over protracted periods of time in their immediate neighbouring countries, resulting in a situation where more than 90% of the globally displaced were hosted in the global south and not in fact in the countries of the Council of Europe or – for want of a better phrase – those Western and developed states, where if one were to believe the media, one would think all refugees were heading towards those destinations.

She particularly wanted to acknowledge the work led by Lord Leslie Griffiths and her colleagues from the division of International Protection of the UNHCR in Geneva as she had been privileged and honoured. She would also venture to say that she very much hoped that the appreciation of the Committee would acknowledge that by agreeing to adopt this commemorative resolution.

When the member States of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries gathered in Geneva in 1951, their primary concern was the protection of about 2 million people who remained displaced and without protection in Europe six years after the end of the Second World War. They were enthusiastic, optimistic and generous in the Convention that they crafted. They also hoped that the institution that had been created the year before by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the office of the High Commissioner of Refugees would have a very temporary lifespan, initially envisaged for only three years. Unfortunately, it had not transpired, and 71 years later, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees continued to act in locations globally in support of states' ability and willingness to comply with all aspects of the 1951 Convention.

In order to be brief, she summarised that the Convention set out who was a refugee and it clearly articulated the rights, benefits and obligations to be enjoyed by refugees. UNHCR believed that the Convention was as valid today as it was 70 years ago. They took pride in the successes and achievements that had borne fruit through the co-operation of states, individuals, parliamentarians, refugees themselves, faith-based organisations, academics, NGOs, – in fact the whole cast of society – whose actions were required to give spirit and life to the letter of the law set down by the 1951 Convention.

In conclusion, she quoted from the comments made by Ambassador Knud Larsen of Denmark in the closing of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries that took place at Palais des Nations in Geneva on 25 July 1951. She hoped that all present would agree that he had a certain vision and foresight in concluding with these

following comments: “We have not kept our eyes on the stars and so created a sort of high-flown system, which could not be translated into reality. On the other hand, we have not been too eager to consider only the interests of states. Our document, the Convention on the Legal Status of Refugees will be the object of study, examination and also of criticism throughout the world. Certainly, we have not satisfied all wishes and desires. We have not satisfied all the wishes and desires of governments. We have not satisfied all the wishes and desires of public opinion in this or that area of the world. And we have not satisfied all the desires and wishes of the refugees themselves or of those who on one basis or another take care of their interests, but I think, we have done nonetheless established a fairly good legal standard and legal status for these refugees, which might become a leading factor in international collaboration.” She believed that the debate, the resolution, and the work being done by the Committee in commemorating the 70th anniversary and all the other commitments to the rights of refugees and those in need of protection very much demonstrated that these closing words were very true. They were in action, making a continued contribution to international collaboration for the protection of refugees.

Friday 26 November 2021 from 14:30 to 17:30

14. JOINT DEBATE (continued)

Mr Oleksandr Merezhko indicated that interesting enough, he started his academic career many years ago teaching international humanitarian law. At that time, he was under the impression that it was a boring subject, and that he would never in his life have to apply its rules. How wrong and naïve he was. When Russia invaded Ukraine, he realised that international humanitarian law was extremely important because it defends Ukraine and other countries. The Geneva Conventions are also extremely important.

The key question was how to make international humanitarian law more effective. The answer to that crucial question is that by bringing to justice all those perpetrators who had committed crimes against international humanitarian law. To bring to justice all war criminals. They had to sooner or later bring to justice the major perpetrator, the major war criminal, Mr Putin himself. It looked impossible then, but Mr Oleksandr Merezhko was sure that in the future, sooner or later, he will be brought to justice.

As for the Convention on the Status of Refugees, a document was also extremely important nowadays. For example, the Belarusian dictator, Lukashenko, by using migrants as a weapon against Poland, he violates the Convention on the Status of Refugees. He himself referred to the migrants he is using as refugees. He could contribute to the solution of the migration crisis by applying this Convention, by following the rules. Unfortunately, nowadays, he is in serious violation of this important Convention.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva begun by saying that almost a year before, when she and her team came up with the idea of such a great organisation as the Council of Europe where human rights were at the heart of it, had to really celebrate the 70 anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. It had to not only celebrate, but to dedicate a file to it. That was very well picked up by the President’s colleagues of the UK delegation.

She highly appreciated the great and tremendous work of Lord Leslie Griffiths, and the work and the leadership of the Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons Committee, of course with the Secretariat’s also great work.

Today they were talking not only of the documents of 70 years ago, they were talking about the 82.4 million refugees and 26.4 million registered refugees, and also internally displaced people whose numbers are rising high in different countries like in Ukraine. Ukraine has 1.7 million registered internally displaced people because of the aggression of one member state which is Russia.

There are things that might have been invisible, because when they work with human rights, it isn’t often very well known when they would arrive. But the current challenges like those linked with the ecological system of our planet, and the pandemic they all faced, brought them to immediate solutions they all had to precede.

From a humble point of view, migrant refugees and internal displaced people never have to be used as an instrument for political wars and attacks. Human rights have to always prevail. Ms Maria Mezentseva reminded her colleagues that they were not only talking about figures, but about human destinies.

Mr Raimond Kaljulaid stated that for Estonia this is not really an academic subject. After and during the Second World War, many Estonians became refugees, crossing the Baltic Sea sometimes in small boats not meant for sea travel. Sometimes with small children, and often not reaching the safer shores where they were heading, leaving behind property which remained behind the Iron Curtain.

That really is an important topic for them. It is highly important that they speak about those things. He complemented Lord Leslie Griffiths for his work, which was superb both in content and in form. It was a pleasure to read.

Lord Balfe thought there were no specific points on his report raised, so there was nothing in particular to answer. The problem as it had been said is with them. It had changed enormously since 1951 when the main aim of refugee resettlement was to clear up the big population movements that followed 1945. The whole scenario had changed completely. They were today in a situation where the West in the shape of Europe and the Americas is sucking in huge numbers of people who are looking for a better life. Lord Balfe doesn't have the solution for that, but his report was about the use of human rights law during a time of war. He thought it was a reasonably balanced approach to where they were that day.

Mr Boriss Cilevičs congratulated Lord Richard Balfe for that very important report. They got used to discuss the issue of asylum increasingly in political terms, in humanitarian terms, in security terms. That was very important to keep in mind. They didn't have to forget that they have a very clear legal framework which is quite specific. The Geneva Conventions were adopted as a response to humanitarian crises, to catharsis after the Second World War.

Currently, they increasingly hear voices about this instrument being obsolete and that they should reconsider and modernise it and adopt a new instrument. Mr Boriss Cilevičs is strongly against those proposals. It is quite clear that it is currently impossible to find a consensus for the adoption of documents of such humanitarian spirit. It is somewhat paradoxical, so people tended to forget the past. That is the main impact of this tragic fate of thousands and millions of people whose lives could have been saved if governments and first of all democracies ensured protection.

Now of course there are new challenges and different views. But still, those humanitarian obligations are there. It is very important to remind themselves about the applicability of humanitarian law and about the applicability of international human rights law.

Although the right to asylum was not formally mentioned in the European Convention of Human Rights, the Strasbourg Court increasingly applies several provisions of the European Convention to asylum cases. First of all, Article 3, because the violation of the non-refoulement principle is consistently interpreted as the violation of the prohibition of torture and inhumane and degrading treatment. The right to family life was also applicable, and a number of other rights.

Mr Boriss Cilevičs believed that it was of course a political issue. Of course, it is a security issue. They just had a debate on the maybe most topical issue, the situation of the Polish border with Belarus. But still, their legal obligations are here. Democracy doesn't have to forget about them. That was why that report was so important.

Mr Ahmet Yildiz wished they could commemorate the 70th anniversary in better conditions. He appreciated the information by UNHCR. Unfortunately, there are so many migrant refugees under severe conditions. In his country alone there are 1.4 million Syrians, just Syrians. 800.000 of them children going to school in Turkey. Every year, 450.000 new-borns. Unfortunately, the core issue on the refugee coordination subject is burden sharing. It is not efficient in any part of the world, including for his country. In Africa there are also some refugees receiving countries, but although the numbers are smaller, their conditions are very harsh.

Mr Ahmet Yildiz had one request from colleagues and from himself. Since he joined PACE, they had been talking about inviting FRONTEX there to brief them on their practices. Those practices they see on television are so obviously against any rule they were talking about there. Pushbacks jeopardising the lives of those immigrants, even their basic rights. EU colleagues present here talk about that issue, besides everybody including them. Mr Ahmet Yildiz invited them to use their offices to bring FRONTEX here. Their invitation was rejected so many times. He thought it was an insult to their Body.

Lord Leslie Griffiths mentioned it had been a privilege to do this so early into his career here with the Council of Europe. He listened carefully to the comments that had been made. Yes, it is an important document now, the Convention. It is not an academic subject, the Convention. Certainly, as they just heard, the application of its core practices was hardly being done efficiently. It seemed to him that the call in the report for greater efficiency, for giving greater tension to systems that work, and work properly, is a proper observation which he was very grateful for.

All he could really say was that this Convention, which underlies what is called quaintly in a document they all got with a postage stamp the day before, called a patrimony of Conventions, that is a collective noun he had not thought of before, a flock of geese, a school of fish and a patrimony of Conventions. That is, agreements

that are part of their inheritance. They would be wrong to be swept away by the latest crisis from giving their proper consideration to the values that were incorporated into the Geneva Convention.

He would say it is part of their DNA. It is essentially part of who they were as a continent. However difficult a crisis, and they had faced many during the course of these meetings, they never had to forget what underlies and what creates the values of the continent they live on.

The astute amongst those listening could have noticed that he made no mention to the United Kingdom Parliament. He did that in the United Kingdom Parliament. There is so much in Britain that they had to learn about a proper application of the values of the Convention. Lord Leslie Griffiths argued that he kept his powder dry.

Lord Leslie Griffiths thanked his colleagues and the President for the enormous privilege of being able to bring that simple report to the attention of the meeting. He trusted that it would not be dismissed because it was simple but be understood to be profound in its simplicity.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez first replied to the question put by Mr Ahmet Yildiz with regard to FRONTEX. Yes indeed, FRONTEX with repeated fashion did not come to the Committee to talk to them. But they did have contact with the head of a new FRONTEX unit for fundamental rights. They hoped things would start to improve the following year. With regards to Lord Leslie Griffith's report, it had arrived just at the right time. They were talking about the commitment of European states with regards to refugees and international cooperation. They had to face a huge pressure there.

To prepare the report, the rapporteur had fruitful exchanges with the HCR bureau in Geneva and London and had a very close cooperation with the HCR representative in Strasbourg, Mr Andreas Wiesner. Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez wanted to thank Mr Andreas Wiesner very much. In fact, Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez also wanted to underline the importance of supporting the commitment towards the people who found themselves in extremely vulnerable situations.

He hoped that member States would make their own commitments by contributing to the implementation of the Council of Europe's action plan on the protection of vulnerable persons against the backdrop of migration and asylum in Europe.

The fate of refugees, that hindered very much on what exactly happens to these people once they make their asylum applications. He hoped that those asylum applications could be launched formally. In the coming days and weeks, as put forward by the draft resolution, Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez wanted to call on member States to align themselves with the UNHCR to implement its strategy on additional ways of working with refugees.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez expressed they wanted to strengthen the autonomy of refugees from the period 2025-28, in coordination with everything that had been done by the UNHCR. That would also address an initial aspect related with the efforts carried out to protect refugees.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez emphasised the importance of strengthening the autonomy of such people. It meant to recognise their education diplomas. They were all highly qualified and they needed to be offered employment in connection with their qualifications. They had to develop the necessary tools by setting up a pan-European scale project in the context of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez stated that they hoped to contribute efficiently to the implementation of the UN Compact on Refugees, which they would support. He also wanted to underline the importance of respecting the commitment they subscribed at a concessionary level. They need to keep their words, for that is a sign of dignity and responsibility as well. Treaties such as the 1951 Convention related to the status of refugees, the European Convention on Human Rights, were the founding block of rights. They need to strengthen their commitments. The future of Europe depends on this.

The President indicated that there were no amendments to the draft resolution on celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

*The draft resolution contained in Document 15394 was **adopted** unanimously.*

The President then informed members that no amendments had been tabled to the draft resolution presented by the Committee on Refugees, Migration and Displaced Persons.

*The draft resolution contained in Document 15396 was **adopted** unanimously.*

15. MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Voluntary relocation of migrants in need of humanitarian protection and voluntary resettlement of refugees

(Ms Laima Liucija Andrikiénė, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the chair)

Lord Alexander Dundee presented the report. He remarked that having heard the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and having adopted two resolutions referring to the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention he believed they might all ask themselves what they could do to make sure that refugees were better protected and given necessary humanitarian assistance.

Seventy years ago, Lord Dundee noted, in Europe and in many parts of the world, the wounds of the Second World War were painfully visible. Huge numbers of people had been forced to leave their homes fleeing persecution, the war and the so-called Cold War afterwards. As a result, the 1951 Refugee Convention recommended “that governments continued to receive in their territories and that they act in concert in a true spirit of international co-operation in order that these refugees may find asylum and the possibility of resettlement.”

The subject of Lord Dundee’s report, he remarked, related to the essence of the Refugee Convention and their earlier debates. The UNHCR estimated that 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2020. Of these, 20.7 million were refugees under the mandate of the UNHCR. Among the Council’s member States, Turkey and Germany hosted the highest number of refugees with 3.7 million in Turkey and 1.2 million in Germany, he commented. Compared to these figures, the number of resettlements might appear to be low. In 2020, UNHCR had identified nearly 40 000 candidate cases for resettlement globally, of which 22 800 actually took place. Nevertheless, this was an enormous achievement at a time when most countries restricted international travel and were in lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The numbers for 2021 were slightly higher, Lord Dundee pointed out, but still fell short of roughly 60 000 refugees resettled annually before 2020.

After he had tabled the motion for the report in January 2020, two events had made a strong impact only a couple of months later. Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic caused a halt to all resettlements, then secondly, thousands of migrants on the Turkish border with Greece had tried to force their way into Greece leading the EU Commission to set up an emergency programme for Greece. The initial aim was the voluntary relocation of 1 600 unaccompanied children and families. That programme proved to work extremely well in the first 12 months, relocating 3 914 to several EU member state as well as Iceland, Switzerland and Norway.

Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe’s Migrations Committee had commented that so far 4 401 people had been relocated from Greece with a further 89 people about to be. In addition, 3 322 transfers were organised for the purpose of family reunification, including those to the United Kingdom.

The year 2021 had witnessed the arrival of many migrants, especially in Italy and Spain, but also in Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom, putting extraordinary pressure on cities and communities to accommodate said persons and process their asylum applications.

For years, Bosnia and Herzegovina had become accustomed to migrants trying to cross the border with Croatia.

Following the takeover by the Taliban, a great many Afghan citizens had been evacuated, thus adding to the total number for resettlement in due course.

Most recently, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland as well as Germany received thousands of irregular migrants through Belarus. Such emergency situations demanded European focus, help and solidarity. He commented that they all knew too well when they failed to act in time. Refugees would often fall prey to smugglers and human trafficking and lose their lives on dangerous routes to Europe.

Consequently, the Mediterranean Sea had sadly become the deadliest of routes. In that context, he wished to praise Italy where earlier this year, the island of Lampedusa decided to create a monument dedicated to those who had lost their lives in the Mediterranean, including in the tragic shipwreck in October 2013, when more than 360 migrants died near Lampedusa.

The report's draft resolution supported the voluntary relocation of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in need of humanitarian protection to third countries for determining their migration status. That was, he added, when countries of first arrival were unable to accommodate them adequately and process their asylum applications, for instance, due to an overwhelming number of arrivals.

Besides relocation, resettlements had received more attention lately, he remarked. He was glad to join the forum on resettlement by EU Commissioner Ylva Johansson on 9 July 2021. He noted that it was good to hear the commitment of the United States government to increase its numbers of resettlements again. Canada joined in the effort and had recently resettled refugees from camps in Libya. Italy, the host of this Standing Committee had also resettled refugees from Libya under the bilateral agreement. The Italian Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs announced that this would happen during the European web conference organised by the United Kingdom's parliament on 4 December 2020.

He commented that to prepare his report, along with help from the PACE Migration Committee, he had organised a series of four web conferences starting on the occasion of World Refugee Day in June 2020 with the latest having been held on World Refugee Day in 2021. He noted that many colleagues of the Parliamentary Assembly had participated as well as colleagues from the OSCE parliamentary assembly. The first was opened by the chair of the Committee of Ministers, Greek Foreign Minister, Mr Varvitsiotis, who had previously been a member of PACE's Migration Committee and who drew attention to the severe situation in Greece and called for more relocations during the conference in June 2020.

Relocations and resettlements, he pointed out, were closely related and it was often difficult to distinguish them legally, not least when migrants changed their status on their migration route. Relocations and resettlements equally reflected the same humanitarian need. Such transfers could only be made voluntary with the cooperation of the refugee concerned. Likewise, the host country had to agree as well.

One of the objectives of Lord Dundee's report was to increase the willingness of host countries to accept resettled or relocated refugees. An interesting example was the private sponsorship of resettlements, which was being carried out with great success in Canada for over many years and ever since the resettlement of Vietnamese boat people in the late 1970s. The charity Sant'Egidio had managed to resettle more than 30 refugees from Kara Tepe Camp on the Greek island of Lesbos to Italian families earlier this year. There were also charities and endeavours that tried to help refugees integrate into the communities of host locations, such as Siobhan's Trust, a small family charity, named after his wife, which worked in the city of Dundee in the United Kingdom.

As parliamentarians, he stressed, they did a lot in their own parliaments as well as at European level. There was an importance to recognise humanitarian emergencies for refugees and start acting. Europe had been built on common values, in particular humanitarian ones. A great deal still had to be done. Yet recent performance could give hope and confidence.

Saint Francis of Assisi said, "All the darkness in the world, cannot extinguish the light of a single candle."

He finished saying that more than 4 000 people recently relocated from Greece and more than 20 000 persons resettled globally were surely shining lights for meeting the challenge of humanitarian responsibility to help refugees in need.

Ms Fiona O'Loughlin commended Lord Dundee on his excellent report. She commented that it was obvious that he was very passionate and understanding towards the situation that so many migrants and refugees faced. She stressed that it was also obvious that they needed to do more to help support those that were in very difficult situations because of the dangers in their own territories and countries. They obviously faced huge dangers in terms of leaving their countries and looking for safe space and asylum.

She mentioned one particular issue: Lord Dundee was speaking about Lesbos and the situation and she had no doubt that it was very difficult for the Greek people to manage and to support, but the civil society organisations that were there trying to help refugees and migrants were under huge pressure. She particularly mentioned two of the volunteers who were on trial in a Greek court last Thursday 18 November. They were Sarah Mardini and Sean Binder. Sean was a German citizen but spent his life in Ireland growing up so there was a lot interest in his situation. Basically, she commented, Sean, Sarah and others had spent three years helping to support migrants and Sean was arrested in 2018 and spent 106 days in prison in Greece. He specialised in defence and security policy in college and had a background as a rescue diver and really felt he could be of assistance to those that were trying to reach safety. Sadly, he was charged with smuggling and spent 106 days in jail. At the trial, there was a feeling that he and Sarah could spend up to 25 years in jail. He recalled that many members of parliament had expressed concern about 24 different humanitarian workers

that were involved but they were essentially live-saving humanitarian workers and she believed it was a serious breach of Sean's and the others' human rights.

It was so sad to see people being criminalised across Europe for doing humanitarian work in helping refugees and migrants, she remarked. The trial had been postponed and they did not know when it was going to be but she wanted to bring attention to it, as she believed it was important to speak about it and some resolution around it could be reached.

Lord Dundee thanked Ms O'Loughlin, leader of the Irish delegation, for her contribution, which showed that the need for relocation and resettlement was a constant challenge. Conflicts and persecutions but also environmental disasters would unfortunately continue to force people to leave their homes. At the same time, each situation would be new and different, requiring individual analysis and reaction. From a political viewpoint, it might be difficult to compare the situation at the border of Belarus with the situation in camps around the Mediterranean Sea or the English Channel. However, he noted, it was always humans who suffered and needed our concrete humanitarian systems.

He concluded with a positive outlook and by congratulating Italy for having relocated from Afghanistan, Shabbat Gula, whose picture from 1985 on the cover page of the *National Geographic* when she had been forced to flee war in Afghanistan and received shelter in a camp in Pakistan. Her life was a mirror of what people in Afghanistan had endured for the past four decades and it was a strong reminder that they must not look away from such suffering. Voluntary relocations and resettlements could save lives.

Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez, Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons commented that a few weeks before lockdown in Europe and all over the world because of COVID-19, Lord Dundee tabled a motion for a report on this topic. When borders closed and there were no international flights and under these exceptional circumstances, one might have thought that a report was not needed on this topic because the resettlement of refugees also came to a halt. Through this very important report, Lord Dundee, wrote very enthusiastically to pinpoint the need to offer additional protection to refugees, especially during the pandemic. He drew in part on the work done by the Committee, the work carried out during the pandemic, the various conferences organised by the British parliament as well. It was a novel topic at the time and he was very pleased to meet and discuss with the chairperson of the ad hoc committee.

He remarked that in Switzerland, migrants were relocated who had come from refugee camps in Greece. This was part of an emergency programme launched by the EU. At a time when COVID-19 was too often cited as a reason to block migrants at Europe's borders.

The drafting of this report, which garnered a lot of attention, helped the Committee highlight the fact that humanitarian action was needed in emergencies.

Although relocation of migrants and refugees only helped a small number of people, he noted, it was nonetheless essential as the Council of Europe was underpinned by human values and human rights. The morning's discussion about the situation on the border between Poland and Belarus, that kind of action was also needed there.

Relocating migrants from camps in Libya or Greece underscored the fact that continued fighting for human values and promoting this practice of relocation was needed.

He stressed that the Committee hoped that Lord Dundee's report and the resolution would help them recognise that need on a wider scale and it staunchly supported the resolution.

In response to the representative of Ireland, he commented that she had mentioned the difficult situation, the fact that Europe was like a fortress bringing up the drawbridge, there were allegations targeting NGOs, FRONTEX as well. All of the issues were a big problem and he therefore staunchly supported the people who had been accused of smuggling – wrongly in his opinion – when they were performing humanitarian actions.

Ms Laima Liucija Andrikiénė announced that the two amendments were unanimously approved by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons at the meeting the day before.

*Amendments 1 and 2 to the draft resolution were **adopted** in accordance with Rule 34.11.*

*The draft resolution was **adopted** with 17 votes in favour and one abstention (Doc. 15401).*

16. SOCIAL AFFAIRS, HEALTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Best interests of the child and policies to ensure a work-life balance

Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch presented the report on Best interests of the child and policies to ensure a work-life balance from the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Social Development. She supposed that many of them were parents, and she was sure that they would agree if she told them that the arrival of a baby spelt huge changes within a family. However, those changes had to always be in the best interest of the child. Responsibility for that lay with the parents.

Over the years, family policies were adapted to a variety of family situations that existed. The success of their implementation depended on the co-ordination of the different stakeholders, in other words, professionals, health workers and authorities.

The aim of Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch's report was to review, in the light of the best interest of the child, the various family policies, childcare arrangements, and related arrangements in the field of work.

Respecting the best interest of the child had to guide them in their efforts to improve those policies. It was true that family policies had changed. The principle of legal equality between parents had been introduced into legislation. Parental leave was introduced, and the role of fathers had also changed.

States allocated financial benefits. Benefits in kind, tax rebates, and they introduced maternity and also sanity leaves. States made commitments through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Goals 4 and 5.

While access to childcare benefited parents, it was undeniable that for many children, there were also negative effects. Some might have felt neglected. Some might have felt anxious. Some might have felt they did not experience enough of their parents.

Even in 2021, reconciling work and family life remained a challenge, but the cost factor did not have to be overvalued in any case. It was extremely important to mobilise sufficient public funds to the provision of childcare. Doubling the services on offer was not enough. Above all, they had to invest in the quality of care.

For the younger children, it was important to create a solid framework of trust, to hire real care professionals, to invest in their training, and to specify the maximum time a child could spend in a childcare centre.

On the parents' side, they needed to increase parental leave, and to respond to as many family situations as possible. They needed to think about special leave for grandparents. Work flexibility needed to be focused on, and more teleworking needed to be developed.

Above all, Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch stressed that the role of parents needed to be valued. They had a central role to play. To carry out that role, they needed to have time available for their children. A child needed a strong attachment to develop social, emotional, and cognitive learning. Interaction with their parents played a key role there. Unfortunately, many parents did not have that time. Unfortunately, screens were replacing dialogue, games, and real interaction. That was a fact that really had to concern them.

Family policies had to help parents exercise their role properly, not replace them. To that end, and in order to guide and support parents properly, various countries set up networks of parental advisors who were involved from the maternity ward right up to the birth. They guided parents in their parenting and provided real and concrete support. They also provided appropriate assistance to the most vulnerable, thus, helping to combat poverty and subsequently fight for equal opportunities.

To that end, good practices were in place in different countries. Preschool education; multilingual support, most of the time free of charge; support schemes for parents; and special allowances and subsidies made childcare more accessible. All of that incurred huge costs. But those costs were very much needed to ensure the healthy development of the youngest children.

Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch quoted Frederick Douglass, who lived from 1818 to 1895. A former slave, he became a high-ranking American official. "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

A massive and sustained investment in family policy reaped social and economic benefits.

Early childhood was a very special age. Protecting the very first years of a child's life had to be a national focus. It was a promising but very fragile period: 85% of a child's brain developed in the first five years. The first

1 000 days, from the end of pregnancy to the age of two, coincided with the most spectacular growth of the child's brain.

Member states had to place that very high on their agenda. The first 1 000 days had to be focused on the needs of children and support for the family.

Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch said that in her report they would find many examples of good practices from a number of different countries that recognised that period as being crucial for the future of the development of children. The first 1 000 days counted for a lifetime. Investing in early childhood was a societal choice.

UNICEF had called on countries to do so to ensure an optimal start in life. Parents and early childhood professionals had to provide the security and love necessary for development, which enabled babies to find the resources to build their emotional security as a prerequisite for developing confidence in society and forging a balanced personality.

Member States had to create the conditions to enable adults to fulfil their respective roles. In that respect, they would also find the most important messages in the resolution and recommendation.

Member states had to ensure that parental leave could be taken by both parents without being disadvantaged afterwards.

They had to think about creating special leave for example for grandparents who could also support the family. They had to ensure good working conditions, especially in times of crisis. They had to strengthen mental health services for children and parents as well as welfare services against domestic violence, and provide special support for the most vulnerable children.

They had to adopt a national strategy for early childhood and ensure the quality of childcare, for instance, by avoiding the excessive turnover of childcare staff. They also had to provide free training for young parents and combat screen addiction both among children and parents, and adults.

To conclude, Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch also mentioned that family policies needed to be monitored. National, local and regional authorities, parents and professionals, co-operated with the ultimate goal of children's well-being ensuring that the necessary resources were made available.

As the Council of Europe was currently developing a new strategy for the rights of the child from 2022 to 2027, they recommended that the Committee of Ministers incorporated the issues of the first one-thousand-days policy.

Mr Luis Leite Ramos began by thanking Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch for her excellent report. He also thanked her for the work carried out within their committee. The report that they were debating was a priority for them, the well-being of their children. They needed to provide the necessary help for parents. Once the child arrived, it was in the best interest of the child to be protected.

In that report, their own colleague underlined a number of important points. Different avenues were identified that they could explore to strengthen that relationship. They needed to reconcile the work-life balance of their parents so they could spend more time with their children.

Parents, the extended family, and professionals who cared for children played an essential role in ensuring, as their rapporteur said a number of times, their physical, mental, and psychological development and well-being. They had to provide a safe, secure, and loving environment for children to grow up in.

The state had responsibilities in those areas. The state had to create the right conditions to enable adults to fulfil their role and support their children's development in the best possible way.

By protecting children from illness, poverty, and emotional deprivation through massive and sustained investments in family policies, states ensured reaping economic and social benefits, and also building a solid foundation for a peaceful and prosperous future.

They needed to invest massively in early childhood and help parents in the role they had to play. The Covid-19 pandemic reminded them how important the extended family was and the role they had to play.

Children had to feel they were secure, loved and they could develop in a harmonious fashion to become responsible members of society. Society had to remain vigilant and ensure that the norms defended by the Council of Europe were implemented.

Respect for the best interest of the child had to guide them in the continuous improvement of public policies to ensure a balance between private and professional life.

Ólafur Þór Gunnarsson started by thanking Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch for her work, which was extremely important. He went on to explain that parenting was one of the greatest responsibilities they took on in life, and they did not have to view it lightly.

They did not have to view it lightly on a societal basis, neither on the state level nor on a municipal level. It was very important because as many of them had heard and read, it took a village. Bringing up a child was not the work of a single person or a single family; it was the work of society as well. Parents were extremely important, but parents usually could not do it all by themselves. They needed help in that role.

They needed to make sure there was adequate maternal care. They needed to make sure that help for infant care services was adequate, that parental leave was available and assured from the birth of the child. They needed to make sure they were allowed for day care, parental leave in the formative years of the child, and so on and so forth. Those were many issues.

In Iceland they recently lengthened the parental leave following childbirth to twelve months, with equal months allowed to both genders. That was extremely important, because it was one of the mechanisms they could use to make certain that real equality between genders was gained. They had to remember that children were their future and that they should do everything they could to make it right, equal and fulfilling.

Ms Fiona O’Laughlin noted that the report was absolutely excellent and congratulated the rapporteur. She thought it was really important they had the opportunity to endorse what she said.

When they thought about the last 20 months and what children had endured, children, as they know from a lot of extensive research, really picked up on stress in the home. It led to many psychological problems for them, as well as education problems in terms of learning. There was no doubt that in their households right across Europe, in terms of the pandemic, there was a lot of stress in terms of health, in terms of finance, and in terms of people not being able to see or meet their loved ones. They always had to be very conscious of that impact on their young children.

When they thought of their children, those in particular who were vulnerable from birth, for different reasons, every state had to be able to help and support and have the necessary intervention with helpers if needed.

In terms of addressing the work-life balance, Ms Fiona O’Laughlin thought that was hugely important. They all needed to take lessons from that: to be able to support young people in their creativity, in their problem-solving skills, and helping support their critical thinking because sometimes they heard of young people and children being under pressure to study and work to be the very best they could be academically. She thought it was more important to help them develop the skills to help them deal with relationships both within their home, among their friends, and within their neighbourhood and to be able to learn the skills that they needed to adapt to life. For them to be able to do that, of course, parents needed to do that.

Ms Fiona O’Laughlin said that she really envied Iceland with what they did in terms of having equal paternity leave. That was hugely important. In Ireland they had really just started that. They only introduced the first paternity leave six years ago, but it was progressing. They had so much to learn in that area.

There was no doubt that they needed to support parents in whatever way they needed support, in terms of how they brought up their children to be good responsible children to be able to contribute to their own lives and to society in general.

Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch thanked everyone who took the floor in the debate for their contributions.

The Vice-President informed members that no amendments were tabled had been tabled to the draft resolution on the best interests of the child and policies to ensure a work-life balance.

*The draft resolution contained in Document 15405 was **adopted** unanimously, with 12 votes in favour.*

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development presented a draft recommendation to which no amendments were tabled.

*The draft recommendation in Document 15405 was **adopted** unanimously, with 15 votes in favour.*

17. CULTURE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND MEDIA

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education and culture

Mr Constantinos Efsthathiou, rapporteur of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, presented the report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education and culture. He quoted from the draft resolution - that long period of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic had shown the degree to which education and exposure to culture were vital for individual and collective well-being.

He said that these two sectors should receive the deserved support and be of a higher priority at the political level in the respective member States. He said it was fortunate that both the European Commission and the European Parliament had taken important political steps to ensure that the education and culture sectors are considered among priorities, and would be eligible for support through the emergency European Recovery and Resilience Facility, with a reinforced EU budget for the period 2021-2027. However, he said to benefit from this support, education and culture have to be included in national recovery programmes.

It is important that national strategies build on synergies and acknowledge that culture and education policies should be mutually reinforcing. To this respect, he said that the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) provides, in his view, an excellent basis to develop innovative partnerships and projects between schools and different culture sectors to guide young people in developing key democratic competences.

The cultural and creative sectors had shown exceptional inventiveness during the COVID crisis to provide access to arts, culture, and creativity for the well-being of citizens, local communities and societies at large, despite the difficult working conditions.

The cultural and creative sectors had shown their potential to contribute more widely to a deeper process to re-formulate their collective ambitions for a better, more inclusive and more sustainable society – a genuine “reset”.

Supporting artists and micro-enterprises that provide a very rich and diverse cultural fabric in Europe, and investing in cultural vitality, is a powerful political means to actively engage citizens, to open public debates on key societal issues and to ensure long-term democratic stability in Europe.

In cooperation with the European Union, the Council of Europe has developed a set of indicators to demonstrate this correlation between investments in cultural vitality and democracy.

He said this set of indicators should be valuable to decision-makers to argue and justify investments in culture as medium- and long-term investments in more inclusive, resilient and democratic societies.

In the context of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and of the European Green Deal, investments in education and in cultural and creative sectors in Europe could also be an integral part of investments in innovation leading towards more sustainable and creative economies.

Building synergies, mainstreaming culture and education in other sectors, and providing incentives for creative partnerships with private sectors could be key for the future.

Another important issue that he addressed in the report was online access to education and culture. The digital space has become the main place for schools and higher education institutions to provide education and for numerous actors in the cultural and creative sectors to perform and connect with their audiences. While this could be a very positive trend to democratise access to education and culture, he said it also brings serious threats.

The swift change to almost exclusive use of digital technologies has deepened the existing digital divide and inequalities, and deprived artists and creative sectors of fair revenue due to a lack of regulation.

He said it is urgent to resolve those persisting difficulties with global digital providers and to establish a strong European digital framework that would be well-adapted for online education and for various cultural online offers.

The digital divide has also further exacerbated disadvantaged children and those facing physical or mental difficulties, as well as their caretakers.

He said that these children were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with the physical distance imposing even further isolation from their school community.

He said it is thus imperative to rethink the ways in which these children too could fully benefit from the immense potential of digital learning tools, and the need to digitalise education in member States.

The draft resolution calls on governments and parliaments of the respective member States to evaluate the lessons learned from the implementation of emergency measures and to review policies, putting more emphasis on the long-term perspective, and to address structural weaknesses, which have deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It makes a number of proposals to be considered concerning the overall policy framework; and more specifically concerning each sector.

He also proposed calling on the European Union to cooperate more closely with the Council of Europe and support innovative projects and European exchange programmes that could serve as guidance to develop new models.

Building synergies, mainstreaming culture and education in other sectors and providing incentives for creative partnerships with private sectors would be essential for the future, he said.

In his draft recommendation, he mentions that the Council of Europe has long-standing experience in the field of education and culture and has to stay at the forefront of positioning them as an integral part of democratic processes.

In the draft recommendation he proposed calling on the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe to deliver policy guidance and develop practical tools to assist member States in shaping new national models for the sustainable functioning of education and culture sectors and for building synergies.

He shared three examples: Developing a standard-setting instrument on inclusive quality education, taking the new online and hybrid education environment into consideration; Finalise, in line with the Declaration of Ministers, the work on a model framework to govern equitable partnerships between business enterprises and education institutions; Creating guidance for innovative approaches and partnerships between the education and culture sectors to implement the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC).

He concluded that they have to do their utmost to argue at the level of the Parliamentary Assembly and nationally in their parliaments that investments in the education and culture sectors are fundamental to support democratic, cohesive, more sustainable and resilient societies for all of their inhabitants on equal status, that are able to address the numerous social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

Mr Ólafur Þór Gunnarson thanked Ms Andrikienė and Mr Efsthathiou for bringing an extremely important aspect of the pandemic to the discussion, putting guidelines on it, and ensuring there are no pitfalls. COVID-19 had shown them that schools and education are essential for society, not only as educational programmes, but also for the mental health of younger children and adults, and for their economies. For example, cultural events had experienced a heavy loss during COVID-19 and it was imperative to address this in their countries.

In Iceland, they had been fortunate enough during most of the pandemic not to close schools - which was proven critical. Cultural events were widely cancelled though, which was difficult for the sector. Yet, there was a silver lining like in every crisis: they developed various virtual events and the technology to provide them with the events had been very protective, and had helped a lot.

Societies had to include culture and education in their stimulus packages, to move faster and gain faster traction out of the pandemic, once it subsides. This would eventually make their societies stronger and help build them up into the future.

Mr Efsthathiou said he would take advantage of Mr Gunnarson's suggestion that the guidelines played a fundamental role in this respect, and the mental and physical health of young children is of utmost importance in society. He said sometimes economic loss is less than societal loss, which is why he had some more suggestions to formally conclude the debate.

Culture and education are closely interlinked; they need to integrate digital cultural activities to the learning experiences and the academic curricula to the greatest extent possible. This could be hugely beneficial as culture can serve as an educational method, accessible to all, even in case of an emergency. Education could thus adopt a dynamic cultural profile.

They had spoken about the pandemic's effect on education and culture, especially in exposing the many existing structural inequalities, and accessing culture and education even sometimes widening these inequalities.

Mr Roberto Rampi, vice-chairperson of Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, believed that Mr Efstathiou's report was very important. He strongly believed that culture and schools are such important instruments for democracy. The Council of Europe believed in democracy and human rights, and couldn't have these two things without culture. He understood how a lot could be lost in the pandemic period by closing ourselves at home and with children not meeting each other.

New technological instruments are now helping them do something which could not have been done in the past. The report was a strong, important instrument for the future, in case of another pandemic situation, and because they were again in a pandemic situation, and because they could have new instruments to strongly do better for democracy, also, he hoped, in non-pandemic situations.

The role of all people in music, art and theatre is very important, also for democracy. All countries understood they needed economic help during the pandemic situation. The very important report had explained more had to be done for them also in a non-pandemic situation since they did not want to lose democracy.

Ms Andrikienė came to the vote on the draft resolution presented by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, to which no amendments had been tabled.

*The draft resolution was **adopted** unanimously with 12 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstained.*

Ms Andrikienė said the same Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media had also presented a draft recommendation, to which no amendments had been tabled.

*The draft recommendation was **adopted** unanimously, by 15 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstained (Document 15397).*

18. EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

a. Gender aspects and human rights implications of pornography

Mr Frank Heinrich, rapporteur of the Committee on Equality and non-discrimination, started by thanking the President. He mentioned that the colleagues might have had the chance to see the poster that he had once written on a similar subject. He posed the question on what would happen if one was beaten and raped again and again. He asked the delegates to imagine if it were their niece who had been scammed into prostitution by a so-called lover boy or their sister who had been forced against her will and were too ashamed to talk.

He mentioned that before he had become a member of the German Parliament and of the Council of Europe, he worked in the Salvation Army. He was therefore neither ignorant of the situation in Germany, or some other countries, that the country was a platform for human traffickers using women as sex slaves nor that hundreds and thousands of women in prostitution were not doing it for fun. It became clear to him along the years, meeting survivors and bringing awareness to all kinds of people who would often at first not believe it or rather not listen and it became clear to him that what was happening deep down did not start deep down, that before diving into one of the darkest sides of society we were actually already bathing in the same water. And very powerful in that was the current porn industry, he highlighted.

His report on gender aspects and human rights implications of pornography included the fact that 66% of men and 41% of women consumed porn on a monthly regular basis. Porn had somewhat always existed, he commented, but its current industry as a recent and mass phenomenon that influenced our societies.

Porn sites had more visitors – and he learnt while researching for the report – than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined and an estimated 50% of all internet traffic was related to sex. So most boys and girls, the ones that appeared in one report, were exposed to online porn and they should be looked after and protected.

The connection between sexual violence and porn was well documented, he affirmed. Major porn providers made pure violence widely available; gang rape, torture, humiliation, choking, beating and physical violence, depictions of slavery and forced prostitution, hate speech, sexual harassment, incest, bestiality and child abuse.

His report, he noted, would show proof of the following:

Pornography contributed to shaping views on sexuality and on women, especially for young people, who mostly considered pornography as a reliable source of sex education.

Porn encouraged men and boys to see women as sex objects, subordinate to men and girls to see themselves as such.

Porn did not only shape sexuality but also levels of empathy in communication, attitudes and behaviour related to gender roles in families, in relationships and inevitably the rights, the dignity and the place in society of women were tremendously undermined.

Porn led to a higher demand for prostitution – the reason why he started the report. The links between human trafficking and porn were multiple, especially financial profit.

To put it in clear terms, dangerous parts of the mainstream porn, as unregulated as they were in the internet era, led to violence against women and a very strong promise for even more sexism.

He remarked that he was a human rights politician so he defended freedom very strongly but he also spoke for all people. In democratic societies, he noted, it was their duty to think about setting limits to the right of personal expression when it was necessary in the interest of the protection of the right of others.

Working on that report, he endeavoured to depict a whole image. He said that it was clear that nothing was black or white, so he consciously worked above the political lines with his colleagues in the Committee of Equality and Non-Discrimination including their input. He mentioned that was the reason there would be rather long parts dedicated to same-sex pornography and to the question of ethical pornography.

With his fellow members of the Committee, they called on member and observer states:

1. to ensure a comprehensive, appropriate and mandatory education on related issues in all school curricula.
2. to enhance the skills of parents to deal with cybersexism and internet pornography,
3. to extend the provisions, criminalising the glorification of criminal acts to cover violent porn,
4. to require anti-porn filters in public libraries and schools, which was not happening, and
5. to promote more research and data collection in national contexts.

He commented that there were more points, but he only wanted to mention five during his presentation.

When he called Germany, about eight years ago, he commented, the “bordello of Europe”, his fellow party members were always pleased. But the words were so degrading and so humiliating was the situation, that the coalition in Germany worked hard to adopt provisions to fight illegal prostitution and ensure safer conditions for sex workers. He understood it was a different subject, but the same approach was needed to find more security for the vulnerable in society.

He reiterated that he was not there to judge or to ban porn, he was merely trying to put his finger on very dark and threatening waters so that they can be harnessed together.

Ms Thorhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir believed it was an interesting report, but she had some reservations to the extent to which the author was encouraging nations to collect data about the pornographer users of their citizens, in particular introducing some kind of age verification service could also be used as a mechanism to follow and see which citizens were watching porn and what kind of porn. She was not sure that having a public register like that was in line with the ideas of privacy and their ideas of what governments should and should not know about its citizens.

She made a short point on something that she believed was always meant in good faith but because pornography was often related to the objectification of women, she expressed a small mental note. Something that irked her was when, like the speaker did in his speech, used the position of women as sisters, wives or daughters as a way to call for, especially, male sympathy. She believed that there was no need to be a sister or a mother to be allowed simple dignity and respect and she never heard it said about husbands, sons and fathers in that kind of context. Was it necessary to always refer to women as daughters, wives and children for sympathy from men? Did it always have to be personalised? Or could women be considered as human beings worthy of respect regardless of their position, she questioned.

Mr Frank Heinrich thanked Ms Ævarsdóttir for her remark and noted that he could reconsider his introduction. He felt that, from the whole report, they were in a very male-dominated society and that was why he wanted to get the male among them to think more about that imbalance in that area of the society: pornography.

With the data, he agreed that it could be a danger and he wanted countries to rethink what was possible and appropriate.

He only saw that the gender-equality imbalance becoming even worse. And its impact on society if they did not focus better and see better into it in their different countries. He saw it as a perpetuation of the imbalances and in very many cases, the relativization of violence and that had a nominative effect. He wished that more light was thrown on this issue and that they did what was appropriate and necessary to stop that harm. He believed the effect would be different in different countries, but he saw the dangers, as the title mentioned, and that might differ in all the countries that were represented.

Ms Petra Bayr, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, commented on the report by mentioning that there had been many debates about the report over the course of time in the Committee, and it changed over time. Mr Heinrich was very sensitive to the feedback that he had been given so the report mirrored a lot of opinions and the Committee members' ideas. She agreed that the topic of the report was very much linked to the topic of the Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee when it comes to human rights implications and freedom of expression and private life, gender equality, violence against women, human trafficking, human exploitation, child welfare and protection and of course, self-determination of women and gender equality. He underlined the lack of a comprehensive sexuality education at school and on many schools' curriculums and that was the reason for which young people often sought advice or information via pornography and that sometimes gave young people a crazy imagination of how sexuality works and spread a lot of misinformation and that could also be potentially harmful. She felt that those countries that had the needs to find recommendations on pornography could be guided by this report and since it was Mr Heinrich's last report, as he was leaving the German Bundestag, she wanted to thank him for his work and wished him all the best for the future.

The President moved to the vote of the draft resolution that had been presented to them with no amendments.

*The draft resolution was **adopted** unanimously.*

b. Discrimination against Roma and Travellers in the field of housing

Ms Petra Bayr, Chair of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, presented the report in the absence of the rapporteur, Mr František Kopřiva. She expressed her gratefulness for being able to present that report one day after Slovakia officially apologised for the forced sterilisation of Roma women. It was a significant day for that whole issue, which was on discrimination of against Roma and Travellers in the field of housing.

She invited everyone to a little time travel with her back to March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic. They might remember that time when they had no tools to prevent the spread of Covid-19 apart from lockdowns, social distancing and frequent hand washing, and sometimes wearing masks when they were available.

Governments across Europe launched campaigns to alert the public about the actions everyone needed to take. Maybe they were doubting what that had to do with the report about Roma and Travellers in the field of housing. It was everything.

Ms Petra Bayr expressed that she was sure her colleagues knew that many Roma people throughout Europe lived in unhealthy, overcrowded, and unsafe conditions without access to running water, sanitation or public utilities, and often at constant risk of eviction.

Those conditions could include isolated settlements, segregated parts of towns, insufficiently numerous and inadequately equipped halting sites for Travellers or discrete buildings. While circumstances might differ, what was clear was that such situations were the result of centuries of discrimination, racism, segregation, and neglect.

That reality had been denounced time and time again by the European Court of Human Rights, by the European Committee of Social Rights, ECRI, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention, UN Human Rights Treaty bodies, national human rights institutions, ombudsmen for children, and many others. But still, the situation was persistent.

Early last year, when governments asked citizens what sounded like quite basic things like to stay indoors, to keep distance from people, to wash their hands frequently, to self-isolate if ill, for many Roma and Travellers, such measures were practically impossible to implement.

Those persons and communities were thus at great risk for their health. Yet, some authorities did not bother to look for ways to overcome those problems or help to provide protection to Roma and Travellers.

Instead of ensuring a clean water supply and providing disinfection or proper shelter, they placed settlements in quarantine, installed checkpoint controls, built temporary walls or carried out temperature controls with drones, only for Roma settlements.

In so doing, they not only failed to help Roma and Travellers who needed it but portrayed them as vectors of infection. They stigmatised Roma and Travellers as unclean or lacking discipline. They used the conditions created by their own persistent neglect of Roma and Travellers to justify stigmatisation and neglecting them further. So, they reinforced anti-gypsyism and anti-nomadism, which were already deeply rooted in their societies. That was just one story, but there were so many others which Mr František Kopřiva described in his report.

Neglect, racism, segregation, and other forms of discrimination affected the housing situation of millions of Roma and Travellers all over Europe. Forced evictions were common.

That reality also violated many other rights of Roma and Travellers: their health status and their right to adequate healthcare, access to education when schooling was interrupted due to evictions or when children had nowhere to do their homework, their right to employment when settlements were situated far from town centres and from access to public transport.

The NGOs they met when preparing that report told them that isolated and segregated settlement also became easy targets for harassment, intimidation, and violence, whether by members of the public or by authorities.

That situation was a cause of shame for the whole of Europe, and yet, as the draft resolution before, that day made clear that there was plenty they could do to set it right.

They had to put an end to forced eviction of Roma and Travellers. They had to map their accommodation needs and provide funding to invest in long-term and sustainable realistic housing solutions.

They had to learn from good practices, as many did exist. They had to strengthen anti-discrimination legislation at all levels of government: local, regional, and national had to work together with each other and with civil society to strengthen communication so that the future could be built on solid foundations of inclusion, mutual understanding, and shared goals.

Many Roma and Travellers were able to break past obstacles that their societies placed in their paths and built strong and confident lives. Far too many are still held back. Discrimination and housing were a major part of that.

The President agreed in his position of Chair that the Roma population throughout Europe were very much discriminated against. It was a very serious matter for all of them to consider.

Ms Petra Bayr concluded by communicating that Mr František Kopřiva had not been re-elected to the Czech Parliament, so he was not going to be member of their Assembly anymore. She wanted to thank him not only for the work he did in the field of Roma and Travellers, but he was also the Chairman for one year of the Subcommittee on Rights of Minorities.

*The resolution was **adopted** with 14 votes in favour.*

19. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Emanuelis Zingeris wanted to remind the Assembly that the parliament had voted and expressed their opinion about the last elections in the Russian Federation and they had brought their letter in the name of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Parliament to the Parliamentary Assembly about the situation in Moscow during the elections and the aftermath. He commented that they would expedite the letter to the Assembly. He was commenting such for information purposes and did not want to raise further debates.

20. NEXT MEETING

The President was pleased to be informed that the new German parliamentary delegation was inviting the Standing Committee for its next meeting in March 2022 in Berlin. He noted that they had wanted to organise the meeting in Berlin during their chairmanship but it had not been possible due to COVID-19. He hoped that the COVID-19 situation would be good enough so that they could go to Berlin.

Mr Frank Heinrich also congratulated the Italians for their great hospitality. He commented that Frank Schwabe of the German delegation and Mr Nick had asked him to give the invitation for 11 March in Berlin so they would also be able to meet the new government as they would likely have a new Chancellor in the next couple of weeks. He remarked that strengthening the dialogue should be kept going and Germany would be happy to take on the baton in Berlin on 11 March.

On behalf of the Committee, **the President** thanked Mr Heinrich for his contribution. He went on to thank all the participants for making it to Rome and to those who made it possible. He thanked the Italian delegation, especially the Chairperson Ms Grande for the invitation to Rome.

APPENDIX

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 POČIEJ 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

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN Finland / Finlande

Mr John HOWELL United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Ms Laima Liucija ANDRIKIENĖ Lithuania / Lituanie

Mme Nicole TRISSE France

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH Hungary / Hongrie

Mr Ahmet YILDIZ Turkey / Turquie

Mr Andreas NICK Germany / Allemagne

M. Petr TOLSTOI Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie

Mr Arkadiusz MULARCZYK Poland / Pologne

Mr Oleksandr MEREZHKO Ukraine

Mr Lars Aslan RASMUSSEN Denmark / Danemark

Mr Irakli KOBAKHIDZE Georgia / Géorgie

Ms Marta GRANDE Italy / Italie

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

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA Austria / Autriche

Mr Samad SEYIDOV Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS Cyprus / Chypre

Mr Lars Aslan RASMUSSEN Denmark / Danemark

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN Finland / Finlande

Mme Nicole TRISSE France

Mr Irakli CHIKOVANI Georgia / Géorgie

Mr Andreas NICK Germany / Allemagne

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH Hungary / Hongrie

Mr Ólafur Þór GUNNARSSON Iceland / Islande

Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN Ireland / Irlande

Ms Marta GRANDE Italy / Italie

Ms Inese LĪBIŅA-EGNERE Latvia / Lettonie

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS Lithuania / Lituanie

Mr Jonathan ATTARD Malta / Malte

Ms Maja VUKIĆEVIĆ Montenegro / Monténégro

Ms Petra STIENEN Netherlands / Pays-Bas

Ms Ingjerd SCHOU Norway / Norvège

Mr Arkadiusz MULARCZYK Poland / Pologne

M. Petr TOLSTOI	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie
Mr Marco NICOLINI	San Marino / Saint-Marin
Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES	Spain / Espagne
M. Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ	Switzerland / Suisse
Mr Ahmet YILDIZ	Turkey / Turquie
Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA	Ukraine
Mr John HOWELL	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

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

Ms Marta GRANDE	Italy / Italie
Mr Zsolt NÉMETH	Hungary / Hongrie
Ms Fiona O'LOUGHLIN	Ireland / Irlande
Mr Ólafur Þór GUNNARSSON	Iceland / Islande

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

Mr Zsolt NÉMETH	Hungary / Hongrie
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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 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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Rapporteurs of the Committees / Rapporteur-e-s des commissions

Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU	Cyprus / Chypre
Mr Frank HEINRICH	Germany / Allemagne
Ms Thorhildur Sunna ÆVARSDÓTTIR	Iceland / Islande
Ms Françoise HETTO-GAASCH	Luxembourg
Mr Sergiy VLASENKO	Ukraine
Lord Richard BALFE	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Mr Alexander DUNDEE	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni
Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

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

Mr Eduard AGHAJANYAN	Armenia / Arménie
Mr Davor Ivo STIER	Croatia / Croatie
Mr Raimond KALJULAI	Estonia / Estonie
Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS	Greece / Grèce
Ms Bisera KOSTADINOVSKA-STOJCHEVSKA	North Macedonia / Macédoine du Nord

Partner for Democracy / Partenaire pour la démocratie

M. Allal AMRAOUI Morocco / Maroc

Invited personalities / Personnalités invitées

Ms Maria Elisabetta ALBERTI CASELLATI President of the Senate / Présidente du Sénat
Ms Marta CARTABIA Italian Minister of Justice / ministre de la Justice italienne
Mr Luigi DI MAIO Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe / ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale, Présidence italienne du Comité des Ministres du Conseil de l'Europe
Mr Roberto FICO President of the Chamber of Deputies / Président de la Chambre des Députés
Mr Michele NICOLETTI Professor at the University of Trento, Member of the Italian network on the Istanbul Convention / Professeur à l'Université de Trente, membre du réseau italien sur la Convention d'Istanbul
Ms Simona LANZONI Vice-President of GREVIO – Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe) / Vice-Présidente du GREVIO – le Groupe d'experts sur la lutte contre la violence à l'égard des femmes et la violence domestique (Conseil de l'Europe)

Other participant / Autre participante

Ms Grainne O'HARA UNHCR's Director for International Protection / Directrice de la protection internationale à l'UNHCR

Secretaries of Political Groups / Secrétaires des groupes politiques

Ms Francesca ARBOGAST SOC
Ms Natalia ODZIMKOWSKA EPP/CD / PPE/DC
Ms Maria BIGDAY ALDE / ADLE

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

Ms Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU Secretary General / Secrétaire Générale
Mme Valérie CLAMER Head of the Table Office, Technological Innovation and Events Department / Chef du service de la Séance, de l'innovation technologique et des événements
Mr Artemy KARPENKO Head of Political and Legal Advice, Coordination and Communication Department / Chef du service du conseil politique et juridique, de la coordination et de la communication
Ms Liri KOPACI-DI MICHELE Head of the Private Office / Cheffe du Cabinet
Ms Greta FAGGIANI Advisor, Office of the Secretary General / Conseillère, Bureau de la Secrétaire Générale
Mr Francesc FERRER Deputy to the Head of the Communication Division / Adjoint à la Cheffe de la Division de la communication
Mme Rachel MOREL Principal administrative assistant of the Table Office / Assistante administrative principale du Service de la Séance
Mme Martine MEYER Administrative assistant of the Standing Committee / Assistante administrative de la Commission permanente
Mme Aurélie HAUG Assistant of the Table Office / Assistante du Service de la Séance