



NEWSLETTER

June 2024 part session | Unified European Left | PACE

♦ **Co-chair Andrej Hunko (Germany)** **spoke** on behalf of the group in the progress report

Upcoming activities

September

The next meetings of the UEL group will be held during the **October part session** from 30 September to 4 October 2024

Election observation missions

Presidential election in the Republic of Moldova on 20 October 2024

UEL representatives: Laura Castel (Spain)

Substitute: Nina Kasimati (Greece)

Parliamentary elections in Georgia on 26 October 2024

UEL representatives: Andrej Hunko (Germany) and Nina Kasimati (Greece)

Substitutes: George Loucaides (Cyprus) and Sevilay Çelenk Özen (Türkiye)

HIGHLIGHTS

Current affairs debate held upon request by the group

During the June part session, upon request by the UEL group, the Assembly held the debate on '**Can the Council of Europe step up its efforts to counter threats to the freedom of expression?**' presented by co-chair Andrej Hunko (Germany).

Spokesperson Berdan Öztürk (Türkiye) noted: "We have celebrated the release of Julian Assange from the UK's Belmarsh but we know that this was a result of a plea bargain and **journalists risk prison sentences for revealing inconvenient truths**. I could give you many other examples from Council of Europe member states, but I will outline one from here in **France**. Just before the European elections, two La France Insoumise (LFI) **politicians** including the parliamentary leader were summoned by police and **accused of apologising for terrorism, for criticising Israel. Accusations under widely criticised terrorism laws** are used to shut down the opposition in **Türkiye** too. And increasingly politicised judiciaries being used to muzzle all political oppositions as in the recent Kobani case against members of our party."

The UEL supported the winning candidate for the post of Council of Europe Secretary General, Mr Alain Berset (Switzerland)

His term will start on 18 September 2024

News:

26 August: Azerbaijan: PACE President reacts to ban on certain PACE members entering the country which includes UEL members Paul Gavan, Laura Castel, Berdan Öztürk, Anne Stambach-Terrenoir and Andrej Hunko.

26 June: UEL welcomes release of publisher Julian Assange



14 June: UEL welcomes the adoption of the Spanish Amnesty Law

18 May: UEL: Kobané trial in Türkiye: a failure for human rights

Progress report

Andrej Hunko (Germany): "We always talk about a Progress Report at the beginning of the Assembly's session. Unfortunately, it is not always the case that we can speak of progress. We still have the **situation in Azerbaijan**, where we cannot accept the return of the Azerbaijani delegation following the very unpleasant signals from Azerbaijan.

We have the situation in **Kosovo**, where this Assembly proposed in April that we open the process, for a recommendation to be made to the Committee of Ministers. That has now been postponed for the time being. I think it is a good thing if the outstanding issues there - for example, the solution to the question of the Serbian association of municipalities - can be resolved, and I think we will have a major debate on this in the coming weeks and months and also in this week's session on the situation in **Georgia**, on the so-called Foreign Agents Registration Act. (...)

In recent weeks and months, we have also had the **peace conference in Switzerland**, where the Council of Europe also signed the final declaration. (...) **Important issues have certainly been addressed**, including in this Resolution - for example, the need to protect nuclear power plants, the need to protect grain exports and also the need for political exchange of political prisoners. But, to develop it into a real peace conference, I think **more states would have to be invited** - including the parties involved in the conflict themselves.

Statements from delivered speeches by group spokespersons in debates

Andrej Hunko (Germany): "On the **question of the threshold for political groups** - that was a big debate, back and forth - it has already been mentioned; we once had 20, then it was raised to 28, and so on. Actually, it's not really a clear rule compared to other international organisations. The European Parliament has 3.2% if you do the math. The Congress also has 3.2%. We are now above that, but it is now down from 28 to **26** because this Assembly has become smaller after the exclusion of the Russian. We **accept this and support it.**" ([full text](#))

Berdan Öztürk (Türkiye): "It is sobering to have to acknowledge this on the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe that **European democracy is in crisis.**" (...) "Recent decades have witnessed a booming industry of fake consultations that only leave people further disillusioned with the political system. But **debate and action** that can promote **genuine participatory grassroots democracy** is the only way out of our democratic crisis. (...) a genuine democracy that listens to everyone must **involve young people** who have their own legitimate concerns and interests and have the most to lose from our current short-sighted trajectory." ([full text](#))

Andreas Sjalg Unneland (Norway): "It is crucial to recognise that **protecting women human rights defenders** is not merely about safeguarding individuals, it is about **upholding the very principles of democracy, human rights and equality.** When these defenders are silenced, entire communities lose their voices. The **withdrawal of Türkiye** from the **Istanbul Convention**, which aimed to combat violence against women, has had a **dire consequence** for activists there." ([full text](#))

Paul Gavan (Ireland): "It's important to stress the background against which this debate is taking place. It's one of continuing **mass drowning of human beings in the Mediterranean**, in which tens of thousands have already perished. It's the **withdrawal of state-led rescue missions** to save lives in the Mediterranean. It's the disgusting **ongoing European Union support for the Libyan Coastguard**, which has seen 150 000 human beings rounded up since 2016 to be penned in detention camps where they are subject to rape, mutilation, torture, and death. It's the **pushbacks by Frontex and European Coast Guards** which have become mainstream practice throughout Europe. It's the insidious **deals with Tunisia and Egypt**, countries with appalling human rights records to act as mass holding pens for human beings." ([full text](#))

Paul Gavan (Ireland): "Just to be clear, first and foremost, **Russia's war on Ukraine is a blatant breach of international law and a full-scale aggression of the Russian military against the people of Ukraine and it has to be condemned.** (...) I'm old enough to remember the sanctions that were proved effective against the old apartheid regime in South Africa many decades ago. (...) The EU launched its 14th round of sanctions at this stage. And yet we know - and other speakers have highlighted already - that there are, and the report highlights, **very significant gaps and loopholes.**" (...) "The view of the UEL is that we **must continue to support any and all actions against perpetrators of war crimes regardless of who they are**, by imposing sanctions and using the multilateral institutions such as the **International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice as mechanisms to hold aggressors to account.**" ([full text](#))

Positions held by UEL members

Emmanuel Fernandes (France), Second Vice-Chairperson: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons (since 23/01/2024)

Nina Kasimati (Greece), Third Vice-Chairperson: Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination (since 18/03/2024)

Alexis Tsipras (Greece), Chairperson: Sub-Committee on the Western Balkans (since 05/03/2024)

Andrej Hunko (Germany), Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee on Public Health (since 3/06/2024)

Reports under preparation by UEL Members

Violent pornography, Laura Castel (Spain)

Questions by UEL Members

Paul Gavan (Ireland) asked a question to **Mr Gabrielius LANDSBERGIS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and President of the Committee of Ministers**, about double standards with respect to statements regarding the protection of human rights violated by the Russian Federation and Israel

Answer

Nina Kasimati (Greece) asked a question to **Mr Volker TÜRK, United Nations High Commissioner for human rights** about the situation of missing persons following the illegal Turkish invasion in Cyprus

Answer

George Loucaides (Cyprus): "The report proposes the establishment of a **Council of Europe mediation process** to overcome **past and frozen conflicts** and suggest a number of ways and the conditions under which this mediation process between the parties could be initiated. We fully share rapporteur's view that the **Council of Europe may play an increased role** in promoting solutions to **foster justice, co-operation and peace in Europe**, thus fulfilling its statutory goal. Accordingly, we **welcome** the idea of considering establishing a **mediation mechanism**, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, to complete the existing tools at the disposal of the organisation, to facilitate finding **solutions to post conflict disputes**." (full text)

George Loucaides (Cyprus): "As mentioned in the report, Armenia has **amended to a large extent its electoral code**, in line with international obligations and Council of Europe standards, as has been proven by the three previous electoral procedures. **Further improvements in the electoral process for reasons of consistency, stability and trust in public institutions are essential**. These should be undertaken through a broad comprehensive reform and the implementation of outstanding **recommendations**, particularly those regulating **party financing** and the **administration of public resources**." (full text)

Andrej Hunko (Germany): "There has often been talk here, including in the resolution, of Euro-Atlantic integration, which we should welcome. I do **not** think that is the **task of this Assembly**. **There are countries that want to join NATO and the EU, while others do not**. That also exists in our countries. So, I think that's wrong. That is a cipher for joining NATO and the EU. I reject these amendments in the resolution. I think it is **completely wrong** to talk about **sanctions** or even the initiation of exclusion proceedings in **such a delicate situation**. I think that is very, very questionable." (full text)

Laura Castel (Spain): "This **aggression**, this war, has **reinforced inequalities and suffering among the vulnerable Ukrainian population**. This is why European countries and other international actors must **mobilise resources** to address urgent humanitarian needs. We do agree that the current situation in Ukraine is unacceptable and constitutes a flagrant violation of a fundamental human right which we fight for within this organisation. In this sense, **forced deportations**, especially of children, are an **attempt by Russia to destroy Ukraine's national identity**." (full text)

George Loucaides (Cyprus): "Unfortunately, as it was already said, in just a few days we will mark **50 years since the Turkish invasion and continuous occupation of 37% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus by Türkiye**. Half a century of division of our country and of our people, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots – 50 years of continuous **violation of international law and massive violation of the human rights**." (...) "This is probably the worst fait accompli since the unilateral declaration of the pseudo-state in 1983 recognised only by Türkiye. Turkish actions in Famagusta are illegal and run contrary to the Security Council Resolutions 550 and 789, which call for the return of the city to its rightful owners under UN administration. **If the status quo in Varosha is not revoked** and is further continued, it will not only undermine, but may also become the **tombstone of the efforts to restart negotiations** for achieving a comprehensive **solution to the Cyprus problem**." (full text)

Exchange of views with invited guests

The group held an exchange of views with:

- ♦ Former Captain Regent of San Marino, leader of the Sammarinese delegation to PACE and former UEL member, **Marco Nicolini**



- ♦ The UEL legal observer in the case of Julian Assange, Dr. Deepa Govindarajan Driver and lawyers of Julian Assange, Mr Martin Cortin and Ms Marie-Laurence Hébert-Dolbec
- ♦ Özlem Tolu, representative of the Teachers' Trade Union
- ♦ Mr Dumitru Pulbere, former judge and President of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova



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Paul Gavan (Ireland): "In fact, Israel has dropped **more than 70 000 tons of bombs on the Gaza Strip since last October**, far surpassing all of the bombing of Dresden, Hamburg, and London combined during World War II. This report **calls upon member states** to consider the best **legal and practical solutions** to tackle the **use of explosive weapons and to facilitate the removal of landmines and unexploded ordnance**. Of course, one key step that member states could immediately implement would be to **stop supplying those weapons of mass destruction to Israel in the first place**. I'm speaking directly to members from Germany and Britain in particular here, but we must also call out the shameful role that the US in particular continues to play in the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Indeed, my only criticism of the draft resolution is that it really should refer to Gaza as well as Ukraine." ([full text](#))

Paul Gavan (Ireland): "Yet **this institution**, so strong and forthright in its condemnation of Russia, still has **not found any words of condemnation for these acts of genocide**, even after nine months. Which, as I pointed out yesterday, completely undermines all of our calls for actions against Russia because people are not stupid. **People know that if you are being selective when it comes to condemnation of illegal occupation, of aggression, of the most heinous war crimes, of human rights abuses, then your words of selective condemnation are empty.** (...). They are the height of gross hypocrisy. History will not judge us well. Yesterday there was a meeting of the Committee of Ministers, and ambassadors from all 46 member states, and not one of them raised Gaza, even as the genocide rages on. Shame on every one of them." ([full text](#))

Paul Gavan (Ireland): "There are two central recommendations here that our Group fully support. Firstly, that states adopt an integrated approach that takes into consideration **environmental concerns, along with economic, social and cultural development**. And second, that **intergenerational equity** must be a **guiding principle in any decision making involving children and youth and the generations that will inherit the Earth**. From our perspective, the implications of these recommendations are that **Europe cannot continue to be dominated by an adherence to market-led neoliberal policies, which always put the needs of the markets and the few before the needs of the many and in recent years has become a key driver to war and conflict across our world**. One of the key progress points in the Reykjavik Declaration was the recognition of the need to move forward in safeguarding human rights for future generations. (...) The rapporteur also rightly highlights the woeful failure to date to achieve the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals alongside growing socio-economic inequalities, public health emergencies as well as war and conflicts. We do indeed **need reinvigorated multilateralism but also a realisation that our adherence to a capitalist economic model is entirely at the heart of current failures** regarding future generations and an ever-less regulated **economic model based on greed** is leading the entire world to **disaster**. ([full text](#))