



NEWSLETTER

2026 January part session | Unified European Left | PACE

Upcoming activities

April

The next meetings of the UEL group will be held during the April part session from **20 to 24 April 2026**

Election observation missions

Parliamentary elections in **Hungary** on 12 April

UEL representative:

Sevilay Çelenk (Türkiye)

Gabrielle Cathala (France)

Substitute: Semra Çağlar Gökalp (Türkiye)

Positions

George Loucaides (Cyprus) elected as chairman of the Sub-Committee on External Relations.

Laura Castel (Spain) elected as member of the Council for Democratic Elections of the Venice Commission on behalf of the Monitoring Committee.

Overview [UEL membership](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

Statements from delivered speeches by group spokespersons in debates

Safeguarding the system of international justice

Emmanuel Fernandes (France) (...)

“International justice is under attack in a way that is unprecedented and extremely serious. For several months now, we have been witnessing a major political offensive against independent courts and international law. In February 2025, the Trump Administration adopted an executive order imposing sanctions against the International Criminal Court: visa restrictions and financial penalties for those who cooperate with the Court. The objective is clear: to intimidate, deter, and block investigations when they concern American nationals or allies. This is an extremely serious precedent. A major power is attempting to neutralise an independent international court. At the same time, international criminal justice is being undermined by the non-cooperation of states. Since 2024, several countries, including the United States and France, have refused to execute ICC arrest warrants, notably against Benjamin Netanyahu, who must answer for war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Palestinians. Other states are delaying the enforcement of these arrest warrants or announcing their withdrawal from the Rome Statute. In cases related to the genocide in Gaza, the International Court of Justice has issued orders intended to compel Israel to modify its military conduct and ensure access to humanitarian aid. However, these obligations are not being respected, as if international law were optional. This logic of circumventing judges also exists within the European Union. Last week, the European Parliament voted in favor of referring the EU-Mercosur Partnership Agreement to the European Court of Justice. We expressly call on Ms Ursula Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission, to take this referral into account and not to proceed with the provisional application of this treaty, thereby disregarding both Parliament and judicial review. It is in this global context that we must understand what is at stake today around the European Court of Human Rights, which is not immune to these attacks. It is currently the target of a very serious offensive. Following an open letter published last May by nine European heads of government, a new milestone was reached in December with a joint statement by 27 Member States directly challenging the human rights protected by the Convention.” (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#))



Progress report: recent activities PACE

George Loucaides (Cyprus) “I will focus on three interconnected issues that are central to this period and to the responsibility of this Parliamentary Assembly. First, preserving the integrity of the European Convention on Human Rights system. Across Europe we see increasing pressure to weaken the authority of the Convention and the Court,

Questions by UEL members

Laura Castel (Spain) asked a [question](#) to the **President of the Republic of Moldova, Ms Maia Sandu** about her support of Moldova's unification with Romania..

[Answer](#)

Emmanuel Fernandes (France) asked a [question](#) to the **Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Alain Berset** on the open letter calling into question the independence of the European Court of Human Rights.

[Answer](#)

Laura Castel (Spain) asked a [question](#) to **Mr Ararat MIRZOYAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia** on the peace process with Azerbaijan.

[Answer](#)

Laura Castel (Spain) asked a [question](#) to **Mr Mihai POPȘOI, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova and President of the Committee of Ministers** on the compliance with the resolution regarding Pegasus spyware.

[Answer](#)

Meeting with COE SG



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often under the pretext of managing migration. We just listened to our UK colleague. This is a dangerous path, dear colleagues. The Convention is not a problem nor a refuge for failure. It is the safeguard that prevents fear from becoming policy." (...) "Second, the geopolitical context." (...) "We are facing a blunt confrontation between international law and the law of the mighty. Under Mr Donald Trump, the United States openly discussed a century of international legal principles. The so-called "Board of Peace" cynically bypasses the United Nations system and erases the Palestinians, while Gaza continues to suffer devastation without accountability. Claims to acquire Greenland revive coercive territorial logic that Europe should have buried long ago. This is not realism, dear colleagues. It is geopolitical bullying. The Council of Europe must respond clearly and firmly, defending the UN Charter, multilateralism and the primacy of law without hesitation or subservience." (...) "Third, in relation to social rights, another issue that we are going to discuss in this session. Social rights remain fragile, 65 years after the European Social Charter. Austerity, deregulation and inequality weaken social cohesion and democratic trust. Defending democracy means enforcing social rights, not only commemorating them. These three issues are not separate challenges: attacks on human rights, the erosion of international law and social injustice are part of the same crisis." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

Laura Castel (Spain) "Today, we bow our heads to remember the six million Jews and the millions of others individuals, who were systematically murdered by the Nazi regime: Roma, Sinti, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and political dissidents, all of them. As it has already been said today, the Holocaust did not begin with the gas chambers, it began with the dehumanization of "the other" and the slow erosion of solidarity. It was the horrific result of unchecked fascism, white supremacy, and a state apparatus used to protect the powerful by victimizing the vulnerable. Memory is not a passive act. To truly honour the victims, we must confront the rising tide of authoritarianism and xenophobia in our own time. We refuse to be bystanders while rhetoric that mirrors the 1930s creeps back into our political discourse. "Never Again" means more than just a vow to remember the past, it is a radical commitment to the present. It means fighting for a world where no person is illegal, where every identity is celebrated, and where the machinery of hate is dismantled before it can take root. Let us honour the dead by fighting for the living. Let us build a future rooted in justice, equity, and an unwavering defence of our shared humanity."



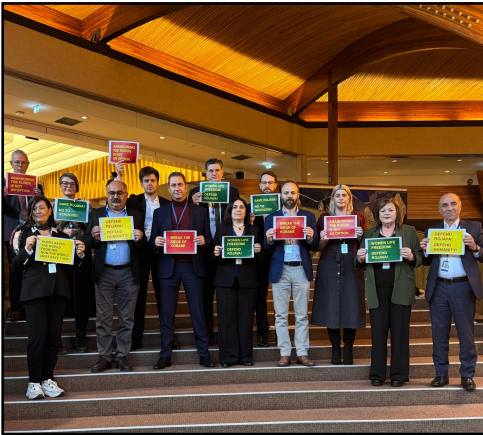
Elections in times of crisis

Sevilay Çelenk (Türkiye) (...) "Protecting elections must prevent the invalidation of results by those in power. National security cannot be an excuse to restrict elections. Disinformation includes not only



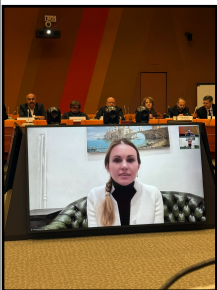
Solidarity action

The UEL group stood in solidarity with the Kurdish people in Kobane.



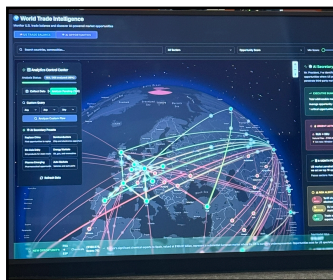
Exchange of views with invited guests

The group held a hearing with Sir Bill Browder, Head of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign within the framework of the PACE report on 'Tracking the proceeds of the crime denounced by Sergei Magnitsky and holding its perpetrators accountable'.



The group held a hearing with Anna Skorokhod, member of the Ukrainian Parliament.

The group held a hearing with Roman Redko, expert in artificial intelligence, sociopolitical analysis, and electoral strategy



foreign interference, but also the use of media in favour of governments. Today, crises are no longer temporary exceptions. They are often deliberate modes of governance. Severe economic hardship, poverty and unemployment combined with the systematic polarisation of society. Public institutions lose independence and are transformed into instruments of authoritarian control. Elections occur where trust in the judiciary is eroded, public institutions lack neutrality and media faces intense pressure. Societies are kept in perpetual states of fear, while crises are misattributed to vague external threats. This climate doesn't strengthen democracy, it drives citizens away from politics. Consequently, elections in times of crisis often struggle to produce genuine democratic legitimacy. Repeated elections, declining turnout and post-electoral deadlock have become familiar patterns. Yet, one truth must be clear. Elections do not end at the ballot box." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Peace for Ukraine

Dionysios - Charalampos Kalamatianos (Greece) (...)

"This war should never have happened, should never begun, and must end as soon as possible. We agree that peace should not translate into capitulation or into regarding the aggressor. A peace without justice would only pave the way to the next conflict. Our goal should be to achieve just and lasting peace. Unfortunately, the international climate is alarming. There are attempts to replace international law by "might makes right" foreign policy. We must be united against this approach in Ukraine, in Greenland, in Cyprus, everywhere. We should be very cautious as the crisis in Ukraine may evolve into an international crisis. We should be very cautious, and our progressive proposal should be founded on two principles: just peace and accountability. Europe should lead all diplomatic initiatives towards lasting, just peace. We must support the Ukrainian people. We must support an agreement in line with international law and human rights. Europe should ensure that Ukraine achieves democratic security and resilience." (...) "Europe must achieve a twofold goal. First, strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the US and NATO through a common foreign defence policy with an emphasis on peace and security and a clear break from Cold War era thinking and from a new arms race mentality. Second, we must ensure that social coherence and resilience remain at the heart of our policies, protecting European citizens, especially the most vulnerable, from energy crises, for example, and soaring costs." ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))



Monitoring of Bosnia and Herzegovina

George Loucaides (Cyprus) "Dear colleagues, on behalf of the UEL group, I reaffirm our full support for a sovereign, united and multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of course we call on all Council of Europe member states to respect its constitutional order, sovereignty and territorial integrity. This report covers a period of serious institutional crisis marked by direct challenges on the rule of law and on the Dayton Framework. We acknowledge that some of the most dangerous developments have been reversed: the repeal of unconstitutional empty level legislation and the holding of elections, despite clear shortcomings, demonstrate a degree of



institutional resilience. At the same time, violent rhetoric, unequal campaigning conditions and low public trust underline just how fragile and reversible this progress remains. At the head of these challenges lies the full implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the binding judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Implementing the Sejdić-Finci ruling is long overdue. The Kovačević judgement also provides important guidance in order to pursue reforms in a manner that respects Bosnia and Herzegovina's specific constitutional structure, while ending systemic discrimination and ensuring equal political participation for all citizens, including those classified as others." (...) "Excessive veto powers are paralysing quorum rules, and paralysing quorum rules have turned power sharing from a safeguard into a mechanism of permanent political blockage. The protection of constituent peoples cannot come at the expense of democratic decision-making and effective social progress." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Democracies and young people: from participation to shared responsibility



Janina Böttger (Germany) "As the Group of the Unified European Left, we naturally support the report because it shows that young people must not just be involved symbolically. They need a real say, real responsibility and real opportunities. But participation often fails where poverty determines everyday life, where schools are underfunded, where there are no meeting places where young people can learn, organise themselves and raise their voices. Those who don't know whether they can afford to go on the school trip, those who have to work alongside school, those who fight for recognition on a daily basis, have neither the time nor the desire for participation processes. Participation thus also becomes a question of social background. We therefore call on member states to finally direct their resources to where they are most urgently needed. Start with the schools in deprived areas. Support local authorities that suffer from structural poverty, invest in public infrastructure, in buses and trains, the frequency of which

must also fit in with the lives of young people. This is the only way to equalise unequal starting conditions. This is the only way to ensure that democratic participation is not a prerogative of the already informed and privileged. Education, political participation and equal rights should form a triad." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Gaza and the West Bank after the ceasefire



Ann Graves (Ireland) (...) "International solidarity is in our DNA. We also know the value of peace and how it can only be delivered to a genuinely inclusive process. The announcement of the ceasefire gave Palestine and the justice-loving people of the world real hope. But while genocide may have slowed down, there's still a genocide. The establishment of Mr Donald Trump's so-called Board of Peace is about empire-building. It is the most exclusive boys' club in history. The Board has more to do with bolstering Trump's portfolio and ego than it has to do with establishing a genuine peace process. It's abhorrent that there is nobody representing Palestinians on the Board. The basis for any peace process, as we in Ireland know, must have Palestinians at the very core. To exclude them is to ensure that the process is doomed to fail." (...) "Since the supposed ceasefire, hundreds of people have been killed in Gaza and attacks on Palestinian farmers by settlers in the West Bank continues. We need to call out the record levels of settlement expansion, settler violence and displacement of Palestinian communities in

the West Bank. The ongoing illegal land grab is going unchallenged. The Israeli settlements are in breach of numerous UN resolutions and of international law. Israel must be held to account for this slow annexation of the entire West Bank. Only today, Palestinians desperately seeking food were fired upon by Israeli forces. The Rafah crossing has to open now, to allow in food and humanitarian aid. It is time for the international solidarity campaign to become more strategically focused and united in bringing an end to Israel's oppression." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#))

Oviedo Convention and involuntary placement and treatment

Laura Castel (Spain) (...) "As it is stated in this report, the draft Additional Protocol to the Oviedo Convention is not a step forward; it is a regressive attempt to regulate what should be an absolute exception: the loss of liberty and the imposition of involuntary treatment. From a progressive perspective, we cannot accept this text. All 46 member states of the Council of Europe have ratified the



United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This protocol contradicts the core principles of equality, personal security, and the right to live free from torture. For too long, we have viewed disability through an obsolete medical model that treats human beings as objects of treatment, rather than subjects of rights. This protocol seeks to legally shield the use of force, allowing medical decisions to override human will. We believe that involuntary placement is a denial of legal capacity, ignores the fundamental requirement of free and informed consent, and creates a discriminatory legal system that offers fewer guarantees to people with disabilities. We are told that coercion is "necessary", but the evidence says otherwise. There is no clinical evidence supporting the therapeutic benefits of involuntary institutionalisation. On the contrary, the risks are devastating. Research shows that the risk of suicide for those interned involuntarily is 55 times higher than in the general population. And further, coercion does not heal; it traumatises. Besides, we must invest in early detection and in systems

that respect the dignity and choices of the individual, and end the dehumanising language and stigma that treats psychic suffering as a reason for exclusion. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been very clear: this protocol must be withdrawn." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

For an inclusive and participatory education fostering democratic values



Emmanuel Fernandes (France) "This report reminds us of something that is fundamentally true, and my group thanks the rapporteur for her work: democracy does not fall from the sky, it is learned, practised and taught. Schools are one of the first places where this experience is possible. We fully agree with this observation. Schools are not just places where knowledge is imparted; they are also places where people socialise, build social links and learn to live together. Yet all over Europe, this democratic mission of schools is being undermined. Weakened by social inequalities, by school segregation, by the rise of discrimination and racism, but also by the exhaustion of teaching staff, subjected to austerity policies and a chronic lack of resources. In France, the government plans to cut 4 018 teaching posts for the start of the school year in September 2026. In the Strasbourg education authority, 85 posts are expected to be lost at the start of the new school year. And yet, France is already one of the European countries with the largest class sizes. How can we expect to train free and enlightened citizens in

overcrowded schools where pupils rarely have a say? Democracy cannot be taught in structures that contradict it on a daily basis. This report is valuable as it states quite clearly that it is not enough to teach democracy, it has to be brought to life in schools. This requires real participation by pupils in the governance of schools, co-operative teaching practices, and the recognition of diversity as an asset and not as a problem to be managed." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Threats against the international order: the case of Greenland



George Loucaides (Cyprus) "Let me start by expressing our group's full solidarity with the people of Greenland and with Denmark, a member state of this organisation, whose sovereignty and territorial integrity have been openly challenged. These threats against the rules-based international order must be understood within a broader political context. The USA has a long and well-documented record of imperial interventions, regime change operations and violations of international law. What marks this phase as particularly dangerous is the abandonment of any attempt to justify such actions, legally or morally, and the extension of this coercive logic even towards its allies and partners. As Henry Kissinger once cynically observed, "it may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal". Today, this warning resonates with renewed force. Greenland stands as a stark example of this reality. Our response must therefore be unambiguous. Greenland is not a strategic asset to be acquired, negotiated or traded. In accordance with international law and the UN charter, only the people of

Greenland have the right to decide freely on their political future, without external pressure or interference. Any deviation from this principle undermines international legality and democratic legitimacy. At the same time, the very recent violent abduction of the Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro through direct military action constitutes a grave violation of international law and the prohibition of the use of force. Simultaneously, the pressure exerted on Mexico, an observer state in this Assembly, and on other countries in the region, illustrates a renewed assertion of domination based on the law of the mighty." (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#))

Political crisis in the broader Middle East

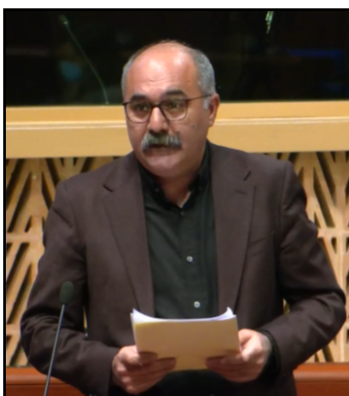


Emmanuel Fernandes (France) “The dramatic situation in the Middle East confronts our common humanity with the challenge of its own survival. In Palestine, genocide continues unabated. The population is still being subjected to an intolerable humanitarian blockade, and civilian massacres are continuing, despite a ceasefire that is in reality only partial. Israel continues to think itself above international law and, to our shame, most of our governments allow Benjamin Netanyahu to act with impunity. In Iran, since December 2025, massive demonstrations have been demanding freedom, dignity and respect for fundamental rights. The mullahs' regime has responded with an extremely violent crackdown, using lethal force against peaceful demonstrators, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and torture. Women and ethnic and religious minorities are particularly targeted, while the state restricts access to information and controls communications in order to conceal the scale of the repression. The institutions guaranteeing

international and humanitarian law must act without delay to denounce this violence, protect civilians and support the citizens' revolution in Iran, for and by the Iranian people, without interference or cynical calculations. In Syria, for the past two weeks, Rojava and the political project it embodies have been undergoing an unprecedented military attack by the Syrian government of Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani, (Ahmed Al-Sharaa), marking a violent challenge to the rights of the Kurdish people and of ethnic and religious minorities. This government defends a centralist and anti-democratic "Syrian Arab Republic", repressing political and trade union rights, denying women's rights and attacking religious and ethnic minorities, in particular the Druze, Alawites and Christians. Conversely, there is an alternative: a decentralised and democratic Syria, giving a central place to women and minorities, embodied by the autonomous administration of Rojava and in north-eastern Syria. Since the brutal interruption of the negotiations begun in March 2025 between the Autonomous Administration and the Syrian government, the violence has intensified.” (...). “Kobani is now under siege, with water, electricity and communications cut off, putting more than 250 000 civilians at risk. We call for the immediate opening of emergency humanitarian corridors to prevent a catastrophe.” (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

For a ban on conversion practices

Emmanuel Fernandes (France) “The report presented to us today on the prohibition of conversion practices is an essential, courageous and, unfortunately, always necessary report. (...) There can be no ambiguity: conversion practices are incompatible with human rights, human dignity and real equality for all. As this report reminds us, conversion practices are not only scientifically unfounded, but profoundly abject, cruel and intolerable. These practices involve psychological, spiritual, sometimes physical and sexual violence, causing lasting trauma, depression, post-traumatic stress syndromes and a dramatic increase in the risk of suicide, particularly among children and young people. France took on a major responsibility by adopting a law banning conversion practices in January 2022. This is obviously a salutary step, and we are defending it and supporting it here too. But this report clearly shows that banning is not enough if we do not really protect. Practices are shifted, concealed and reinvented, particularly in family, religious or transnational settings. The fight against these barbaric practices cannot stop with this law: without compulsory training for professionals, serious evaluation of its application and investment in research, the ban will remain partial and the victims will continue to be invisible.” (...) “I would like to salute the success of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) on banning conversion practices in the European Union, which has attracted more than 1.2 million signatories and marks a major step forward for the rights of the people concerned. We now look forward to a swift favourable review by the Commission. Conversion practices thrive where reactionary rhetoric gains ground, where the rights of LGBTI people are called into question, where identities become ideological targets. Across Europe, the decline in LGBTI rights is growing with the rise of the far right.” (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))



The European Social Charter: social rights as foundation of resilient democracies

Berdan Öztürk (Türkiye) “On behalf of the UEL, we strongly support the report marking the 65th anniversary of the convention and all efforts to strengthen it. As reaffirmed in the May 2023 Reykjavík Declaration, the European Social Charter is an integral part of the human rights system. Without effective social rights, full respect for human rights is impossible, and human dignity depends on social justice, equality and solidarity.” (...) “When access to education, healthcare, housing and social protection is unequal, concepts such as dignity, equality and participation lose their real meaning. This is particularly true in countries where the democratic

institutions are weakening, as in these contexts, social rights are often the first to be undermined. Türkiye provides a clear example of this dynamic. While social rights are formally recognised, in practice, access to these rights is often determined by political views, identity and backgrounds. These structural problems affect vulnerable groups most severely. For Kurdish communities, the lack of access to public services and education in one's mother tongue is not merely a cultural issue; it is the question of equal citizenship. Language barriers make it difficult to access healthcare, social assistance and municipal services, pushing vulnerable groups further to the margins of public life.” (...) “Here, the link between social justice and democracy becomes clear. When local democracy is weakened, social rights are weakened in practice. Protecting social rights, especially at the local level, and for vulnerable groups, is therefore not only a matter of social policy, it is a prerequisite for democratic legitimacy, social cohesion and long-term stability.” ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia



George Loucaides (Cyprus) “Our Unified European Left group, also supports the proposal of our rapporteurs to close the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia, as recommended in the draft resolution before us. The report acknowledges the progress achieved in the functioning of the democratic institutions, the conduct of competitive elections, the general respect for fundamental freedoms, as well as continued co-operation with Council of Europe bodies. At the same time, the report is explicit in that a number of key issues remain unresolved. For our group, therefore, closing the post-monitoring dialogue should go hand in hand with the Assembly's continued follow-up through its periodic review mechanism. The report highlights ongoing consensus about the independence, efficiency and funding of the judiciary, as well as the low level of public trust and the risk of political interference. The Assembly rightly emphasises the need for further reforms in line with the Venice Commission's and Group of States against Corruption's ([GRECO](#)) recommendations, including those relating to the composition and functioning of the judicial council, the provision of adequate financial and human resources, and the implementation of effective anti-corruption measures.” (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#), [report](#))

Emmanuel Fernandes (France) “For several months now, farmers in the EU have been mobilising on a massive scale. At issue is the **Mercosur agreement**, by far the largest and most harmful free trade agreement ever negotiated by Brussels. This agreement will have far-reaching consequences, with devastating effects for our agriculture, public health and the environment, but also for our European economies, and with it, devastating social impacts. It provides for hundreds of thousands of additional tonnes of beef, poultry, cheese, cereals, sugar and honey to be imported every year. These are products that we already produce in Europe, and which will only put our farmers, already strangled by falling incomes and rising costs, in direct competition with each other. How can we fight against knockdown prices from factory farms in Brazil, which have neither the same wage levels nor the same health, environmental and animal welfare standards? Faced with these warnings, the European Commission is hiding behind mirror measures and safeguard clauses, but these measures are largely ineffective.” (...) “Faced with this



situation, on Wednesday, 21 January the European Parliament adopted a motion initiated by The Left group in the European Parliament, chaired by Manon Aubry, calling on the Court of Justice of the European Union to examine the legality of the EU-Mercosur agreement. This is a powerful political act. And yet, despite this, the Commission intends to trigger the provisional application of this agreement. In concrete terms, this would mean that it could enter into force even before the European Parliament has given its consent. This is a serious anti-democratic move. Yet the framework agreement between the European Parliament and the Directorate-General for Trade is clear: trade agreements must not be applied provisionally before Parliament has given its consent. Since 2011, almost all agreements have complied with this principle, with very few strictly justified exceptions. In this case, however, there is no justification for going through the motions.” (...) ([Full text](#), [video](#))