

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the Parliament of Moldova today on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I wanted Moldova to be one of the first countries that I visit in my present capacity; therefore I am grateful to the Speaker of parliament and acting President of the country, Mr Ghimpu, for the invitation that he issued to me as soon as I got elected as President of the Assembly.

The priority that I attach to Moldova is above all an expression of the spirit of friendship and mutual support that unites us all in the Parliamentary Assembly. For us, there are no small and big countries. Every country deserves to enjoy, as much as the others, all the benefits of democracy. And for this every country deserves to receive all the moral encouragement and assistance, especially at difficult times.

The last time I was in Moldova was in July 2009, when I was heading the Assembly delegation that observed the early elections, which led to the formation of this parliament. I am happy that 8 months later, I can come face to face with such a vibrant, active and pluralistic institution.

Yet the fact that we are not gathered today in the proper building of parliament, is a reminder of how easily things can go wrong. When a parliament gets destroyed, it is as if the very house of democracy collapses, because its foundations are not strong enough.

I am glad that a parliamentary committee has been set up, in line with the Assembly recommendations, in order to conduct an independent and thorough inquiry into the post-electoral events and the circumstances that led to them. We hope that the conclusions of this committee, which I understand are expected soon, will help reestablish trust.

It is equally important to have an independent and fair trial. A trial which is not dependent on political interests and which is beyond any suspicion of intents to settle scores. Crimes need to be adequately punished and victims properly compensated. Only then can this sad page of recent history be turned once for all.

Dear friends,

Over the last two days I have met leaders of the main political forces in the country, as well as the leaders of the parliamentary factions, and I have witnessed democracy in the making. Certainly, a period of political transition is never easy. For those who move from opposition to power, campaign ideas and slogans have to be transformed into concrete deeds which have a real impact on society. And for those who move from power to opposition, it is important to realize that in a democracy, the opposition is also a strong power, which has to be vigilant, but also constructive.

Transition from government to opposition and vice versa is healthy and it guarantees the constant rejuvenation of the democratic process. I would like to praise all the political actors for managing this transition peacefully, after the dramatic events that shook the country one year ago.

Yet, dear friends, this transition could have been happening better. When you were elected, the people of Moldova placed their trust in you, both who are part of the government and those who are in opposition, in order to solve a critical problem for the country; the election of its President. People expected from you to remedy quickly and efficiently to the failure of the previous parliament to find the necessary majority. People need strong and performing State institutions which can start working on the most pressing needs of the society.

Unfortunately, what we have witnessed is deep division. The opposition had been boycotting parliament; the delegation to our Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg is still incomplete; and what is the worst, two new attempts to elect a President have failed and the parliament is again at a crossroads.

I shall address these problems one by one and will be as frank as I was during all my meetings with political leaders.

I am honoured that my address to you today is happening in front of all the political forces represented in the current parliament, including the opposition. I take this not as a personal compliment, but as an expression that the opposition wants to be committed to the principles of the Council of Europe.

But dear friends, your presence here today would have nothing more than a symbolic value if at the end of the speech you leave the parliament again. The people who elected you did so because they wanted you to be present, not absent. They wanted you to contribute with your ideas and your experience to the solution of the problem that the country is facing.

So let me repeat again, in front of everybody, my appeal: please stay and do your best as a parliamentary force for the future of this country.

I also very much hope that the Moldovan parliament will soon have a fully-fledged delegation at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. As you know, our Assembly is the biggest pan-European forum for dialogue. It is therefore vital that all the political forces represented in your parliament participate in this forum, not least because there they can learn much about the art of talking to each other and overcoming differences.

As a President of this Assembly, I have stressed explicitly in my meetings yesterday the right of each political force represented in parliament to choose freely its representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly. I think that I found understanding and am very much confident that this issue will get solved in the nearest future.

I am now coming to the most urgent priority that your country is facing: the election of its President.

Over the last days, I have heard the whole spectrum of arguments in favour of, or against, one or another possible solution.

Moldova is a sovereign country and can take its own decisions. What we can do as unbiased and well-meaning friends is listen and advise. And as you know, the Venice Commission – the Council of Europe’s body for constitutional advice – has provided a very clear opinion which has been taken as a good basis for compromise also by the EU and the OSCE.

So of course, the final decision belongs entirely to the Moldovan people and its elected representative. However, I must take this opportunity to reassert some crucial principles that the Council of Europe upholds as the guardian of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and which are also the basis of the independent legal advice provided by the Venice Commission. And these are also principles that Moldova has vowed to respect and promote as one of its member countries.

First of all, that every matter of highest national interest has to be solved through dialogue and with the broadest possible national consensus.

Second, that as a matter which concerns the very foundation of a democratic State, it has to be solved in strict compliance with domestic and European democratic and constitutional principles.

To this I would add some political considerations. The current deadlock would not bring political dividends to any political force. It only deviates the country from urgently needed political and economic reforms. And it projects an image abroad which would do nothing to help Moldova's further integration into the European architecture and into the international financial and economic structures.

Over the last two days I have heard not only very diverging views on the way that should be chosen but, sadly, I have witnessed a lot of suspicion and mutual distrust on both sides of the political spectrum. However, I have also seen unanimous concern for the future of this country and for me, this is a basis on which I believe that a compromise is possible.

Firstly, it is clear that the present deadlock cannot continue. It would be unimaginable to ask the people of Moldova to go to the polling stations one more time, only to find themselves once again with the same absurd scenario in a new parliament. This is why I warmly welcome the setting up of a parliamentary committee which will revise article 78 of the Constitution, as well as the fact that all political forces have appointed representatives to it.

I appeal to the political responsibility of all of you to find an agreement on the content of article 78 as soon as possible. The Council of Europe is ready to stand as an international guarantor of this agreement, so that it can be voted unanimously in parliament when the time comes.

Secondly, it is clear that the present constitution has many imperfections. Moldova needs a modern constitution which can fully serve its purpose of a foundation of the democratic process. Such a process will require time and an intense national debate in order to achieve the broadest possible consensus.

I am sure that the Venice Commission will provide the highest quality advice in the process of elaboration of a new constitution; you can also be sure that we shall follow the process very closely at the Parliamentary Assembly and will assist it in the best way we can.

Lastly, any new elections have to be organized up to the highest democratic standards. It is indeed time to solve the problems namely with the electoral lists and the voting abroad.

Dear friends,

As I already mentioned, solving the problem of the election of the Head of State is important not only *per se*, but also in order to allow society to concentrate on the most urgent political, economic and social problems that the country is facing.

Moldova has now been a member of the Council of Europe for nearly 15 years. We know that these have not been easy years for you. It takes a great deal of courage for a small country, without huge natural resources, to reassert its independence and to move forward while part of its territory is effectively cut off and bearing in mind that its position is delicate from a geopolitical and geostrategic point of view.

Over these years, the Council of Europe has been doing its best in order to help with reforms that it considers as essential for the development of the country. And while the organisation has shown a great deal of understanding of the difficult external circumstances specific to Moldova, we have to admit that sometimes, it has also come across a certain lack of political will and courage.

The reforms in your country should have been, and could have been, far more advanced. Key obligations and commitments that Moldova undertook upon joining the Council of Europe are still lagging behind.

To name but the most outstanding – the reform of the judiciary and the Prosecutor’s office; the reform of the police; the creation of a genuinely independent public service broadcasting and guaranteeing the independence of the media; the reform of the electoral legislation and practice.

Please understand me correctly. I am not coming here to judge and to criticize. If I am sharing these concerns with you, it is because I am convinced, and the Assembly is convinced, that many of your current difficulties could have been avoided, or at least alleviated, if the democratic process had been more advanced.

In this respect, the new government has undertaken some important reforms, which may not be very popular in the short term – for instance, the new agreement with the IMF – but which are necessary to bring a more prosperous future of the country. I appeal to all the political forces to support constructively such reforms and I also appeal to international institutions and donors to do their best, so that the people of Moldova do not have to pay too big a price for this absolutely necessary transition.

Again, the Council of Europe can also assist this process with a wide range of measures aimed at promoting higher democratic standards. Let me mention in particular the latest joint EU/Council of Europe programme "Democracy support", which also has a strong parliamentary component. Its content has already been agreed and the programme can be set in motion as soon as the Moldovan parliament is ready for it.

Dear friends, may I repeat again, you are not alone. Bringing an end to the current political crisis is something that concerns us all. Political stability does not rime with political immobility. Moldova needs and deserves to move forward on its path to more democracy and more prosperity. We shall support you in any way we can.

Thank you.