

Final edition

**Proceedings of the European Conference of Presidents of
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European Conference of Presidents of Parliament

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Opening of the Conference

Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to take a seat.

Madame Secretary General,

Dear Colleagues,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you all today to Strasbourg for this European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, which is of particular significance this year as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

I am deeply convinced that the reason we are celebrating this anniversary is because Europe and, in particular, our fellow citizens need an organisation like ours. Indeed, our political mission – to build greater unity among European states in order to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law – is now more legitimate and important than ever. We therefore need to focus on all that we have achieved and establish the main lines of future action for our organisation. The themes chosen for our debates will guide us in our deliberations and, if I may, I would like to briefly introduce them.

In order to have a better idea of how the future will look, we will start by examining the state of our “European Common Home” as it celebrates its 70th anniversary. This home is built on a solid foundation but, given the rapid changes taking place in our societies, it faces many and diverse challenges.

First of all, there are external challenges with the growing question marks over our multilateral co-operation mechanisms. Today, we are witnessing a degree of disengagement in the multilateral implementation of international human rights standards. This is reflected in particular in the challenging of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and in a certain “politicisation” of fundamental human rights issues. In addition, frozen and open conflicts in Europe and at its borders are a considerable obstacle not only to international dialogue and co-operation, but also to our human rights protection system, as conflict-affected territories are “grey areas” in which individuals are de facto prohibited from accessing our mechanisms for the protection of their human rights.

As you are all aware, our organisation has had to face an institutional and political crisis in recent years. Fortunately, we have managed to shoulder our responsibilities. We must now move forward, but we must not forget our commitment to respect for international law, which must be fully reasserted through a frank and open dialogue between all the member states of our organisation.

Then there are the internal challenges to our democratic institutions and mechanisms. Faced with growing inequalities and the marginalisation of certain sections of the population, we are witnessing an erosion of trust in the institutions of representative democracy. At the same time, direct democracy mechanisms, coupled with the exponential advances of new means of communication such as social networks, are increasingly being used or even manipulated by populist or extremist movements.

Lastly, we cannot ignore global challenges such as, for example, digitisation and the ever-growing use of artificial intelligence, climate change and migration. In order to tackle these new challenges, we need to develop a human rights-based approach in order to continue to defend all that we have achieved for the well-being of our 830 million fellow citizens.

In this context, the role of parliaments is absolutely crucial. I look forward to hearing your ideas and proposals on what we can do together to meet these challenges and together write the narrative of the Council of Europe for the next 70 years.

Dear colleagues,

I now come to the second theme of our debates.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is of particular importance to the Council of Europe and all our member states. This Programme seeks to implement human rights for all, without any discrimination, an objective that our Organisation has always pursued.

The Council of Europe is actively contributing to implementation of this Agenda. Many of our Conventions, such as the Istanbul Convention on Combating Violence against Women, the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and our Conventions against Corruption, are open to non-member states of the Council of Europe. Accordingly, our normative framework can serve as a model for the development of worldwide regulatory provisions in several areas covered by the UN 2030 Agenda.

Here too, the role of parliamentarians is of particular importance and I am sure that by comparing our respective experiences, our debates this afternoon will enable us to identify good practices and avenues for joint action.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues

Finally, I come to the third theme of our debates, but it is certainly not the least important. This is indeed a topical political issue, I would even say that it is a matter of some urgency.

Gender equality is one of the fundamental democratic principles: without equality, societies cannot develop in the best possible way, because it is inconceivable, in a healthy and solid democracy, to exclude half of society from decision-making processes and from the opportunity to fully exercise their capacities, to the detriment of society as a whole.

Inequality is expressed in a variety of ways, and sexism, harassment and violence against women are clearly the most subtle of these forms.

Exactly one year ago, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe unveiled a regional study on sexism, harassment and violence against women in European parliaments. The results of this study – which you have all received in your files – are staggering.

What can we do to reverse the trend? There are indeed several avenues, one of which is the Assembly's initiative #NotInMyParliament. Tomorrow, we will have the opportunity to share our experiences in order to identify common courses of action. I hope that, thanks to the commitment of each and every one of us, the #NotInMyParliament initiative will grow into a real movement against sexism and harassment in all spheres of our societies, with endless possibilities such as #NotInMyOffice, #NotInMyCity, etc.

Dear colleagues,

Let me conclude these introductory remarks with a few questions.

Before we begin our debates, let us ask ourselves why we have all come here today. What have we brought with us that we want to share and what will we take back home, to our national parliaments, after two days of intensive debates and bilateral meetings?

These questions are very important, because the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament is not only a place for exchanges and meetings but also an opportunity to deliver common political messages and launch joint initiatives.

What can we do to help strengthen the role of the Council of Europe in addressing the many challenges facing democracy, the rule of law and human rights? As you may be aware, we have embarked upon a major project to set up – through dialogue between the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly – a new joint procedure for responding to situations where one or other of our member states fails to comply with their statutory obligations. In order to supplement this work, we need political commitment at the highest level, within our Governments and Parliaments, and I count on your support.

At the same time, our internal procedures and mechanisms will have only a limited impact if we do not have the material resources to support our member states and provide our fellow citizens with the protection to which they are entitled. However, the zero nominal growth policy implemented in recent years has greatly weakened our organisation. As parliaments, we have budgetary responsibilities in our member states and we must therefore give serious thought to this issue in order to provide the Council of Europe with the financial means to fulfil its political role.

Returning more specifically to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, how can we, together, strengthen its political role and the impact of its action? Should we focus on just a few priority issues? Undoubtedly. However, let us not forget that our Assembly represents the voice of Europe in all its diversity and plurality. We must therefore ensure that it continues to be a forum for debate and exchange, without shying away from addressing the most controversial issues, because it is in our Assembly that we can set out the political guidelines for tackling the major challenges of the future. The active participation of all Assembly members in our work is therefore vital to ensure that our resolutions and recommendations receive the widest possible support from European parliamentarians.

Finally, how can we contribute to strengthening dialogue and co-operation on our continent? Let us remember that it was indeed through dialogue and co-operation that we were able to reconcile the continent after the Second World War and to eliminate ideological divisions after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, we must continue to vigorously defend our political role: that of building greater unity among European states in order to defend and promote – together – human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We have been building our Common Home for 70 years now and yet, if we do not show commitment and political will, there is a danger that it will crumble, leaving 830 million Europeans without any multilateral means of redress to protect their rights and freedoms.

That is our responsibility.

I hope that these few questions and thoughts will guide the many bilateral discussions that we will hold during and in the margins of this Conference.

Thank you for your attention, and I now ask Mrs Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to please address you a few words.

Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Thank you, Madam President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Dear Speakers and Presidents of Parliaments,

Mr President of the European Court of Human Rights,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by welcoming you to Strasbourg, the capital of Europe, and more particularly to the Council of Europe, the main human rights organisation in our continent.

As we are celebrating its 70th anniversary, our organisation must remain for its members a unique pan-European platform for dialogue and constructive cooperation.

The Council of Europe must also remain a reference in the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights and the rule of law on our continent. In fact, this role must even be strengthened, and it is clear from our Statute that respect for these fundamental values is an essential obligation for all Member States and a test of our credibility.

The Council of Europe's *raison d'être* is to work with Member States to set common standards and make sure they are fully applied and respected.

The Court of Human Rights is responsible for ensuring that the European Convention on Human Rights is respected in our 47 Member States. Each of them has ratified the Convention and all their citizens therefore have the right as a last resort to apply to the European Court.

However, the primary responsibility for defending the Convention system and executing the Court's judgments lies at the national level: it is a legal obligation for governments and it is, of course, the role of parliaments to remind them of this responsibility and to ensure that national legislation is in full conformity with international law.

Consequently, when the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter and the many other treaties and instruments that have followed are in danger, it is clear that national parliaments have a central role to play in preserving and promoting common standards and values in today's Europe.

I am therefore not only pleased to welcome you here today, but I would also like to thank you for your role as Speakers and Presidents of Parliaments. I also urge you to continue to work in your area of competence to ensure that the debate and action, which are highly necessary to defend the common European legal space, find their place there.

Admittedly, the task is not an easy one, as the subjects you will be discussing over the next two days show this very clearly.

The achievement of the objectives within the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development deserves all our efforts.

This programme, of course, emphasises that the respect, protection and promotion of human rights are the responsibility of States. The Council of Europe has made clear its determination to integrate sustainable development objectives into its work, with the nine operational programmes included in our proposed programme and budget for 2020-2021, supporting the full implementation of the United Nations programme.

Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

When it comes to women in politics and in public discourse, the issue that you will consider is really a form of discrimination that discourages women from contributing fully to public life. Harassment and hate speech towards female politicians is unacceptable and it must be stopped. And this forum is the perfect place in which to share your experiences of this problem, and best practices by parliaments for addressing it.

Certainly, the Council of Europe has undertaken a range of related initiatives: from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence to the Committee of Ministers' recommendation on preventing and combating sexism. We are working with member states to prevent harassment in every walk of life, including the workplace. In addition, and with great thanks to you Madame President of the Parliamentary Assembly, last year the "not in my Parliament campaign" was launched to help members of this audience to end sexism, harassment and violence against women inside national parliaments.

And within our own Secretariat, we have a Commission against harassment and our current CARE campaign to ensure respect between colleagues. But before these debates, you will discuss this morning "Our Common European Home: the next 70 years". Within this title, there are two implicit assumptions. The first is that the Council of Europe belongs to all of us, and the second is your commitment to its success in the long term. I'm greatly heartened by both. Yes, the achievements of the past 70 years have been enormous and unprecedented. The application of our common standards has improved the lives of every citizen, better protected the range of minorities who live within our societies and created a 47-strong block of states in which the death penalty is no longer applied.

No other continent has achieved this, but there is still a great deal for us to do together; long-term and recurring challenges that must be met. These include corruption threats to independent judiciary and journalists and the free media, restrictions on civil society and human rights defenders, persistent gender inequality and gender-based violence, and the surge in hate speech and populist rhetoric that aims to generate support by appealing to prejudice and fear. Persistent and sometimes increasing poverty and inequality mean that we should also consider how we can better promote the social charter and social rights in Europe.

And new challenges continue to emerge, not least, the rapid rise of the new technologies. Their influence poses important questions about the application of human rights. Artificial intelligence has already made a significant impression on some sectors of employment with a disproportionate impact on the female workforce. Immediate attention is therefore required to explore carefully how artificial intelligence and other new technologies can develop in ways that enhance our human rights rather than undermine them, and what guidelines or other tools we should therefore develop.

The Committee of Ministers has already agreed on the terms of reference for a new intergovernmental steering committee that will address this and work is underway. I know that you will be familiar with these issues, that they feature in the debates, discussions and decisions of your national parliaments. But my point is this: that for the next 70 years to build on the progress of the last, we require -- as our statute says -- greater unity between our member states.

Member states are expected to contribute the ideas, the commitment and the financial resources to provide for an adequate environment to ensure that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are respected and upheld. And national parliaments have a vital role to play in supporting these efforts and in taking innovative measures in this respect.

I hope that this morning's debate will generate new thinking about the best ways in which that can be done, creating a renewed impetus for our concerted and tangible actions.

I wish you all a very successful conference.

Thank you.

Under the presidency of Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Thank you, Madame Secretary General.

Dear Colleagues,

I now invite you to adopt the agenda for our conference, which you know will address the three themes that have been mentioned. The session, which begins now, will continue into the afternoon and will be devoted to the discussion of our first theme for reflection: "Our Common European Home: the next 70 years". The second theme for discussion, "Implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals: contribution by Parliaments", will be debated in the afternoon. Indeed, in view of the large number of presidents who wish to speak on the first topic of reflection, I propose that we continue the exchanges on this topic until around 5:30 p.m., so that the discussion of the second topic can begin in the late afternoon.

The discussion on the third theme for reflection: "Women in politics and in the public discourse. What role can national Parliaments play in combatting the increasing level of harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians?" will take place tomorrow morning from 10:00 a.m. Finally, I will have the honour of presenting the conclusions of our conference at the end of the session.

Are there any comments about our adjusted timetable? This is not the case, so it is adopted.

The rules of the conference are also on file, and I have the pleasure and honour to inform you that Mr Gérard LARCHER, President of the French Senate, Mr Richard FERRAND, President of the French National Assembly, will be Vice-President of the conference today and that Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN, President of the Norwegian Parliament, will be Vice-President tomorrow morning.

Our first topic of discussion concerns "Our Common European Home: the next 70 years", two of our colleagues will introduce this theme: Mr Richard FERRAND, President of the French National Assembly and Ms Marina CAROBIO GUSCETTI, President of the Swiss National Council.

I therefore give the floor to Mr FERRAND, President of the French National Assembly, to present his introductory contribution.

Theme 1: "Our Common European Home": the next 70 years

Mr Richard FERRAND, President of the National Assembly, France

Europe is no longer just a nation of many; this is what Montesquieu taught us. The Council of Europe is this unique, indispensable place where all these nations – whether or not they belong to the European Union – can meet, talk and get to know and understand each other better. That is why I am particularly pleased to take part with you in this conference of the Presidents of the parliaments of the member States of the Council of Europe, in this highly symbolic city of Strasbourg. This meeting provides us with a unique opportunity to reaffirm our common conviction for greater cooperation between our parliamentary assemblies for the exchange of information and good practices, but also for concrete actions.

It is an honour to appear before you because – like all the French authorities – in the first place, the President of the Republic, our Assembly and myself attach great importance to the Council of Europe. It is an international organisation that has laid the foundations for a continent that is at peace, that is deeply humanist, and in which individual rights, democracy and the rule of law are not abstract concepts but requirements. It is also an ambitious challenge, to say the least, because it might seem presumptuous to claim that we can sketch out what the future of the Council of Europe will look like over the next 70 years.

Sir Winston Churchill's famous speech calling for the creation of the United States of Europe, delivered at the University of Zurich on 19 September 1946, is often cited as the first step towards the creation of the Council of Europe. Undoubtedly, this was also behind the 1948 Hague Congress, which promoted European unification and was then followed by the signing of the Treaty of London and the establishment of this organisation on 5 May 1949 right here in Strasbourg.

It was, at that time, the very first European organisation with the official objective, according to its statutes, of achieving a closer union between its members.

The history of the Council of Europe began against the backdrop of the Cold War, but it was also part of a process that saw the birth of a large number of institutions on our continent.

Created at the same time as the European Organisation for Economic Co-operation, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Coal and Steel Community, the Council of Europe has played a key role in protecting the fundamental rights of citizens and in unifying and integrating the continents.

I will mention just a few of its achievements: the eradication of the death penalty throughout most of Europe, the reduction of torture, the improvement in prison conditions, and the fight against corruption.

While the Council of Europe is very much influenced by the relationship that has been established with what was to become the European Union, it does however have its own identity and areas of expertise. It has experienced high points but also crises, too. Three major periods have marked its 70-year history: first of all, its establishment from 1948 to 1969; then its quest for a new identity from 1969 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; and finally, the period of its enlargement and affirmation as a pan-European organisation welcoming the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and European countries from the former Soviet Union.

From that point on, the idea of a common European house – evoked in this very place by Mikhail Gorbachev in a speech delivered in July 1989 – has become a reality. Throughout its existence, the Council of Europe has demonstrated its capacity for adaptation and innovation. It has accompanied the waves of enlargement by introducing new tools and new forms of assistance for the countries concerned.

As proof of this, I would particularly like to mention the aid programmes and the Venice Commission, from 1990 onwards, as well as the establishment of a procedure for monitoring human rights obligations – known as monitoring – to ensure that member States' commitments were respected. This was set up in 1994.

Similarly, major institutional changes have been decided at several summits of Heads of State and Government. The Vienna Summit in 1993 gave impetus to the creation of a single human rights court as well as the establishment of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. The Strasbourg Summit in 1997 launched the idea of a European Commissioner for Human Rights, while the Warsaw Summit in 2005 initiated the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Union.

But, above all, I would like to stress that the Council of Europe has served as a forum for internal governmental cooperation providing concrete responses to the problems and threats affecting our modern societies. Thanks to the dialogue between member States, parliamentarians and experts, conventions on biomedicine were drawn up in 1997; on cybercrime in 2001; on preventing and combating terrorism in 2005 and 2007; on combating violence against women in 2011; and on trafficking in human organs in 2015.

This summary would not be exhaustive without a special mention of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its implementing body and instrument for the effectiveness of these rules: the European Court of Human Rights. Particularly appreciated by all our fellow citizens, it has established itself as an international court of reference whose views must be taken into account by the member States.

The last piece in the overall structure, Protocol No. 16 to the European Convention on Human Rights, now offers the possibility for national supreme courts to consult the Strasbourg Court on any matter likely to be the subject of future litigation before it.

Clearly, this is a major step forward and I am pleased that France has allowed it to enter into force through its ratification on 12 April 2018. Similarly, I am pleased that the French courts have used this new instrument since 5 October 2018.

We are therefore a very long way from the time when General de Gaulle spoke of the Council of Europe as an organisation "sleeping on the Rhine". On the contrary, it is as active as it is inventive, and that is why France is proud to see that this 70th anniversary of the creation of the Council of Europe coincides with its presidency of the Committee of Ministers. This is an opportunity for representatives of national parliaments such as ours to formulate thoughts for the future.

Although forecasting is never an exact science, I believe that the Council of Europe will continue to make its contribution to the defence of common values on our continent for decades to come. In what forms, and with what objectives, and for what purpose? These are – it seems to me – the questions we are being asked today.

In my opinion, the Council of Europe embodies the ambitions of the original European construction. What gives primacy to the value of man in society, what affirms his place, is a political philosophy, a set of elaborate legal rules developed, maintained, defended, perfected, among others, by the Council of Europe, which was the first to reflect this ambition. In this respect, it would make sense for the European Union to accede to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms.

The primacy of democracy, the rule of law and human rights are based on an extraordinarily fragile set of values and legal principles. As we all know, the implementation of the Strasbourg Court's case law is sometimes difficult. A fragile but very precious foundation, judging by the attraction it exerts on many countries on the fringes of our continent, such as Morocco and Jordan, which have been granted the status of partners for democracy. They are striving for convergence with Council of Europe standards and, in many respects, they demonstrate that the ideal underlying the foundation of this organisation remains very relevant.

Should the Council of Europe, therefore, assert itself in the future as a school of democracy or rather as a club of democracies? The enlargement following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the choice of an open conventions – à la carte – with ratification by the member States, tend to favour a space for constructive, fruitful and encouraging dialogue. The ideals of human rights and the rule of law, towards which member States must strive, remain a powerful lever for action towards countries whose democratic transition is still recent.

History teaches us that pluralism, the rule of law, and individual or collective freedoms take time to prevail. And current events show us that the rule of law can be re-established within the Council of Europe's member States themselves. In order to continue to have real added value, the Council of Europe must continue to adapt continuously to new challenges related to the exercise of human rights in order to respond to citizens' concerns. These issues cover topics as varied and important as artificial intelligence, bioethical issues or the manipulation of information. The Council of Europe must also further improve its monitoring procedures and mechanisms.

Much progress has been made over the past 70 years, including the election of judges of the European Court of Human Rights, the election of candidates for the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, and the election of the incumbent as Commissioner for Human Rights – to mention only the most significant ones.

Work is already underway to set up a procedure for joint reaction by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers in the event of a breach of its obligations by a member State or a failure to respect fundamental principles and values.

I hope that this work can be completed in the coming months.

For my part, I am firmly convinced that national parliaments must be given a greater role in the monitoring of work carried out within the Council of Europe's institutions. Of course, this assembly is – in a way – their very essence. But it would probably be very simplistic to confine the mission of our assemblies, fellow speakers, to the periodic review of the activity of our respective delegations in Strasbourg and to confine it to a careful analysis of the resolutions adopted. Our national parliaments must monitor more comprehensively the actions carried out within the various institutions of the Council of Europe. This means that they must pay close attention to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights with regard to our respective States. They must pay close attention as well to the conclusions of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in places where there is deprivation of freedom, or to the observations made by the Commissioner for Human Rights, in order to ensure much greater dissemination.

This follow-up could give rise to, why not consider it, debates in the committees in charge of international organisations, or even in public meetings, more exceptionally given the agenda constraints inherent to our assemblies. This would undoubtedly make the work and actions of the Council of Europe better known.

I also think that the Council of Europe would benefit from encouraging its various officials to come and address some parliamentary bodies in the member States. Doing this, even if exceptional, would certainly increase awareness of the work they carry out to serve the 840 million Europeans living in the organisation's geographical area.

Like all of you here, I am committed to preserving and defending the Council of Europe's contribution to peace, respect for collective and individual rights, and democracy on our continent. I hope that the conference we are attending today will make a useful contribution to this.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Marina CAROBIO GUSCETTI, President of the National Council, Switzerland

Europe, a continent, 50 countries, even more languages and dialects, over 800 million inhabitants. So different, but so united. This is Europe. Almost all of it was brought together under the institutional umbrella of the Council of Europe, which today includes 47 countries and has signed 220 conventions. The glue between the various entities is not, however, limited to institutional agreements and supranational treaties, but what really holds us together are our common values. Even when we look back over the history that led to the founding of the Council of Europe, we see that values play a fundamental role. As he pointed out when the Treaty of London was signed on 5 May 70 years ago, the Foreign Minister of Great Britain at the time, Mr Ernest BEVIN. "This agreement – he said – lays the foundations for something new and full of hope for life in Europe. Today we are witnessing the creation of a new democratic institution common to this ancient European continent." It is therefore a first step towards greater economic, political and social cooperation between the European States, which was then considered essential for maintaining peace. Thought then, but still valid today. Collaboration not as an end, but as a means of lifting Europe from the rubble in not one but two wars; a means of bringing prosperity and prospects to the new generations and, above all, a means of ensuring that something like this never happens again.

This year, therefore, we are celebrating 70 years of the Council of Europe. 70 years of peace and unity in Europe. A continent that has been able to learn from its mistakes and rebuild itself. An ambitious reconstruction process, oriented towards values such as peace, respect for human dignity, individual and collective freedoms, democracy and minorities. But also based on equality, the rule of law and human rights. In addition to the need to share these values, European states are characterised by pluralism and solidarity. Values partly denied by intolerance, racism, xenophobia or gender discrimination. But as with any federal or confederal political entity, the right balance must be found between the openness and sovereignty of individual states, between collaboration and independence. This balance does not, according to some, exist at the moment, having conferred excessive powers on supranational institutions and thus depriving the nation state of them.

Personally, I don't think that is the case. Precisely because many of the challenges that we are facing and that await us in the future do not stop at national borders. Climate change, migration and digitisation – to name but a few – are global issues that require responses beyond the competence of individual states. It is therefore essential to find global answers without, however, wanting to diminish the importance that the national Parliaments play in the implementation of these answers. It is the Parliaments that have the competence to create the laws, adapting them to the specificities of each country and, above all, it is the national Parliaments that have the direct link with citizenship and have received the democratic mandate from them. National parliaments, however, must be very attentive to the discussions and decisions that are taken in the Council of Europe, reporting and discussing what has been discussed and what has been analysed.

I think that what we have achieved must not, however, lead us to take for granted the achievements we have made and the values we have found. That's why the next 70 years in this community home are so important. We must remain vigilant. The questioning of common principles that underpin democracy is multiplying and gaining ground in many regions. It is not just a question of criticising the European institutional structure, but also of criticising the values which it represents and which we represent. There are more and more people and movements questioning values that should be intrinsic to any modern and democratic society. Values such as equality, equal opportunities, protection of minorities, mutual respect and solidarity. We live in an age in which there are people who want to build visible and invisible walls, real and imaginary, to divide people on the basis of criteria such as nationality, ethnic, religious or social origin, but also gender.

As a representative of a linguistic minority in my country, the Italian minority, I consider myself to be a supporter of minority rights and I have made this a subject in my presidential term. I sincerely believe that our differences should not distract us, but should instead serve to enrich our cooperation. The defence of linguistic and cultural minorities, their recognition, inclusion and participation help to reduce the distance between citizens and institutions. Just as the fight against economic and income inequalities, the fight against poverty

and the strengthening of the rights of women and minorities must be clear priorities that parliaments must have. By giving space to the opinions of others, by recognising international law and by defending democratic mechanisms, we can therefore strengthen confidence in the institutions. I come from a country – Switzerland – where direct democracy plays a central role. However, I am aware and convinced of the importance, also in my country, of involving and making citizens more and more involved in decision-making and public life. This also means, in fact, that information must be accurate and impartial. Coming from a country where direct democracy plays such an important role, I am aware of the need to reflect on how to involve the population more, how to involve the younger generations more in political discussions and decision-making. This anniversary cannot and must not, therefore, be merely a reminder of the well-being of unity and peace found in Europe, but, as we shall be discussing today and tomorrow, also a warning and a hope for the future.

Let us not take for granted what has been achieved, but let us commit ourselves every day to safeguarding and protecting these achievements and above all these common values. Today, tomorrow and for the next 70 years.

That is why, not only in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, not only in these meetings of the Presidents of Parliaments, but also in the National Parliaments, we must increasingly talk about values if we want to give a future to our common home.

Dear colleagues,

In order to face the challenges mentioned above, I think it is also essential to encourage these moments of meeting and discussion, conferences like this one, but also other mutual exchanges. We must try to strengthen the platforms for inter-parliamentary exchange, stressing the importance of the discussions that are held by the Parliamentary Assembly, the discussions and decisions that are taken by the European Court of Human Rights. This exchange is necessary in order to provide answers to the citizens, even in the age of globalisation, by making them understand the importance of multilateralism and the need to have the Council of Europe in the future too, a Council of Europe capable of discussing, analysing the situation and defending the values I spoke of earlier.

On behalf of the Swiss Parliament, it is therefore a great honour to be able to speak here today and to be able to say a few words of introduction to the important debates that we will have this morning, today and tomorrow. Above all, however, it is important for me to stress the importance of the Council of Europe and the work that is being done here, but above all, I would like to thank you for the important work that you are doing to defend the Europe of solidarity, unity and peace. Thank you and let us remember not to take for granted what has been achieved, but let us commit ourselves every day to safeguarding and protecting these achievements.

Thank you.

Mr Andreas NORLÉN, President, Riksdag, Sweden

I've only been in the speaker of the Swedish Parliament for a year now, but I have actually managed to become somewhat historic during this short time. I had the dubious honour of taking care of Sweden's longest process ever of forming a government, which took 134 days. In Sweden, it is the speaker's task to present a proposal for a new prime minister to the Riksdag and it wasn't until the third attempt that I succeeded in getting support for a candidate.

During the process of forming a government, I deliberated with each of the party leaders seven times and they were also having talks with each other. In order to successfully conclude the process, three components were of central importance: negotiation, confidence and broad support. Negotiation to reach political agreements, confidence to enable meetings to take place with an open mind, broad support because our political parties are member-based democratic organisations.

The process of forming a government was thus an example of democracy in practice. When there is no broad support, there is no confidence; when there is no confidence, there is no trust; when there is no trust, democracy becomes weaker. So, a high level of trust in society is of tremendous importance. If we don't rely on each other, the result will be that all relations, transactions and actions will become more expensive, more difficult and more troublesome. So, if people meet corruption, lack of freedom and bad service in society, obviously, they will have no trust in suppliers, no trust in us as elected representatives, and no trust in societal institutions. So, when feelings of trust in democratic governments are undermined, in this way, other forces may take over internal and external enemies of democracy.

So a society built on core values represented by the Council of Europe, democracy, human rights and the rule of law must be founded on the trust of its citizens and such societies, which, in turn, strengthens the trust of the citizens in societal institutions. You cannot build a house and then believe it's finished. Houses need to be renovated and maintained. This is also the case with our common European home.

Values such as democracy, trust and the rule of law are facing challenges in Sweden and in Europe as a whole. Authoritarian regimes are once more gaining ground. Political extremists, of various kinds, are challenging our open societies. Also, in this organisation there are member states where democratic institutions are being weakened or even destroyed. This organisation itself was a few years ago stained by corruption. This shows that we can never take democracy for granted.

The Council of Europe was formed in the aftermath of the Second World War as an association of the democracies of Europe. Let us stop to think for a moment when faced with this simple truth: the democracies of Europe. It was the democratic countries of Europe who came together to create mechanisms that were to safeguard and strengthen the democratic systems of our countries and make them resilient to powers that wanted to challenge and fight democracy. Democracy means not only free and fair elections and the rule of law but also respect for minorities and human rights, such as freedom of expression, academic freedom, freedom to demonstrate and freedom of association.

I think that, while being cautious not to exaggerate too much, one should at the same time be open with recognising the fact that there is a gap between the many states who wish to continue to develop, deepen and strengthen our democratic social model and the few countries where governments do not trust their own people and therefore cannot trust the unit power of democracy.

However, much we want to restart or reset troubled relationships, we cannot pretend that that gap does not exist. Because of this, I cannot stress enough the importance of the tasks of the Council of Europe and the values we defend. We must strengthen these important values and safeguard institutions, such as the European Court of Human Rights. In consolidated democracies, each new generation must be one for the cause of democracy. In the new struggling democracies, we must work tirelessly to strengthen democratic institutions because we care about the citizens of those countries and because it is in the interest of all of us. When the light of freedom in 1989 was lit throughout eastern Europe after more than 40 years of darkness, that light shone across all of Europe.

So, ladies and gentlemen, the rule of law, human rights and development are the tools we have used to build our common European home. They will also be used by the generations to come over the next 70 years and thereafter.

Thank you.

Under the presidency of Mr Richard FERRAND, President of the National Assembly, France

Mr Viktoras PRANCKIETIS, President, Seimas, Lithuania

Europe is strong when it speaks with one voice. I believe that what unity requires is the perception of unanimity, a common identity. This can be built in an active process involving individuals who are not just objects, but rather actors and participants of the process. Today, here in Strasburg, we are the participants of this process, who certify that the values of democracy and human rights are among the key elements of European identity.

We have assembled here to build the Common European Home. Even though the "Common European Home" is a well-worn phrase, it is still quite attractive to many. The question may arise: what is it? Is it a reality, a dream, a myth, or just a joke? More persuasive, at least for me, is the home in common Europe. My country, Lithuania, has recently marked the centenary of its statehood. Soon it is going to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the restoration of its independence. That was Lithuania's return to Europe.

So, what have we managed to build in the last three decades? We can welcome the achievements ranging from free elections, freedom of expression and freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, to gender equality and protection of minorities. Today, none of the Council of Europe member States is applying the death penalty anymore. Lithuania refused it more than 20 years ago. The Council of Europe has carried out a number of important campaigns, including a campaign for child protection, a campaign against hate speech online and a campaign for the Roma, the biggest national minority in Europe.

The Council of Europe is assisting its member States in the fight against corruption and terrorism, and the enforcement of legal reforms. However, we have to take the courage to acknowledge that there have been, and there are still, moments when we have not been equally successful, and discuss what we can do to achieve more progress. For as many as seventy years, this organisation has been building coherence, a philosophy based on shared values and objectives. This coherence is beginning to decay from the inside now, and this represents the biggest challenge for our future in the Council of Europe.

One of the solutions is the renovation of our common home, but this solution would only fit those who believe that Europe can be integral and free. You can find the ones who frequently speak about it but, in fact, there will be few that actually believe in it. Another approach is to build a new common home, but this requires strong will and funding. The third is the easiest, but also the most desperate way: neither redesign nor

renovate, simply legalise what has already been done: current annexations, unsafe power plans and human rights abuses. Is this the way the Council of Europe is choosing now?

We do appreciate the fact that Russian citizens' rights will be further ensured under the European Convention of Human Rights. At the same time, however, we can see the negative consequences of the decision of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Russia's unconditional return. The grounds on which Russia was removed have not been eliminated, though. The Russian authorities are treating this decision as the first step towards the recognition of Crimea as a part of Russia and the lifting of sanctions against it. Together with parliamentarians from other countries, the Lithuanian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has taken a firm stand in defending the values and principles of the Council of Europe, and we stand ready to use all the instruments available within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to make Russia liable for the violations of international law.

The divided approach of the Council of Europe member States towards the issue of the return of Russia to the Parliamentary Assembly has shown that this organisation is not fully united. It has also shown that human rights and democracy cannot be treated separately from security issues. That is why, when the Council of Europe marks its 70th anniversary, our countries must do their utmost to assure that this organisation continues to respond to the interests of the European people.

This can be achieved only by avoiding exceptions and double standards in respect of some members for their non-compliance with the Council of Europe principles. Today, we do not only need a strong overall response mechanism but also clear rules for its application. Sanctions must be applied immediately to the countries that violate the principles of the Council of Europe, the sovereignty of other countries, human rights and democratic values.

May I once again congratulate you all on the beautiful anniversary of our organisation. While recalling the reasons and objectives for which it was established, let us make use of its strengths and build on its achievements, and let us be bold to recognise our mistakes and correct them. Let us build and improve our Common European Home by choosing the way that is complicated but acceptable for all. Europe is strong when it is united.

Thank you.

Mr Ararat MIRZOYAN, President, National Assembly, Armenia

It is a real honor for me to be here today, in the Chamber of the organization that 70 years ago embarked on a fascinating, yet difficult journey of creating a Europe united in its determination to establish societies based on universal system of values with a human being, human rights and democracy at its center.

Using this opportunity, I would like to focus on recent changes and developments in Armenia. The non-violent peaceful revolution that happened in my country last year was purely about democracy, rule of law, human rights, independent judiciary and free and competitive economy. The revolution ended the nightmare era of injustice, systematic corruption, oligarchy, falsification of results of elections etc. Under the strong pressure of citizens, the anti-democratic forces were driven out from power in May 2018. The snap parliamentary elections in December of the same year, which were marked as unprecedented free and democratic by international observers, became the final manifestation of democratic changes designing current features of executive and legislative powers. During this one and a half year we have already managed to initiate some substantial political, economic, judicial reforms making sure that the democratic developments in Armenia are irreversible. However, there still exist some challenges and threats our young democracy is facing and countering that I would like to share with you.

The large scale fight against corruption, investigation of many cases on corruption, illegal enrichment, as well as massive violation of human rights at some point certainly deal with the judiciary system. Unfortunately, some in Judiciary system haven't gone through the process of self-transformation being most probably and presumably themselves engaged in corruption and illegal enrichment (investigations are going on and respect for presumption of innocence doesn't allow me to say more) and/or having strong visible political motivation and political affiliations to the corrupt and antidemocratic forces fully rejected a year ago by the citizens of Armenia.

I am sad to say, but the Constitutional Court of Armenia does not stay apart from these negative processes and in the eyes of people is perceived to be the symbol of the systematic injustice and a last stand of the past regime. The body, which ought to protect the constitution, ensure its supremacy and assure the checks and balances, is acting rather as a group of politically motivated people, deviating from their constitutional mission and consequently being a threat to common democratic values, which unite us under the umbrella of the Council of Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We, the democratic and legitimate Parliament and the Government of Armenia, cannot keep a blind eye to the degradation of rule of law and collapsing of democratic institutions in our country. This situation is an imminent threat to constitutional security and stability which may ruin the new democratic fundament of Armenia if appropriate measures would not be implemented. Unfortunately, there are no proven universal solutions for such situations which we might usually see in transitional societies or young democracies. In some cases, young democracies fail to overcome these kinds of challenges remaining in a trap where literal interpretation of written procedures is underestimating the spirit and philosophy of law.

Anyway, I want to restate that the settlement we will find in Armenia, will be in accordance with incontestable principles of democracy, human rights, institutional values and the spirit of law. Because these are core values of Armenian leadership and Armenian society, and Armenia will definitely continue its way based on these values.

It is a big honour for us to be united with CoE having these values in common and we will stand for them locally, regionally and globally.”

Ms Cristina NARBONA, Vice-President, Senado, Spain

I would like to start by thanking the Council of Europe for having agreed to our membership in 1977, a year before we approved our democratic constitution. What the Council of Europe was doing was showing confidence in the will of the Spaniards to overcome Franco's dictatorship and to commit to the principles of the rule of law and respect for human rights. Spain has indeed come to consolidate its democracy, and Council of Europe recommendations and resolutions are an extremely valuable point of reference as well as a stimulus for the constant improvement of the quality of our democracy.

The documents that we are debating today can only lead us to think about how we, from the parliaments we represent here, can reverse the increasing mistrust on the part of our citizens towards public institutions. I think that we should speak with one voice in replying to those calls and namely that we can remedy the shortcomings in our democracies with more and better democracy. This means that we need to have better information, we have to counter falsehoods, we need to have a system in which truthful information is easily accessible to guarantee participation of citizens in public life. We also need better accountability and we need to make sure that we relieve the inequalities in income and wealth. Particularly, we have to fight against a lack of perspectives among the younger citizens in our societies. We have an increasingly deregulated labour market, in which people's qualifications no longer correspond to the kind of wages they receive. We also have to fully comply with the European social charter and we have to deal with the environmental collapse and planetary limits and in particular, climate change.

So these are global challenges that no country working in isolation on its own, however powerful it may be, can deal with. That is why now, more than ever before, we need to coalesce around this union and diversity which has been the guiding principle of our history here in the Council of Europe and make sure we have greater political integration amongst the Member States of the European Union. A principle that was defended before the European Parliament by Josep Borrell who is the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Vice-president of the European Commission, and he said that if we are united, then we are stronger. But we can only proceed with integration in a gradual and consensual fashion, making sure that we do have multiple speeds within the European Union. We have to recognise that this is a reality. I believe this applies equally to countries that belong to the Council of Europe and we must have one overriding objective, which is to preserve the basic pillars of our common identity.

We have recently celebrated the Council of Europe 70th anniversary and on that occasion, we heard an address by Felipe González who was our prime minister for 14 years. He said that there can be no democracy without respect for the law, but democracy can also reform laws in our constitutions by following established procedures to guarantee the rights of all citizens. I believe this is a particularly relevant observation at a time in which Spain is in the spotlight because certain representatives of a part of Catalan society to impose Catalonia's secession on the majority of the population in defiance of their wishes and also in defiance of the territorial integrity of our country, which is enshrined in our constitution, as it is indeed in many European constitutions. But as I say, there cannot be a democracy if there is no respect for the law on the part of citizens as well as their institutions. But we can overhaul our legislation, and indeed we must, with the greatest possible degree of consensus and this is what we have been able to do in Spain during our political transition.

And that, indeed, is what is happening today. We are closing a chapter. The remains of the dictator Franco are being moved from their outsized monument where they have laid for 40 years and will be buried alongside his wife in the cemetery. There have been major revolutions that are transforming our societies in the 21st century: the empowerment of women, ecological considerations which are absolutely vital for just, safe and sustainable progress, as well as incorporating new technologies and digitalisation and artificial

intelligence. All our parliaments must work together. I am particularly delighted to see the Ibero-American Court of Human Rights consolidate its work and set a good example. And Spain will work alongside the Council of Europe following the mandate that was given in Helsinki. Thank you very much for listening.

Mr Michał SEWERYŃSKI, Vice-President, Senat, Poland

Seventy years ago, our continent, was subject to terrible tragedy with an enormous loss of life in the cruelest war in the history of mankind. And then it was torn in half by Soviet violence, which held its eastern part in the shackles of totalitarian communism. The continent was desirous of peace, freedom and security. And it was this desire that gave rise to the concept of the Council of Europe.

Two French citizens – Georges BIDAULT and Robert SCHUMAN – have translated this desire into practical action, while the Belgian citizen, Paul-Henri SPAAK, initiated the creation of the European Parliamentary Assembly. The plan, not very realistic, to form a supranational European government was fortunately blocked by the British and Scandinavian opposition.

The Council of Europe was therefore born in the Netherlands. It grew and developed thanks to concrete action and enthusiasm on behalf of the French. It took shape following the concept of Belgian parliamentarianism and the old democratic traditions of Great Britain and Scandinavia, while fully respecting the sovereignty of nations. The enslaved nations of the eastern part of the continent were able to engage in this work only 40 years later – after the fall of the Soviet Empire.

The experience we have acquired encourages reflection on the future of Europe. Of course, predicting what's going to happen 70 years from now is more of a task for a fortune teller than for a responsible politician. However, politicians have a duty to identify impending challenges and plan appropriate actions.

I represent Poland, one of the oldest democracies in Europe. Last year, we celebrated the 550th anniversary of Poland's first bicameral parliament. We share various experiences of regional unions with our neighbours: the Polish-Lithuanian union, the Austro-Hungarian union or the Czechoslovak union, all of which are important for understanding the idea of European integration. Our vision of Europe's future comes from three sources: an old democratic tradition, the experience of regional international cooperation based on the principle of "free with free, equal with equal" and, thirdly, the memory of the price we pay for poorly identified dangers.

We know that this is sometimes the highest price. Poland was at one time a great power, and then it ceased to exist. That is a unique experience, so we know something that others cannot even imagine: we know that even if you are a great power, you can cease to exist.

So what are the challenges ahead? Above all, we must effectively resist the change of borders through force and violation of international law. The policy of appeasement is never fair because an aggressor cannot be appeased by concessions. If the aggression brings about benefits and advantages, it will be followed by subsequent aggression, by annexations and finally a great war. In this scenario, in 70 years' time, our European house will be in ruins.

For 70 years, it has been the Americans who have been responsible for the defence of Europe. We Poles are committed to the idea of transatlantic unity. If Europe breaks away from this idea, it will have to bear the cost of its own defence. This will be difficult at the necessary scale, given the fact that European societies are ageing – in both financial and human terms. The European home will, therefore, have to have a solid bridge, even in 70 years' time, linking it to the other side of the Atlantic.

The demographic crisis I've just mentioned – the ageing of Europe – is a challenge in itself. If we do not overcome it, we will cease to be Europe. Someone else will be there to build the European house according to his own architectural style. Even if we still called it "Europe", it would have as much in common with us today as contemporary Egypt has with the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

In order for our common European home to have solid foundations, healthy walls, a leak-free roof, watertight windows and a safe door in 70 years' time, we must meet a few conditions. We must base its structure on the ability to effectively resist aggression. It must operate on the basis of the democratic mandate given by its citizens in accordance with their national traditions and differences. It must renounce the ambitions of pursuing ideological objectives in order to identify the real challenges and the appropriate responses to them.

Let us, therefore, continue to base our European values on Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian axiology. They will be the guarantee of a sustainable and prosperous "European home".

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Alia HATOUG-BOURAN, President, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, PAM

It's my sincere pleasure to be here in Strasbourg to address this high-level conference on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. The topic of discussion is dedicated to "Our Common European Home: the next 70 years". I come from Jordan, I myself from Jordan, and our Assembly comprises today 34 member parliaments of the greater Euro-Mediterranean and Gulf regions, out of which 19 are European States.

Being a Jordanian, I know very well what collaboration means. I know very well what the region and the south of the Mediterranean mean. Being a Jordanian, I speak with credibility when I say that this small country has hosted more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees. So when I'm here talking about the importance of the future and the importance of a unified Europe when it comes to the geopolitical aspects of looking and the relationship between the north and the south, I think this conference and this Assembly is extremely timely to be able to highlight the important points of our strategic relationship to the next 70 years and beyond.

That's why my address will focus on the very intimate and everlasting connection between Europe and southern and eastern neighbours with whom it shares many critical challenges. In addition to peace and security, these include mass migration, vulnerability of energy supply, climate change, poverty, food security, water, demographic trends, youth unemployment, and trade wars.

To ensure the security in our regions and to achieve this, we must all work together to end the conflicts in the Euro-Mediterranean region through political dialogue, and parliamentary diplomacy has proven effects in this field.

The Parliamentary Assembly is extremely concerned about the ongoing situation in northeastern Syria with new massive displacements and the conditions for foreign fighters and their families to escape from detention camps, thereby refuelling wars and multiplying the terrorist threats in our own countries, not to mention the expansion of Isis operating throughout Africa.

Throughout the crisis inside Syria, we have been saying that the most important thing is to stabilise the region and to stabilise Syria. And, you know, we are often asked: what makes a refugee go back home? Is it some statement coming from one politician saying that everything is fine and now, you know, the floods of refugees will be going back? Of course not. A refugee will only go back when he or she knows they're going to be safe, they're going to be living in dignity and they will be part of the future of that country.

This is what PAM is all about and this is why we always have stressed the point of the importance of integration and working together. PAM also believes that the countries should take responsibility for their citizens who joined Isis and repatriate, bear the responsibility and deradicalise these fighters as well as to rehabilitate the undocumented children born under the Isis regime. This is a necessary step to prevent an already foreseeable terrorist threat 5, 10, 20 years down the road.

We all know that the instability in Libya has a profound effect on Europe. By opening rules for irregular migration and resulting in horrible tragedies at sea, Libya is in its current state and has also become a hotbed for terrorism and organised crime, destabilising the entire Euro-Mediterranean region.

I just want to share with you that PAM was in Washington just a couple of weeks ago and we were talking about this issue with the administration, with the White House, and we were saying that the relationship between the north and the south is never in compartment. The relationship between the north and the south has an interrelated, interdependent relationship. It's not a compartment that says: "All these issues they are there just for the south and the north has nothing to do with it", or vice versa. This is not the case. This is the voice of PAM, this is wherever we go, this is the kind of language we speak with each and every nation that we believe we can have a voice for the future of better collaboration.

Thank you very much, I know I have exceeded my time. Thank you.

Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President, Nationalrat, Austria

Today, after 70 years, the Council of Europe with its Parliamentary Assembly is a symbol for the "common house of Europe", as Mikhail GORBACHEV already mentioned in 1989. A Europe based on democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

The year 1989 marked the end of the division of the continent. The civil and dissident movements have made a very significant contribution to this. The names of dissidents such as Václav HAVEL, Lech WAŁĘSA or Andrei SAKHAROV are still light figures of common European history today.

Looking back on the founding of the Council of Europe and the year 1989, it is clear that our commitment to common principles and values demands an attitude; an attitude that must be learned and lived.

The European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights with its legally binding judgments are milestones of democratic development. They are an expression of the indivisibility of human rights, which are non-negotiable for us Europeans. I am proud that the European Convention on Human Rights is included in the Austrian Constitution!

A consistent democratic principle characterises many European societies today in a comprehensive way. This does not end at the gates of our parliaments, but permeates the whole of civil society, from families to schools, from associations to universities. Democracy also means seeking dialogue. I therefore very much welcome Russia's return to the Parliamentary Assembly.

It must be possible to work together to resolve conflicts under the auspices of the Council of Europe. I also see it as an important role for the Council of Europe to become more involved in integrating the countries of the Western Balkans in Europe and bringing the countries of Eastern Europe closer to common European standards.

The Venice Commission's election observations and constitutional expertise are proven tools of the Council of Europe for the development and strengthening of democracy and the rule of law.

Warnings from the Council of Europe about restrictions on fundamental and human rights must be taken more seriously than ever.

Let me pick out three issues on which I am counting on the voice of the Council of Europe in the future:

1. Climate change will change Europe, more than we realise. It is about understanding climate change in Europe as an opportunity to develop new climate-neutral technologies. The Council of Europe will be able to make a contribution to the legal framework.
2. In the field of digitisation, it is already apparent today that the existing legal framework does not adequately cover developments in the digital space. The Internet must not be a legal vacuum. It will be necessary to take action at the European level against hate postings in such a way that an editorial principle applies on the Internet and in the social media, as in the classical media.

There will also be a need for legal action in the development and use of artificial intelligence, and I welcome the fact that the Council of Europe has already started this discussion here.

3. The defence of democracy is a core task of the Council of Europe. The commitment to democracy also includes our resolute action against anti-Semitism and political Islam.

This means that we must reject parallel societies and cannot accept a political Islam that ignores our basic democratic and constitutional values. In the same way, many Austrian and European Muslims wish for a European Islam that will be shaped by a new Enlightenment.

Holocaust researcher Deborah LIPSTADT concludes her analysis of democracy and anti-Semitism:

"Jews are something like the yardstick of society. Whoever attacks them attacks all democratic and multicultural values."

Anti-Semitic incidents in Europe are increasing at an alarming rate. Studies also show that anti-Semitic statements on the Net are becoming increasingly radical. We need broad European anti-Semitism research and not just research into individual right-wing extremist cases.

We must fight left-wing and Muslim anti-Semitism, which is often related to Israel, just as resolutely as right-wing anti-Semitism. We must start with young people and invest in education.

The Council of Europe has experience in the fight against racism, and it has the weight to initiate campaigns and programmes that reach 820 million people.

In the spirit of Europe's historical responsibility, I consider the fight against anti-Semitism and against political Islam to be a duty to which we must devote more attention together.

Dear colleagues,

Let me close with an invitation.

In August 2020, the Austrian Parliament will host the fifth IPU World Conference of the Presidents of Parliament. We want to make the formation of democracy and the fight against violent extremism and hate speech an issue. I hope that this Vienna Conference will send out a strong signal from parliaments for democracy and common solutions.

In this spirit, I look forward to your coming and to seeing you again in August 2020.

Mr Pat The Cope GALLAGHER, Vice-President, Dáil Éireann, Ireland

I'm pleased to be with you today on this special occasion and to have the opportunity to address this Assembly in the year of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

As one of the founding members, we are proud of our commitment to its values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As a member State prepares to leave the European Union for the first time, we've been pushed to take a closer look at the major role that the European project plays in our lives. The sheer scope and ambition of European cooperation have become clearer to many. Ireland has benefited immensely, both in social and economic terms, from our membership of the European Union.

The Union has enriched our relationship with other European countries and continues to enhance our capacity to promote our values and advance our interests on the world stage. Ireland's present and its future lies in cooperation, lies in interdependence and shared problem-solving at the heart of Europe. In turbulent times, we have even been encouraged by the clear evidence that Irish citizens strongly agree with this sentiment.

Recent polling shows that 93% of the people of Ireland believe that we should remain within the European Union. Ireland's National Citizens' Dialogue last year put more people into the conversation. What we heard from our citizens informed Ireland's national statement on the European Union, which set out our government's priorities to the EU strategic agenda for 2019 to 2024. Many of these priorities are now reflected in the strategic agenda adopted by the European Union or European Council last June.

Implementation of the strategic agenda is now key and the responsibility of all institutions. The new agenda strengthens the foundation for the development of the EU that we want to see by 2030. It focuses on the EU as a leader of climate change, deepening, strengthening and, ultimately, completing the single market and ensuring that Europe remains a place where people feel free and feel safe, where their rights are defended and those rights protected.

Together as parliamentarians, we must deliver a strong economic Europe. A Europe that achieves a competitive market for our businesses that creates jobs and improves living standards, while continuing to protect consumers. We must act to deepen and strengthen the single market, particularly in the area of services.

We also need a trade policy. A trade policy that champions liberalisation and opportunity. We need economic and financial policies that are socially responsible and fair to our citizens. Within the Council of Europe, we should all work to deliver the shared values on which the Council of Europe was formed some 70 years ago.

Madame President, to conclude, we've seen many changes in Europe over the past 70 years and no doubt there will be many more in the years ahead as Europe's place in the world is changing. The message from Ireland for the future of Europe is that people want a Europe that is fair: fair to its citizens, fair to the environment and fair in its dealings with the rest of the world. The role of the Council of Europe would be central to achieving these outcomes and Ireland will remain a proud and committed member of the Council of Europe.

Go raibh maith agaibh. Thank you very much.

Mr Gérard LARCHER, President, Senat, France

Allow me to say what a great pleasure it is for me to be here at this European conference. This conference is quite unique and gives us an opportunity to celebrate 70 years of the Council of Europe; 70 years, in other words, devoted to the reconciliation of people and to the defence of human rights in Europe.

In fact, since 1949, Europe has grown through the Council of Europe, or rather, it has returned to its origins. In doing so, it has vindicated General de Gaulle, for whom Europe extended from the Atlantic to the Urals. In a few days' time, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which put an end to this terrible partition of our European continent. It was right here in this rostrum, at Easter, that he said, "Peace is based on the reconciliation of minds."

The "European common house", a word from 30 years ago, has expanded considerably, thus giving tens and tens of millions more citizens in Europe the possibility of finding new protection under the European Convention on Human Rights, which is the pillar of this institution and which restores a jurisdiction whose rulings are binding on all States' Parties.

If the foundations remain solid, the walls of this house are sometimes shaken. The member States where the rule of law itself is sometimes shaken are known. If there is the temptation toward exclusion, we are well aware that this is not the way to progress, which is why I share the Council's approach, which aims to keep the entire European family within it and thus enable millions of people to maintain effective protection of their fundamental rights. But the obligations that derive from membership apply to all States, without exception.

Therefore, after these seven decades spent building a foundation of values, what can we expect for the next 70 years? I believe that if we keep the same energy, the same requirements, then we will have the foundations to maintain and consolidate our building. Of course, we must remain vigilant to ensure that the rule of law remains our common foundation.

Now there are new difficulties on the horizon, related to the new information technologies as well as disinformation. One of the major challenges that democracies will face is the relationship between citizens and information. An evil is spreading: that of growing mistrust of information and traditional media, which is losing credibility. The preference is for rumours, conspiracy and "fake news", which contributes to sowing doubts about our institutions and democracy, which is why, for example, the Senate of the French Republic has taken the initiative to launch a fact-checking website for its own institution.

Another plague of disinformation lies in wait for us: the risk of information being manipulated by third countries. That is why we have taken the initiative -- moreover, in conjunction with our German and Polish friends -- to initiate a symposium entitled "Human Rights and Democracy in the Digital Age".

There is a disconnect that is growing, too, Ladies and Gentlemen, between the global and the local levels, between the centres of power and the territories. This is also a crucial challenge. Local authorities are a space where communities can learn to live together because our local authorities are the cornerstones of our democracies. European history is diverse, but it has been built on the foundations of common values.

Let me borrow the words of a French writer who was also a senator, Victor Hugo, who said the following words a hundred years before 1949, announcing the advent of the United States of Europe that would "crown the old world and give it expression without a gag, conscience without the yoke and truth without the dogma." Victor Hugo's principles may be the challenges for the decades ahead.

Thank you for your attention.

Thank you.

Under the presidency of Mr. Gérard LARCHER, President, Senate, France

Mr Mustafa ŞENTOP, President, Grand National Assembly, Turkey

I would like to greet you all as the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. I attach great importance to this session entitled "Our common European home". While people struggle, they work in order to achieve principles well used, and they then establish institutions for the protection of those values. But, in time, the next generations forget about why those institutions were established in the first place. And they get away from the original perspectives of those institutions. When we look retrospectively, we see that we have forgotten how we set up in the first place. We should ask ourselves whether we are still aware of where we set out in the first place with the establishment of our institutions.

For that reason, I attach great importance to this theme of "our common European home". I believe that this session will not lay the foundations for some good rhetoric only; I believe it will also lay a foundation for some internal evaluations. I will be making a speech as a person from inside of this home.

Distinguished Speakers, European political, institutional and central values and the spreading of these values are not so old actually. When we look at the principles, values, mechanisms and institutions of Europe celebrating the 70th year, 70 years is even less than an average human life. That is why our evaluation of the 70 year will be of so much importance. We have to evaluate what is going on in the world with all the realities of the world. We have to understand what is going on around the world. Otherwise, some colleagues of ours will be making some rhetoric. Using the words of European values, they will be saying something nice but the racism, antisemitism and also xenophobia and islamophobia will rise in Europe, and the wars and massacres will continue in the world. And, also, international terrorism which I believe is sourcing from the West, and which is being used to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries worldwide. And also, this way we will pay the way of what imperialist greedy powers, which will be rushing to the oil, and they will be making the Middle East and the east Mediterranean their headquarters.

Distinguished colleagues, there is a saying I like so much. It goes as follows: "how you learn defines how you remember". How has Europe learned the values that we are talking about in the first place? Heavy colonialism, human trafficking and also the accumulation of capital which was thanks to the black money in the nineteenth century. We are talking about these affairs actually. And the First World War which cost the lives of 20 million people, which was followed by the Second World War which cost the lives of 70 million people because people were greedy for power.

And the vast tragedies, the worst tragedies of humanity, happened in these soils, in the soils of Europe. And the perpetrators of these vast wars are not African people, not people of the Middle East, not Asian countries. The perpetrator is Europe. So we have to think about how Europe has learned in the first place all

these values, they learned it this way, actually through wars. And, this is why, how we learned our values in the first place should guide us in our future activities so that such tragedies will not be experienced around the world again.

Dear Speakers, if we forget about the background, if we do not try to understand what is going on around the world by putting ourselves in the shoes of the other countries in the region, if we do not think that everybody is equal as equal children of Adam and Eve, if we just sit down in the European cities which are placed in glass castles, then we will be out of the game.

First of all we should sincerely believe that European values are values for everybody, we have to believe in that. And these values should not avail for meeting the greedy ambitions of the colonial powers. And these values should not be used as means to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries. We should not be followers of democracy when we like it and we should not throw the hat for coup plotters in some other countries when we like it, and we should stop adopting double standards.

We have people living in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America, not only in Europe, they also deserve democracy. Those people deserve human rights. We shall not preach about democracy and we should not try to preach about democracy while terrorist organizations are trying to separate Turkey. And our belief in European values will have to be questioned if you preach on democracy when a political party, which has been found to be affiliated to a terrorist organization, is shut down, and keep silent and make no comment about the ECHR's rightful verdict in favour of shutting down Batasuna political party. The world is changing, everybody has responsibilities and rights, and at the same time, each state has their rights and responsibilities.

You cannot just say that you make a game and other countries would follow the game. No, if you are living in such a world that it means that you are behind in that game, we cannot have countries around the world which are making decisions in favour of their people only. We have to have a world where everyone can live, actually, not only our own people.

Thank you very much for the kind attention.

Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN, President, Stortinget, Norway

It is a great honor to have the opportunity to address colleagues here in Palais de l'Europe. It fills me with a strong sense of pride, but also of responsibility. I'm proud to represent one of the 10 founding members of the organization that has been a platform for pan-European dialogue and a watchdog for democracy, human rights and the rule of law for 70 years.

At the same time, I feel an immense responsibility to be part of the generation of politicians that has to stake out the way ahead at a time when enthusiasm for the European project and our liberal values is so clearly under pressure. The concept paper prepared for this debate contains several important aspects and questions. I've chosen to address the notion of trust. The constant work to maintain and strengthen trust in democracy is a core task for all of us. If we lose people's confidence we also lose our mandate to make decisions on behalf of the voters. Even more seriously, the voters themselves may lose interest and belief in democracy.

One way to strengthen this trust is by engaging children and young people. If young people believe in democracy, democratic institutions and elected officials, it will go a long way to guaranteeing strong democratic governance in the future. We can do this through genuine debate and by addressing opponents in a respectful way. Children and young people learn about democracy in school, but this is worth little if they cannot learn from our example and experience. It is through democracy in action that positive ideas emerge and are converted into good decisions. Young people need to practice how democracy works, we must offer them skills and confidence to develop into democracy conscious adults.

This is why I, in cooperation with the political youth parties and the Norwegian Children and Youth Council, have launched the "Speak Out" initiative. "Speak Out Now" is a guide for young people on how to take part in and contribute to good and democratic debates. The initiative also includes a guide for adults, it contains five simple tips: how to behave, how to comment and when to comment online, how to create a good debate for everyone, how to respond to threats of harassment and how to always take young people seriously and help them experience a good debate.

This is very basic, so basic in fact that adults should not need a guide. Yet, the many comments about the Swedish girl Greta Thunberg after her speech in the UN, have shown only too well that we need to be reminded of our responsibility. Democracy has a problem if adults do not meet children and young people's engagement and opinions in a sincere manner. They are not lucky, sweet or weak when they enter the debate. They are debaters. No more, no less. And they should be taken seriously just as we should take anyone who debates seriously. This is why I do my best to convince young people around Norway that we take them very seriously and really listen to their views when I have my weekly Skype meetings with them.

Dear colleagues, everything starts at home. Do we genuinely want to build a common European home for the next 70 years? If so, we must do our utmost to safeguard good democratic culture at home. It's our most important contribution. Here, the younger generation is both the key and our hope, and we must not fail them. Thank you.

Mr Viacheslav VOLODIN, President, State Duma, Russian Federation

Of course, it's an opportunity for us today, not only to welcome one another, but to review the work that is done by the Council of Europe. That of course means working on our common errors because in the future we would like to avoid those errors in order for the Council of Europe to really be a common European home in which we can discuss issues on the basis of the principle of equality of Member States; a principle that is set out in the founding texts of the Council of Europe. No double standards, no attacks on the sovereignty of the Member States. If we manage to do all of that and work on that basis, then we'll work effectively together, we'll cooperate together, and we'll take decisions that will subsequently be implemented. And I hope that if there is such dialogue, we can achieve consensus.

Do we manage to do this? Well, unfortunately, not always. And it doesn't always work because on the one hand, we talk about equality but on the other hand, we in fact, apply double standards in many cases and that is not appropriate, it is not correct.

So I would like to take advantage of my presence here at the rostrum to appeal to all of you that we should move away from these double standard approaches, which are very destructive for our common European home. We can't have certain requirements for some and different ones for others. When we talk about the sovereignty of our Member States, well it turns out that this sovereignty does not always take into consideration the traditions, the cultures, the histories of different countries. I mean, we all have our own pasts which are not necessarily the same, and if we all applied the same magnifying glass to the monitoring of individual countries, well that can not work. It will not lead to anything positive.

So, I would like to suggest that we work together on common standards, which are accepted by consensus and if we are going to talk about universal human values, well, it's quite clear that they must be clearly defined, and rigorously followed in all states. If they are to be common values, well, let them be common, but we do represent 47 different states with different cultures, with different histories, with different political regimes. And after these 70 years, I think this is the road that we must follow to ensure a high quality of our work. We need to come up with model laws on issues such as combating terrorism, such as drawing up unified common lists of terrorist organisations. Only then, can we jointly combat terrorism. So, this all needs to be formalised through our joint effort, through harmonisation of our legislation.

And it would also be most appropriate to start with those points that unite us and then work on the ones that divide us only subsequently.

So, the question is whether we can find this way to come together, to be more united. I mean, just recently, in the Parliamentary Assembly an issue was put on the table on the possibility of creating an institute to write a common history. And a little more than 70 years ago, Europe was standing before a dramatic situation and the Soviet Union was a great sufferer in that; 27 million Soviet citizens lost their lives in the Second World War. And 70% of those 27 million were citizens, who would today, if they were still alive, be living in the Russian Federation. The other states that contributed to this great combat with us must remember the fact that we have fathers, grandparents who sacrificed their lives to save us from fascism. So, I think that it would be correct, it would be right, to start with things that should unite us. We need to stop disturbing the graves of those who sacrificed their lives in order that we be able to meet now in peace and security, that we can live in the world we live in today, for ourselves and for our children.

So, I would appeal to all of you to support this simple decision. A very minor decision but let's take it on board. What we see happening is unacceptable. The war affected absolutely every family in the Soviet Union and such a war must never happen again. And those republics that fought with us against fascism, many nationalities, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, Moldovans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, I mean you are all here in the room. We will all be celebrating next year the 75th anniversary of the great victory over fascism and I hope that you will join us in this celebration and that this will be perceived not just as a victory, but also as a day to pay tribute to those who are buried in the earth of almost every European state because they gave their lives to save Europe for us and for our children from fascism.

Thank you.

Mr Andrej DANKO, President, Národná Rada, Slovak Republic

It is my great pleasure to meet with you in Strasbourg where we have convened to jointly celebrate the 70th anniversary of founding the Council of Europe this year. We also mark the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain.

In 1993, the Slovak republic became a full-fledged member of the oldest European political organisation. The Council of Europe was born on the ruins of a war-torn Europe. Its cornerstones were the principles of equality, brotherhood, and also of respecting human, civil and national rights. These principles constitute the foundation of an institution that is respected by all European states, which is reflected in dozens of key international conventions and agreements. European civilisation is rooted in ancient culture which introduced the rule of the people to our continent.

Democracy in Europe is now multifaceted in all of our efforts. We should focus on mankind, on the people. We must understand that, oftentimes, priorities nowadays seem to be given only to the rights of our citizens, forgetting that a citizen of a democratic state has to be acting in a responsible way. We must understand that politics is the art of the possible, therefore, we are obliged to seek ways to tackle problems and challenges faced by Europe today.

The Council of Europe is the platform on which nations can promote cooperation and mutual dialogue. I particularly want to point out the importance given by the member states to the fact that the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe would not be as important had it not had the Russian Federation in its circles.

I am very glad that I could stand here side by side with Mr VOLODIN. During the last five years, the Russian Federation was not part of the Council of Europe but it was not passive. It contributed to the development in Europe and I would like to recall another recent meeting in Kazakhstan, at the recent Euro-Asian summit. It was quite clear to me that the parliaments in Asia are fighting the same issues as we are: climate change, digitalisation, the question of human rights and the like. We believe that it is Russia that could bridge Europe with Asia.

We should learn from the lessons of the past. We should not repeat the same mistakes. The Council of Europe is a very important organisation and it covers a territory stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok. And we can build a common European home on the basis of promoting the rule of law, human and civil rights, and respecting national sovereignty and culture. It is only unity in diversity that may deliver the sought result. Any unification or artificial rules restricting the inherent development of individual national communities will escalate extremism and undermine the principle of international cooperation. I think that the time has come to really think of all the things we have in common: what are our common visions, how we want to develop Europe. The European continent is divided geographically as well as economically, demographically, culturally and linguistically.

Dear Colleagues, we must tackle the existing problems in a pragmatic way, tackle the true problems. A topic that deserves attention at an international level is the digital world. I believe it would be worthwhile if we tried to develop universal rules in order to ensure cybersecurity, in order to have a regulated digital space. The virtual world has become an intrinsic part of our lives. The virtual world should serve us – not we should serve the virtual world. We believe that we need to open up to artificial intelligence. It seems that human rights are not at all protected in the virtual world. I am not referring to censorship, not at all. I think that the time has come to introduce rules in the digital world, in honour of our children, the world we live in, and in honour of future delegations.

By way of conclusion, I appeal to you that we should be better in respecting one another, learning lessons from one another, helping each other. I believe that the advancement of all of our member states is one of the big benefits that we enjoy and this should be based on dialogue, and dialogue is something that ensures progress – it is not war.

Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, President, Hrvatski Sabor, Croatia

First of all, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for hosting this conference. I would also like to wish the best of success to the new Secretary General, as well as to commend my French and Swiss colleagues for their introductory remarks.

Seventy years ago, still in the painful aftermath of the Second World War, here in Strasbourg, our organisation was founded by 10 countries guided by deep reflection on its founding fathers and their vision, courage, wisdom and faith. Firm faith that it is possible to unite peoples around cooperation and sharing of common values that will lead towards a path of reconciliation. Faith in men and respect for their dignity. And this respect for fundamental human rights has been the backbone of our cooperation for all this time.

The construction of the European project has been gradual. As Robert Schumann said, Europe will not be made all at once or according to a single plan, it will be built through concrete achievements, which first create a *de facto* solidarity. And what are these achievements? First and foremost, the unique system of the

European Convention on Human Rights and all related instruments that put the protection of human dignity at the very centre.

In these 70 years, 47 countries have showed their willingness to accept the basic principles and achievements and to be part of European unity. Among them, Croatia. Participation in a range of activities has greatly contributed to the strengthening of democratic standards, to the great benefit of all our citizens. The role of the Council of Europe has been particularly invaluable in light of our efforts made on our path to the European Union, whose presidency we will hold in two months' time.

Dear colleagues, today we are witnessing a number of challenges, not only global but also on the European continent itself. All these challenges have direct consequences on building Europe in partnership and we have to address them jointly, because only European-wide solutions can bring a positive result in the future. Protection of common values and principles has to be at the core of our actions in order to preserve the European project. The role of the Council of Europe is therefore more important than ever before. Protection of the highest European values must not be compromised under any circumstances and that is where the primary responsibility of the Member States lies.

Croatia is very determined because Croatian citizens have paid a high price defending those values and principles. Through continuous and constructive dialogue and joint action, we can avoid divisions and preserve unity. And it is precisely these divisions that have led us into the simplistic trap of populism and criticism of all that has been so carefully constructed until now. It has led us into the mistrust of citizens on the ability of the European institutions. Therefore, we should all learn our lessons and find strength and responsibility, design the right policies and lasting solutions that our citizens could support.

Thanks.

Mr Henn PÕLLUAAS, President, Riigikogu, Estonia

Estonia became the member of the Council of Europe in May 1993 but already in 1960 the Consultative Assembly of the CoE commemorated the anniversary of the annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the special resolution condemning the brutal act of the Soviet Union.

Estonia has gained significantly from the membership of the Council of Europe. We have invited Council experts to consult our legislative process after regaining our independence, and thus, ensured that our laws are in full accordance with international norms. Estonia was the first among central and eastern European countries to successfully close the PACE monitoring mission back in 1997.

Ladies and gentlemen, that being said, allow me to return to the Parliamentary Assembly session in June when the voting rights of the Russian delegation were restored by the Assembly. With this act, PACE overruled the fundamental principle of the Council of Europe: protection of the universal human rights.

The war is still waged in the heart of Europe. People are still hurt and killed in violent action. Russia has committed aggressive acts against Ukraine and refrained from following internationally negotiated guidelines to resolve the conflict. We need to keep the pressure on perpetrator and demand the violations of the basic human rights in eastern Ukraine to cease. Every international organisation is created on a foundation of mutually agreed rules and standards. This agreed framework of international law is supposed to provide us with a certain safety net of trust, applied universally by every Member State. The equality before the law encourages a small state to instinctively trust the principle of rule of law and believe in active international cooperation. This trust can be easy to lose.

Russia's systematic aggressive demonstration of lack of respect of international law and UN Charter signals desire for conflicts and instability. Destabilising behaviour affects not just neighbouring states but the whole Euro-Atlantic area.

The Parliamentary Assembly decision in June did not do justice to the countries facing aggression by their neighbour or trying to solve the frozen conflicts. We have seen an increasing number of conflicts related to Russia. For example, Transnistria or Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine.

The Parliamentary Assembly June decision encourages the bully to reach further to grab more. By changing the rules, the Assembly lost its ability to put pressure on countries that violate our common rules. Inability to counter aggression and neglecting the breach of law undermines trust in organisation and cooperation in general. Yet, we cannot afford to weaken the European security situation. We are under obligation to consolidate our common European home. Nobody is going to do it instead of us.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Estonia is a democratic state with a law-abiding society and for us the principle of sticking to rules is a fundamental value. We recognise the importance of the PACE as a unique form uniting 47 different countries. Estonia remains an active member of the Council of Europe because only then developments can be effectively influenced by both word and deed. Estonia does not act alone. Together with colleagues from like-minded countries, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Ukraine, Poland and the United

Kingdom, we continue to coordinate our next steps.

Dear colleagues, the Council of Europe at 70 is so much more than celebrations, it is a call to action. Forty-seven plus nations deserve a safe and tidy home.

Thank you.

Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, President, Il-Kamra Tad Deputati, Malta

First of all, I would like to extend my greetings to you all for today's Part Conference, and also for the organizing of this meeting. Well, the Council of Europe can boast of many achievements during the past 70 years. To make our home, as we can say, of which we enjoy the freedoms of fully developed democracies and also enjoy rights which our forefathers could only dream of.

Many colleagues have already touched, we heard them today also, upon many of these. For example, the phasing out of the death penalty in Europe and the success of the European Court of Justice and of Human Rights are only two of the most, I would say, venerated examples of such accomplishments. However, despite these achievements, it is inevitable for the Council of Europe to experience setbacks along the way. And we had setbacks. Even seasoned diplomats would agree that balancing different national rights, while trying to find common ground, is no easy feat, especially when certain issues seem to fall in diametric opposition sides between different parties.

However, in order to safeguard institution relevance in today's world, in this modern world, it is of utmost importance to address these challenging and difficult issues and, as we say it, you take the bull by its horns. No matter the potential criticism one could face, we have to do this. Avoiding complicated issues has never, and I repeat, has never resulted in peaceful resolution. On the contrary, when conflicts remain ignored and neglected, their intractability increases substantially, as the parties involved become more entrenched in their positions. This is why I agree with the speech which was done by the new Secretary General, Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ, about the need for more dialogue to preserve multilateralism.

While multilateralism is increasingly being contested, it is the bedrock of the fight for Human Rights. As the speaker of the parliament of Malta and a citizen of course on my own rights, I stand firm in the belief that parliaments are central for the protection of Human Rights in democratic states. In fact, in the Parliament of Malta we are already in the process of establishing a Human Rights and equality commission, which will be responsible for the promotion and protection of Human Rights, which will only be accountable to parliament in order to perform its functions with impartiality and with complete independence. So parliaments are protectors of Human Rights, by their own very nature, the way they behave, the way they act, as they work for the good of the people, they represent the people. And the Maltese Parliament welcomes and supports all bilateral and multilateral efforts to promote democratic and rule of law structures and an independent judicial system worldwide. We know, dear colleagues, that we politicians need to come in terms with the fact that in fact real conflicts will not only be solved overnight, nor with a swift ink signature on the paper by a pen. That is not the solution.

The peaceful resolution of conflict takes time and patience. So, we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of this Council of Europe, we have to be reminded that it is the job of each and one of us to break down barriers, whatever they are, between conflicting parties, to lead the way through dialogue. Address uncomfortable issues in the hope of resolving deep-rooted and long-standing disputes. This is our role, this is the role of the Council of Europe and we have to do this. If we don't do this, we are not leading by example.

So, I have to conclude, that while we may not always agree with what we have done, what we did here in the Council of Europe, with the decisions that were taken here, however lest we forget the successes of the Council of Europe are the successes of the Member States as well.

Thank you very much.

Mr Dmytro RAZUMKOV, President, Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine

This year's conference is a landmark event for many reasons. It provides a great opportunity to sum up and evaluate the achievements of the Council of Europe as an international organisation on the 70th year of its existence and to try to understand the root causes of some of its failures.

Times have changed along with the context of international relations, but the values and principles laid down by the founding fathers of the Council of Europe remain today as relevant as ever. Mentally, my country has always belonged to the European home of free nations. The citizens of Ukraine have paid a high price for protecting the values of the democratic world.

This year, Ukraine has witnessed a national game-changer ushered in by free and democratic elections. Our new government team has received a tremendous amount of trust from Ukrainian citizens. Ukraine has shown that citizen-wide engagement in political life is possible, as is the active inclusion of young people.

As representatives of Ukraine, it makes it possible for us to save Ukrainian citizens and address their needs. As the speaker of the newly elected parliament, I can ensure that the new Ukrainian government is aware of its enormous responsibility for the future of Ukraine. Therefore, we are fully committed to efforts aiming to reform our country. Last week, we recapped the first 50 days of our parliament's work. During that period, we had been able to lay the needed legal groundwork for further reform, which is so much expected by our people.

Dear Members of national delegations, almost a quarter of a century ago, Ukraine joined the Council of Europe and thus became part of this club of democratic nations. This period of our membership has been rather complex. However, the Council of Europe has always remained an important international platform for finding common and timely responses to the challenges of the times.

Ukraine is concerned about the undermined efficiency of the key Council of Europe bodies, due to the abolition of the right to oppose effective sanctions on those member states that neglect their commitments and pursue a systemic and determined policy that disregards human rights. Double standards which unfortunately sometimes become part of the day-to-day decision-making process in the Council of Europe call into question the value system of this organisation.

The decision by the permanent delegation of the Verkhovna Rada not to attend the session of the PACE was motivated by a protest against the unconditional return of the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly without implementing any of this organisation's seven resolutions concerning the continued armed aggression against Ukraine. This decision is a response to the total and systematic violations of human rights by the aggressor in temporary occupied territories. Moreover, the situation related to the credentials of the Ukraine delegation has set a dangerous precedent – the consequences of which are difficult to foresee at this moment.

Ukraine is concerned that the organisation is showing a weak response to consistent patterns of human rights violations in some countries. Even though the very issue of human rights together with access to the European Court of Human Rights was the main argument used to justify the return of the Russian delegation, our country, together with other states, isn't ready to put up with attempts to damage the credibility of the Council of Europe.

Dear Colleagues, in my opinion, the next 70 years of the Council's existence should go under the motto of "returning to the ideals and principles dating to the time of its inception". As history shows, compromises with conscience have always ended badly. Our consistency with principle must be unbroken if we are to strive for the promotion of international law as the utmost value.

Ukraine has undertaken to protect the Council of Europe, including the Parliamentary Assembly from the negative consequences of the double-standards policy and to preserve it as a pan-European platform for setting the highest standards, not only for human rights, democracy and the rule of law but also for pan-European security.

The territorial ambitions of some member states have cast a shadow over the peaceful future of our peoples. Historic opportunities to strengthen peace and stability on the continent are repeatedly lost.

The only guarantee for free and democratic development, the establishment of the European space as a vast area of democratic security, is the willingness to ensure – not in words but in reality – respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic freedoms.

Therefore, the basis for the development of Europe for the next 70 years should be the concept of democratic security by implementing the principles laid down in the European Charter on Human Rights. Without democratic values, there can be no stable and mighty Europe. The failure to respect human rights gives rise to aggression, which endangers the whole world.

Unfortunately, it is not enough just to point to the problem. And I'm sure that the national parliaments which do not uphold standards related to human rights, the rule of law and principles of good neighbourly relations, peaceful coexistence and inviolable borders should feel the effects of such wrongful conduct. I'm convinced that the restoration and respect for democratic values should become a predominant topic of further debate within these walls.

Thank you.

Mr Talat XHAFERI, President, Sobranie, North Macedonia

Allow me, on behalf of the members of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, and on my own behalf, to congratulate everyone on the marking of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Europe. The leading Human Rights organization of the continent, with 47 European Member States, which aside from being in the same continent have one more important thing in common, that is, they are signatories of the European Convention on Human Rights. This is actually a treaty for the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Republic of North Macedonia has been a Member State since 1995 and has been actively cooperating with all the bodies of the Council of Europe during that time. Many changes have taken place since the establishment of the Council, both politically and geographically. One can truly say that the original idea of Europe as a common home of all has now spread beyond the borders of the European continent. And, why not, when the principles proclaimed by and underlined by the work of the Council, are those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Organization representing nearly all of the world's states.

The world we live in today differs from the one in which the Council was founded, but the fundamentals are the same, democratic and essential. And those are the rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms. Therefore, all people, without exception, have the right to a free, dignified life without being denied the right to life, movement, learning, working and creating, the exercise of rights and fair and equal treatment before judicial authorities and state institutions. In order for this to happen, it is necessary to respect the democratic rights and principles that have long been established and accepted by states signatories of international conventions.

However, the most important thing is that this is respected and practiced by all. Because, in reality, all of us as human beings, as individuals, have our own traits, characteristics, aspirations and desires. Sometimes realistic, sometimes unrealistic, but it is important that they are based on shared values and principles. Let us not allow divisions, let us not have second and first-class citizens, because feeding those demons, supporting new self-centred and self-willed leaders, who will outweigh the common good to achieve their egoistic goals will not bring anything good for anyone. Differences are beautiful only when they are part of a puzzle that compresses the whole picture, without lines of division and discord, otherwise the picture will be gloomy and sad, full of pain that I know young generations are unaware of and, hopefully, they will never know.

However, all of us who have once tasted the bitterness or experienced it, or have been talked about it by our fathers or grandfathers, we have a moral obligation not to let it be felt by either the present or future generations. We have an obligation to teach them to live together, with each other, not next to one another. To sympathise with the joy but also with the pain of the other. Because, first of all, and above all, we are citizens of this world which, no matter how complex and difficult it is, if we establish all the true values of mutual respect and understanding, can be very simple and beautiful.

And this was precisely the purpose of establishing the Council of Europe, to unite diversity, to respect particularities, but also to find a common platform to develop and promote cooperation and understanding between states and people in order to create a more beautiful common home for all. A home in which everyone will feel equal and protected without national, religious, economic, social, cultural, gender, sexual or any other discrimination. A world in which everyone has an equal opportunity for education, healthcare, to work, and create a world where everyone has the right to a clean environment and clean air. Is there anything more beautiful than satisfied citizens who feel their country as their home, who work and contribute to its progress and development?

Distinguished, the Republic of North Macedonia, its citizens, its state and public institutions, the political actors from the government and opposition, the NGO sector and all human potential have always been consistent with the ratified Universal Convention for Human Rights and Freedoms. Even through all the turbulent times that have been an integral part of the Balkans, the same have been incorporated to the constitution of the country since its independence and are fully respected, as it is a guarantee of peace at home, of security in the region and beyond in the world.

The Republic of North Macedonia has been working hard to promote strengthened good neighbourly relations because we believe that together, as regions, we can send multiple lessons of unity and power.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe you are all already aware of the latest developments regarding our expectations for getting a date to start accessing negotiations with the European Union. Something that unfortunately failed to happen despite the several successive reports that noted the positive progress of the Republic of North Macedonia. If you ask the question, whether the arguments for not getting the date are based, I will not comment. But if you ask which path we will follow, we will follow the path for integration into the European Union. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the attention.

Mr Ogtay ASADOV, President, Milli Mejlis, Azerbaijan

Seventy years ago, the farsighted individuals who laid the foundations of the Council of Europe found out that the way to avoid the repetition of the horrors of World War II, Fascism and Stalinism, is to unite European nations in a common home surrounding their common values. They rightfully declared that the most effective means of achieving greater unity in Europe is establishing the principles of freedom, democracy, and protection of human rights and the rule of law. During the past period we have made amazing progress in the field of protecting and developing European values. Important steps have been taken to implement ideals that are the common goals of the European nations.

This period has also shown that, just like 70 years before, there is no alternative to democratic development today. Therefore, the promotion, support and protection of democracy are now the rights and responsibilities of every European state. Naturally, a particular responsibility in this area falls upon the institutions we represent. A parliament based on gender balance that is reflected on the whole spectrum of political forces, trends and ideas existing in society and considerate of ethnic diversity, is a true school of democracy and political culture. By adopting laws that meet modern standards, parliament insures the implementation of political freedoms and establishment of the rule of law.

Coming to the republic of Azerbaijan that I represent here today, I can tell you that our country has been a member of the Council of Europe for 19 years now, and is actively involved in the activities of various organizations. Azerbaijan has honoured the vast majority of the obligations and commitments undertaken when joining the Council of Europe, and has made significant progress towards building a democratic society based on the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

Today, Azerbaijan has become a party to more than 70 conventions and agreements of the Council of Europe. The last instrument that our country joined was the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. This document, known as the Lanzarote Convention, has been ratified by the Milli Majlis on these days. Azerbaijan is ready for constructive dialogue and cooperation with the Council of Europe institutions including the Parliamentary Assembly on the outstanding issues. In this regard, we can mention with satisfaction the consistent measures undertaken within the context of implementation of the Council of Europe action plan for Azerbaijan, covering the years 2018-2021.

Dear colleagues, today, the issues have been added to the list of problems that had forced our continent to unify 70 years ago. This includes terrorism, illegal migration, religious intolerance and extremism, xenophobia, islamophobia, ethnic separatism and violation of state sovereignty. The challenges of the modern era raise serious doubts above the possibilities of addressing the problems of democratic development within the paradigm that was established in the past. I believe that in the future the Council of Europe should base its activities on the principle of indivisibility of security and raise the following issue: a unified approach to security problems that pose a threat to the democratic values system should be formed before the challenges for democratic development are accumulated and increased further.

I am specifically speaking about the need to prevent ethnic separatism, nationalism and attacks on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. The reason for this is clear, for more than 25 years, 20% of Azerbaijan's territory, that is the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, have been occupied by Armenian armed forces. Ethnic cleansing accompanied by ruthless genocide acts was carried out in the occupied regions as well as the territory of Armenia. One million Azerbaijanis have been expelled from their home lands and their fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights have been grossly violated. Similar problems exist in some other European countries as well, and the political and humanitarian consequences, as well as the threat for the reignition, undermine our collective efforts to build strong democratic inclusive societies. We have always based our appeals on the following point: an attack on the security of the State means an attack on democracy and the rule of law. Moreover, we wanted to bring our European colleagues attention to an attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one of the member states of the Council of Europe, who seeks to achieve greater unity among the inhabitants of Europe, must be regarded as an attack on our entire union and values. We carry individual responsibility as countries and collective responsibility as the Council of Europe, which has been considered as a locomotive of democracy in the world to overcome many threats to the centuries of European old values.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr Gramoz RUÇI, President, Kuvendi, Albania

As a representative of a small and peripheral country of today's Europe, I have more reasons to imagine the dreams of small countries like Albania coming true.

Those countries that are all living under the roof of 47 members' common home, named Europe, are still some outside and some at the threshold of the 27-28 members' family, named the European Union. Today Europe is the world's most beautiful place. The development programmes and scenarios in the last 70 years have made the continent less conflictual and, of course, more solidary.

However, our Europe remains the continent of asymmetries. I believe that, in the coming decades, Europe will have solved many of them. My first conviction is that in the next two or three decades, the European family will be inside the European home. Europe will suffer less from the consequences of asymmetries between the super-developed North and developing South trying to reach North.

Europe's peninsulas, Scandinavia, the Iberian peninsula, the Apennines and the Balkans will no longer be so different in terms of development rates, competitiveness, prosperity levels and contribution to peace. The people of the Balkans will no longer need Scandinavian negotiators to calm down among themselves. Southeast Europe as a concept will probably not exist anymore because the differences that gave rise to this notion will have disappeared or, at least, greatly mitigated.

Western Balkans will no longer be the "black sheep" for the European leaders but will be an additional value of the big European common family. Europe's cultural and political boundaries will become less considerable and will probably comply with geographical boundaries. For those who will convene in this same palace after 70 years, the reasons for keeping religious conflicts alive, of course, will have mitigated. The European statesmen and politicians would just have to follow the model of religious coexistence my Albania provides. European leaders will no longer argue over whether or not to accept immigrants. The large European economy will produce beds for everyone, and citizens from other continents will not be stopped in Lampedusa.

So we all will face other enemies, such as climate change, environmental degradation, population ageing, cyber insecurity, technological risks, etc.

Honourable Colleagues,

Churchill, Schumann, de Gasperi, Adenauer, Spaak and Beyen – rather than dreaming of it – they contributed to the construction of the European common home. We and the generations to come should follow their example. I thank you.

Under the presidency of Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Mr Constantine TASSOULAS, President, Vouli Ton Ellinon, Greece

I am called upon to speak as a politician – not as a prophet – and, as such, I will talk about what must be done in the next 70 years and mainly what the priority is. As you will see, this priority unites the two themes of our conference.

So, I am not a prophet, besides, it is well established that it is difficult to make predictions, especially on the future. The Council of Europe was born 70 years ago, after the horrors of the Second World War, to defend human rights in the European continent. The European Convention on Human Rights is the foundation of the European legal culture. It was followed by the European Court of Human Rights to ensure compliance of the member states to the binding nature of the court.

With the European Social Charter, the Council of Europe supports social rights and with the Venice Commission, it strengthens the rule of law. All these achievements I've just described would not have been easily predicted 70 years ago because they are literally unprecedented; however, now this chapter allows us to be optimistic about the next 70 years.

Our main objective in the immediate future is to address the vital challenge of climate change. If we don't do that, there is no point to any programme on well-being, on economic progress, on innovation and education, or new competencies in local administration. If the protection of the natural environment is not immediate and sustainable – that is, if we don't implement the Paris Agreement and the UN Agenda 2030 – then we will be deprived of the framework within which we usually shape the story of our lives, taking it for granted as assailable and infinite.

Can we do that? We have done it in the past. In October 1971, a particularly inauspicious message was sent out to humanity. It said the following: "After the year 2000, life on Earth will be almost impossible. A rapid population growth before the year 2000 will be followed by a dramatic, sharp decline due to food shortage and the impact of environmental pollution on humans." This was a conclusion of 17 leading MIT scientists, under Dr Dennis MEADOWS, and they came to this conclusion in the report "The Limits to Growth".

The Dutch commissioner of the then European Economic Community, Sicco Mansholt, read the report and was very concerned. He is known as the father of the Common Agricultural Policy. In February 1972, affected by this MIT report, he sent a letter to the chairperson of the executive committee of the EEC, Franco María MALFATTI, in which he suggested way for Europe to intervene to prevent the foreseeable disaster in 2000. We know today that Europe has addressed and preempted the predictions of the world's largest computer at the time. We know that both the food crisis and the demographic decline were both prevented. It is therefore proven that Europe, with political decisions, has prevented the worst by tackling these serious crises.

Is, however, climate change on a par with the 1971 food crisis? It is clearly a much bigger problem, but we do have the knowledge and the objectives ready and voted on. What we need is democratic and political will. Greece, for example, already ardently supports the strategic long-term vision for an EU economy that will not burden the climate by 2050. We have already fulfilled the goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Until 2030, we plan to produce 35% of our electricity from renewable sources, shutting down all ignite based power units by 2028. And as of 2021, we will ban single-use plastic.

I come from a region of northwestern Greece, called Epirus. My village is Dodona, where the oldest oracle of Ancient Greece was located. It was dedicated to Zeus the King of Gods. From the 8th century BC all the way to the 4th century AD, this oracle – for 12 centuries – answered questions posed by laymen but also by leaders. Will my child be healthy? Will my debtor repay me? Will the harsh winter pass? Should I marry Fenomeni?

Up to the 4th century BC, people expected their god to free them from their anguish. At the time, a significant shift took place and religious Dodona became political as well. An assembly was established in Dodona where laws were passed and where local citizens decided on their lives and they didn't just expect God to do things for them.

This is why I chose the subject on "the next 70 years, not because my village had an oracle but because it had an assembly.

This way, similarly, in this significant and esteemed European Assembly, I can finally predict that, yes, in the next 70 years as well, our common European home will be solid, that the Council of Europe will be at the helm of environmental protection, which is proving to be the primary human right of our time.

Thank you.

Ms Ināra MŪRNIECE, President, Saeima, Latvia

I would like to start by congratulating all of us on the 70th anniversary of our organization. Also, let me thank the President of the Assembly for organizing this conference, that indeed opens an excellent platform for debate. Over the last 70 years, the Council of Europe has been a unique standard-setting organization in the field Human Rights, rule of law and democracy. The unique individual human rights protection mechanism provided by the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the work of different monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe have prompted major legal and structural changes across Europe. However, we also know that it is easy to destroy something that has been built over the years.

Unfortunately, today we witness that the unity of the Council of Europe has been challenged, its core values and principles undermined and the authority of the Parliamentary Assembly has been compromised and weakened. How did we get there? There are a number of events that have contributed. The illegal annexation of Crimea, the military conflict in Donbass and the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the flagrant interference with the freedom of speech and assembly, repression against journalists, political opponents, human rights defenders... have clear negative effects on the functioning of the Council of Europe. Failure to address these issues has contributed to the loss of trust of our people in the organization. Moreover, the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly on the unconditional return of the Russian delegation to the PACE caused doubts on the credibility of our organization.

The resolution was adopted in circumstances where the military aggression by the Russian Federation in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea has continued, and Russia had not made any steps towards conflict resolution in Ukraine and Georgia. Thus, the resolution manifestly disregarded the previous PACE resolutions condemning the grave violations of international law committed by Russia. It is also important to recall why Russia's voting rights were suspended in 2014. It was in response to the first annexation of the territory of a sovereign state since the end of the Second World War.

Therefore, Latvia and other like-minded countries, the Baltic plus group, voted against the resolution and demonstrated a clear position by leaving the Assembly's June part session, not participating in the Assembly's autumn part session and refusing to attend the celebration of the organization's 70th anniversary. The group has an objective: to re-establish the credibility of and confidence in both the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe. Latvia will continue the policy of non-recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and condemnation of its aggression in Ukraine and Georgia. It is a joint responsibility of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Member States to follow closely and make sure that all Member States comply with international law, their Council of Europe commitments and the respective assemblies' resolutions. National parliaments must play a key role in this process.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Ivan BRAJOVIĆ, President, Skupština, Montenegro

This year, we mark the 70th anniversary of founding the Council of Europe as well as the 30th anniversary since the fall of the Berlin wall, which hailed the end of the dividing lines in Europe. During these 70 years, through common desire and effort, European states have built an enormous legal key based on the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

By promoting the idea of the common European home, as well as the vision of ourselves within that home, I want to emphasise that throughout its history – and especially in the last 13 years since the renewal of its independence – Montenegro has cherished common European values. These are the values of respect for differences, equal opportunities and, above all, promoting long-standing peace.

Montenegro maintains its pro-European course through the engagement of its institutions in all its entire society in the accession process, in particular of the parliament of Montenegro, which plays an important role in the harmonisation processes with the EU acquis. The focus is placed on the quality of reforms, on the constant transformation of society and the improvement of all institutions guaranteeing political security and economic stability.

In this process, where I would like to point out the importance of international parliamentary cooperation, it is important to know that all Montenegrin parliamentary parties support membership of the EU. This clearly and sufficiently speaks to the commitment of the citizens who elected them and who expected a clear European perspective for their country.

The parliament of Montenegro, through its active work, contributes to the improvement of the political and socioeconomic environment by continuously communicating with institutions, citizens, representatives of the media and civil society and international organisations operating in our country. This is also evidenced by the fact that, in the wide range in research, the Montenegrin parliament in several years has been continuously recognised as the most open in the region.

These days, the parliament of Montenegro – by working on constant improvement of the electoral environment – does a social consensus of all elective representatives of the citizens with regard to their commitment to further democratisation of society through the institutional strengthening of the rule of law.

I'm convinced that within our common challenge, where the OSCE and the European Union provide us with immeasurable support, a responsible understanding of the needs of society, openness and readiness for cooperation will be the dominating political needs. Coming from the parliament, which is considered the most open in the region, I will be free at this exceptional parliamentary gathering to mark the understanding, openness and willingness to cooperate as keywords in the success for interparliamentary cooperation, as well as the cooperation of the EU members states and future members.

And I will not consider it coincidental that Mikhail Gorbachev promoted the idea of a common European home in his speech in 1989 at a Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. We witness that this visionary idea expressed here in this Parliament has survived these 30 years and gained its historic transformation.

Montenegro and Western Balkans believe in the vision of belonging to a united Europe. This is why we think that precisely this topic of a common European home is an opportunity to talk about the enlargement of the EU, because the Western Balkans is undoubtedly a part of the future of a strong, stable and united Europe.

In Montenegro, which has long been a leader in meeting criteria and a major promoter of the Union's values, we believe that discouraging enlargement messages from some European countries do not support the further democratisation of the Western Balkan countries nor the European stability. Such messages encourage only populist movements within states and also open doors to political influences that no one among us here considers desirable.

So, in the end, I would like to send the following message: citizens of Montenegro are true Euro-enthusiasts. We believe that in the following decades, the following common European values and interests will be even stronger.

We also believe that awareness will be raised for the needs of our common European home – which was built on sound and strong foundations – to be strengthened internally but also enlarged with new members. Montenegro sees itself in this home as a productive, useful and loyal member to be welcomed as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Ms Borjana KRIŠTO, President, Predstavnicki dom, Bosnia and Herzegovina

It is my great pleasure and honour to speak today on this item which I believe will contribute to strengthening our mutual ties on the path to understanding and bringing closer the peoples and countries we represent. The multilateral meetings of the parliamentarians are not only a formal form of expression, but an opportunity for a substantive debate on all key issues for the further development of relations, in this case among the member states of the Council of Europe. This oldest international organisation of European states in its 70 years of existence has certainly made a major contribution to the improvement of parliamentary democracy, to respect for human rights and the establishment of the rule of law in Europe, which are certainly the basic roles based on which it was founded in 1949. It is on these fundamental principles and values of the Council of Europe that over the past seven decades, we have succeeded in making of Europe, which was an area of open conflict and intolerance, an area of cooperation and prosperity based on a common interest. Of course, we can always rightly ask ourselves if we are satisfied with our achievements and whether we could do more and better. But if there hadn't been that transformative power of European process, today, we would not be in the position to talk about, I would say, the biggest contributions of this organisation, namely the European Commission on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as a number of international treaties that were concluded under the auspices of the Council of Europe on human and social rights, media, freedom of expression, education, culture, cultural identity, cultural diversity, sport, local authority, health and all legal, regional and national cooperation.

It is obvious that today Europe is increasingly facing the challenges of globalisation, accompanied by various crises, from the financial, economic, democratic to the migrant crisis, the dialogue is certainly a powerful instrument for addressing all the challenges of the day because this is the only way we can unite our own efforts in the defence of common values.

The country from which I come and which I represent is structured as a state of three, constituent people: Croats, Bosniaks, Serbs and of other citizens who live in the country which functions under the International Peace Agreement, Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Due to this specific nature of Bosnia-Herzegovina's internal organisation, the dialogue and the understanding of the issues that are crucial for Bosnia and Herzegovina's functioning and its move towards Euro-Atlantic integration are of the utmost importance. Therefore, the most important questions that arises in our reform and integration plan is precisely the changes in the electoral legislation in terms of applying the basic democratic standards through the respect of the democratically expressed political will of all three constituent people. Therefore, I know very well the value of compromise, dialogue and consensus in order to build better relations and shared values. It is only through dialogue that we can maintain and improve the common values and principles of the Council of Europe as our common heritage.

It is just in this way that we will be able to think about trust in the European institutions and to talk about the future of the Council of Europe. Thank you for your attention.

Ms Maja GOJKOVIĆ, President, Narodna Skupština, Serbia

This year will mark an important jubilee, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Europe, and in this context, I would like to emphasise that I am glad that Serbia is a part of the community of European nations that advocate democracy, foster democratic institutions, rule of law and the respect for Human Rights. Serbia has been a Member State since 2003, not only because it is in the heart of Europe geographically, but because it is committed to universal values within the Council of Europe and to the European integration process. And, because of this, the European home may not be complete without Serbia. The European home's commitment to multilateralism is the best way to avoid conflict and ensure democratic security for all citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, all the horrors of the Second World War that devastated Europe indicated the necessity of founding an institution such as the Council of Europe. For us, in the Balkans, the horror of the civil war in 1990s that shattered our common state at the time is now behind us. But we need to remember the past so that it does not repeat again. More importantly, we need to look towards the future together. Common values and institutions such as the Council of Europe need to unite us in building up a robust and free Europe. The Republic of Serbia is, because of this, particularly committed to finding sustainable solutions through cooperation and dialogue at the regional level.

In this connection, we emphasize the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's neutral position with regard to the Kosovo and Metohija issue, and observance of the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1244. Respecting common and original values, includes also active advocacy and taking some concrete steps. For Serbia, it includes not only application of Conventions but also practical cooperation towards strengthening institutions as well as full activity of our delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe towards advocating our founding values.

In the wider regional framework, it is always worth recalling to what extent the European integration process has contributed to increasing safety in Europe. The enlargement policy is one of the most successful policies

in the European territory. It is an example of a concrete work towards the preservation of common values, which is why it is important to continue with its implementation.

For 70 years now the Council of Europe has been decisively defending a democratic and free Europe. This free and democratic Europe, in which the rule of law is respected and Human Rights protected, is our common home that we must defend against all challenges so we can leave it even stronger for next generations. In this regard, we may not only speak about expectations for the future, because expectations will not be fulfilled on their own. We need to be active in achieving our goals, with a view to keeping our common values.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are numerous challenges ahead of us in this modern turbulent world. Only together can we tackle all these challenges. I think that it is notably important for us to believe in our common organization and particularly to trust each other. Our commitment is to protect our common legal instruments, democracy and the respect of rights. We are all different here, and this diversity should be protected and appreciated. But it is in this diversity that we should stand united in our common undertaking towards preserving democracy and basic freedoms, as it has been the case for the past 70 years.

The destiny of our common European home does not depend on how similar or different we are, but on whether we will conduct policy of unity or policy of conflict. The policy of unity enables us to see similarities in diversity and the policy of division turns similarities into differences.

We need to use new energy to renew the old pledge given to basic Council of Europe values among which parliamentarism is given a special place. It is important to explain to our citizens, particularly to the young ones, that parliaments are their institutions, instruments in their hands for tackling the most significant issues in society. It is possible that the source of citizens' mistrust in institutions is that the parliaments do not advocate universal values.

We need to be determined in the intention, and very active. So that the youth and other citizens are not misled by extremist ideologies, increase of racism, xenophobia and related intolerances. We must not respond to ideology with another ideology, but by applying standards. Only with these values can we build a civilization and a community of prosperity and future welfare for our nations.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr George TSERETELI, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE

Let me thank the Council of Europe and the leadership for the opportunity of being here today in Strasbourg, to address this distinguished body on behalf of OSCE parliamentarians on this special occasion. As our regular cooperation demonstrates, our organizations have a lot in common, but firstly values. In these turbulent times, when multilateralism severely suffers from widespread mistrust and the breach of basic commitments, we need to step up as mediators to revitalize peaceful diplomacy and strengthen parliamentary engagement.

Dear colleagues, when thinking of our common European home, we surely approach the future with mixed feelings. On the one side, over the past 70 years Europe has truly become a common home after so many wars and conflicts, and this happened greatly thanks to the determined political will to preserve peace, advance Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, enshrined in the foundation of institutions such as the Council of Europe. But on the other side, the number of worrying setbacks in our democratic and security commitments need to be addressed urgently. While we have managed to build a common home with strong foundations, disdain for house rules has made it more complicated to maintain our harmonic coexistence. Breaches of commitments, violent extremism, Human Rights violations are at rise, accompanied by broad popular dissatisfaction, radical nationalistic trends and the rejection of the very concept of common home. If we look at the 70 years ahead of us, the picture will not be bright if we do not resolve the conflicts affecting our region and neighborhood, where first and foremost our people are suffering and losing hope.

Only in the OSCE area, in Ukraine, we're witnessing continued military activity, despite of an existing road map for a peaceful solution. In Georgia, illegal border decisions are going on in blunt breach of international law and agreements. The situation concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is still extremely fragile and the Transnistrian settlement process, while there have been some positive steps, needs further acceleration. For instance, we are more concerned also and we also must look beyond our frontiers to follow the current critical situation at the Turkey-Syria border. While all our countries have their own legitimate security concerns, we must not compromise on our rule-based order and we have diplomacy to achieve and maintain stable peace. When necessary, we must act rapidly and decisively to prevent crises.

Dear colleagues, this year marks another anniversary, 30 years ago East and West celebrated in the fall of Berlin Wall. The Helsinki process played an important role in these events that led to November 1989. If we believe in a process that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, we must pursue spirit also in addressing the many divisions that still affect us today. So complex are our joint challenges that they require even unprecedented

cooperation and partnerships. It is not by chance that OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, held this year for the first time in its history the plenary meeting, in a partner Mediterranean country, Morocco. During our annual session, the latest one in Luxembourg, our members have adopted their wide range of recommendations for our governments, covering issues from hard security to gender equality and environment.

And as elected representatives of our oversight function, we carry the additional responsibility of restoring the confidence of our citizens towards politics. They are increasingly disillusioned, and participation in the public life and discourse is shrinking. Reverting this trend is an imperative and we can only do it by giving the example. Europe as a common home remains more relevant than ever, but we must truly believe in it. We need to engage youth and prove the new generations how much international cooperation can achieve. However, we have to be consistent and care about the credibility of our institutions, delivering on our promises, but of course never compromising our values. You can, dear colleagues, rest assured on the full support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly toward this goal.

I look forward to continuing this dialogue, to bring an added value to the end users of parliamentary diplomacy, our citizens.

Thank you very much.

Mr János LATORCAI, President, Országgyűlés, Hungary

First and foremost, allow me to express my deep-felt gratitude to the founding fathers for the fact that they have created these institutions for the benefit of all of us, and we would also like to say thank you to the organisers of this session. It is a great pleasure that we finally found a solution to the year's long crisis of the Council of Europe, an organisation that celebrates its 70th anniversary here. As a result of this solution, we manage to remain pan-European. This is very important because, although the division of Europe into an eastern and western part ended 30 years ago, our continent continues to be fragmented by several dividing lines.

In such a situation, it is of key importance that we have the opportunity to conduct a debate about our shared European home and, especially, its next 70 years. We, the heads of parliaments, dedicated to representing our people, are certainly obliged to try to reduce the distance between citizens and politicians. It is visible that in many places the political elite drifted away from their voters. And, instead of listening to the voice of these people, they wish to convince them of their own utopian views.

At the same time, those who are capable of listening to what the people are saying are often pronounced as "populists". Populist politics must indeed be avoided – but this cannot lead to an elitist government. We must never forget that there cannot be democracy without the demos.

In recent years, we Hungarians applied the principle of direct democracy and sought the opinion of our voters on issues including migration, the protection of our borders, terrorism and the need to support families. The political leadership of several European countries emphasise the human rights of people arriving on our continent while they seem to disregard the rights of indigenous minorities, which have lived here for centuries.

In a similar manner, they ignore the human rights and the fears of the people in their own countries and the ever-deepening social division that is the consequence of such policies. We, however, believe that every country has the sovereign right to decide when and to whom it opens its borders. I absolutely agree with those who drafted our concept paper when arguing that we must combat terrorism but, in the meantime, we must guarantee the security of our citizens by also representing, not stigmatising, entire groups.

However, this has a very important prerequisite, namely that we do not import into Europe the problems of the world but that we try to solve those problems where they have occurred. And another important point I wish to make is that we can only throw in our lot with people who themselves are prepared to do the same with us. That is, that they accept the rules and customs of the country where they want to live. It is a highly critical issue because the moral and societal teachings of some religions are contradictory to the European legal environment. It is enough to refer to the social role of women and their rights.

Speaking about the role of women, I would like to reflect upon the point made in the keynote document, namely, that resistance against gender equality is ever vocal. I wish to emphasise that rejecting the gender agenda cannot be confused with accepting violence against women. Nothing proves this point better than the report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights on violence against women, stating that, above the age of 15, every third woman in the EU has experienced physical or sexual violence at least once. The worst is the Danish and the least bad is the Polish indicator. Similarly, to the Poles, we Hungarians are a rather positive example in this regard.

I find it, however, so provoking – distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen – that while Poland is frequently criticised for its shortcoming on gender equality, women in Poland are still the safest of all. So we certainly do not lack challenges, but the last 70 years proved that dialogue and cooperation are the best tools by which we

can protect our shared values. Dialogue and cooperation require trust-building even today, the basis of which must be consistent adherence to our obligations to which we committed ourselves in the treaties of the Council of Europe.

For this, I wish all of us unrelenting perseverance and much success. Thank you very much for your attention.

Mrs Carmen Ileana MIHĂLCESCU, President, Camera Deputaților, Romania

Combating racism and intolerance, as well as promoting equality are core fundamental values of European society. Consistent efforts have been made to promote this and safeguard peace and security in Europe, but we don't have to forget that we are currently facing challenges caused by the increasing rise of populism, extremist rhetoric and hate speech online and offline. This generates intolerance, racism, xenophobia and undermines the foundation of European democratic societies. During our EU Council presidency, we have put emphasis on combating racism, intolerance and xenophobia, populism, anti-Semitism and hate speech, as the fourth pillar of our priorities was dedicated to the Europe of common values.

Artificial intelligence is increasingly influencing the information and work environment worldwide. It may enable broader and quicker sharing of information and ideas globally, representing a tremendous opportunity for freedom of expression and the access to information. At the same time, the opacity of artificial intelligence also risks interfering with individual self-determination, autonomy and agency and, in the end, this creates the ground for hate speech online. Moreover, artificial intelligence is also being used to undermine democratic elections or allow authoritarian governments to limit freedom of speech, leading to a shrinking space for the Civil Society or boost cyber hate speech. A significant global challenge confronts those seeking to promote and protect human rights and the rule of law.

How can states, companies and civil society ensure that artificial intelligence, technologies, reinforce and respect rather than undermine human rights? One of the answers to tackle discrimination and racism is to use artificial intelligence to detect online hate speech. This is an area where algorithms come into place and where experts from major IT companies can work together. Of course, we are aware of the difficulty to imagine all the algorithms to suppress hate speech, to surface internet and social media platforms. We just need to look at the amount of languages that exist in the world and how, with one letter, or one number, a troll can shift the writing of discriminatory word and it's not sanctioned by an algorithm.

The use of artificial intelligence in combating cyber hate speech raises the question of regulations, norms and standards. We live in a time when democracy and human rights, including fundamental freedoms of expression or assembly information, enjoy wide recognition. The modern world provides us with challenges that remind us of this continuously. Disinformation reduces the trust in institutions and the media in general, disinformation leads to a lack of civil cohesion, disinformation has been a subject of intense debate at European level for a number of years now and for good reasons, because it has proven successful in replacing the truth repeatedly, creating malign effects on our society, but most importantly on the cornerstone of any democracy: the electoral system.

There can be no freedom, no democracy and no security in a world dominated by disinformation and generalized mistrust. All aspects of the life of our citizens and, of course, the working of Institutions, the cohesion of entire societies, the political establishment, rules, laws, among many other things can be negatively influenced by disinformation and the absence of truth. As such, those who cherish democracy, truth and international security, not only inside national institutions, but also in the civil society, media, feel compelled to take a stand against it. In this context, more than ever before, the role of the media in safeguarding our democratic way of life is of paramount importance.

I thank you very much.

Mr Demetris SYLLOURIS, President, House of Representatives, Cyprus

I would like to express my pleasure for being here today among you all at this important conference, which gives us the opportunity to discuss and exchange views on vital issues that concern our citizens and related to European and world affairs.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, a pan-European organisation that since its very establishment following the horror and destruction of the Second World War, has acted as a beacon for reconciliation in Europe and the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law. Values and principles, however, that are not always adhered to as intended by its founding members. Despite obstacles and shortcomings that have harmed the integrity of the organisation, the Council of Europe can certainly look back at this 70 years course with pride.

It has achieved a huge amount of ground-breaking work and has pursued efforts that brought possible change. Individual and collective rights have always been at the core of the action and aspirations. All different, all equal, that was the theme of the Council of Europe campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the organisation. After more than two decades, this slogan is still so very timely. At the same time, however, we

need to plan ahead and work proactively for the sustainability of our common European home for 70 years. Feeling satisfied and proud of achievements in milestones so far gives us the courage and the stamina to push ourselves for more.

Dear colleagues, in November 1989 the fall of Berlin Wall brought hope and inspiration to all Europeans, thought to be marking the beginning of the end of dividing lines in Europe. Unfortunately, this was not the case for my country Cyprus, part of which is still under the Turkish military occupation. After more than four and a half decades since the Turkish invasion, the human rights and fundamental freedoms for my compatriots are still harshly violated. We cannot turn a blind eye to such gross violation. One of the oldest Council of Europe member States and member of the European Union, Cyprus, is still divided by force, with refugees and enclaved persons.

Turkey is also violating, at this very moment, the right of the Republic of Cyprus to utilise its exclusive economic zone. This organisation can and must stand up against such injustice. I will agree at this point with the president of the parliament of Turkey that it is impossible to accept approaches which give us the right to intervene in, as he said – an imperialistic way in the eastern Mediterranean, I think it is about trying to hear what he is saying. There can be no excuse for the intervention in other countries' affairs or military interventions. I will agree on that as well. But here is a huge gap between words and actions. Compatibility is very important and therefore our words and declarations have to conform with our actions. Although we are realistic about the drawbacks, different views, opinions and ideas we may face on our way forward, as it is usually the case with the large families, we must never get tired of trying our very best for our people. We must stay focused with their best interest at heart. Let us keep working together.

Thank you very much.

Mr Stéphane VALERI, President, Conseil National, Monaco

On behalf of the National Council of Monaco and on my own behalf, I would like to thank President Liliane MAURY PASQUIER warmly for organising this conference, which brings us all here together as Speakers of Parliaments of the Council of Europe Member States.

The theme today is ambitious: to look back on the 70 years spent in this common house, and to look forward to the next 70 years. Our Monegasque response will be that of a recent member, a small country in a large house, with its history and centuries-old stability, probably unique on this continent.

It was indeed a little more than twenty years ago, under the reign of Prince Rainier III, that the Principality of Monaco submitted its application for membership of the Council of Europe. Six years later, in 2004, Monaco became the 46th Member State of this Organization in the service of peace, human rights and democracy.

I would like to recall the words of His Serene Highness, Prince Albert II, at the time of this accession: “By becoming, as I wanted, the 46th Member State of the Council of Europe, the Principality of Monaco has thus joined its natural family. It will work within it in the continuity of its past actions to contribute to the promotion of the message of peace, humanism, respect for others and progress delivered by the Council of Europe.”

On that occasion, I had the great honour – in my capacity as President of the National Council and member of the Monegasque delegation – to attend this historic moment for the Principality. I remember it with emotion, of course. Since then, cooperation between Monaco and the Council of Europe has continued to grow and it is in the defence of common values and through inter-European dialogue that Monaco has continued to strengthen these links, including the signature and ratification of no fewer than 53 conventions.

After our accession in 2005, at the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, I proposed to my counterparts in the Parliaments of the small States of Europe that we meet each year to discuss topics of common interest. This idea came naturally at the time of Monaco's accession to the Council of Europe: it had become clear that our small countries needed to maintain, through their democratic representatives, regular exchanges and sharing of experience, in order to exist in a coordinated and united manner on the international scene and within an Organisation whose size leaves little room for manoeuvre to our smaller states.

It was a success: the dense and fruitful exchanges that we wove during this first meeting allowed us to affirm our respective specificities, which remain today, in an indisputable way, our strength and our richness. I am delighted that these conferences, which for almost thirteen years have brought together nine small States with populations of less than one million, are continuing: Andorra, Cyprus, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, San Marino and Liechtenstein.

They allow us all to speak with one voice on certain issues in different European and international bodies. This shared action actively participates in the construction of our common home. Small States are an essential element of diversity in the international community.

The Council of Europe's activities have an important geopolitical dimension: both ambassadors sitting on the Committee of Ministers – whose exchanges are permanent – and the Parliamentary Assembly – through parliamentary diplomacy and through the discussions that parliamentarians have informally held between them – contribute to them. In fact, parliamentarians never stop talking to each other, continuing conversations where diplomacy sometimes stops. These links are very valuable for democracy and human rights.

In this respect, I must highlight the strong involvement of the members of our delegation in the work of this Parliamentary Assembly, both in plenary session and in the various committees. In addition, I would like to recall that the Principality of Monaco, with more than seven centuries of history, has affirmed its place in the camp of nations. Monaco's international relations have always been developed at the instigation of its Princes.

In the concert of nations, Monaco is the voice of a State whose influence is not proportional to its size but reflects the constancy of its values and its concern to respect a principle of active neutrality in the fields of peace, human rights, in particular women's and children's rights, sustainable development and environmental protection.

I will conclude by reiterating the National Council's desire to continue these valuable exchanges for our assemblies, by building the future by developing our sense of belonging to a common foundation based on our democratic values and expertise.

No one can claim to hold the absolute truth, the richness of the debates which, naturally, allow the expression of contradictory positions in a democracy, must be understood solely in the objectives shared by all: the general interest of the country and the well-being of our fellow citizens.

Thank you very much.

Under the presidency of Mr. Gérard LARCHER, President, Senate, France

Mr Dejan ŽIDAN, President, Državni zbor, Slovenia

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the presidency for a job well done and for its significant contribution to the strengthening of the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe is an exceptional product of cooperation between nations that are able to overcome their differences in order to provide peace and prosperity. It turned a continent that used to be marked by wars into a space of progress and development.

Since its establishment seven decades ago, the Council of Europe has been the very foundation of the freedom of people to live in a secure and healthy environment, guaranteeing freedom of thought and expression, action and creation. Our common path, which has always been carefully planned, turned out to be the right one. It is not only worthwhile to stay on our course, but we should even further enhance our efforts. The purpose of our meeting here today is to seek – in a sincere dialogue – solutions to challenges of unthinkable proportions faced by our generations, namely the new environmental and climate reality, the changed political and security relations and the outstanding technological and developmental progress.

I am convinced that this pan-European granter of the rule of law, human rights and democracy can provide us with answers to the dilemmas at this crucial point in time. This, however, can only be accomplished on the basis of formal and actual equality of countries and the work of everybody for the common good. It also requires our unconditional support for the work of the European Court of Human Rights, and for awareness-raising about its significance, as well as support for active implementation of reform measures adopted by the Court. We should above all, do our utmost to prevent restricting access to the judicial protection by the European Court of Human Rights.

Commitment to multilateral mechanisms stands from our strong belief in the principle of sovereign equality of countries and from the progressive evolution of international law. Despite the ever-changing reality, when the values of rules-based multilateral world order are being transformed, we remain fully committed to these mechanisms. None of us will benefit from only pursuing our short-term interests or the interests of our countries.

I especially strongly condemn any extraordinary circumstances – be it for security, political, migration or environmental reasons – that lead to violations of Human Rights and human dignity, weaken international law or the mechanisms of collective security. The surge of nationalisms and extremisms has now given rise to aggressions also on European soil, undermining the dignity of the entire community. We should wake up and act, as it challenges the democratic culture of the entire European space. We want a Europe worthy of the foundations on which it was built. We want a Europe that is a secure and a good home for all the people. The central role of parliaments has always been their accountability and service to citizens, mutual respect for joint commitments and the discharge of obligations in good faith.

This is also something that our people, who are calling for more open and transparent work of parliaments, rightfully expect from us. I believe, that we parliamentarians have the political vision and the necessary tools to tackle the true nature of these challenges. Ladies and Gentlemen, I look forward to our debate and thank you for your attention.

I wish you all the best.

Mr Jan Anthonie BRUIJN, President, Eerste Kamer, Netherlands

It is a great honour for me to represent the Senate of the Netherlands in this European Conference of Presidents of Parliament of the Council of Europe. In July of this year I was elected the new president of our Senate. This is one of my first inter-parliamentary conferences in that capacity and I relish this opportunity to meet with you all, my colleagues, and I look forward to the chance to get to know you better over the course of these two days.

The Council of Europe is a remarkable organization: remarkable in its ambitions, remarkable in its achievements. This year we celebrate the 70th anniversary of this Pan-European ambition to unite our countries on the principles of the rule of law, human rights and genuine democracy. The Council of Europe was founded in 1949 and I'm proud to note that the first initiatives in this direction took place on the premises of my own Parliament a year before. In May 1948, 750 delegates from around Europe, as well as observers from Canada and the United States met the whole night in The Hague, in the so-called Congress of Europe, as it was then called. It brought together important political figures such as Winston CHURCHILL, Konrad ADENAUER, Francois MITTERRAND and Altiero SPINELLI. They discussed, among other things, the creation of a European assembly realized a year later with the foundation of the Council of Europe. Sir Winston CHURCHILL, when describing his idea of European unity and cooperation, spoke of, and I quote, "a dynamic expression of democratic faith based upon moral conceptions and inspired by a sense of mission". In the center of our movement stands the idea of a Charter of Human Rights guarded by freedom and sustained by law."

That is the foundation of our common European home as laid by the generations before us. Over 70 years a unique, multilateral organization has been built that commits 47 Member States to over 220 conventions. It has played its role in a lot of occasions during European history to take a course that was unimaginable in the immediate post-war years. It has given direction to the development of many individual countries. It has weathered through many a crisis in international relations. It is a solid construction, but our common European home, impressive as it is, needs constant maintenance and repairs like every house: if we neglected it, it first starts to leak and then falls apart. There are many and very diverse challenges to the Council of Europe, like corruption, populism, fake news, climate change or terrorism, to name a few. And let me be clear: all of them need to be taken seriously, but in my opinion no challenge to the Council of Europe stands out like the very rejection of multilateralism itself does.

Our predecessors who gathered for the Congress of Europe in The Hague in 1948 had come to the heart of the insight that multilateralism is the best means to avoid conflict and ensure democratic security for all citizens. That insight is no less valuable 70 years later. In this organization we see it happening when human rights issues are politicized and interests instrumentalized, when open debate on differences of opinion is replaced by power play or filibuster, when human rights commitments that Member States have voluntarily agreed to are ignored. We see it happening when frozen conflicts persist, with the result that people living in these areas are denied access to the fundamental human rights monitoring mechanisms that the Council of Europe provides. A diminished faith in multilateralism might be a symptom of a general questioning of crucial democratic processes, institutes and structures. Why work together if it seems easier to find a quick solution unilaterally? My answer is: because we need each other to make solutions last, to make them sustainable.

Colleagues, it is up to us, as parliamentarians and political leaders, to ensure that our common European home remains fit for purpose for the next generation. We have to use this organization to keep discussing the issues that divide us, with the goal of finding common ground in living up to our human rights commitments. Because, as the American President Abraham LINCOLN used to say, "a house divided against itself cannot stand". Let us make sure that all our citizens have equal access to human rights, democracy and rule of law in our common European home and beyond. Thank you.

Mr André FLAHAUT, Vice-President, Chambre des Représentants, Belgium

There is no denying it: our Europe is now broken down, often inaudible and strategically unable to exist.

75 years after the end of the Second World War, 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe needs a new momentum, perhaps also new foundations. We must reinvent Europe and work to rebuild bonds of trust and respect between governments and citizens. As a result of a lack of food, these links have gradually weakened.

Institutions and leaders cannot continue to build Europe without worrying about the people's opinion; without listening to their fears and aspirations. European bureaucracy is increasingly disconnected from people's lives. Procedures are often unreadable, even by specialists. Leadership is not available. This distance works against the spirit of a united Europe. As I often say... when you have no more ideas or projects, you just do institutional work and forget the basics. For Europe, I see this and I regret it.

In concrete terms: the European project has lost the immediate evidence that the post-war ruins conferred on it in the eyes of all. We wrongly believe that peace and democracy are achieved. We neglect the efforts to preserve them. Yes, Europe is a project for the future: a project that brings hope, prosperity, peace and justice. This is why the "European common house" must be more than just a slogan.

It really deserves to be the responsibility of the citizens of Europe. The challenge is not to do administrative pedagogy. On the contrary, it is to generate enthusiasm and support to build the future together. Europe needs to reconcile with itself. It must develop in a coherent, open and fair dynamic in order to reduce fractures.

I am thinking in particular of the rupture between cities and the countryside. I also think of the temptations of withdrawal. In this respect, it is necessary to restore the lost trust, by working to strengthen Europe's role through education for responsible citizenship. This is where parliaments have a role to play, particularly by promoting meetings with all young people.

Moreover, the promotion of compulsory voting, the strengthening of parliamentary diplomacy, the amplification of the *Erasmus* experience and European voluntary work are avenues to be explored. Democracy is a struggle to be fought. Democracy is a place of meetings and debates. As democrats, we have a duty to reaffirm our commitment to the freedoms we have won and the rights we have fought for. They must support the foundations of a respectful, humane and supportive society.

The human is not an adjustment variable. This is the *raison d'être* of public action. This is the *raison d'être* of our "common European home". The decisions we take in Europe must respond in a concrete, rapid and sustainable way to the needs of our citizens. Health, education and culture cannot be left to market forces or the ease of privatization. Access for all to quality public services must be guaranteed. This is about reducing inequalities and collective well-being.

Living together in respect and diversity: this is the European challenge. As such, we must do everything to counter the rise of extremism and populism that threatens the future of Europe and that of democracy.

I have also been advocating – for a long time – for the construction of a genuine European Defence. This Europe of Defence – for which we need to establish a European academy and a military procurement agency – is not opposed to NATO. Its function is to complement the action and effectiveness of the Atlantic Alliance, but also to promote peace in a dynamic of collective utility.

Dear colleagues,

Let us rebuild Europe from the bottom up rather than from the top. Thank you very much.

Mr Jānis VUCĀNS, President, Baltic Assembly

It is an honour for me as the President of the Baltic Assembly to participate in this European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments.

The foundation of the Council of Europe 70 years ago was based on common values: human rights, democracy and rule of law. Each Member State that joined the Council of Europe has committed to these common values within its own country and in relations with other Member States. Therefore, all Member States of the Council of Europe have to supervise and respect these common values.

It is unfortunate to learn that in the very recent history of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly there has been a serious deviation from our common values both by single countries and by the Council of Europe as a collective guardian.

Suspending and later uncritically restoring voting rights of Russia serves as a vivid example of the failure to safeguard our common values. With this step the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has shown inconsistency in decision making, as well as powerlessness or unwillingness to protect human rights, democracy and rule of law.

Dear Colleagues,

This year, not only the Council of Europe marks a significant anniversary, but also the Baltic States. Baltic States and its parliamentary organisation – the Baltic Assembly – mark anniversaries of two crucial milestones as well.

80 years ago, on 23 August 1939, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was concluded. This Pact was a tragedy for the Baltic States. Also, for a half of century it negatively impacted the life of many nations. Borders of the European countries and peoples' life were decided against those common values which now are at the heart of the Council of Europe.

This year, on the same date, 23 August, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Way when in 1989, two million of Baltic people joined their hands in a human wall of 600 km by uniting Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. We showed by this action to the world community not only our desire to restore independence but also our determination to regain our sovereignty in approach of values of the Council of Europe by respecting democracy, parliamentarism, human rights and rule of law.

What are my main messages by these two examples on historical milestones?

Firstly, it is self-evident and only natural that countries or groups of countries may have disagreements mainly due to economic reasons or other interests. Baltic States are not the exception. It is important that these disagreements are being solved in a way of parliamentary democracy and respecting international law created by the Council of Europe. International law is created and collectively accepted so that Member States comply with them. Baltic States and our parliamentary organisation, the Baltic Assembly, in cooperation with the Nordic Council, Benelux Parliament, GUAM Parliamentary Assembly and other parliamentary organisations have always respected the core principles of the Council of Europe.

Secondly, in the first 70 years of the Council of Europe we have established and developed a framework of core values. This framework gives us a solid ground to live together in our common European home despite the differences and disagreements. Our differences also are explicit European values. I hope that in the next period of time jointly we will learn to live in accordance with the established and developed framework of core values not repeating mistakes like those that I already mentioned. To use an allegory, the fault is not in architects and builders of our common European home but in its managers. The situation here is similar to the one which was debated in the last session of the League of Nations in April 1946. At that meeting, French politician and diplomat Joseph PAUL-BONCOUR said, let me quote, "It was not the League which failed. It was not its principles which were found wanting. It was the nations which neglected it. It was the Governments which abandoned it." I encourage all of us not to repeat the same mistakes of our past.

Thirdly, I wish that in the next 70 years and further we live as good neighbours in our common European home despite the size of flats, floor of the building or level of wellbeing. We have to avoid situations where due to short-term advantages we betray our common values.

Let me conclude by saying that the Baltic Assembly will continue to be an active participant in the processes of development of European home. Common European values are the cornerstone of the Baltic States and it is our duty to protect them.

Thank you very much.

Mr Steingrímur J. SIGFUSSON, President, Althingi, Iceland

It's really a pleasure to return to the Parliamentary Assembly, now in my capacity as the Speaker of the Icelandic Parliament, and to this meeting room in which I spent considerable time as a member around a decade ago. I would like to thank Mr FERRAND and Ms GUSCETTI for their excellent presentation and other colleagues for their interesting contribution to the debate.

Now, most individuals reaching the age of 70 have either already retired or are considering or preparing their retirement. But the Council of Europe, although celebrating its 70th anniversary, must remain strong; it must remain young in spirit, vibrant and vigorous despite having reached this respectable age. The Council of Europe cannot retire. Europe needs the Council of Europe just as much now as it did 70 years ago.

Of course, we have had our ups and downs both in the council and more recently here in the Assembly, but it is all the same of vital importance to safeguard the credibility of this cornerstone of common values, of democracy, human rights and rule of law. In my mind, that's very much what Europe is about but, of course, it's not only up to the Council and the Assembly. Member States' parliaments must also uphold the basic values and principles. We have a saying in Icelandic, "*Vinur er sá er til vammis segir*", roughly meaning that friends should point out each other faults. Criticism can be a friendly gesture.

In another four years, we will be celebrating a very important milestone when we reach the 70-year anniversary of the European Charter of Human Rights. Of course, one can't help being worried about human rights in our great continent. We have seen examples of oppression of freedom of speech; journalists have been suppressed – even killed – and minorities are being attacked based on their religion, race, gender or sexual preferences. And politicians are not immune to violation of human rights. Their freedom to express views and values must be respected despite being different from our own, as long as the rhetoric does not imply or encourage hate speech – another cause for concern in the current era of populism.

I must admit that the situation in Catalonia worries me, and I have raised my worries during the lengthy detention of the former President of the Catalan Parliament to my esteemed colleagues both in the Quarters and the Senate in Madrid. I believe that the Catalan situation deserves also the attention of this assembly. In fact, I have also raised my concerns regarding the Catalan situation with both the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Again, in Icelandic, "*Vinur er sá er til vamma segir*". Parliaments, states and individuals face many common challenges today. Challenges that no one organisation, no one country – not even one continent – can solve on its own, but success for the future of humankind depends on common actions.

The main challenge, in my mind, facing humankind today is the escalating climatic change. We must act fast and we must act now. Coming from the Arctic, where the consequences of global warming are very obvious and where the temperature rise and the changes taking place are at least twice as fast as on the average on the globe, the urgency of the situation is very obvious, very apparent.

Togetherness is one of the great benefits of the Council of Europe and our Assembly. Despite differences – sometimes serious – this is the venue to come together, to share our views and to debate our differences. It is of vital importance that all the 47 member states share this mutual venue. Despite all of our different frameworks for cooperation within Europe, I for one welcome the fact that we don't have empty chairs anymore. We are together, united in diversity. We certainly have our differences, as we have heard today, but at the end of the day, I for one believe in the dialogue. I believe it's better that we are together in the same room to discuss our differences than to shout at each other from apart.

The Alþingi Parliament of Iceland will remain a committed Member to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Karl BADER, President, Bundesrat, Austria

No one would dispute that the Council of Europe has been a success story as a peace project as well as its institutions and conventions as a defender of human rights to this day. The 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe is, therefore, a reason to celebrate, a reason to pause, but also a suitable moment to look to the future.

We have long regarded peace on our continent as secure. But today, we know that it is a precious commodity that must be fought for anew every day. In this respect, I also welcome the return of the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, just as I would very much like the Ukrainian delegation to participate actively in the work of the Assembly. Russia's return to the Assembly does not mean recognition of the annexation of Crimea, which is in violation of international law, nor does it approve of Russia's warlike activities in Eastern Ukraine.

The Parliamentary Assembly is, however, first and foremost a forum for the defence of human rights and the search for peaceful answers to the challenges posed by society. All members should be involved, especially if they are parties to a conflict.

Since its accession in 1956, the Republic of Austria has always attached great importance to making a significant contribution to the work of the Council of Europe. This can be seen from the fact that a relatively small State such as Austria has since provided three Secretaries-General, two Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly and one male President as well as one female President to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

The question that concerns us today is that of the future of our common Europe and that of the Council of Europe in the years and decades to come. The world as a whole faces a number of major challenges. Some of them affect us very much in Europe, some of them less.

Unfortunately, we also have our own conflicts and problems to deal with. I will focus on a few particularly important aspects. First of all, I would like to talk about the membership of the Council of Europe and the role of the European Court of Human Rights, but also about climate change, artificial intelligence and digitisation. These technical developments also affect federalism and subsidiarity. Artificial intelligence and digitisation, in particular, open up great opportunities for Europe's rural regions and are an essential aspect in promoting decentralisation.

The European Court of Human rights: This is a task for all of us to ensure that, in the coming decades, all citizens of the member States of the Council of Europe will continue to have unrestricted access to the Court, that it will be able to process the independent cases as best and as quickly as possible, and that the judgments handed down can then be implemented in the member States, even if these judgments, at first sight, displease some member States.

I would also like to mention how important it is for the EU to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights. We must ensure that there is a thorough and proper dialogue on this, and particularly with member

States that violate the basic principles and values of the Council of Europe. Leaving the organisation is not a suitable solution for both sides. Negotiations on the new joint dispute settlement mechanism should be based on this idea. I would like to single out the Court as a particularly successful project but, of course, we must not forget the Council of Europe's 200 conventions and their often ground-breaking importance for Europe.

Allow me to comment briefly on climate change. As a result of a series of short-term political considerations and decisions, we have underestimated and even suppressed this issue for too long. In Austria, in the last election campaign, "climate" was one of the most decisive, if not the most decisive, issues. If we do not get this problem under control, then we will not only destroy our environment, but we will also aggravate – with our eyes wide open – the problem of climate refugees, which has unforeseeable consequences.

Another topic, of course, is digitisation and the upheavals caused by artificial intelligence. We are now all aware that these major upheavals represent a major political challenge for us, especially in view of the need to respect and ensure all fundamental and human rights. We need to create a robust legal framework to develop all the opportunities for the people in Europe. The Assembly is also already addressing the issues of artificial intelligence and democracy, and I am pleased that the Council of Europe has recognised the urgency of the issue.

Finally, I would like to address an issue that is particularly close to my heart as President of the Austrian Federal Council, and I recently held a parliamentary enquiry on this subject in the Parliament in Vienna; this is the issue of decentralisation. It is closely linked to the issue of federalism and subsidiarity. It is my firm conviction that the regions and municipalities of Europe can provide essential input for solving current challenges. I therefore call on all those who do work here in the Council of Europe to work on this issue. I wish the Council of Europe all the best for the next 70 years.

Thank you very much.

Ms Zinaida GRECEANÎ, President, Parliament, Republic of Moldova

I must say I am honoured to be here at this European Conference of Presidents and Speakers of Parliament, in a year that coincides with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Council of Europe. Something that has brought a lot of transformation in many parts of Europe, including the country I represent, the Republic of Moldova. Looking back in time, our common European home was designed and based on the lessons and tragedies of history, with the view to preventing the repetition of past errors and also with a view to responding to new challenges for human rights, the rule of law and democracy. In the 1990s, the doors of the organisation were opened to new members, such as the Republic of Moldova. This offered new opportunities for us to be heard.

The resolutions and recommendations of the Council of Europe established new standards that were subsequently transposed into our national legislation. We are living in a period that involves new responsibilities and new challenges and reaffirms this commitment that we must have to achieve the real aims of the common European home.

Dear colleagues, in the 24 years since the Republic of Moldova acceded to the Council of Europe, we have been guided by this organisation in a way that ensured the impact of democratic transformations. And that is very visible with the reform and adjustment of our constitutional and standards-setting framework, and through to the creation of sustainable institutions that guarantee the rule of law.

The recent developments in the Republic of Moldova, over the last year, have proved that political dialogue is crucial and it has provided for openness and the establishment of a political majority that would insure compliance with the rule of law. Overcoming the political crisis with a peaceful transfer of power has given a new impetus to international cooperation and has allowed the Republic of Moldova firmly to adhere to balanced foreign policy.

In turn, this policy requires that we remain neutral and open to all international partners both from the west and from the east. In the process of overcoming the political crisis in our country, we have managed to unite forces that in the past have had somewhat different positions. But these political forces, in the name of a common purpose and with the massive support of the people of Moldova and all foreign partners, have found it possible to reduce contradictions and to reach compromise in order to transform the Republic of Moldova from a captured state to a free and sovereign state.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Council of Europe, which has been – and continues to be – a constant and faithful partner of my country. Granting us its invaluable assistance in promoting good governance and a democratic culture. The 2017-2020 Plan of Action of the Council of Europe for the Republic of Moldova gives additional witness to this close cooperation.

The joint mechanism of the Council of Europe and the European Union provided through the Partnership for Good Governance is also extremely important for the Republic of Moldova. I am convinced that together we will succeed in achieving the expected impact in crucial areas. Distinguished participants in the conference, our common home is supported by the pillar of the European Convention and the European Court of Human Rights, which over its 60 years of existence has provided substantial and decisive case law for member States.

I would like to stress that one of the challenges threatening Europe's peaceful journey resides in changes accompanied by conflicts that remain unsettled: the so-called "frozen conflicts" that are a factor of regional instability. There is no universal formula for the settlement of these conflicts so we must continue our efforts aimed at achieving a new comprehensive, peaceful and lasting settlement.

Our state is interested in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict under the 5+2 format. With the Transnistrian region being identified as part of the Republic of Moldova, based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, with full guarantees for human rights and political, economic and social rights as well, of the population, as stipulated in the relevant OSCE documents.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the Council of Europe and our countries have a whole past of history lessons that we need to take into consideration. And you must jointly assume responsibility and make a firm commitment to a dignified future and democratic transformation. Our citizens in our countries need a common European home in which peace and prosperity prevail.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN, Vice-President of the Senate, Romania

I should like to begin by thanking the President of the Parliamentary Assembly for the invitation to attend the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, which is being held in Strasbourg, the cradle of Franco-German reconciliation and the cornerstone of the European construction process.

This year we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, 70 years which the Strasbourg organisation has devoted to promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in a Europe extending from Dublin to Vladivostok. The Council of Europe must preserve its pan-European dimension because the Greater European Home has the ability, as proven over the years, to secure convergence between the interests of the 47 member states, while at the same time ensuring that democracy and the rule of law remain the key pillars of every society and that citizens' fundamental freedoms and rights are duly protected under the umbrella of the European Convention on Human Rights.

We cannot forget how the Council of Europe was the first partner in dialogue for central and east European countries after the fall of the Iron Curtain. For that, I should like to thank the Strasbourg organisation and, in particular, the Parliamentary Assembly, which supported all these states by offering them valuable advice throughout their democratic reconstruction processes. In this context, I would also express my gratitude to the Parliamentary Assembly for the decisive contribution it made to Romania's accession to the Council of Europe in 1993. That success was a major step because accession to the Council of Europe also meant the political criteria had been met, which was one of the key aspects for my country's subsequent admission to the European Union.

The Council of Europe's contribution to the democratic architecture is undeniable. Its legal instruments have laid the foundations in the human rights field, including not only standards on civil and political rights, social rights, the rights of members of national minorities and the fight against racism but also active European monitoring of those standards by the member states.

What can we do in the next 70 years in reaching for our goal of achieving "a greater unity" as formulated by the builders of the Europe that emerged from the ashes of the Second World War?

One step in the right direction was taken a few months ago by the Assembly in the form of Resolution 2277 (2019) and Recommendation 2153 (2019) entitled Role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future. These are to be the starting point for discussions on the introduction of a complementary procedure between the Council of Europe's two statutory organs, i.e. the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, in the event of failure by a member state to comply with its statutory obligations. This is an entirely necessary step because we have to respond consistently and with a single voice in situations where a member state violates its statutory obligations or does not respect the fundamental principles and values upheld by the Council of Europe.

At the same time, national parliaments must go beyond their legislative functions and role in scrutinising government. Elected representatives must work to find the best means of regaining public trust, by re-establishing the social fabric and placing greater value on citizens' aspirations. Without trust, which is the key prerequisite for a lively and dynamic society, democracy is eroded and there is an insidious risk of opening the doors to political extremism.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing an unprecedented rise in hatred, whether racial, xenophobic or anti-Semitic, or which spreads and condones intolerance of certain specific groups.

I would take this opportunity to mention that the priorities of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union held by Romania in the first half of this year included a fourth pillar entitled the Europe of common values, focused on combating racism, intolerance, xenophobia, populism, anti-Semitism and hate speech. In this connection, I would add that during Romania's chairmanship in 2016 of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, we adopted the non-binding operational definition of anti-Semitism, encompassing the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Joint Declaration. Many countries have already taken up this definition and incorporated it in their domestic legislation. I hope that our Assembly is also going to use this definition as a reference point in its work.

Efforts to combat hate speech in general and online hate speech in particular involve two converging objectives which governments, international organisations and private sector representatives have actively pursued in recent years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The rapid worldwide development of artificial intelligence has brought about more extensive and quicker sharing of information and ideas, which is a tremendous opportunity for freedom of expression and access to information. Artificial intelligence tools can also be used for more targeted efforts to combat online hate speech with powerful and secure algorithms. At the same time, however, account has to be taken of both sides of artificial intelligence, to which end we must advocate strict regulation of the field with a view to ensuring human control over artificial intelligence systems, while stressing the need for enhanced protection of privacy and data governance. The undeniable advances brought about by artificial intelligence must work for the benefit of human beings and fundamental rights.

The challenges threatening the democratic fabric also include fake news, which is weakening public security, undermining social cohesion and reducing trust in institutions and the media in general.

We are at a crossroads in Europe, which is facing multiple challenges in democratic, security, migration, technological, identity, environmental and other terms. To tackle them, we must work together in this project and discover or rediscover the meaning of living together and the paradigm for a true European Home in which all citizens are respected.

Thank you very much for your attention!