

**PACE President Intervention at the Plenary sitting
of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus
*Thursday, 6 July 2023, 16:00***

- Mr President, Madam Speaker, dear colleagues, great to see you again, now in your own Parliament, and thank you so much for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to address the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus in my capacity as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Europe's oldest and broadest peace organization, founded in the aftermath of the Second World War and now on its way to its 75th anniversary, next year.
- The Assembly which I represent here is one of the two governing bodies of the Council of Europe, the other being the Committee of Ministers. The Assembly serves as an important European platform for interparliamentary dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy, bringing together parliamentarians from 46 member States, observer States and our Partners for Democracy. In your direct neighbourhood these are the parliaments of Greece and Turkiye, as well as our partner parliaments in Jordan, Palestine and Israel. Our members represent the whole political spectrum, coalitions and oppositions, from the left to the center and the right. Our Assembly serves as a real agora to all of them, a European meeting place to find out whether, with all our differences, sustainable answers can be developed to nowadays problems. The Istanbul Convention was inspired by that agora, to protect women against violence, as well as the Lanzarote Convention, to protect children against sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Nicosia Convention, to protect cultural property against offences and destruction. Visiting your Cyprus Museum today, the need of the Nicosia Convention became even more clear to me. And we are working hard on rules to recognize, everywhere in Europe, a healthy environment as a fundamental human right, and to defend human rights against dangers of artificial intelligence.
- Cyprus has been and remains an important partner of the Assembly. A partnership that started with its accession to the Council of Europe on 24 May 1961, less than one year after your country gained its independence.

Representatives of your National Assembly contribute in a constructive and useful way to debates and other activities of our Assembly, thus helping to promote fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law in Cyprus, in Europe and beyond. One of my predecessors on the post of Assembly President was a remarkable Cypriot politician and a good friend of mine, Ms Stella Kyriakides. She presided over our Assembly at a most challenging moment and is still remembered for her skills, kindness and wisdom. I am looking forward to see her during the next October session of our Assembly, when I have invited all former Presidents to exchange views and ideas.

The high esteem and respect to the members of the Cypriot delegation within our Assembly has also been shown in their frequent appointments as thematic and general rapporteurs. I am particularly happy to illustrate this by saying that, just about two weeks ago, Mr Constantinos Efstathiou has been reappointed as the Assembly's rapporteur on the hugely important issue of the implementation of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

- I wish to thank your delegation and its Chair Mr Nikos Tornaritis for this meaningful input in our work. I also wish to thank the Republic of Cyprus for its commitment to the principles of our organisation which is also clearly manifested in your support to our actions aimed to address the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, particularly those aimed at restoring peace and justice. I was happy to see the Republic of Cyprus as a founding member of the Registry of Damage established by the Council of Europe, at the proposal of our Assembly - the first international legal mechanism that should ensure accountability for the crimes committed by the Russian Federation in and against Ukraine since 24 February 2022.

- As you are aware, the Council of Europe held its 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in Reykjavik in mid-May. I had the pleasure to meet and see you, Mr President acting there. In Reykjavik, you and your

colleague-leaders of member States set an ambitious roadmap for the organisation's future path. You and your colleagues recommitted yourselves to the values and principles of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law as the cornerstone of restoring peace in Europe, based on justice and multilateral co-operation. In a time where we see the rising of dangerous unilateralism, not based on rules but power, I was grateful that the Council of Europe showed its courage in this respect: not the rule of power but the power of rule.

- The implementation of the Summit's declaration will be our priority for several years to come and I wish to urge you, as Cypriot parliamentarians, to support this process here in your Chamber by considering the best ways of streamlining its provisions in your national legislation and integrating them into your dialogues with your national government. I am confident a debate on the Reykjavik declaration (as has already been done in some other European countries) will be a most interesting and engaging event, which will also demonstrate the relevance of this document for Cyprus. I am looking forward to receive your report on this debate!
- Of course, the focus of the 4th Summit was on the urgent need to address complex challenges resulting from the Russian aggression against Ukraine and to strengthen our resolve to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. But these key principles of international justice, multilateral co-operation and respect for the rule of law apply not just in Ukraine but are of universal nature. They are of course particularly pertinent in Cyprus and maybe even more relevant now than ever before.
- Indeed, this relevance was highlighted by you, Mr President, in your address at the Summit on 17 May 2023, stressing the vital need of addressing the Cyprus problem, where the island has been divided by force for almost fifty years. It is incredible and unacceptable that we in Europe cannot resolve this in a proper way for so long, thus maintaining a dangerous frozen conflict in one of our member states, which hurts the vital interests of all Cypriot citizens.

- The ongoing war against Ukraine has shows us how easily a so-called frozen conflict can be transformed into a full-scale bloody war that brings death and destruction. Frozen conflicts also create conditions for dangerous instability for the entire regions hence undermining legitimate economic activities and prospects of peaceful and prosperous future of our citizens. Frozen conflicts also tend to create grey zones where people are left unprotected with limited or no access to the protection by the European Court of Human Rights and vulnerable to various threats. We must therefore never get complacent with the situation of the frozen conflicts and should continue to look for a sustainable solution that will ensure that all Europeans (including all Cypriots) have equal access to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
- The Cyprus problem is not just an issue of Cyprus. Of course, in the end it is you, the citizens of Cyprus, to take decisions. But is also an international, and especially a European problem. You, Mr President, compared it - while speaking first at the Council of Europe Summit and then addressing the European Parliament recently - to an open wound on a European body. I endorse your call to see whether the European Union could do more to make a sustainable solution possible, based of course upon the relevant UN resolutions and negotiation work that has already been done. Yesterday, at your modern art museum, I saw a piece of art, referring to numerous UN-resolutions about your country. There is no need to start all over again. It would be my humble advice to continue from efforts that did remain at Crans Montana and from convergences that have been recorded over the years. The so called Guterres framework is there to serve you and should be reaffirmed. I welcome this month's statement of the European Council calling for resumption of negotiations and indicating its willingness to help to strengthen efforts from UN-side in this respect. I hope that the meeting of your foreign affairs minister, yesterday, with his Greek counterpart, was fruitful on this subject. I wish the United Nations Secretary General all the best in his ongoing efforts to find a way out of this enormous problem, that handicaps your country and all your citizens so much. I call on the Turkish authorities not to call for a so called two state solution, which goes against the UN resolutions and

cannot lead to any viable solution – and therefore also goes against the interest of the Turkish Cypriote community of Cyprus. A bi-communal and bi-zonal federation with political equality on the island of Cyprus seems to me the only viable solution to the Cyprus problem.

- We, the Council of Europe, to which Cyprus, Greece and Turkiye belong, could also do more. Let us use our multilateral structure to help you to find ways to finally solve the main problem of your country. I wish to stress that our Parliamentary Assembly stands ready to engage with the Cypriot parliament and government in helping to find viable and effective ways to re-unite your country and we will put all mechanisms, resources and expertise at your disposal for this purpose. I applaud the efforts to involve local communities, women and youth more in this process. It is my humble observation that where men often are engaged in creating problems, women often find creative answers to solve them. I dare to count on the women of Cyprus, and the young generation of Cyprus. It is your future, we are talking about. So: take your role in these talks, we all will benefit!

- By the way, in Reykjavik our Assembly created together with the government of Iceland the new prize on women's empowerment. It is named the Vigdis Prize after the first democratically elected female President on earth. You, Madam Speaker, are the first democratically elected President of this Parliament and a role model for many. I would advise your colleagues to consider your nomination in the future for this esteemed prize!

- You are aware that the re-unification of Cyprus has been in the focus on the attention of the Parliamentary Assembly since the very beginning of your accession to our organisation. We will continue to follow it very closely in the framework on several reports and debates. Just last May, our Political Affairs Committee held a very engaging hearing on Safeguarding Peace and Stability in Eastern Mediterranean at the nearby island of Crete. A report on the situation in Famagusta is currently in preparation by one of the most respected and reputable members of the

Assembly, Mr Piero Fassino. The issues of direct relevance to the Cyprus situation will be examined in the report on the question of just and equal redress in the context of reconciliation and reparation while overcoming past conflicts (where a member of your House, my good friend Georgios Loukaides, will prepare an opinion). These examples highlight the rich and diverse expertise on the matter that we have accumulated over these years. Moreover, our Assembly has repeatedly proven itself as a unique platform for dialogue where very divergent views can meet and find common grounds and where viable compromises can be reached. I wish also to remind you that our Assembly also includes two representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community whom are part of the one and unique Cypriot delegation. I would like to encourage all members to use the presence in the Assembly to discover possible new opportunities on the way to a solution of the Cyprus problem – as well as other problems in your society.

- We are committed to do whatever we can to help you to overcome this painful, horrible division of your beautiful island. I do believe that another window of opportunity has just opened for this. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has not just challenged the Council of Europe as a unique European peace project: it also underlined the risks of neglecting other frozen conflicts in Europe and the forced division of Cyprus is perhaps the most vivid example. I strongly believe that efforts to restore, strengthen and perhaps re-invent European democratic security and rules-based multilateralism will need to find solutions to frozen conflicts, and the Cyprus problem in particular. Your citizens deserve it!
- May I propose we speak less about the Cyprus Problem and put all our energy in the Cyprus Solution?
- Once again: thanks a lot for allowing me to share my ideas today with you.