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**A very good morning** to everyone.

Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Portugal

Vice President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

— Deputy Registrar of the European Court of Human Rights

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

**Dear ALL,**

It is **my pleasure to join Mr Nazim Ahmad** – who is kindly hosting us here in the beautiful premises of the Ismaili Centre – in **welcoming you** on behalf of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe to this **29th edition of the Lisbon Forum** and to thank you for being here with us today.

The Lisbon Forum is one of the **flagship events** of the North-South Centre.

It is an **annual platform** for dialogue, reflection and collaboration – which brings together representatives from the North and the South, from Council of Europe member states and beyond – to share experiences, practices, knowledge and expertise on how to **take on specific challenges** that transcend geographical borders and affect us all.

The challenges we are facing in the world today are many, **but one in particular stands out** as an **existential threat to humanity** – and that is climate change. Being in Lisbon today, it seems only appropriate to quote the recent famous words of **the Lisbon-born Secretary General** of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, who declared a few months ago that *“the era of global warming has ended; and **the era of global boiling has arrived**”*.

A **stark warning** that underscores the urgent need for global climate action. Something, which youth have been and continue to be **at the forefront**. Their relentless drive and motivation to address and combat climate change, is a great asset that we must recognize, embrace and utilize for building a climate resilient – and ultimately **liveable future**.

And that is what this Forum is about – **bringing youth** – who are often not involved enough or not at all in decision making and designing solutions that affect their own future – and **providing them with a platform** to share their own perspectives, exchange directly with policy makers, civil society, parliamentarians, and representatives of regional and local authorities on **topics that concern them**.

In these two days, we will hear many young voices that are excelling in their efforts **to influence and mobilize** young people around the world – to raise their voices on the climate crisis – to advocate for the protection of the environment – and to change behaviours and take action accordingly.

This is why the format of the Lisbon Forum, as an interregional North-South quadrilogue, with a significant youth representation is in my view, **the best format** to discuss this pressing matter.

The Lisbon Forum **does not stand in a vacuum** but takes stock from the previous work of the North-South Centre, where other flagship activities of the Centre were this year connected through a common theme: Young People, Peace and Climate Change.

Just a few weeks ago, I was at the University on Youth and Development in Spain with 240 participants from 70 different countries who discussed the importance of **the eight pillars of positive peace** in relation to the protection of the environment, of which Good Governance, Low Levels of Corruption and Acceptance of the Rights of Others – all of which are central to this Forum’s theme - form three of the main pillars.

Being there, I was inspired in seeing all the work and efforts they are devoting **to preserve the planet and our future**. However, I also sensed a concerning degree of hopelessness, a fear that they are not heard, and that policy makers and governments are too slow in their reaction.

Which makes the focus of this Forum **all the more important and relevant**, as it is also about addressing the less explored nexus between corruption and economic crimes with climate change.

The North South Centre is looking forward to this discussion **as a starting point of a series of initiatives** to support young people in this fight against climate change – including on addressing conducts that jeopardize and undermine efforts to combat climate change effectively – to emphasise their pivotal role in catalysing change, and ensure they are given a space to make their voices heard by policy makers.

As North South Centre we are committed to supporting progress and development in the context of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law – the **three core values** on which the Council of Europe was built on – and which we are committed to promote and transmit to neighbouring regions.

And talking about neighborhood, let me take a moment **to thank and stress the support of the South Programme V** "Protecting human rights, rule of law and democracy through shared standards in the Southern Mediterranean" in the organization of this Forum – which is implemented in the context of **reinforced cooperation between the South Programme and the activities of the North-South Centre**, which aims at maximising each other's added value, and better connecting our efforts to promote these **fundamental values beyond European borders**.

The Lisbon Forum is not just what happens in the official Programme, but also the side conversations and the new connections and networks created. There are plenty of **good experiences and best practices** to share and learn from each other – so I encourage all of you to share your expertise, practices, and ideas to move forward **together**.

I wish you all a Great Forum!

Thank you for your attention.