

**Statement by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of
the Council of Europe**

Plenary meeting of the Venice Commission

Saturday, 13 December 2025

Scuola Grande San Giovanni Evangelista, Venice

Dear President, dear members of the Commission,
dear colleagues and friends gathered here today,

Let me begin by congratulating Marta Cartabia on assuming the Presidency of this distinguished body, a role that crowns an already remarkable career and reflects our collective trust in her leadership. On behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, I reaffirm our commitment to close and effective cooperation.

I also wish to thank Claire Bazy Malaurie for two years of inspiring and steady collaboration, marked by clarity, professionalism, and genuine purpose. And I recall with gratitude our celebration here of the 35th anniversary of the Commission, a milestone honouring your profound constitutional influence.

Your opinions may be non-binding in form, but they are authoritative in substance and impact, shaping laws, guiding courts, and inspiring governments. Your voice travels far beyond Europe's borders, and your work remains essential for democratic resilience.

1. The Convention under pressure

Earlier this week in Strasbourg, ministers of justice discussed Articles 3 and 8 of the Convention, touching the core of dignity and human

protection. Their debate brought to mind another European moment, one that reveals both fragility and courage in history.

In 1703, Daniel Defoe stood in the pillory, punished for satirising fanaticism and intolerance. He expected humiliation and violence from the crowd, yet the people applauded him instead, defiantly so, turning punishment into a defence of free expression.

Three centuries later, we hear proposals again to reconsider the absolute prohibition of torture or to restrict the scope of private and family life. These ideas present themselves as bold innovations, yet too often they revive old political temptations.

Einstein once said he rarely had new ideas, a remark reminding us that many proposals today are not truly new but cleverly repackaged arguments aimed at provoking audiences or gaining short-term ground. But constitutional principles require deeper reflection.

The facts themselves speak clearly and honestly: the Convention does not obstruct migration policies, and only 0.7 percent of applicants ultimately remain because of the Court's judgments and interventions. In 45 years, the United Kingdom faced only three rulings, none of which prevented enforcement of national policy.

This debate is therefore not merely legal or technical; it is deeply political and morally consequential. The temptation to imitate extremes is dangerous, for imitation legitimises the very forces we oppose. Democracies weaken when they borrow illiberal ideas.

At Reykjavík, all 46 Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their commitment to the Convention's authority. Nothing in law has changed since that clear endorsement; what has changed is the surrounding

political climate. The Convention remains Europe's minimum common standard.

Protocol No. 15 already strengthened national courts, embedding subsidiarity and the margin of appreciation directly into the Preamble of the Convention itself. This demonstrated that the system adapts intelligently without undermining the protection of fundamental rights.

2. Artificial Intelligence — the new constitutional frontier

Another priority of my Presidency has been AI, which is no longer a distant or abstract concern but a central constitutional challenge for our era. Our Assembly now works on several important reports covering AI in administration, parliaments, and democracy.

Experts we met in Warsaw made one point clear: AI can empower democratic participation and transparency, but only when governed responsibly and ethically. If misused, it can undermine trust and democratic life faster than any previous technological evolution.

Next week in London we will meet parliamentarians to discuss how to keep AI aligned with human dignity and prevent it from becoming a tool of manipulation. I am pleased the Venice Commission integrated proposals enhancing the AI chapter of the Rule of Law Checklist. Your readiness to address emerging challenges is vital.

3. Mercenaries and PMSCs — evolving and dangerous threats

Allow me also to mention our shared concern regarding private military and security companies, a field transformed by the emergence of groups like Wagner. Your 2009 opinion was ahead of its time, remarkably so, and our Assembly's new work builds upon that foundation.

This week the Committee of Ministers endorsed the Montreux Document, a key global soft law instrument, fulfilling recommendations long advanced by both our bodies. This strengthens Europe's response to new security threats and reinforces the rule of law in complex armed contexts.

4. The moral architecture of Europe

Let me close with a reflection I offered recently during the 75th anniversary of the Convention in Strasbourg, because the spirit of that moment echoes here today.

Imagine, even briefly, a Europe without the Convention, a continent that rebuilt homes and parliaments after war but failed to rebuild its deeper moral architecture. In such a Europe, minorities could remain invisible, victims of torture might stand unheard and forgotten, same-sex love could still be treated as a crime, children born outside marriage might bear stigma, domestic violence might remain a hidden private sorrow, and journalists would speak with fewer protected words.

We would still have Europe, but not the same Europe;

we would still have institutions, but not the same trust;

we would still have laws, but not the same soul.

Fortunately, the Convention has been here for decades, quietly reminding governments to honour their promises and serving as Europe's conscience in difficult times. Any discussion about its future must proceed calmly and never under populist pressure or political spectacle.

This dedication to constitutional integrity and balance is precisely what the Venice Commission represents today.

As my term as President of the Assembly concludes, this may be my final address in this magnificent room. Allow me to express my deep gratitude and admiration for your professionalism, your integrity, and your insight. It has been a genuine privilege to work alongside you, and I am certain my successor will feel the same honour.

Thank you.