Opening of the promotion of the Global Communications Campaign
“Every Generation Leaves Its Mark. Education Shapes Its Legacy”

26 January 2026, Lobby of the Hemicycle, Strasbourg

Speech by Petra Bayr
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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Dear Ambassador Totchytsky,

Dear Madam Chairperson of the Ukrainian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, dear Mariia,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Democratic education lies at the very heart of the Council of Europe’s mission. It is the foundation on which our societies are built and the legacy we pass from one generation to the next.

When a child is born, we feel joy and an instinctive need to protect this fragile life. We surround the child with care, but also with learning. We teach independence, critical thinking and resilience. Because one day, the walls of protection the parents build will no longer be there. And what will remain, when the child must face the world alone, is what we have given: values, courage, and the ability to understand and to choose.

Through its conventions, its educational programmes and the work of its experts, the Council of Europe strives to offer children across our continent this essential legacy.

Not only lessons of mathematics or geography, but also values.

In a world marked by cultural diversity, by differing opinions, and increasingly shaped by algorithms and artificial intelligence, we want young people to grow up open-minded, critical and responsible - able not only to live in democracy, but to sustain it.

We teach this through history, when we ask not only what happened, but why.

We teach it through dialogue and through community, learning to live together in respect.

We teach it so that our children may not only inherit democracy, but renew it, protect it and pass it on.

Dear friends,

On the first day of school, a child usually climbs the stairs to a classroom.

But in Kharkiv, children descend underground. Their school desks are in shelters.

One and a half thousand children study in underground schools under the constant threat of bombing, in your native city, dear Mariia.

But this is how destruction is transformed into resistance.

This is how learning becomes an act of courage.

And this is why we are profoundly grateful to the First Lady of Ukraine, and to all those who, together with UNICEF and the Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen, have made this powerful initiative possible.

Because every generation leaves its mark, and I deeply hope that the mark of the next generations will be one of dignity, freedom and peace.