

**Conference on the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe,
Moderation of the workshop “Strengthening of democracy by PACE: the
contribution of Greece”, Hellenic Parliament
1 November 2024**

**Speech Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis
Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of
Europe**

Opening speech:

Your Excellency, Madam President of the Hellenic Republic,
Honorable Mr. President of the Hellenic Parliament,
Honorable Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of
Europe,
Distinguished Guests,

It is both a great pleasure and a great honor for me to coordinate the first session of today, which focuses on the strengthening of democracy through the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Greece's contribution to this effort. Allow me to make two brief remarks, as my intention is not to delay proceedings but to coordinate in the most effective manner possible so that we can keep the discussion within the allotted time of one hour. Let me just offer two thoughts:

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is intrinsically linked to the restoration of democracy in Greece. In fact, it was the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that, just five days after the coup, drew the attention of the world—not just Europe—to what was happening in

Greece. It condemned the dictatorship, and from that moment, a very intense effort began to restore democracy. Two years later, in 1969, as both the President of the Hellenic Parliament and the President of the Republic reminded us yesterday, Greece became the first country to be threatened with expulsion from the Council of Europe, essentially leading to its expulsion. Greece declared its resignation only after the discussion about its expulsion had already begun, all of this initiated by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, just as it recently did in the case of Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe when red lines were violated there.

At that time, the reaction was not as obvious, and there were reservations about it, which is why we believe the action of the Parliamentary Assembly was decisive for the decision made by the Committee of Ministers in December 1969. At the same time, as the President of the European Court of Human Rights reminded us yesterday, northern member states advanced the Greek issue, and thus, through coordinated efforts, an important international denunciation took place. It was once again the Parliamentary Assembly that had the honor of hearing the representative of the Greek Government, Mr. Averoff, in September 1974, who was warmly applauded, and Greece was once again embraced by the Assembly. Since then, Greece's presence has been very significant and active in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of which I have the honor of being the first Greek and the first woman Secretary General, elected by the Assembly members. It is no coincidence that our delegation includes

former Prime Ministers, former Ministers, and members who work dynamically and with great success.

Another connection I would like to highlight is the Parliamentary Assembly's relationship with the European Convention on Human Rights, the anniversary of whose reaffirmation we are also honoring today. It was the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that, in a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers, proposed the creation of a European Convention on Human Rights at its very first session, realizing the vision of the founding fathers—back then, there were no founding mothers—of Europe's establishment. It was also the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that elected the first judges, and it continues to elect the judges of the European Court of Human Rights, closely monitoring the implementation of its rulings.

Thus, our Assembly is intrinsically connected to the effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights. As a Greek Secretary General, it is a great honor for me to witness the vigorous action of the Greek delegation and to have alongside me the first Greek President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Theodoros Roussopoulos.

Without further delay, allow me to give the floor to former Prime Minister and member of the Greek Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. George Papandreou, who is also the first general rapporteur for Democracy, a position created by the Parliamentary Assembly specifically to strengthen democracy through concrete actions in member states.

Mr. Papandreou, it is my honor to give you the floor.

Closing remarks:

Unfortunately, there is no need for further discussion. Allow me to thank the speakers who, more or less, adhered to the speaking time for their important contributions, and to conclude with 10 phrases. I would say it is a "Decalogue" for the role of the Parliamentary Assembly in strengthening democracy.

Firstly, the Parliamentary Assembly itself is an expression of democracy—Europe's strongest expression of democracy—because it gives a voice not only to representatives of government majorities but also to the opposition and minorities. The Parliamentary Assembly proposes new conventions, and as I reminded you earlier, it was the Assembly that proposed the European Convention on Human Rights. It is also the Assembly that continues to propose new conventions, such as the one we will give our opinion on early next year, regarding the profession of lawyer—an initiative that began within our Assembly. The Assembly monitors the behavior of member states in matters of democracy and observes elections. Recent important election observation missions in Georgia and Moldova revealed, I must admit, some concerns among the observers regarding the interference of "big brothers," as Mr. Papandreou mentioned earlier, in the conduct of these elections.

The Assembly requests opinions from the Committee on Democracy through legal means, notably the well-known Venice Commission. It gives opinions on the accession and expulsion of member states, always guided by whether these states adhere to democratic principles. It contributes to respecting the democratic principles recently agreed upon in Reykjavik at the summit, in which the President of the Hellenic Republic participated. One outcome of this summit was the establishment of the rapporteur on democracy.

The Parliamentary Assembly elects judges, but it also elects the Commissioner for Human Rights. Later on, we will hear from the first Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, and the Assembly closely monitors the execution of the Court's rulings. It promotes youth and the participation of young people, as well as active citizenship beyond simply overseeing elections.

It is a pioneer because it was the Assembly that first called for a convention and a Council of Europe project on environmental issues, promoting the idea of a healthy, safe environment as a human right. It is also the Assembly that requested legislative work on artificial intelligence, and we are proud that the first global convention on artificial intelligence focuses on human rights, the rule of law, and democracy—principles that are at the heart of the Council of Europe.

Finally, the Assembly promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women, and with pride, I conclude by saying that for the first time, our Parliamentary Assembly has approximately a 50-50 split between female and male members, whereas just a few years ago, women made up only one-third of our members.

I extend warm thanks to the President of the Hellenic Republic and the President of the Hellenic Parliament for the honor of organizing this event, and many best wishes for the next 75 years of the Council of Europe. Thank you.