

HATE SPEECH AND THREATS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Pre-conference event at the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament

Date and time: 28 September 2023 from 10.00 to 10.45 a.m.

Venue: Wicklow Hall 2, Convention Centre, Dublin, Ireland

Background:

■ Hate speech and threats of violence against elected representatives, on and offline, are a growing concern and a serious challenge to the proper functioning of our democratic societies. Incidents, ranging from verbal abuse and harassment, intimidation, physical attacks, and increasing assassination attempts, are a direct threat to the proper functioning of democratic governance, civil engagement, public safety and political stability.

■ Acts of hate speech and threats of violence against elected representatives contribute to creating an atmosphere of fear and can dissuade individuals from entering the public service or engaging in political processes. Ultimately, they may result in a decline in the quality and diversity of democratic processes, undermine public trust in this regard, and stifle debate and diverse opinions.

■ A combination of political polarisation, ideological extremism, disenchantment, dissatisfaction and discontent with political systems and processes, the raise of fake news, irresponsible media coverage and inflammatory rhetoric, contribute towards an atmosphere that is increasingly fostering hostility and inciting acts of hate speech and threats of violence towards elected representatives. While precise global statistics are difficult to establish, documented cases from around the world highlight the pervasiveness of this issue. The 2011 shooting of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords in Arizona, the murder of British MPs Jo Cox in 2016 and Sir David Amess in 2021, and the most recent example of an arson attack on the Mayor of Saint-Brevin-les-Pins in France, have sent shock waves across the world and have demonstrated the devastating impact of political violence. Such terrible events have led to serious discussions not only about the need to enhance the security measures for elected representatives, but most important, the need for increased civility in public discourse, the importance of fostering respect and understanding among political opponents.

■ This event aims to look at the underlying causes of hate speech and threats of violence against elected representatives, its consequences and potential strategies to prevent and address them, ensure the safeguard of democratic processes and protect the individuals who uphold them.



Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas





Opening remarks by Kathleen Funchion, Chair of the Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Thematic discussion with the participation of:

- ▶ **Nóirín O’Sullivan**, former Commissioner of the Irish Garda, former United Nations Assistant General Secretary for Safety and Security
- ▶ **Hannah Phillips**, Research and Policy Manager, Jo Cox Foundation
- ▶ **Carola Gunnarsson**, United Cities and Local Government Special Envoy for Freedom, Solidarity and fighting violence against local political leaders

MODERATOR:

- ▶ **Flor MacCarthy**, Journalist and Broadcaster

Exchange with the audience (Q&A)

Concluding remarks

This is a closed event; no recording is allowed.

Chatham House rules apply.

English and French interpretation is provided.