

Dubrovnik Forum 2025: Channelling the Change
Panel: "Mobilising Parliament Power: From Debate to Action"

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Dear Participants,

Those of you who had the opportunity to walk in Dubrovnik you may have noticed the Latin inscription over the gates of this Old Town: "Libertas." Liberty is a principle, a promise, and -at times- a battle.

Dubrovnik, or Ragusa as it was once known, thrived not by power or conquest but through diplomacy. The Republic preserved its freedom for centuries through wise negotiation with the most powerful empires of the time. We can call it, an early practitioner of what we now call parliamentary diplomacy.

It is that same spirit—of speaking rather than silencing, of laws rather than violence—that animates today the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, whose presidency I am honoured to hold.

Two weeks ago in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe took a historic step. We signed the agreement to establish a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, a long-standing initiative of our Assembly. This is not merely a legal mechanism. It is a message: aggression must have consequences, impunity cannot stand, justice is not optional—and the law must speak louder than bombs.

But justice is not only achieved in tribunals. It begins in the parliaments.

Parliamentary diplomacy—when genuine—can lower tensions before conflict escalates. It can expose foreign interference before it distorts a democracy. It can defend the rule of law not only after it has been violated—but before it is even threatened.

That is why we've launched an Alliance for Free and Fair Elections and are refining early warning systems to detect democratic backsliding and foreign interference.

This work is especially vital for the Western Balkans. Foreign interference—hostile, manipulative, often invisible—is a grave threat. It divides, it destabilises, it sows mistrust.

To achieve unity, we must try hard. I come from the Balkans - I am a Greek- and I know that history is a heavy burden on our shoulders. But when we are asked by our successors of what we have done then the answer should be that at least we tried to find solutions. We tried to establish Democracy everywhere, to support media freedom, civic education, and a society that knows how democracy works—and why it matters.

In that vein, we offer unwavering solidarity to those in this region and beyond who continue to believe in the European project—not just as an idea, but as a living system of values.

Dubrovnik gives us one more example from its past.

The greatest military asset was not its navy, but its negotiators. This wasn't weakness—it was wisdom. It allowed the small republic to survive for centuries among empires, becoming one of the most prosperous and free cities of its era.

But I don't want to be misunderstood. History also shows that neutrality is not always enough. Faced with aggression, it can become complicity. If no one stands up, who will defend the powerless? Today, we must pair Dubrovnik's diplomatic legacy with Europe's moral courage—because true peace is impossible without justice.

I spoke about peace. Peace is not only the absence of war, but also a state in which citizens feel safe from visible and, above all, invisible threats. And one invisible threat today has to do with the amazing but also dangerous tool of artificial intelligence.

Amid global conflicts, the misuse of Artificial Intelligence can be one of the most disruptive forces of our time. Since 2020, our Assembly has examined its impact on Democracy, justice, and human rights, endorsing core ethical principles and supporting the Framework Convention on AI, opened for signature last year in Vilnius.

But regulation alone is not enough. We must strengthen democratic resilience—especially where AI influences elections, public debate, or security—and ensure that private tech actors are held to democratic standards.

Today, as we face war in Europe, technological disruption, democratic fatigue, and foreign manipulation, the lesson from this ancient city that is hosting us today, still holds: Freedom must be defended not only with strength, but with wisdom.

Not only with courage, but with cooperation.

And not only by governments—but by parliaments and citizens alike.

I am not claiming that all our member states in the CoE strictly adhere to their democratic obligations towards their citizens, but we are 46 countries together on a platform of consultation and mutual control. It is important to try, as I said earlier. And we must do so continuously, because the struggle for Democracy is never-ending.

Thank you.