

135th Session of the Committee of Ministers

Chişinău, 15 May 2026

Opening Intervention by Petra Bayr

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Chair, dear Ministers, Secretary General, dear colleagues,

Chişinău. A city that chose Europe when Europe was not easy to choose. **We owe it something.**

We owe it **decisions that last.** Not declarations that fade. Not commitments that bend at the first sign of resistance. No language that is re-interpreted under the pressure of populism. **We owe decisions carved in resolve.**

The Parliamentary Assembly — the democratic conscience of this Organisation, the voice of 700 million people — **is watching. And we are asking:**

Will you seize this moment — or just attend it?

Look at what this session has already made possible. More than thirty states committed to a Special Tribunal for Russia's crime of aggression against Ukraine. **Over Thirty.** *And growing.* Accountability is no longer a wish. It is a structure. Being built. Here. Now.

And the Chişinău Declaration: 46 states reaffirming, together, that the European Convention on Human Rights is **not negotiable**. That the Court is independent. That human rights are universal — not optional, not inconvenient, not tradeable.

Yes, the Convention lives and breathes. It adapts. That is its genius. But it must evolve through principle — **never through fear, never through populism**. The Assembly will be the guardian of that line.

Now. When you go home — **talk about us**.

Because here is the truth most of our citizens do not know:

When a journalist is jailed for telling the truth — **there is a court for that**.

When a government silences its opposition — **there is a court for that**.

When a refugee is pushed back without hearing — **there is a court for that**.

*In Strasbourg. Independent. Answering to no government. Not even the powerful ones. **That is the Council of Europe.***

It abolished the death penalty across a continent. It monitors your prisons, your elections, your courts. It holds a mirror to power — and power does not always like what it sees.

The Council of Europe is the Soul of Europe.

*Not its market. Not its budget. Its **conscience**.* The memory of what happens when rights are abandoned. The promise that it must never happen again. And far bigger than the EU.

The Parliamentary Assembly is the beating heart of that soul. We are not here to applaud. We are here to drive.

So yes — sign the Declaration. Build the Tribunal. Continue the work. These are historic.

But carry one more thing out of this room: **the duty to make the people in your country understand what stands between them and arbitrary power.**

Moments like this are rare.

Don't just attend history.

Make it.

Thank you.