

“Second Washington Dialogue”

Washington DC, 16 September 2026

Opening remarks by Ms Petra Bayr
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to speak to you today.

I do this for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 612 legislators. 46 member States. 700 million Europeans. When our Assembly speaks, European politics listens. And very often, Europe follows.

Let me remind you why.

In March 2022, less than three weeks after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, our Assembly proposed to expel the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe. Unanimously. We were the first international organisation to do it. Others followed.

That decision was legal. It was political. But above all, it was moral. Russia in its current form does not belong to the Europe of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Politically, Russia is far from Europe. Geographically, it is our neighbour. We are all prisoners of geography. We cannot change the map. But we can change the future.

What happens in Russia decides how safe Europe is. So we pioneered again. Our Assembly became the first international body to institutionalise dialogue with the other Russia.

The Russia of Vladimir and Jevghenia Kara-Murza. The Russia of Ilya Yashin. I am glad to see you all here today. And the Russia of countless ordinary people who support Ukraine, who feel European, and who dream of the day their country becomes normal again.

For them we created the Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces. One third of the Russian representatives are from minorities and indigenous groups.

And let me be clear. This Platform is not only Russians. It brings in the leaders of our political groups, our committee chairs, our general rapporteurs. Serious parliamentarians from Spain to Estonia, from Finland to Italy.

That was a deliberate choice. We put our political capital, our institutional credibility and our trust on the table. While the war goes on. While repression deepens. While democracy in Russia looks far away.

We do not invest in illusions. We invest in people. We invest in a European continent based on our values.

Because one day Russia will come back to Europe. A Russia that is respected, not feared. A partner, not a threat. A country that learns from history instead of repeating it. A country where citizens hold their government to account. A country that respects its minorities and its indigenous peoples, their languages and their identities.

That Russia will not fall from the sky. It has to be built. Institution by institution. Law by law. Mind by mind. It will be built by Russians. But they should not have to build it alone.

And this is where you come in.

I am delighted that this is not only a European ambition. Here in the United States, the same conviction is alive. We share the same values and a common vision of a better world. Where a democratic Russia, Europe and America are natural allies.

This vision is practical, not sentimental. It gives Europe, the United States, Canada, Latin America, and our partners a common basis for their Russia policy. Political, economic, cultural. Coordinated instead of scattered.

It is supportive for Ukraine too. Ukraine deserves organised support from anti-war Russians now. And it deserves partners who plan today for the neighbourhood of tomorrow.

So my message to you is simple. Work with us. Our Assembly has the reach, the mandate and the will. Add your voice to ours, and we set the agenda on both sides of the Atlantic.

Today's meeting is a building block. What we build here is a global approach to restoring democracy and human rights in Russia.

It is ambitious. But every democracy in Europe was once an ambition too.

Together, we can do it. And the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will not step back.

Thank you.