

134th Session of the Committee of Ministers

14 May 2025, Luxembourg

Speech by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Noone is happier than me in this room today.

I had an opportunity, within less than 24 hours, to participate in the events like the opening for signatures of the new Convention for the protection of the profession of lawyers and to witness a significant step towards the establishment of the Special Tribunal on the Crime of Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Both initiatives were started in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of which I have an honor to be President. They clearly show us how even most improbably dreams may become reality if a political will to pursue them is there.

Dear President Bettel, Dear Xavier,

You were present in my office in Strasbourg some weeks ago, when I had the honor of welcoming the Grand Duke of Luxembourg. He urged me to read recent surveys about youth attitudes toward democracy - pointing out that 35% of young people globally do not trust democracy. And he was right.

Although most young people say they prefer to live in a democracy a striking 35% of them support the idea of a strong leader who bypasses elections. Many, feel democracy doesn't deliver on key issues - climate change, inequality, corruption. As a result, there is a significant minority open to non-democratic alternatives.

In the UK, one of Europe's oldest democracies, 52% of Gen Z believe the country would benefit from a leader NOT constrained by Parliament. I must be clear: this does not necessarily mean young people reject democracy. They are asking for a better version - more inclusive, accountable, and effective.

Youth political engagement is evolving. Today's young people often choose non-traditional forms of participation: climate protests, digital activism, grassroots movements. Their democratic engagement may look different, but it remains deeply meaningful. In that regard I am grateful to Luxembourg who put a particular emphasis on promoting the youth engagement during its Presidency.

I am really glad that Malta as the incoming Presidency also set issues of the youth high on the agenda, which is consistent with the priorities of our Assembly to actively support and promote youth participation.

Many of you have heard me saying that "Democracy may be old, but not old-fashioned". It is still worth defending.

And it is still worth fighting for. We need to give a better example to the youth.

When some of my colleagues do not participate actively in the PACE works, when in the annual meeting of the ministers only one third is present then.

The message we send is not the right one. Even more disastrous is when we tolerate member states Violating our principles.

Young people are watching. If we want them to believe in democracy, we must first give them a reason to believe in us.

Dear Xavier, thank you for your enthusiastic personal engagement in this presidency.