Hackathon on Disinformation

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

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Dear friends,

Some say we live in the age of information.

I'm not so sure.

We are surrounded by more words, more images, more opinions than ever before — and yet, we are not necessarily better informed. Sometimes we are simply overwhelmed.

There's a quote often attributed to Winston Churchill — the founding father of the Council of Europe — I like it because it speaks to our moment: "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on." And in today's world, that feels almost gentle.

Lies now hit 100,000 likes before truth even logs in. This is the challenge you are here to face: disinformation. Not just spam. Not just gossip. But carefully engineered deceit that distorts our democracies, undermines trust, and sometimes… puts lives at risk.

We gather here thanks to the initiative of our Secretary General Alain Berset, under the Pact for Democracy.

It's a call to action — not only for states or politicians — but for societies. For each of us. I will not stand here and tell you, as too many do, that "the youth will save the world." That is not only a cliché — it's a burden, and it's false.

You don't need flattery. You need honesty.

Yes, young people have native experience with digital tools — with platforms, memes, networks, trends. But that doesn't mean you're better informed.

In fact, the paradox is this: More content does not equal more clarity. More sources do not equal more truth — especially when digital media simply reproduce each other.

Endless scrolling doesn't always lead to understanding. And likes? They don't necessarily reflect the truth — they're often just an emotional reflection of the moment.

What you need — what we all need — is something deeper: media literacy, not just media fluency; curiosity, not just connectivity; journalism, not just influencers; debate, not just comment sections.

The Council of Europe has already adopted the first global Convention on Artificial Intelligence, grounded in human rights, Democracy, and the rule of law. It is now up to our member states to give it life — to create the mechanisms that will monitor how AI is used, and more importantly, how it may be misused to threaten the democratic fabric.

And that brings me to why you're here.

This Hackathon is not just about tech. It's about truth engineering. It's about saying: "I won't let someone else write the code for my reality." This is not a problem somebody else will fix.

Like a knife, technology itself is neutral. We cannot forge every tool — but we are responsible for how it is used. To cut bread or to cause harm — that is the ethical line that defines us.And that is where democracy either breathes or breaks.

Because — as my predecessors, the Athenians, the founders of democracy, believed — it is participation that builds democracy. Those who refused to participate in the public life of the city were called "ἰδιῶτες."

Even if you've never heard Greek, you know the word. It entered the English vocabulary as "idiots." So be participants in the real world — not observers lost in the digital sphere.

Thank you for participating.