

“International Day of Women in Diplomacy“

Strasbourg, 24 June 2026

Speech by Ms Petra Bayr

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Today, on the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, I want to speak not only as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, but as someone who has spent a career navigating institutions that were not designed with women in mind — and who has seen, in that very experience, why this day matters.

This day was established by the UN General Assembly in 2022 to honour women’s contributions to diplomacy and to shine a light on the continuing barriers to their full and equal participation in international affairs. Four years on, those barriers have not disappeared.

Between 1992 and 2019, women represented just 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in peace processes worldwide. These are not historical footnotes — they are symptoms of a structural problem that persists today. Women lead only one third of multilateral organisations. In 78 years of the United Nations, only four women have served as President of the General Assembly. And no woman has ever been appointed Secretary-General.

At PACE, we are determined to be part of changing this. We have pushed for gender parity in delegations and in leadership. We know from our own work on equality and non-discrimination that representation is not a courtesy — it is a condition for legitimacy. When women are absent from the table, the decisions made at that table are poorer for it.

There is a saying: if you not sit at the table you might be part of the menu.

The meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, mediation, and conflict resolution leads to more inclusive and more durable outcomes. This is not an

aspiration. It is evidence. And it is an argument that should no longer need to be made — yet still does. And I am very happy that half of the ambassadors here in Strasbourg are women. That changes the climate and even more important: the content.

So today I call on governments, on international organisations, and on parliamentary assemblies across Europe and beyond: remove the structural barriers. Invest in women's diplomatic careers from the beginning, not just at the moment of appointment. And do not wait for the next generation to fix what this generation has the power and the obligation to change.

Women in diplomacy are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for the world to be taken seriously by all those who live in it.