

Opening of the Exhibition

Beyond the Visible, Mount Athos

29 September 2025, Strasbourg (France)

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

Distinguished colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When one stands before the holy peninsula of Mount Athos in Greece, what the eyes perceive is undoubtedly moving: monasteries perched on cliffs, towers gazing over the Aegean, and landscapes where time seems suspended.

Yet, Mount Athos invites us to look beyond the visible, to sense the immeasurable worth of silence, prayer, and human striving toward transcendence. What is not immediately seen is often what matters most: the centuries of devotion, the unseen resilience of tradition, and the quiet dialogue between humanity and the divine.

That is why I would like to particularly thank the artist present with us today, Mr Yannis Giannatos, photographer and artistic director of this beautiful exhibition. My thanks and deep respect go also to Abbot Efraim and Father Elisaïos who honour us of their presence today.

Yes, in a world oversaturated with images, appearances, and the fleeting grasp of what is easily observed, Mount Athos reminds us of a deeper truth: sight alone does not capture essence.

The heart, the spirit, and the will to search for meaning must complement vision.

This lesson is not solely religious—it is also profoundly political, urging us leaders to rely not only on appearances in our relations, but on depth, sincerity, and trust.

Parliamentary diplomacy, when genuine, is of this same nature. It is not measured merely in visible gestures, treaties, or official visits; it rests in deeper foundations, often invisible at first: the building of mutual understanding, the respect of cultural heritage, and the humility to learn from others.

This is where intercultural dialogue becomes indispensable.

For true diplomacy is more than negotiation—it is an act of recognition, an acknowledgment of the other, and a will to overcome differences without erasing them.

Mount Athos, with its centuries-old coexistence of diverse monastic traditions, teaches us that dialogue between cultures, languages, and spiritualities is not only possible, but fruitful. This very dialogue is a precondition for peace, and by advancing it at the parliamentary level, we lay the groundwork for societies that know how to resolve conflicts without hostility, and to cooperate without domination.

Today, as we reflect on the symbolic message of Mount Athos, let us commit to practicing diplomacy that seeks what cannot always be seen: respect, solidarity, and the conviction that true strength comes not from imposing, but from listening.

Thank you.