

Address to the Parliament of Malta

6 October 2025, La Valletta, Malta

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

Mr Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address this distinguished Parliament, in the presence of the Prime Minister, the Speaker, and all Honourable Members of the Maltese Parliament.

Walking through Valletta yesterday, I was pleased to see, at the heart of this city, the bust of Winston Churchill — a statesman I deeply respect for his contribution to the freedom of Europe from the yoke of tyranny. He remains a symbol of perseverance and patience, of leadership in difficult times — a leader who stood before his people and guided them to the right side of history.

I begin with the man we call “the Prime Minister of Victory,” because he was also the visionary behind the Organisation I have the honour to represent today in front of you. In February 1943, in the midst of the Second World War, Churchill spoke on BBC radio and said that, after the war, the European nations should unite in what he already then called “a Council of Europe.”

He imagined a continent united around the rule of law and mutual understanding, so that never again would Europe’s divisions turn against its own people. This is what Churchill said on BBC radio in February 1943.

Yesterday, I was watching BBC television and listened with sadness to remarks made by politicians in the United Kingdom — voices imagining a Britain without the European Convention on Human Rights, and a Council of Europe without the country that first conceived it. What a pity.

Especially now, as we celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Some time ago, in Strasbourg, addressing our Assembly which I have the honour to preside over, I said that both the Council and the Convention were created by personalities greater than history itself.

We, their successors, simply continue their work. And I cannot help but think how small, in comparison, will appear those who today try to erase Europe's finest moments merely to gain a few votes through populism.

This year we also celebrate together another anniversary: sixty years since Malta joined the European family of the Council of Europe.

Every such anniversary -like a Festa I dare to say- honours and reminds us that the strength of democracy does not lie in size or wealth, but in the commitment to justice and freedom — the values that give dignity to every human being.

When Malta joined this European family, it was a young, independent state — yet already a nation with deep roots and a strong identity. Your decision to join was not a mere diplomatic act; it was a declaration of faith in the Europe of values.

As a historian, walking yesterday through your capital, I took pleasure not only in the monuments and inscriptions -like the one by Roosevelt for example- honouring the bravery of your people, but also because — coming myself from the other side of the Mediterranean — I felt that this sea, often seen as a frontier, has always been a laboratory of coexistence.

In this sense, Malta's experience mirrors the very mission of the Council of Europe: to transform diversity into dialogue.

Dear colleagues, our parliaments are not just places where laws are made — they are where democracy breathes. They give voice to disagreement, ensure transparency, and uphold the bond of trust between citizens and the state.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe shares this same spirit. It is a true house of parliaments, bringing together representatives from forty-six member States who serve voluntarily — expecting not a salary that does not exist anyway, but something far greater: respect for democracy itself.

Our members observe elections, prepare reports, and elect the judges of the European Court of Human Rights, who serve a single nine-year term to safeguard their independence.

Of course, nothing is perfect. Populism and authoritarianism are our new adversaries, and democratic fatigue is visible across Europe.

Worse still, a growing number of voices wrongly claim that the European Convention on Human Rights is to blame for the challenges of migration — as if it were an obstacle to sovereignty.

Let us be clear: the Convention is not the problem; it is the safeguard that keeps Europe on the path of humanism. Those who speak of leaving the Convention, in truth, speak of leaving Europe itself. I come from a country that knows well the pressures of migration.

For two years, before my election as President, I had the honour to chair the Assembly's Committee on Migration. I know how difficult these issues are. But, as I often say, I do not blame the knife for the crime; I blame the hand that chooses to use it as a weapon rather than as a tool.

The same applies to human rights: they are the tools of civilisation. To weaken them because they are “inconvenient” is to forget why they were created — to protect the human being, especially in times of fear.

And fear is even greater in an era of disinformation and the misuse of another ingenious tool — that of Artificial Intelligence, which is the new frontier of our age.

The Council of Europe recently adopted the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence -the first international treaty of its kind- ensuring that technology serves humanity, not the other way around.

Innovation must never come at the expense of trust, democracy, or freedom. Fake news generated by Artificial Intelligence is the new and dangerous trend of our time — manipulating facts, distorting public opinion, and undermining trust in democratic institutions.

That is why our Assembly has called for an international parliamentary conference in London this December, dedicated to “Artificial Intelligence and Democracy,” to explore concrete ways of safeguarding human dignity and truth in the digital era.

Seventy-five years after its creation, the Council of Europe remains the moral compass of our continent. Its Court in Strasbourg is not perfect, but it is indispensable. Its conventions and commissions are not theoretical texts; they shape the lives of seven hundred million Europeans.

Honourable Members,

When Malta joined the Council of Europe in 1965, it did so in the belief that sovereignty and solidarity can coexist. Sixty years later, that belief is more essential than ever.

The challenges we face — from war and disinformation to technological disruption — are not reasons to retreat, but to cooperate. The future will

not belong to those who shout the loudest, but to those who remain faithful to principle when it is hardest to do so.

Let us recall Churchill's vision of 1943 — a Europe united not by fear, but by hope.

Let us keep that hope alive — in our parliaments, in our courts, and in the hearts of our citizens.

Thank you.