

“35th Anniversary of the Venice Commission”

Palazzo Ducale

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

Honourable President of the Italian Republic,
Honourable Presidents of the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of
North Macedonia,
Dear Secretary General,
Dear President of the Venice Commission,
Distinguished participants

The Greeks once called Venice “a refugium in periculis” — a refuge in
times of peril.

I have visited this city many times — not as a tourist, but as a
researcher. While writing my PhD thesis at the University of Edinburgh
on the ethnic identity of the Greeks in Venice in the seventeenth-
century, I had the privilege to work in the magnificent archives of the
Serenissima. There, among letters, contracts and parish records, I
discovered the living history of people who found in Venice both refuge
and recognition.

After the fall of Constantinople, many Greeks came here.

They brought their faith, their art, their language — and they found, not exile, but belonging. They created fraternities, built churches, and celebrated their traditions openly, weaving their identity into the fabric of this city.

Venice allowed them to be both Greek and European — a balance that still defines the best of our continent. Venice itself was born from refuge.

In the fourth century, people fleeing northern invasions built literally in the “laguna”, on water and sand. They drove thousands of wooden piles deep into the lagoon, creating foundations strong enough to support palaces for a thousand years.

This fragile ground reminds me of justice itself: it often stands on uncertain facts yet must deliver firm and fair decisions. That paradox — building stability upon fragility — is what defines the work of the Venice Commission: transforming the instability of politics into the stability of law.

As a lover of Venice, this is how I see the Commission that bears its name: often obliged to reconcile the irreconcilable, not as a severe judge, but as a fair companion to the Council of Europe — which, for seventy-six years, has been the beacon of unity and the guardian of human dignity. Because, above all, what we do in the Council is to protect dignity.

Together with the European Court of Human Rights and the Convention, which marks its seventy-fifth anniversary this year, we have lived in what may be the best era of European cooperation since the Second World War.

Yet there are still those who question the Convention — who see rights as obstacles rather than safeguards, forgetting that the rule of law is not a luxury of peace but the condition for peace itself. To them, Venice offers a final lesson: what stands firm is not what is rigid, but what is resilient — what bends with the wind yet remains anchored to its foundations.

May the Venice Commission continue to be that anchor — our “refugium in periculis”, our moral compass in times of storm.

Thank you.