

## PACE Standing Committee

21 November 2025, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

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

---

Dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome you to this meeting of the Standing Committee, and I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the authorities of the Republic of Moldova and, personally, to Mr Igor Grossu, Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament, for organising our gathering and for the exceptional hospitality which we experience here.

The Presidency of Moldova in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has started last week and I can assure our Moldovan colleagues that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe looks forward to working with you in the coming months and to supporting the implementation of your priorities. Especially as they are perfectly consistent with our own priorities and offer great opportunities for developing meaningful synergies between the statutory bodies of the organisation.

Needless to say that our continuous support to Ukraine will top the agenda of the entire Council of Europe in the foreseeable future with the work on ensuring the accountability of the Russian Federation for all wrongful acts it has done in and against Ukraine already making great progress.

In less than a month a new Council of Europe Convention on the Claims Commission will be launched in the Hague. This should clearly give a further impetus to the activities aimed to consolidate and further develop the comprehensive accountability system under the auspices of the Council of Europe. It is equally important to continue our co-operation on ensuring the functioning of the democratic institutions in Ukraine in the time of war with particular support to the vital parliamentary oversight, free media and respect for the rule of law. In recent weeks, Ukraine demonstrated that it remains a country fully attached to the European values where, even in the difficult circumstances of the martial law, independent anti-corruption institutions manage to successfully investigate and prosecute the criminal activities at the highest level of government. But clearly further work is needed to ensure that the democratic principles and practices are upheld and developed, and that they can successfully resist to the growing threats, very often generated and nourished by external actors.

This is why I am delighted that the need to confront the foreign interference into the domestic politics of European countries has been identified among the priorities of the Moldovan Presidency. This particularly includes the exponentially increasing use of social media and AI to manipulate elections and other democratic processes as well as to facilitate the spread of the post-truth discourses aimed to erode trust in our institutions. I wish to remind you that our Assembly organises an international conference on the impact of the AI on democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the middle of December in London in the House of Commons.

One of the key institutions currently attacked by populists is of course the European Convention on Human Rights, the 75th Anniversary of which we marked just a few weeks ago. The adoption of this Convention in 1950 was undoubtedly a huge step that transformed history and established the most influential and comprehensive regional human rights treaty ever created. It put in place a new kind of commitment - one in which the protection of rights and freedoms was no longer a matter of principle alone, but of binding law. Now, the Convention is under attack from those who attempt to question its authority, renegotiate it or even to withdraw from it under the false pretext of improving our protection system. I wish to warn us all against a hasty attempt to modify the Convention for the sake of short-term political gains. This will only further weaken our institutions, encourage populists and, ultimately, reduce protection that our citizens need perhaps more than ever. But of course, the beauty of Convention is that it can indeed be changed to adapt to evolving environment in which it operates, and this was envisaged by its authors 75 years ago. But If changes are ever needed, they must be discussed calmly, thoroughly and democratically – never under the pressure of populism.

The same applies to another Council of Europe convention that often becomes a victim of populism and disinformation – Istanbul Convention - the first and only international treaty that recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights. A few weeks ago, we all witnessed an attempt to orchestrate the withdrawal from the Convention by Latvia, which would be an extremely alarming backward development.

I am delighted that due to the unprecedented mobilisation of Latvian people and a firm position by the President of Latvia, the most catastrophic scenario was averted, and Latvia remains a party to the Istanbul Convention. I wish to express my gratitude to President Edgars Rinkēvičs, and the Head of Latvian Delegation to the Assembly Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica for their crucial role in achieving this outcome. However, the whole situation has highlighted how fragile and weak the system of protection of women's right is and should remind us not to be complacent but keep on working hard to strengthen this system.

We will discuss the situation around women rights and Istanbul Convention later today, but in that context, I am also pleased to announce that we are launching the third edition of the Vigdis Prize for Women Empowerment today with the call for nominations to be published in the coming days.

Thank you for your attention and let's get to work!