

Plenary Session of the Mexican Senate

14 November 2023, 13:00 – 13:30

Honorary Address by Mr Tiny Kox

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

May I first express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the victims of the disastrous Otis hurricane that struck Mexico 3 weeks ago, killing dozens of people and creating devastating damage in the Acapulco region. May I wish them, and you all, strength to overcome this tragedy.

May I then thank you, Madam President Ana Lilia Rivera Rivera, for inviting me to this official visit to Mexico and to your Parliament.

The Council of Europe represents 46 European member States, from Iceland to Turkey and from the North Pole to the Mediterranean Sea. It is Europe's oldest and broadest treaty organisation and aims, since 1949, to promote and protect peace in Europe by means of member States' respect for democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

As the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I already have the great pleasure to receive regularly a delegation of your Parliament to our Assembly's meetings in Strasbourg, as well as your permanent representative there. And of course I had the honour to meet you, Madam President, in person, only a few weeks after your election to your esteemed job here in Mexico, at the Conference of Presidents of Parliament, in Dublin at the end of September. May I once again congratulate you on your presidency of Mexico's Upper House.

The Council of Europe's Assembly has regular relations with several non-European countries which are near to our geographical or political neighbourhood.

Although separated by a large geographical distance – the vast Atlantic Ocean, took me eleven hours from Amsterdam to Mexico City yesterday –, Mexico without doubt belongs to Europe's political neighbourhood.

Earlier this year, President Lopez Obrador, issued a statement on the occasion of Mexico's participation in the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, in Reykjavik, Iceland. The President stipulated that it was imperative that in these complex times we continue to promote and to strengthen the values of the Council of Europe: the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The President underlined the important relationship between the Council of Europe and Mexico. He referred to Mexico's permanent observer status to the Council of Europe since 1999 . Mexico is until now, the Council of Europe's only observer state in Latin-America.

According to your President's statement, Mexico's participation in the Council of Europe has contributed to finding solutions to common problems, which can only be solved through consensus and international co-operation. In 2020 Mexico and the Council of Europe therefore recommitted themselves to a strategic partnership and to regular consultations to exchange issues of common interest and areas of cooperation on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Next year we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of Mexico's official observer status in the Council of Europe. Please allow me today already to congratulate you on this anniversary and also allow me to invite the President of your republic to visit and address our Assembly next year, on the many opportunities and challenges of the Strategic Partnership between the Council of Europe and Mexico.

Your country has committed itself over the last quarter of a century, to actively contribute to the work of the Council of Europe. This is clearly manifested in your participation in several of important international conventions and agreements of the Council of Europe. One of them is Mexican's participation in the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI); another is Mexico's representation in the European Commission for Democracy through Law, also known as The Venice Commission. In total Mexico is now a signatory to eight Council of Europe conventions, including the conventions against cybercrime and for data protection. I know that your government and parliament are also very much involved in the possible participation of Mexico in the so called Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, a convention which is considered to be the world's golden standard in protecting women against all forms of violence against them. I strongly encourage you to take decisive steps in that direction, as others have recently done so: Ukraine and the United Kingdom for example, and most recently, the European Union. You would surely make my day – and that of millions of women, in Europe and Mexico, who seek better legal protection against wide spread violence - if I could convey a message in this respect from Mexico City to Strasbourg. I also warmly invite you to consider your country's possible accession to the Council of Europe convention on Protection of Children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Convention); Mexico was amongst the States that participated in the negotiations of this so relevant Convention. I am looking forward to your ideas to increase the protection for victims of this exploitation and abuse of Mexican children by means of this Convention.

Your country is also connected to Europe by its many historical and cultural links. With 130 million citizens, you are the largest Spanish speaking state in the world. And Mexican culture is the result of millennia old indigenous developments in one of the cradles of human civilization on Earth, combined with the legacies of 300 year Spanish rule, which makes Mexico a crossroads for the people and cultures of Europe and Latin-America.

My apologies for not being able to address you properly in Spanish here today, nor to do so in Nahuatl or any other of your country's 63 indigenous languages, although I know that I am also heavily indebted to these languages, by borrowing words as tomato, avocado, and chocolate from Nahuatl. What a tasty language by the way.

As I said earlier, the Council of Europe has 46 member States, as well as some associated States, amongst which Mexico. A 47th State was expelled last year from membership. The Russian Federation, which had joined the Council of Europe more than a quarter of a century ago, crossed the red lines of our treaty organization by brutally and illegally invading its neighbour- and our member-state Ukraine. The main aim behind the creation of the Council of Europe in 1949 was the prevention of war in the continent, after World War II. A large-scale war of aggression has now returned to European soil, with all its terrible consequences. Tens of thousands have lost their lives since the beginning of this war and millions of Ukrainians have had to leave their homes, often even their country, seeking shelter in one of our other member States. I thank all these members and their citizens for showing solidarity when it really mattered. I also thank Mexico for its outspoken condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as for its stance underlining, time and again, the importance of dedicating every possible effort to achieve peace through diplomacy. I agree with you: this war, that should never have started, should end as soon as possible. Peace should return, based on the respect of the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine, and every other State, and in line with the need to hold those responsible to account, and to compensate, as much as possible, the victims of this flagrant violation of international law. I also welcome the intention of Mexico, formally expressed at the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe's Heads of State and Government in Reykjavik in May this year, to be a party to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Registry of Damage – the first brick in what should soon become a comprehensive compensation mechanism to ensure that the Russian Federation pays for all the wrongful acts it has done in and against Ukraine. I would be grateful to learn when Mexico will be able to join this important agreement, together with already 40 other States, inside and outside Europe, and the European Union.

A flagrant violation of international law is also taking place in another neighbouring region of the Council of Europe area: the Middle East, where the terrorist attack by fundamentalist Hamas on 1400 innocent Israeli citizens last month has been followed by an enormous military response by the Israeli army against Hamas, which has cost the lives of thousands of Palestinian citizens, living in the world's largest open-air prison - Gaza. I welcome Mexico's support for an immediate cease-fire, to allow humanitarian support to reach Palestinian citizens in Gaza, and I also welcome Mexico's continued support to a two state-solution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, two States with parliamentary delegations in our Council of Europe's Assembly. In October we were the first international assembly to discuss this next chapter of misery, with the participation of Israeli and Palestinian MPs. We will increase our efforts to search, together with our Israeli and Palestinian colleagues in our Parliamentary Assembly, for a way out of this misery and forward to a viable solution, and I would like to include also your Mexican delegation in our Assembly's deliberations.

Conflicts almost always create, amongst other effects, large scale refugee and migrant movements, which is a challenge familiar to the Latin-American region. I welcome the recent call of Heads of State and Government of several Latin-American countries when meeting in Palenque, Mexico to aim to curb immigration by using diplomacy, and especially parliamentary diplomacy, instead of sanctions. I am aware that as we speak, about 10.000 people each and every day are on their way to another place to seek shelter and settlement, hoping for a better future for them and their children. I am also aware of all the efforts Mexico makes to tackle this human tragedy – and of the enormous challenges that are ahead of you. The Council of Europe, which is also confronted with large movements of internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, is ready to establish a meaningful dialogue on this matter which will help us share our knowledge and experience with Mexico, also in legal matters and international law.

Many more issues need our attention, from Council of Europe member States as well as from Mexico. As it was agreed in Reykjavik, we will continue to co-operate with likeminded States in our geographical and political neighbourhood. One of the vital issues is how to apply the essential Principles of Democracy, as reconfirmed in this year's Reykjavik Council of Europe Summit: freedom of expression, assembly and association, independent institutions, impartial and effective judiciaries, fight against corruption, protection of children from sexual violence and democratic participation of civil society and especially young people and women. Principles which are also in the forefront of recent challenges faced by Mexican society. The Council of Europe is following with great interest and involvement the adventure of Mexican democratisation, in which the Mexican Parliament, as the representative of the Mexican citizens, has to play a pivotal role. I wish you strength, wisdom and courage in doing so. You surely will need it!

Once again, thank you so much for your invitation here. I promise we will continue our co-operation and make it stronger and more effective!