

**Meeting of the Committee on Foreign and European Affairs,
Foreign Aid, Foreign Trade and the Great Region**

Chamber of Deputies, Luxembourg, 5 June 2024

Introductory remarks by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear President,

Dear Fellow parliamentarians,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak in your Committee's meeting and exchange views with you on the current and emerging challenges that our continent, Europe, faces. Unfortunately, we have no shortage of those.

I represent here the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – organisation which now celebrates its 75th anniversary. The Council of Europe is a relatively small organisation compared to some on the international stage. Certainly, its budget is tiny compared to that of the EU. However, I do believe that the Council of Europe does deliver a very useful contribution in the fields in which it has a unique mandate, expertise, moral authority and a certain agility and flexibility of action which others might lack. I am convinced that the Council of Europe has a clear role and purpose in today's international landscape, and that it must serve as a platform for reacting in an effective and innovative way to new challenges and daring to go into unknown territories.

The ongoing war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine, which continues to bring death and suffering to its people every day, unquestionably determines challenges and priorities for the EU and for entire Europe. We must be honest – the Russian aggression created new geopolitical reality

and it would be naïve to pretend that we can continue to live as we did before 24 February 2022. This new reality requires adaption from all of us by adopting new thinking. It also requires us to unite closer than ever around our common European identity based on fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It has been said before but cannot be repeated enough. Ukraine is fighting this war for these very values which are the cornerstone and the pride of our European continent. It is fighting this war not just for its own freedom and sovereignty, but for the freedom and security of us all. And we must continue to show solidarity and commitment to these values not just in words but in concrete actions. We must not weaken our resolve to stand by Ukraine. We must not hesitate, at this critical moment, in supporting Ukraine.

I am aware of the important contribution of Luxembourg to Ukraine should it be in terms of financial support or financial contributions for procuring munition, training Ukrainian soldiers or modernising software and others.

Your stance of solidarity is a modal one.

Ukraine is now in the third year of its brave fight against the brutal Russian aggression, which has increasingly targeted in recent weeks critical civilian infrastructure, with no care for international law governing conflicts, for the environment nor for human life. Protecting Europe now means supporting Ukraine! Ukraine needs our help– it needs right now the vital munitions which will allow it to continue to defend itself, to defend us all and to defend the most fundamental right of all laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights – the right of people to life.

I wish to underline once again - the international community should not lose sight of its primary objective: remain united, to stop the war of aggression and to win peace; a peace which is comprehensive, just and lasting, and ensuring that the rule of law prevails over the rule of force.

This is why our Parliamentary Assembly have actively pursued the agenda of accountability of the Russian Federation for all wrongful acts it has done in and against Ukraine. We keep pushing the governments of our member states to establish a comprehensive accountability system. In May last year, the leaders of the 46 European countries met in Reykjavik for the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe. In Reykjavik, following the call by our Assembly, they agreed to establish the Registry of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine – the first international legal instrument to address the consequences of this aggression. While welcoming this historic decision in Reykjavik, we now call on member and non-member States to swiftly advance on future steps towards accountability and justice, namely the establishment of a comprehensive compensation mechanism for the damages recorded in the Register of Damage, and a compensation fund to pay out the decisions for reparation of damage. Our Assembly who was the first to call for setting up an ad hoc international tribunal for the crime of aggression and we continue to actively support all international initiatives that could lead to its establishment.

The peace, security and stability in Europe also depend on ensuring Ukraine's reconstruction, based on strong and resilient public institutions at all levels, good democratic governance and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in the framework of the respect of the rule of law. Ukraine is a future member of the European Union and this means that the EU's borders will move further east. This is why a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine is vital for the security of the entire continent.

Two important peace process initiatives are to be mentioned in particular. On 15 and 16 June 2024, Switzerland is organising a Summit on Peace in Ukraine. The aim of this conference, bringing together heads of state and government, is to develop a common understanding of a path towards a

just and lasting peace in Ukraine that should serve as the basis for a peace process.

At the same time, a special conference, which I am going to attend, will also be held in Berlin to mobilise continued international support for the restoration, reform, and modernisation of the Ukrainian economy.

Although the Russian aggression against Ukraine is the first and foremost issue we must focus on, there are other challenges that require collective response and multilateral approaches. For example, we have already witnessed how a climate change has an adverse impact on the living conditions of millions of people. Rising sea levels, worsening desertification, lack of drinking water, and other environment-related threats may also spark conflicts, giving rise to competition for access to resources.

[You have probably noticed the recent landmark judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland*, where the Court found that Article 8 of the Convention on the right to privacy and family life encompasses a right to effective protection by the State authorities from the serious adverse effects of climate change on lives, health, well-being and quality of life.

This is a topic on which the Assembly has long called for action. PACE adopted, back in 2021, seven resolutions that call for a paradigm shift in international and national law and policies to ensure that a healthy environment is recognised as a basic human right.

Our Assembly has also taken steps to combat the effects of climate change and natural disasters, with the aim notably to prevent mass displacement of populations by proposing concrete solutions to States beyond Europe. It is undoubtable that adequate action for climate adaptation and mitigation would help the affected populations feel safe and not forced to flee their homeland.

This is clearly an issue where unilateralism is useless and a concerted effort bringing together all European countries is required.]

And speaking about bringing the countries together, I should mention the recent development with regard to the accession application of Kosovo. As you know, the Parliamentary Assembly has recommended that Kosovo* be invited to become a member of the Council of Europe – while deciding to monitor its fulfilment of an extensive list of commitments and obligations as from its accession.

Under the Council of Europe's procedures, the Assembly must first give its opinion on any application for membership before a final decision is taken by the Committee of Ministers, the organisation's executive body made up of Foreign Ministers.

In its statutory Opinion, the Assembly concluded that membership would lead to the strengthening of human rights standards by ensuring access to the European Court of Human Rights for all those who are under Kosovo's jurisdiction.

Membership would also help Kosovo to address outstanding challenges and matters of concern including the gap between normative standards and their effective implementation, the need to better protect the rights of non-majority communities, and fostering a climate conducive to trust, reconciliation and inclusion. You are of course aware of the the implementation of the Constitutional Court's judgment in the case of the Visoki Dečani monastery, which was a tangible sign of the commitment of the government to act in full accordance with the rule of law and convinced out members to support the accession of Kosovo.

The establishment of an Association of Serb majority municipalities would of course be another important step to ensure the protection of the rights of Kosovo Serbs and I do hope this will happen soon.

Luxembourg will be holding the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from November 2024 to May 2025. I am convinced that your country, placed in the heart of the Europe history and at the crossroads of European institutions, will remain a driving force in promoting the Council of Europe's values during its Presidency. These values relate to social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, understanding, tolerance, and democratic participation. Everything that unites us around the concept of "living together." I know that each year Luxembourg holds a Festival "Migrations, Cultures et Citoyenneté" which, for years, has been encouraging people to come together to build a more caring and empathetic society. I suggest placing the 2025 edition under the auspices of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of Europe.

In concluding, I wish to stress once again that the Council of Europe which was born as unique peace project in the aftermath of the horrible Second World War to preserve peace and promote human rights, remains relevant and effective in addressing current and emerging challenges 75 years after its establishment. And I wish to thank once more the Austrian Parliament for your consistent support and active contribution to the work of our organisation.

Only together and other through concerted actions united by and around our common European values, the values that became an integral part of the European DNA, we can successfully address the challenges for the security and prosperity of our citizens. They deserve this and we must deliver!

I thank you for your attention.