

Celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe
Strasbourg, 16 May 2024
Speech by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Secretary General,
Dear Minister,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here before you today to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe is a revolutionary Organisation

I am always puzzled when I hear that the Council of Europe is the oldest pan-European Organisation.

Age – some of you will agree with me – sometimes is not the most significant feature.

In my view, when we talk about the Council of Europe, we should rather use the adjective **REVOLUTIONARY**.

In 1949, great hopes were pinned on it, as the first political organisation dealing with nearly all the issues which mattered in Europe, apart from defence.

Strasbourg, a city scarred by many wars, was chosen as its headquarters.

Holding its very first session on 10 August 1949 in the main lecture hall at Strasbourg University, the Assembly identified the protection of human rights as a priority, asking the Committee of Ministers to draft a convention to this end.

The European Convention on Human Rights was the first instrument in the world aimed at giving effect to certain rights laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It made them binding. Its ratification became an obligation for all Council of Europe member States.

To date, it represents the most advanced supranational system for the protection of human rights worldwide, giving individuals the right to take a case before an international court.

It applies to anybody within the jurisdiction of a member State, irrespective of their nationality.

Humbly, I would add that my presence here is one of the results of that Council of Europe revolution, which led the founders to embed a parliamentary dimension in the Statute of an intergovernmental organisation, giving the Parliamentary Assembly strong powers,

such as:

- the responsibility to elect key Council of Europe officials,
- or the right to question the Committee of Ministers,
- or the obligation to be consulted on the admission of new members and the expulsion of those who breach their commitments.

We should be true to our mission

Opening the first session of the Assembly, its Honorary President Edouard Herriot declared: "*Your Statute has instructed you to GIVE FORM TO THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLES OF EUROPE and to FURNISH THE GOVERNMENTS WITH THE MEANS OF KEEPING CONSTANTLY IN TOUCH WITH THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION*".

That's what the members of the Assembly do.

We are vested with the revolutionary ambition to let the voice of Europeans be heard.

And we should shoulder this responsibility with greater resolve.

We should invest greater energy and time to engage with Europeans and let them become aware of the impact of the Council of Europe on their daily lives.

We are elected in our countries, and we represent our constituencies in our national parliaments.

In Strasbourg, we take part in the proceedings of our political groups.

We participate in the meetings of the committees of the Assembly and of course in plenary. And yet, when we go back home, all too often we forget the revolutionary mission which falls on us by decisions that were made on the ashes of the most destructive war that the world had ever known:

- to represent Europeans,
- to be in a continuous dialogue with them on how to strengthen human rights, promote democracy and ensure the rule of law,
- and to engage with the governments represented in the Committee of Ministers, to strive for the realization of peace and prosperity in Europe.

Old lessons

The past few years have reminded us of many lessons, which the founders of the Council of Europe had already understood:

- that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are interdependent, and one cannot be guaranteed without the other,
- that prosperity cannot be ensured without peace,
- that the security of each European State depends on the state of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the others.

These lessons shall guide our political work, in our countries and in Strasbourg.

Secretary General,
Ministers,
Distinguished guests,

Europeans want peace. A just peace.

Europeans stand in solidarity with Ukraine and call for the accountability of the Russian Federation for its aggression and the many wrongful acts committed by Russian forces in Ukraine.

Europeans want prosperity, now and for future generations.

They want democratic institutions which they can trust.

They want to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

We should live up to the revolutionary spirit of the founders of the Council of Europe and spare no effort to deliver on our citizens' expectations.

United around our values.

Strong in our belief in the mission of the Council of Europe.