

Meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy (AS/Pol)
26 May 2025, Chania, Greece

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

Excellencies,

Dear Chair,

Dear colleagues,

Allow me to begin by expressing my warm thanks to the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, my friend Nikitas Kaklamanis, for the enduring support that the Greek Parliament offers to our Assembly.

Even during the demanding days of the Greek Presidency of the Council of Europe —at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic — the Hellenic Parliament made that presidency unforgettable. Just as unforgettable was the last visit of this Committee here in Chania, three years ago.

That is why, when Dora — my dear friend, and truly the best host in Chania, and not only here — took the initiative to convene us once again, the decision felt both natural and symbolic. We are back in a place of beauty — but more importantly, in a place of purpose.

It is both a privilege and a joy to join you today in Chania, where the history of Crete reminds us that freedom, dignity, and democracy have always come at a price — but are always worth the struggle.

This Committee, through your work and political vision, has long served as the compass of our Assembly. When the road is unclear, your reports help us chart the course. When the pressure is great, your voices have not wavered.

So dear colleagues I have decided to ask you to let us walk together — through the map of our democratic challenges. As members of this Assembly, we are guardians of democracy. And we travel not for sightseeing, but to witness, to understand, and to act.

Let us begin in Europe, where democracy is under direct military assault.

The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine is a turning point in our post-war history. It is not just a geopolitical crisis—it is a moral one.

The reports by Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, reaffirming our commitment to a just and lasting peace; the tireless efforts of Yelyzaveta Yasko on prisoners of war; and the forthcoming mission of Piero Fassino — these efforts are not bureaucratic tasks. They are a line of defence for international law, for accountability, and for the dignity of every victim.

Remaining in Europe, we turn to democratic backsliding, which spreads silently in some member States.

Here, too, your Committee has taken action. Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica's report on foreign interference is a key warning: democracy does not only fall through coups — it decays through disinformation, institutional erosion, and manipulation. Our answer must be structural.

That is why I strongly support your work on a Democratic Pact for Europe — a new commitment across our member States to defend pluralism, transparency, and the rule of law.

This journey brings us next to the core of democratic renewal: youth participation. Young people are not waiting politely to inherit institutions — they are demanding to transform them. Their concerns — about rights, climate, justice — must be heard in this Assembly. If we fail to include them, we risk irrelevance.

And speaking of transformation, we cannot ignore the next frontier: Artificial Intelligence. AI will shape the way our societies govern, educate, inform, and protect. It brings promise — but also deep ethical risk. That is why the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on AI is such a groundbreaking step.

I commend all of you who have supported this work. And I particularly welcome the engagement of the UK delegation in co-organising our December conference in London, where we will explore AI's impact on democracy. I call on this Committee to stay fully involved — not just technically, but politically — in this essential debate.

Let us now pause on multilateralism, a theme close to the heart of our host today.

Dora Bakoyannis has remained an active Rapporteur and a powerful voice for the international rules-based order. Her recent report called for a multilateralism that is not nostalgic, but fit for the 21st century — agile, resilient, and inclusive.

This message was echoed during my visit to the United Nations in New York and to Washington, where I was joined by George Papandreou and Marietta Karamanli.

George, as General Rapporteur on Democracy, continues to provide indispensable leadership, and Marietta, as Chair of the Sub-committee on External Relations, is a tireless advocate for the Council of Europe's global

engagement. Together, we reaffirmed that strategic cooperation with the UN and with democratic allies remains vital, especially in times of fragmentation.

Let us now turn south — toward our Mediterranean neighbourhood. The terrorist attack by Hamas in October 2023 and the ongoing suffering in Gaza and the West Bank remain open wounds in the conscience of humanity. We mourn all victims and we reaffirm that only a negotiated, just two-state solution can offer peace, security, and justice.

The work of your Sub-committee on the Middle East is crucial in this context. It keeps the door open — not only to dialogue, but to dignity.

From there, we cross the Atlantic, to Latin America. Antonio Gutiérrez-Limones' report reminded us that democratic vigilance cannot stop at Europe's borders. In Latin America, we see democratic systems under stress — polarisation, institutional threats, social distrust.

But we also see citizens and leaders who resist. And we must stand with them.

The Council of Europe must remain a platform for the world — not out of ambition, but out of responsibility. Our values are not European by geography — they are universal by nature.

And now, as we come full circle, we must return to ourselves. To our institutional mission. If we are to be effective, the Assembly must remain an equal statutory organ — not in name alone, but in practice.

That means strategic cooperation with the Committee of Ministers — not parallel paths, but shared action. I intend to continue developing this political dialogue, and I know this Committee will do the same.

And it also means something simple, yet essential: participation. The Assembly's credibility — our legitimacy — begins in rooms like this. In the voices raised in debate. In the hands raised in vote.

Dear colleagues,

From Kyiv to Chania, from Strasbourg to Gaza, from Montevideo to Westminster — we have walked a path through the geography of responsibility. And what we've seen is not just crisis, but commitment. Not just erosion, but resilience.

Our political compass remains steady — because you, this Committee, continue to point true north.

I look forward to today's discussions. And to the work we will continue — together, across borders and beyond barriers.

Because — as I often say — democracy may be old — but not old-fashioned. And it worths fighting for it.

Thank you.