

Opening of the PACE Standing Committee

Valletta, Malta, 23 May 2025

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 in the sunny and beautiful La Valetta and I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Maltese authorities and, personally, to Hon. Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta, for organising our gathering and for the exceptional hospitality which we experience here.

Last week, I represented our Assembly at the 134th Ministerial Session in Luxembourg – an event that concluded the Presidency of Luxembourg in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. There, I was fortunate to witness two important events. First, I participated in the ceremony of the opening for signatures of the new Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, which was immediately signed by 17 member States. Then I was also present at the moment when the formal process of establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine had been initiated.

These are of course two quite distinct events with different legal and political implications. But both have one thing in common – they were both conceived in our Assembly, born from the debates we held in our Hemicycle, resulted from our political courage and creativity.

And this is clearly a sign that our Assembly is not a chatterbox that produces meaningless paper tigers, but that our work matters, and it often leads to serious results of considerable political importance. This is a sign

of how a dream can become a reality if there is a political will, courage and determination.

I believe that this sign of how relevant our work remains and how appreciated it is must give us a serious encouragement to carry on our work as number of urgent and highly pertinent issues faced by Europe and the entire world is truly impressive.

The need to restore peace in Ukraine and bring justice to all those who suffered consequences of the horrible Russian aggression clearly tops the list of issues to be addressed. Our Assembly pursued very actively a serious accountability agenda which already brought about tangible results. But we must not rest and must continue to support the development of the comprehensive system to deliver peace based on justice.

This war that Ukraine wages now for our common values reminds us that democracy and peace are not established once and for all as we might have believed after the end of the Cold War. We must strive to uphold them each and every day, continuously, in all parts of our continent and beyond as we can see that they are now more at risk than ever –

We see authoritarian tendencies emerge and trust in democratic institutions erode.

We see misuse of fundamental rights and freedoms to subvert our institutions and undermine values.

We see the growing impact of AI, social media and other modern technologies on elections and other democratic processes.

We see the spread of the post-truth politics.

Therefore, we must multiply our efforts in reversing these trends and, in that regard, I strongly support the proposal of the Secretary General to

develop the New Democratic Pact, to which I am sure our Assembly will make a serious contribution.

I also welcome that Maltese Presidency of the Council of Europe, that started last week, is committed to addressing this democratic backslide and I am particularly pleased to see that this will be done through fostering active and meaningful engagement of the youth in democratic processes, creating avenues of participation of young people in public life and developing mechanism for effective communication with young people.

This priority of Malta is perfectly consistent with our own priorities, and it offers great opportunity for developing synergies and working together. This is crucial as two concrete deliverables – new Convention and the Special Tribunal - I mentioned earlier, could only become a reality when the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General acted together in a concerted manner.

Let's continue this good practice and we will be even prouder of future results!