

**The 75th anniversaries of the Council of Europe and NATO as pillars of
democratic security**

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**Closing remarks by Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

Good afternoon,

And thank you Ms Gardini, and Mr Cesa, for hosting this wonderful celebration of the 75th anniversaries of the Council of Europe and NATO.

This is an incredible milestone. I am glad to be here with all of you, and to have the honour of closing this ceremony, together with my dear colleague and friend, Ms Ruxandra Popa, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO.

[The 75th anniversaries]

The two organisations have been working hand in hand for the past 75 years, to safeguard our common values and ensure democratic security in Europe, with the vital contribution of their Parliamentary Assemblies.

Since its very first meeting in August 1949, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has provided a forum for political debate among different European voices, to keep governments in touch with European public opinion.

With national parliamentarians from all the member States of the Council of Europe, the Assembly embodies the democratic character of the

Organisation and ensures the representation of European citizens in the European political process.

Through this parliamentary dialogue, the Assembly upholds the shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law that are the “common heritage” of the peoples of Europe.

We must never forget that the founding of the Council of Europe was guided by the hope for peace and a better future for all Europeans, after the horrors and the destruction caused by the Second World War on our continent.

The Organisation has strived over these 75 years to advance standards that improve the lives of people in Europe, looking to the future while never forgetting the lessons of the past.

In that same spirit, NATO was founded 75 years ago to ensure that like-minded democracies on the two shores of the Atlantic Ocean could cooperate for their collective defence and protection.

The establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO, a few years later, gave it further impetus, providing elected representatives from Europe and North America with a space where they could discuss and influence decisions on the security of the members of the Alliance.

[Our common values]

The Council of Europe and NATO have different tasks, but they are both based on the fundamental values of protecting human rights, and safeguarding democracy and the rule of law.

The two Organisations also share the same ultimate goal, which is the pursuit of peace.

When we say it out loud, an obvious question follows: how can we ensure peace for all our citizens? This cannot be conceived without first achieving democratic security in our member States.

It is only by achieving democratic security that our countries will be capable to react to the challenges of the XXI century. The concept of democratic security is therefore central to the creation of peaceful and resilient societies.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has reiterated this idea in several of its resolutions: while “hard security” continues to be vital, it cannot guarantee peace alone. “Soft” or “democratic” security, the expression of societal resilience and individuals’ well-being, covers an equally crucial role.

Ensuring that the shared principles of human rights, democracy and rule of law are respected in all our member States becomes an imperative if we want to achieve peace. After all, we cannot expect a country that does not abide to these principles, to be a safe and reliable partner in its relations with its neighbours. This is embedded in the concept of democratic security.

The joint work of the Council of Europe and NATO contributes to safeguarding these principles, and is today, after 75 years, more relevant than ever.

[Challenges]

The large-scale, unprovoked war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has represented a turning point for both Organisations.

The blatant breach of international law that this entailed, with Russia invading a neighbour country, violating its international borders, threatening the use of nuclear weapons, as well as the plethora of crimes it is committing in Ukraine, is having severe effects not only on the European continent, but on a global level.

It also represents, possibly, the biggest challenge that our two Organisations had to face ever. This is even more true if we consider the repercussions it is having on our already stressed rules-based international order.

Furthermore, our democratic institutions are facing hybrid threats, including the malicious actions of foreign agents behind which we know that autocracies such as Russia and China are hiding.

This is also particularly worrying, as these actions contribute to democratic backsliding, by interfering in our election processes, or disseminating fake news that trigger fears and uncertainties among citizens, and ultimately enhance political cleavages within our countries.

The multidimensional and interrelated challenges that we are currently facing – from conflict, geopolitical and financial crises, to global health and climate change –all demand solutions that draw from diverse perspectives and involve different bodies with specific expertise.

[PACE and PA NATO]

The role played by the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and of NATO is crucial in this sense. What we celebrate today is also this: a major expression of democracy.

By giving voice to elected representatives, and allowing them to oversee and influence the course of action of the two Organisations, the two Assemblies have an important responsibility in upholding our common values.

It is important that we honour this role, and that we keep strengthening our collaboration in all possible areas. The starting point must be the Cooperation Agreement that was signed in 2005 between the two Assemblies, which foresees that there is a regular exchange of information between the two bodies.

The two Assemblies also collaborate in very practical terms, for example through their joint election observation missions, which are conducted in collaboration with other parliamentary bodies, such as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly or the European Parliament. This collaboration contributes greatly to the monitoring of democratic processes, which is, yet again, an essential tool to safeguard democratic security.

[Conclusion]

The commitment of our two Organisations and of our two Parliamentary Assemblies to ensure democratic security is clear and irreversible.

Our joint efforts represent the only possible defence against autocracy and the forces of darkness.

If we fail, the immense sacrifices that our forebears made for us will be in vain. We need to keep fighting for democratic security: we owe it to them, and we owe it to the future generations yet to come.

Let us keep walking together, holding high the lights of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, for the next 75 years, and more.

Thank you.