

European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments

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Tiny Kox,

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Speaking points

Dear all,

Let me first convey my gratitude to the Speakers of both Houses of the Irish Parliament, for hosting this conference in Dublin on pressing issues and growing challenges which we face to protect, promote and develop democracy, human rights and the rule of law in all our member States of the Council of Europe.

Dear all,

We live in most exciting but also challenging times. While we are all gathered here at the beating heart of Dublin by the River Liffey in the beautiful city of Dublin, war is raging in Ukraine, the other side of our continent. There, millions of citizens have had to leave their homes and even their country, due to a brutal war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

This war should never have started and has to end as soon as possible, to avoid further tragedy.

Let us never get used to this war.

Let us never start perceiving it as a new normality, taking place somewhere else in Europe.

Our support for Ukraine should remain unwavering. Our first session today will be dedicated to our role as national Parliaments in addressing the consequences of Russia's war of aggression and ensuring effective and meaningful assistance to Ukraine. This is needed now and will be needed in the future, to restore national sovereignty and territorial integrity and rebuild the devastated country. Let us help to do justice to all victims of this war and assure accountability for

those responsible for this irresponsible war. Only then will we be able to restore sustainable peace, in Ukraine and in Europe.

Our Council of Europe was created as a unique peace project, in the aftermath of the Second World War, with a clear goal: to prevent a new war in Europe. We wanted to build democratic security on the basis of every member State's commitment to the rule of law, human rights and democracy. This goal remains vital. Not only does Russia's aggression threaten the very existence of Ukraine, but it also threatens all of us and creates grave dangers, fuelling tensions and conflicts elsewhere in Europe. This war has happened during volatile times with many challenges to representative democracy, which is the second theme of our conference. We face the growing erosion of trust in democratic institutions and principles in many of our countries. We see authoritarian tendencies emerge, and backsliding in democracy. We will look at these challenges, and discuss if and how parliaments and parliamentarians can prevent and tackle this dangerous democratic decline.

In this respect, let me welcome, in May this year, the declaration on Europe's future by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe's member states, in Reykjavik, at the 4th Summit of Europe's oldest and broadest peace organisation. In Reykjavik they robustly reconfirmed their commitment to the core values and principles of the Council of Europe and reasserted, without reservation, the importance of systematically and sustainably strengthening our Convention system, based around the protection of individual human rights in Europe. In Reykjavik, our states also committed themselves to a newly formulated set of democratic principles, to be upheld in by all our governments and all our Parliaments. Democracy cannot be seen as a given, it will always have to be a work in progress, day after day.

We, parliamentarians now have a most important role to play in implementing this bold and ambitious agenda set by our leaders. As a consequence, I recently requested all Parliaments in Europe, to look closely at the Reykjavik declaration, and identify the contribution that each and every Parliament could and should make to its implementation, individually and in co-operation with other Parliaments. It is also important to make sure that the Council of Europe is appropriately resourced to carry out the many tasks to which it was entrusted

at the 4th Summit. We have to make sure that together we now put our money where our mouth was, in Reykjavik.

To be able to meet the challenges that Europe is facing, it is important that as parliamentarians, we have democratic legitimacy, which includes equality and diversity in public representation. To have democratic legitimacy we need greater participation of young people, women and ethnic and social groups as members of parliament. This is the third important theme of our conference.

Dear all,

We are living in challenging and dangerous times, and we cannot cast a blind eye on important issues.

In this regard, I wish to recall tragic events in Karabakh region, where people are on the run, out of fear of conflict and fear of ethnic persecution, and after months of a humanitarian crisis. We all bear responsibility that again we were not able to avoid such a tragedy happening. We have to be far more vigilant in the future.

I wish to use this occasion to call on the authorities of Azerbaijan to do everything to guarantee the inhabitants of the Karabakh region full protection under their international obligations, particularly the European Convention on Human Rights and the Statute of the Council of Europe. I call on them to protect the inhabitants of this region from any violence, and restore confidence that they will be able to live a decent life in secure and peaceful conditions where their rights will not be violated by anyone.

Dear all,

There are many challenges that our continent now face.

Not an easy job for any of us, here today in Dublin. But if life was that easy, then we as politicians would have to look for another job. So, there is no reason to complain, but we must perform to the best of our abilities for the benefit of our 700 million plus citizens in Europe.

Thank you.