



Council of Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

The President

Strasbourg, 8 August 2014

65th Anniversary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 10 August 1949 - 10 August 2014

Dear colleagues,

It was sixty-five years ago that the first sitting of our inter-parliamentary body, then called Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, took place. It is hard to imagine now, how inspiringly and freshly daring the idea of such an organisation could appear then – only four years after the end of the World War II, a conflict provoked by the destructive twist of raging ideologies born from failing diplomacy, revanchist rhetoric and xenophobic populism.

The founding fathers of our Assembly against all odds and stereotypes committed themselves to the construction, out of the ashes of hatred, of a new Europe – a Europe based on common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, a Europe without dividing lines, a Europe where mutually respectful inter-parliamentary dialogue, and not constant defiance, would become a key to the sound international order. Today, on behalf of us all, I want to pay our tribute to the first members of our Assembly, including its first President, Mr Paul-Henri Spaak, former Prime Minister of Belgium, who in his inaugural speech in 1949 expressed the enthusiastic feeling of Euro-optimism that so many of us have felt in the hemicycle ever since. Mr Spaak spoke about the European dream: "what we thought unattainable, what, at certain moments, we had sadly renounced, this dream of ours has taken shape; and we are here in Strasbourg to try to make a living reality of the beautiful dream which we had in our youth."

The first session of the Consultative Assembly brought together more than one hundred delegates from twelve countries. Now we are 318 representatives and 318 substitutes from almost all European states: East and West, South and North, all are together in our common house of parliamentary democracy. During its history our Assembly has met numerous crises. Sometimes we felt that we were not sufficiently listened to, or that we were powerless facing injustice and conflicts, or that we were not doing enough. But during all these years, the past members of the Assembly were constantly and consistently working towards making Europe a better place – regardless of the states and regions they were coming from, regardless of their gender, ethnic origin, political affiliation or cultural background. I want to sincerely thank all the past members and past Presidents, from Mr Paul-Henri Spaak to Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, for not giving up on the European dream, for keeping it inclusive and open to new member states and for having transcended their national and political differences to defend the values that are common to us.

.../...

**To all Members of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the
Council of Europe**

*Postal address:
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France*

*Tel.: +33 (0)3 88 41 20 94
Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 27 96
anne.brasseur@coe.int*

I would like to thank you, present members of the Assembly, for your important work in plenary, in committees and in the political groups. I am thankful for your continuous support, I truly appreciate your commitment, but I also value your criticism. Let us remember that we represent the vanguard of European parliamentarism, and let us continue to conduct our work responsibly, in a dignified and respectful manner, guided by the values of the Council of Europe.

Finally, I would also like to thank on our behalf all those who have carried the burden of the responsibilities of the Secretary General of PACE, as well as all the staff of the secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly, of its political groups and national delegations. Without their professionalism and availability a great many things this Assembly has achieved would not have been possible.

Dear colleagues,

Let me conclude this letter to you by quoting another great European. In his address to our Assembly on 20 April 1959, Mr Robert Schuman spoke about the main driving force behind our Organisation, a reminder that is all the more meaningful when we think about the bloodshed and sorrow that affect today some of our members states, the reminder that the Council of Europe is first of all a platform to achieve peace: "Our ideas on the ways to build Europe continue to differ. They should never result in forcing us to abandon the search for reasonable conciliations. The Council of Europe is one of the main forums where should be prepared the future where our security will go hand in hand with our will for peace and constructive friendship".

Our predecessors have learned the lesson that co-operation is a pre-condition for peace in Europe. Today's rise of populisms and extremisms trying to draw European societies apart and to turn them against each other makes me wonder if we are not about to forget this lesson. The anniversary of our Organisation should serve as a reminder of our duty to stand strong and united against intolerance, xenophobia and hatred.

Yours sincerely,



Anne Brasseur