

## Statement to the press

**Tavrisheskiy palace, 27 March 2017, 11 am**

I am very glad to be today in St Petersburg for the meetings of the CIS Inter-parliamentary Assembly which celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. 2017 is a symbolic year for the relations between our two Assemblies because this year we also celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a Co-operation agreement between our Assemblies.

During these 20 years, we have organised a number of joint conferences focusing on the issues of migration, inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue, fight against terrorism, as well as the building of a common European space without dividing lines. Our sectoral Committees have held a number of joint meetings.

This morning, a Joint Meeting was held between the ad hoc Sub-Committee of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy of PACE and the IPA CIS Permanent Commission on Political Issues and International Cooperation. This was an opportunity to hold a comprehensive exchange of views on issues on which we can work together.

In the face of the momentous challenges that our Continent is facing – in particular, the terrorist threat, migration management and the refugee crisis, the erosion of our democratic principles and institutions, as well as the growing populist and anti-institutional trends – the potential for synergies and co-operation between our Assemblies cannot be underestimated.

In the margins of the CIS Assembly meetings, I am holding some bilateral meetings with the Speakers of CIS member states and, of course, our Russian hosts. Yesterday, I met Mr Volodin, Speaker of the State Duma. We had a comprehensive discussion on a wide range of subjects. We agreed that it is essential to shape an international and Pan-European response to the challenges Europe is facing today, in particular, the terrorist threat, the refugee crisis, instability on Europe's borders, as well as fight against any type of criminal trafficking. No country alone can effectively respond to these challenges. Therefore, we must work together – among 47 member states of the Council of Europe as well as with Europe's immediate neighbours.

Naturally, we discussed the relationship between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Russian Parliament. We share the positive assessment of the results of the recent exchange of views in the Assembly's Standing Committee held in Madrid.

Our discussion in Madrid showed that there are many issues of mutual interest and concern which we have to discuss and on which we have to work together, as a Pan-European Parliamentary Assembly.

Yet, I cannot say that in Madrid we agreed on all fronts. Difficult issues, in particular relating to the conflict in Ukraine, continue to be an area of disagreement between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Russian Parliament.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that we have to continue our dialogue, focusing – in priority - on issues of mutual interest and concern. I mentioned three of them – fighting terrorism, addressing the refugee crisis and combating international criminal trafficking – but I am sure there are many more areas.

By demonstrating that we can talk to each other and co-operate on issues of mutual concern, I believe that we will be able to re-build a climate of mutual trust and co-operation among all 47 members of the Assembly, so as to address the difficult issues of disagreement and find solutions together.

I believe that this is the right way forward and I shall continue to follow this approach in my activities.