



25.10.2019

Conclusions by Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Presidents, Speakers and colleagues,

At the end of these two days of our Conference, allow me to present to you some of the main conclusions. It will obviously be impossible for me to pick up on everything, as our discussions have been so wide-ranging. First, however, I would like to thank you all for the many contributions which have provided valuable input to our deliberations on the three themes that were the subject of our discussions.

The 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe has been a common thread and a frame of reference throughout our discussions. Established out of the ruins of the Second World War and based on the key values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe has built up over the seven decades since its creation a huge acquis, to which our Assembly has made a major contribution.

We can be proud of the progress made and the standards set, many of which are pioneering on a global level.

But let us not forget – and this, I believe, is what I would say has been the leitmotif of the three themes we have been discussing – that human rights, the rule of law and democracy are never acquired once and for all. We must defend them again and again, promote them, continue to develop them and not let them be eroded. This is our responsibility and we have within our “European common home” the tools to achieve this.

Our discussions have also shown that the Council of Europe’s political role of building closer unity between European states in order to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law is today more legitimate and important than ever. And it is a role that we must tackle together, united in diversity.

Dear colleagues,

I will now present conclusions on each of the topics we have discussed.

As regards our first theme – **“Our common European home”: the next 70 years** –: the number and excellence of the contributions to show not only the many issues facing our societies and the complexity of the challenges ahead, but also the great interest we have in tackling them together. At the same time, your contributions have highlighted the fact that the Council of Europe, throughout its existence, has always been able to adapt, innovate and stay one step ahead. This ability to be as active as it is inventive in defending humanist and democratic values is certainly one of our Organisation’s strengths in meeting the challenges of tomorrow.

The challenges raised touch on all areas of life, and many of the contributions related to the responses that we will still have to provide to phenomena such as the rise of populism and extremism; racism, xenophobia and intolerance; the fight against hate speech, “fake news” and the manipulation of information; growing inequalities; poverty and the marginalisation or indeed exclusion of certain citizens; difficulties in coping with migratory flows; the divide between cities and rural areas; terrorism; authoritarian tendencies; corruption; current and future transformations due to digitalisation and the increasing use of artificial intelligence; bioethical issues, climate change, etc.

You have pointed out that in the face of these challenges, our common home is already strong.

It has a solid foundation enabling it to promote unity in diversity, as it is based on the shared core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's case-law are its cornerstone.

Alongside that, we have all the Organisation's conventions that form its frame – many of you have referred, among other advances achieved through the Council of Europe's conventions, to the abolition of the death penalty, the reduction of torture and the strengthening of social rights and of the rights of women, children and persons belonging to minorities.

Our common home is also equipped with windows and doors to the outside world, which enable us to take into account global realities and, above all, to maintain a special dialogue with our neighbouring countries and other international organisations.

Lastly, inside our common home there is a vital space for pluralistic dialogue between equals, an essential pan-European forum where everyone has the same rights and obligations.

In the course of our discussions, several speakers alluded to the emergence of cracks in the walls of this home, as there are still open or frozen conflicts in Europe and international law is severely put to the test; the diversity of point of view does not always make agreement easier, and sometimes, even our common values are called into question.

We asked: will our common home be able to withstand the earthquakes and storms that come our way? Will it be able to still stand firm in the face of the challenges of our time and those – which we cannot foresee – that are yet to come? And you replied with conviction: “yes”, and together, we are stronger!

The Council of Europe has already demonstrated its ability to live in accordance with the times, but we must adapt to a changing world. You pointed out that to stand the test of time, houses need to be maintained. They need our investment, and our national parliaments have a fundamental role to play in achieving the goals you have cited. Many of your contributions stressed the need to promote even more strongly unity among member states; the importance of a multilateral approach; and our common duty to be constantly ready to defend our shared values, since nothing is ever achieved once and for all. You also stressed that we must step up our efforts to strengthen citizens' confidence in democracy; that a Europe based on unity and solidarity requires us all to listen and engage in dialogue. Just like 70 years ago, it is dialogue

and cooperation that will enable us today to restore the mutual trust that cements our common work.

You have highlighted the importance of monitoring and joint reaction mechanisms to respond more effectively when the core principles of our Organisation are called into question. As you know, the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General are working together to progress on this.

Finally, several statements recalled that member States must reaffirm their political commitment to the Council of Europe and provide it with resources, particularly budgetary resources, that are commensurate with the tasks they entrust to it. In our national parliaments, we need to pay careful attention to this issue.

As many of you have said, let us never lose sight of the fact that we are here to serve our citizens. For it is they who must be the beneficiaries of our joint actions as parliamentarians, and it is up to us to restore their confidence in our democracies. To do this, we must also involve young people, listen to them, hear them and give them a voice within our democratic institutions.

Dear colleagues, this brings me back to the architecture of our common home, and in particular to its roof. The mission entrusted to us within the Council of Europe – to work for greater unity among our member states – is an ongoing one. This means that the height of our home's roof will be limited only by the ambitions we share. Let us agree to always keep a skylight in this roof, so that we can regularly turn our eyes to the sky – to those 12 stars so dear to Vaclav Havel, those 12 stars that promise a better future, united in all our diversity within the Council of Europe.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I now come to the 2nd theme of the Conference – **Implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.**

Dear colleagues, our debate has shown, first, that sustainable development lies at the heart of our concerns and, second, that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers us an integrated response to the unprecedented challenges facing our societies. We still have a long way to go to reach these goals; we need to step up our efforts.

Three main conclusions clearly emerge from our discussions:

1. We all agree on the paramount importance of the 2030 Agenda and the priority we have to give to the integrated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We are all in this together; no country is able to tackle these challenges alone.
2. Our parliaments, which are the pillars of the democratic institutional system and in which democratic legitimacy resides, have the duty to become fully involved in this implementation, to give it once again the necessary political impetus and take on, at national level, the role of being real champions for change – for time is running out.
3. Multilateral parliamentary forums, such as our Assembly at European level and the Interparliamentary Union at global level, provide a very useful framework for sharing experiences and best practice with regard to strengthening the contribution of parliaments to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We must continue to work together to ensure that the 2030 Agenda can be a success.

The 2030 Agenda reflects the global awareness of the deep and multifaceted crisis of human society. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to tackle major societal problems (such as poverty, hunger, disease, discrimination, inequality, environmental degradation, etc.). Many of you referred to the vital importance of tackling climate change, and also of fighting against inequalities between and within countries, between women and men, and all forms of discrimination so that no one is left behind. Several speakers underlined the direct link between the SDGs and respect for human rights and the rule of law which lie at the heart of our activities in the Assembly.

Implementation of the SDGs is the responsibility of States, including parliaments. Its success will depend on continued and increased commitment by national authorities at all levels, and

on raising public awareness of the issues at stake – and the price to be paid in the event of failure.

You made the point that parliaments have a key role to play in implementing the SDGs at national level. In particular, they are well placed to help strengthen national and local ownership of the SDGs, which remains a challenge. To this end, they must mainstream the dimension of these objectives in carrying out their legislative, budgetary and control functions, as many of you emphasised. Parliaments must also be fully involved in setting national priorities and in co-ordinating policies to implement the SDGs, including by defining development aid policy.

Our parliaments allow both the majority and the opposition to express their respective priorities. Inclusiveness is our strength. As parliamentarians, we must mobilise all stakeholders and give voice to their dreams: in particular, women and young people, including children, who represent more than half of humanity.

You mentioned several innovative interesting instruments in this context: a joint committee dedicated to the SDGs in a bicameral parliament, public hearings with the participation of the private sector and civil society and the presentation of voluntary national contributions in your parliaments. Unfortunately, according to the Interparliamentary Union, not all parliaments are yet actively involved in these important activities. But it's not too late!

Several of you have criticised the questioning of multilateralism and the values promoted by the UN and the Council of Europe, which are, however, the essential precondition of sustainable development. Inclusive parliamentary diplomacy, within our multilateral parliamentary forums, guarantees effective pluralism and helps us to face our challenges in a spirit of partnership.

Parliamentarians are, by nature, the intermediaries between the people and the State. They must help raise society's awareness of the challenges of sustainable development and promote responsible individual and collective behaviour. They must work more actively to lead a broad and inclusive public debate on sustainable development-related issues and enhance their visibility which is essential to ensure broad support among the population. In particular, parliamentarians should support the action taken by children and young people to promote

sustainable development and involve them in the public debate. We will not succeed without their commitment.

We only have ten years in which to accomplish this agenda – the most ambitious in all of humanity – in order to construct an inclusive and supportive planet – let us get to work to give fresh momentum to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda!

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Dear colleagues,

I now come to the 3rd theme of the Conference **Women in politics and in the public discourse**
What role can national Parliaments play in combating the increasing level of harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians?

In our discussions, we noted progress in the fields of equality and women’s participation in and contribution to political and public life. We also reiterated the importance of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seeks to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls worldwide and eliminate, in both public and private life, all forms of violence against women and girls.

We expressed regret that the prevalence of psychological violence, including sexist remarks, intimidation and threats, and of physical violence and sexual harassment, has a deterrent effect on women’s engagement in politics. Consequently, we unanimously condemned the increase in harassment and hate speech, including online, against women politicians and members of parliament and we expressed our determination to take action to bring this to an end.

It is up to us, Presidents and Speakers of Parliament, and our parliamentary colleagues to make sure that our institution – the Parliament – becomes exemplary in the fight against sexism, harassment and violence against women politicians and parliamentarians; this will encourage greater participation of women in democratic processes.

We must strive for greater equality in our parliaments; this is an essential precondition for a more effective fight against violence against women in politics.

All of us have put forward a variety of actions that we can take. The way forward for a parliament without sexism and harassment is clear: we need to:

- demonstrate political leadership by condemning sexist behaviour, sexual harassment and gender-based violence;
- make gender equality in all areas a political priority and mobilise the necessary resources;
- carry out awareness-raising campaigns on the model of #NotInMyParliament;
- in order to ascertain the extent of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments and to identify the most appropriate tools in the fight against those phenomena, undertake surveys in each national parliament and disseminate the results;
- establish appropriate, independent and confidential complaints and investigation mechanisms so that victims of harassment and aggression can be given assistance and advice on their rights;
- introduce disciplinary sanctions to end the impunity of perpetrators of sexual harassment and violence against women;
- promote a parliamentary culture that enables all parliamentarians to become fully aware of their position as role models and to act accordingly;
- provide training on combating sexism and harassment for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff and make training on the code of conduct and ethics mandatory;
- as gender equality is a concern of everyone, recognise the contribution and commitment of men and the fact that they are part of the solution;
- promote educational programs on equality between women and men from an early age.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is an important platform for co-operation both between national parliaments and with other regional and international parliamentary networks. Let us use it to forge alliances, strengthen co-operation, exchange positive measures and initiatives and increase the impact of our work to achieve our common goal: parliaments without sexism or sexual harassment, a society without sexism or sexual harassment.

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Dear Presidents,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

We have reached the end of our debates. I would like to thank you all once again for our excellent discussions. The defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is an ongoing project and, as I said, the construction of this home is far from over.

We have come up with many ideas that can serve to inspire the design of our joint European architecture for the next 70 years. It is now up to each and every one of us to help to make it a reality. So let us meet again in two years' time to continue building together our common home.

This European Conference of Presidents of Parliament is now closed.