

Democratic Security Based on European Unity and Co-operation
Conference of the Chairpersons of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs
Committees of the Council of Europe Member States

Sofia, 8-10 February 2016

Welcoming Address by Ms. Tsetska Tsacheva - President of the Bulgarian
National Assembly

Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,
Madam Deputy General Secretary,
Mr. Chairman of the Committee of Ministers,
Honorable Chairpersons of the Foreign Affairs Committees,

Thank you all who are here, concerned about the future of United Europe. Our countries today are faced with challenges that only a few years ago seemed unthinkable.

The solutions to the problems we face today can be achieved only by common actions and unified policies.

Bulgaria assumed the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 10 November 2015. We proposed the slogan "Unity makes strength" as a motto of the Bulgarian Chairmanship.

Just in time.

The violations of international law we witnessed in 2014, as well as the huge wave of migrants from Syria and Afghanistan to Europe in the winter season rendered the situation dramatic.

Those challenges are far from having gone in the past.

That is why we rely on the Council of Europe not only as the first pan-European structure, but also as a unique forum for dialogue between the member states of the European Union, and those who do not belong to it.

The concept of Democratic Security, launched by the Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland in the last annual report on the state of democracy in Europe, shows that protecting the security is by no means contrary to the protection of human rights and democracy. Quite the opposite. Without the protection of society and the established order there can be neither social nor economic security, nor can the rights and freedoms of citizens be defended. Emergency measures in a difficult situation are admissible explicitly to protect the core values and the achievements of European Unity. However, it is obvious that such measures are taken in a particular occurrence, they have a strictly specified scope and duration, and whenever circumstances permit so, they are lifted.

The border is a guarantee of the state's responsibility to protect citizens' rights. Strengthening our borders is a matter of duty both to our own citizens, as well as to the protection of rights of those who seek refuge in our countries.

Therefore, protecting our borders from illegally crossing migrants does not in any way contradict the principles of democracy and rule of law. I would like to emphasize that today some of our frontiers are at the same time external borders of the European Union. Therefore, the problem of migrants is not, and cannot be considered a matter of a single country.

I congratulate the Bulgarian delegation for the adopted on November 27 in Sofia Declaration on European unity and cooperation. It was submitted with the signatures of leaders of all political groups in the Assembly. We count on support for the continuation of this initiative, having led to the idea of convening the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the member states of the Council of Europe and the newly elected President of PACE Mr. Pedro Agramunt.

We could reach an accord based on the values we share. I think that the intercultural and inter-religious dialogue that the Council of Europe promotes in a number of documents would help to discover a model in which to live together in the 21st century while preserving common values and principles of European unity and cooperation.

I believe that this conference will help to reaffirm the European spirit, which brought peace and prosperity to the old continent.

Parliamentary diplomacy is our response to the challenges of the dynamically changing international environment.

Parliamentary diplomacy reflects the political will of all parties represented in Parliament, and for that very reason, increases even more the legitimacy to our agreements. That is why, in the sense of Resolution 1773 of PACE it has its place in the European political architecture, and our Parliaments should make use of this opportunity and develop it further.

Let me in my wishes for success of this conference to conclude that the confidence among us makes the synergy possible and the motto that had inspired our ancestors and which we offered to the United Europe is sending the message that "Unity makes strength!"