

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE:
TOGETHER PROMOTING DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE
RULE OF LAW**

**Address delivered by the
Hon. Dr Angelo Farrugia,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Parliament of Malta**

at the

**European Conference of
Presidents of Parliament**

15 - 16 September 2016

Mr President

Dear Colleagues, Presidents and Speakers of Parliament

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this distinguished gathering on the theme: National Parliaments and the Council of Europe: together promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which is the *raison d'être* of this Parliamentary Assembly.

The promotion of these concepts and ideals is a formidable and ever present challenge both to individual national parliaments and to this Assembly.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are facing challenges, which are not new but some of which are perhaps at present affecting our continent with more intensity. Here I am referring to such issues as migration, internal and external security, terrorism, instability, conflicts and good governance.

In the face of such challenges, politicians must resist the temptation to heed to nationalist tendencies and extremist ideologies of intolerance and even hate, and we even have to be careful with regard to policies that instead of building bridges, create barriers and insularity which stand to wipe away certain important achievements made in terms of respect for diversity, inclusiveness, the movement of persons, the rights of the individual and minorities, to mention some.

Along the decades, this Parliamentary Assembly has done valuable work to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law, not least through its on-going debates and the deployment of fact-finding missions to monitor member states with a view to aligning themselves as part of their membership requirements and even to member states which at any particular time may be facing specific

challenges and situations. Here, I cannot fail mentioning the recent visits undertaken by the President of this Assembly, Mr Pedro Agramunt, to Ankara on the 1st and 2nd September and to Moscow on the 6-7th September for talks with the authorities of these two states members of this Assembly in the light of developments taking place there.

Article 15 of the European Convention of Human Rights should not be invoked except in extreme circumstances and even then, with restraint and for no longer than absolutely necessary but certainly not indefinitely and in respect of fundamental human rights^[1]

In order to ensure the rule of law, the three branches of the State require checks and balances. The constitution needs to offer an opportunity for redress particularly against the actions of the authorities and that also brings us to the setting up, the strengthening and the safeguard of truly independent and effective institutions. At the European level, one cannot but commend the excellent work carried out by the European Court of Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

Another aspect of a healthy democracy is a free and pluralistic press together with the protection of journalists. The influence and power of the mass media are ever increasing and correspondingly it is all the more important that this sector, including online media outlets such as political blogs, should act on the principles of impartiality, objectivity and veracity.

^[1] *Art. 15 – Derogation in time of emergency: In time of war or other public emergency, a government may do things which go against your rights, but only when strictly necessary. Even then, governments are not allowed, for example, to torture you or to kill you arbitrarily.*

The continuous improvement of democracy is the underpinning of good governance. National parliaments should not rest on their laurels as there is always much that still needs to be done. As Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives, I have worked tirelessly to increase access by the citizens to parliamentary work through video streaming of parliamentary sittings and committees on our dedicated free-to-air channel and the issue of a series of publications featuring parliamentary work. Moreover, there is an on-going process to review the parliamentary standing orders to better reflect current practices and aspirations, among them, efficiency and the enhanced role of the Opposition. In the past few years we have enacted, among others, the Whistleblower's Act, the Political Party Financing Act, the removal of prescription on acts of political corruption and measures to minimise court delays so as to ensure timely justice and an enhanced role for the Commission for the Administration of Justice. I also look forward to the enactment of the bill, presently before Parliament, setting up the Office of the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life.

Apart from the plenary, parliamentary committees also play a very important role in holding the authorities accountable for their actions, such as, the Public Accounts Committee which scrutinises the procedures followed in granting public contracts and in safeguarding the public purse in general; and the Environment Committee which discusses, with the active participation of environmental NGOs, civil society and interested parties, development policies affecting the environment. Parliament, which by definition represents the individual and society at large, has the pivotal and difficult role of seeking to strike a balance between the various, sometimes contrasting, interests in such vital areas as the environment, justice, minority rights, individual rights versus public security and the distribution of wealth.

In the area of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, one can never look back and say that enough has been done but we should all strive not only to retain the achievements already made but to reach better standards so as to make our continent and, for that matter, the world, a better place and therefore the challenge for us all lingers on Thank you.