

Dear Colleagues,

Madame Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

first of all I also want to thank our Russian hosts for inviting us to Saint Petersburg, which is a particular place for a parliamentary assembly as President Putin and IPU-President Choudhury have explained yesterday evening. As a German citizen I appreciate the strong historical relations between Russia and Germany over centuries. As a German parliamentarian I am aware that St. Petersburg during the Second World War suffered severely from German troops with an unbelievable amount of civilian victims. In this context I would like to remind us that it was just today, 27 years ago, that the Nobel prize committee announced that Michail Gorbatschow was awarded the peace Nobel Prize, 1990, honoring his personal contribution to overcome the Cold War in Europe and to establish a new architecture of peace and freedom under which the reunification of Germany became possible.

This Conference will be for me personally the last participation after 15 years of cooperation with many fellow colleagues of you within the framework of the IPU. Please allow me to combine my thanks for this cooperation with some remarks on my observations and experiences.

We all together call ourselves parliamentarians, but we should be aware that we work under significantly different working conditions: there are countries with free elections, and others without – both within the IPU. We have countries with fair competitions between and plurality of parties and candidates, and countries without. We have countries with open or restricted access to public offices and parliamentary mandate. We have countries with independent courts, or without, with freedom of press or with censorship. There are many countries in which parliaments oversee the work of government and several others where government controls parliament.

We all have to evaluate ourselves to which extent we meet our own claims of serious parliamentary democracy and we cannot deny that within the last decade a remarkable number of IPU-member-states have fallen back and behind indispensable principles.

Ladies and gentlemen, this general debate is mainly about cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism begins at home. It is not convincing to applaud cultural pluralism in general and to accuse and to prevent artists, intellectuals and journalists at home from using and demonstrating pluralism – which happens in many countries of the world, including IPU member states, unfortunately also in Russia. I like to mention two prominent cases. There is Kirill Serebrennikow, a famous theatre and opera director, who is under home arrest since a couple of weeks and being confronted with astonishing accusations. There is Oleh Sensow, a famous film maker, who already has been sentenced to 20 years of prison and by the way is already an issue in our human rights committee of the IPU. I express on behalf of the German delegation our solidarity with people like Serebrennikow and Sensow and all the other people wherever in the world who are under pressure of political authorities because they demonstrate cultural pluralism and we call those authorities to drop persecutions.

Dear colleagues, the IPU is about democracy, “democracy for everyone” as we proudly announce – by the way, this is the difference between the IPU and the United Nations: the United Nations are not about democracy but about cooperation of states independent of their political systems. The IPU is about democracy and democracy necessarily needs pluralism and this is indeed our promise and common obligation to make pluralistic democracy available for everyone.

Thank you!