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Speech of **Mr Toomas Kivimägi**, Head of the IPU Estonia at the General Debate “*Contemporary challenges to democracy: Overcoming division and building community*”

IPU 143rd Assembly, Madrid

Mr President, dear colleagues,
Madame Speaker,

On behalf of the Estonian delegation I'd like to say “Muchas Gracias” to Reino de España (Kingdom of Spain), to Madrid, to Cortes Generales (Spanish Parliament) for hosting this event in person.

Many thanks also to the IPU President, Secretary General and Secretariat for great effort in tackling this challenge together with hosts.

Unfortunately, virtual meetings are sometimes inevitable replacements. Face to face meetings are so much better for the IPU as an organisation. Well done and keep on going the same way!

Dear colleagues,

I am sure that many will agree when I say that parliaments are keepers and promoters of democracy. Without democracy, society will struggle to have peace, sustainable development, the rule of law and the respect for human rights.

But we live in a turbulent world, and democracy is experiencing a crisis of confidence. Numbers of opposers to democracy are increasing and many supporters are taking it for granted. Global pandemic, migration, and other crisis test our governments to come up with solutions. And in crisis forces arise and promise simple solutions to very serious problems without considering institutions and laws. But even then the core values of democracy, or the human rights must not be overlooked.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing how undemocratic governments use any means to advance their political aims, without slightest consideration for human lives. One would only hope that such methods remain in the history textbooks.

But on the borders of Belarus with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia people are used as shields, their lives endangered. This is a vivid example of hybrid war against EU, in which Lukashenka's autocratic regime uses people to promote his aims.

This should not be tolerated anywhere in the world and any such action resolutely condemned.

Dear colleagues,

One of the cornerstones of democracy is active participation in elections. We are witnessing shift in perceptions, lower levels of voter participation and reduced trust in institutions and politicians. I believe that parliaments should step up their game, and as pillars of democracy lead by example, especially during difficult times. And young people must be included.

Allow me to share Estonia's experience of voting via Internet, without leaving your home or computer. At the last parliamentary elections, 43.8% of voters gave their votes as e-votes. At the last local elections, the share of e-voters was 45%. Without this possibility, the voter turnout would be much lower. We must keep pace with time and new possibilities and take into account habits of the young people. Estonia has been implementing the e-voting for two decades, and it has especially contributed to the involvement of the voice and opinion of the young people. And that is example of inclusive democracy. And, as a rule, young look further ahead than their ancestors.

Dear colleagues, so why despite all difficulties we still gravitate towards democracy?

Allow me to quote some thoughts from Mr Kofi Annan speech at the Athens Democracy Forum: "Democracy actually delivers: of the twenty countries with highest levels of human development as measured by the UN's human development index, nineteen are liberal democracies.... Democracies are also

less vulnerable to famines and conflicts. Most importantly, freedom itself is development”.

Thank you for your attention!