

Speech by Ms. Heli Järvinen, Chair of the Finnish delegation at the 143rd IPU Assembly in Madrid on the general debate theme:

Contemporary challenges to democracy: Overcoming division and building community

Dear colleagues, fellow Parliamentarians,

In the past weeks and months, we have seen a lot of news coverage from the border between Belarus and Poland where migrants are caught between the border fences of the two countries. People have been lured to Belarus and then pushed further towards the EU border and Poland in one of Lukashenko's latest hybrid attempts to destabilize the EU, and to drive a wedge between member states, by sending in a large number of migrants. In contrast to many other refugee crises or migrations, the current hybrid operation has been orchestrated by the Lukashenko regime as a response to EU sanctions imposed on the country after its disputed 2020 presidential election.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is sad to see how thousands of people, even small children are being used as instruments of hybrid operations, subjected to inhuman conditions in the cold and damp weather with no proper shelter. Lives have been lost in this operation. This kind of actions are clearly not acceptable, and we must be able to counter these measures no matter where in the world they take place. At the same time, we have to help the people in distress and provide them with medical care. This does not mean, however, that we are sending a message to human traffickers that the route

is clear for their business. UN humanitarian organizations and other aid organizations are doing their best in this this situation, but we can do much more with the root causes.

Dear colleagues,

The grass may often seem greener on the other side of the fence. And indeed, sometimes it is. However, the answer cannot be that we always move to the greener pasture across the fence. Rather, we will have to grow the grass green on both sides of the fence. For this we need the right conditions. We need a fertile ground where people's needs and aspirations are met. Where they can feel safe and build the society better and fair for everyone. My firm belief is that the fertile soil is **representative democracy** in which human rights are respected and people's voices are heard. Only when these conditions are met, the seeds for the green meadows can be sown. This can only happen under freedom of expression and rule of law, not by oppression! When people feel they are living in a just society – they will be willing to work hard for a flourishing society and lend a helping hand to their neighbors. The rest will follow...

Ladies and gentlemen,

Perhaps the most important attribute of democracy is dialogue. Dialogue between different interest groups in a society, different political parties, religious groups, or nationalities. Dialogue is always the first step in reconciling disagreements or grievances. Honest and direct dialogue will also be the perfect foundation for any good partnership – be it at the national or international forum. An open-minded dialogue will help all parties to better understand the positions of each other. Trust is built when dialogue leads to promises, and the promises are kept. Vice versa, the

most dangerous situation is one without any dialogue. That is... when assumptions and rumors replace information and may lead to dangerous misinterpretations.

Dear colleagues,

We parliamentarians should always be the first in line to remind of the importance of speaking with – and listening to – each other. Let us keep the dialogue going even when there seems to be little common ground. This is in the interest of our constituents and our nations – it is the only way to lasting peace and prosperity.

Thank you!