

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Speakers of Parliaments, Colleagues,

I welcome the opportunity to be here with you today and discuss an important topic on today's challenges to democracy. Regardless of its small size, Lithuania is strongly committed to democratic values and makes every effort to promote these values inside the country and beyond. Having defended its freedom and faith in democracy by blood thirty years ago, Lithuania now feels a moral duty to respond to requests for assistance from countries where democracy is deteriorating and human rights are being undermined.

Lithuania is concerned about **human rights violations in Belarus**. We initiated and supported measures in the multilateral fora to remind the international community of the deteriorating situation in Belarus which requires constant attention.

Lithuania is accepting Belarussians seeking asylum because of repressions in their own country and will continue supporting the people, civil society, human rights defenders, and independent media in Belarus. The Belarusian regime should stop enjoying impunity with regard to all human rights violations in Belarus. Lithuania calls for the accountability of the regime.

Also, we would like to attract your attention to the alarming **situation of migrants** from different countries in the Republic of Belarus. This situation was artificially created by the Belarusian regime for the purpose of exerting political pressure on the EU and its Member States in revenge for our support to the Belarusian people struggling for freedom and in response to European Union sanctions imposed for the harsh violations of human rights in Belarus.

In recent months, the Belarusian authorities have been deliberately attracting people from the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia to Belarus, issuing them with tourist visas, bringing them near the border of Belarus with the European Union and forcing them to illegally cross the border into the territories of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

We condemn this instrumentalisation of migration flows and exploitation of men ,women and children for political motives by the Belarusian regime. With these inhumane actions, the Belarusian regime is putting people's lives in danger, breaking international law, disregarding the fundamental human rights Belarus has committed to respect, and threatening international security.

In order to avoid tragedies and prevent a humanitarian crisis on the territory of Belarus, we call upon all competent international actors to engage with the Belarusian authorities in order to provide humanitarian and medical assistance to the migrants who are currently on the territory of Belarus.

Disinformation is yet another major modern challenge. The spread of disinformation polarises our societies and destroy trust in democratic institutions. To raise public resilience and counter misinformation campaigns, we have to support pluralistic and independent media. Strong media can boost state measures to counter disinformation campaigns by identifying manipulated information and in providing objective facts. It is of vital importance to protect the media freedom and the health of the global information ecosystem.

We are concerned about the damage caused by the deliberate creation and circulation of false or manipulated information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is imperative to support independent journalists who provide people with facts they need to protect themselves and their communities.

As parliamentarians, we are best-placed to focus on all the matters mentioned above. Only by keeping our eyes open to the problems instead of protecting our ratings and by keeping true to our democratic values rather than trading them off for economic benefits, together we will create a more beautiful future not only for the citizens of our countries, but also for the whole world..