

146<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly - General Debate  
Statement by the Head of the Austrian Delegation  
Mr Reinhold Lopatka, MP  
Manama, Bahrain 13.03.2023

*Check against delivery*

Honourable President,  
Honourable Speakers,  
Colleagues and Friends,

At the outset, let me thank our hosts for their hospitality in enabling us to come together for the 146<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly. We have again come together in challenging times: challenging with a view to global economy, climate change, as well as with a view to international peace and security. In this regard, let me state how deeply I regret that we are still confronted with war in Europe.

Let me be clear: We, as MPs and participants of the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentarian Union – an organisation which has always been standing for dialog and peace – we have to take on our responsibility in tribute to the founders of this organisation and Nobel Peace Prize winners William Randal Cremer and Frédéric Passy. Indeed. Peaceful coexistence, tolerance and inclusive societies are cornerstones of the peace we want – not only for our own – but for each and every country.

Referring to the *Global Peace Index 2022*, only 4 out of 163 countries in the world are statistically more peaceful than Austria. And although the report reveals that the world is at its lowest point of peacefulness in the last decades, Austria has become more peaceful than the year before. However, we should not feel too safe even in a peaceful country like Austria.

In recent years, with high number of migrants and in COVID-19 pandemic times, we have witnessed also in Austria increased polarization and intolerance in our society, boosted by phenomena such as disinformation and hate speech, especially on social media platforms. But we must reflect on how to overcome the division these developments have caused, how to control online dissemination of fake-news and how to restore trust in government and the traditional media channels, which increasingly are under pressure.

With the so-called "Democracy Workshop", the Austrian Parliament has already taken on a pioneering role with regard to democracy education. It's workshops have included a special focus on diversity, prejudice and civil courage. It is important to recognize stereotypes and discriminatory prejudices and to learn how to react. Since

the start in 2007, 123.000 young people participated in this program in our parliament.

In this context it is worth mentioning that the Austrian Parliament is a member of the National Committee "No Hate Speech" that has been formed by numerous stakeholders as a national campaign committee of the Council of Europe's "No Hate Speech Movement".

As parliamentarians, we must encourage the adoption of international standards in our national framework!

However, a crucial factor of polarisation is a disconnect between politicians and citizens themselves. Parliamentarians are at the strategic forefront of prevention. We can work with citizens and build different pathways to counter hate and violence. If citizens feel they are not heard, not represented in institutions or by political parties, polarisation grows. I am convinced that parliaments and parliamentarians can take leadership in overcoming polarization and building on inclusive societies if there is enough willingness to meet with respect – we parliamentarians should be the role models in choosing dialogue over division. Respect is key for success of our work. Let us use it for peace and welfare in all our countries.

Thank you!