

Speech of **Ms Maris Lauri**, Head of the IPU Estonia group at the General Debate “*Parliamentary action for peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16)*“

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Distinguished Chair, dear colleagues, hounorable hosts!

It is easy to spread fear and hatred, and it is hard to destroy the walls of distrust and build up understanding. One can slip from the path of democracy even not noticing it on the first place. It is very hard to find way back, because trust is destroyed, and bad memories prevail.

In Estonia, we know all too well that the collapse of a repressive regime does not in itself result in an open society. Moving in this direction presupposes long-term commitment to upholding personal freedoms and building representative and accountable institutions. It requires hard work and persistence not only form the political elite but the whole society.

Dear colleagues,

we are living at a time when the world is increasingly interconnected and domestic and foreign issues are difficult to tell apart. International terrorism is a problem that needs to be dealt with by all of us, and any workable solutions must be grounded in the values we share.

When during the Cold War, political struggles were about the ability to control and convey information, today, political struggles are about the creation and destruction of credibility. We need to be able not just to better communicate our message, but create dialogue and build trust. We cannot out-propagandize networks of radicals and populists, what we must do is to provide access to truthful information and make a convincing case in support for open and tolerant societies.

When it comes to communication and trust-building, we as members of parliaments have a particularly important role. For one, we need to demonstrate our awareness of – and comfort with – the realities of the interconnected and culturally diverse world. Let's do all we can to involve people into substantive discussions so that they could become more aware, more open, and perhaps over time revise some of their preexisting assumptions. Merely a political agreement on how to solve a major international problem will not suffice, workable solutions need to involve whole of societies.

Personal contacts are the most effective way to build up trust, however in current increasingly connected world, we have to use ways technology offers. There are concerns regarding AI, but we have to keep in mind that technology itself is not bad or good. It is the way how it is used – for bad or for good. Technology can be used for supporting openness in societies, it can be used for building up trust between different nations, societies and also inside societies.

To counterbalance the worldview that chooses autocracy over democracy, and restraints over openness, we need to be determined to strengthen the international framework of institutions and norms that help advance human rights and create free and responsible societies. As representatives of Parliaments, we are particularly well-placed to engage with the people in our communities, and emphasize the importance of dialogue and cooperation in achieving these goals.

Thank you for your attention!