

Concept Note for the General Debate

Parliamentary Diplomacy: Building Bridges for Peace and Understanding

The desire to raise the level of interparliamentary dialogue in order to work towards peace, development and mutual understanding has become a priority mission today. For two reasons: firstly, because the crisis in the mechanisms of international cooperation is there for all to see and, given that the IPU was established precisely on the concept of multilateralism, we cannot but be very concerned at witnessing this gradual hollowing out of the power of multilateral organisations; secondly, because conflicts are rampant and many of them violate a wide range of human rights by disregarding respect for international treaties and conventions

Over the years, the IPU, as a forum for informal parliamentary diplomacy, has played an essential role, certified by many fundamental steps: parliaments have often been at the centre of global politics, creating new spaces for dialogue, open to the input of a broader spectrum of political forces - not necessarily governmental - and succeeding in achieving concrete results even where traditional diplomacy had encountered contingent difficulties.

This is the main added value of parliamentary diplomacy: voicing points of view that official government officials cannot (or do not want to) convey; multiplying the political players capable of acting on the international stage; keeping channels of discussion open; seeking common ground to bring different cultures and sensibilities closer together.

Thanks to its greater flexibility than official diplomacy, particularly in the field of human rights and democracy, it has on many occasions succeeded in finding innovative and original solutions that probably could not be achieved by the rigid protocol of diplomacy.

This is also due to the fact that the processes of globalisation and the constant transfer of decision-making power from the national to the international environment have placed increasing emphasis on the need to find new venues and new instruments to expand parliamentary control and bridge the democratic deficit in international relations, by providing parliamentarians with concrete instruments for involvement in foreign policy and enhancing their involvement in the implementation of peace processes.

As part of international channels, MPs have developed an invaluable skill to mediate in conflict resolution negotiations, coordinate consultation processes and foster cooperation between countries.

The edge of multilateralism is precisely this: finding neutral fora where to settle conflicts. And although the responses are not always immediate, they can still lead to concrete successes over time.

This approach is all the more urgent today, not only because many of the current conflicts are once again being resolved through the use of force, but above all because many people view the regulatory function of international fora and meetings almost with annoyance.

If this is the spirit of the times we live in, the IPU working model is also very much under threat. But we must react to this portrayal of reality and defend the capability of parliamentary diplomacy and its instruments such as persuasion, awareness-raising and institutional pressure to ensure peace and freedom for humankind.

The continuing war in Ukraine with the constant risk of escalation, the tragic events following Hamas's brutal attack against the State of Israel, which has brought the Israeli-Palestinian issue – that we all had culpably removed from the multilateral agenda of international politics – back to the forefront, and the many hotbeds in many other parts of the world, which hit the headlines way less often, require that we take a strong stance and make a truly incisive and constant commitment.

These are issues that can no longer be ignored or evaded. Parliaments have a duty not to remain subordinate to the approach of governments, to take a stand and condemn what is not acceptable. They have a duty to recognise with increasing awareness the added value of their presence in international fora. They have a duty to exercise their legislative function by stimulating and giving political direction to prevent and respond effectively to the magnitude of these challenges by engaging in mutual listening and developing a common position.

This is not only inevitable, it is beneficial. Not least because many of these conflicts may spill over beyond their geographical boundaries, taking on regional dimensions affecting an already very unstable geopolitical scenario, and that will spread in the open contradictions of our societies.

This is an exercise in responsibility that we clearly cannot shy away from, because it calls into question our responsibility towards the younger generations, to whom we cannot leave a world devastated by hatred. It is not an easy path, nor is it a short one. However, it is the only one that seems reasonable.