

Address by Speaker of Albania's Parliament, H.E. Mrs. Elisa Spiropali to the IPU plenary session

14 October

Honorable chair of the session,

Honorable colleagues,

At the very beginning of my speech, I would like to share with the Assembly the great news that tomorrow, on October 15th, in Luxemburg, Albania starts the second Intergovernmental Conference with the European Union for opening accession negotiations for Cluster 1, the Fundamentals.

This is a well-deserved achievement for Albania and the reforms it has adopted, being the first country in the group of candidate countries that opens accession negotiation based on the new methodology of EU membership. Our Parliament is strongly committed to maintaining the leadership, guaranteeing the democratic legitimacy and the inclusiveness of the process.

In the turbulent times we live in, the role of parliaments is becoming increasingly essential, not only for strengthening the system, institutions and democratic values, but also for supporting economic and social development.

The development of every country is increasingly supported by scientific and technological progress.

In recent years, there has been a rapid development of technological means and knowledge, a phenomenon that is followed by the so-called "democratization" of these means — the increase in access to knowledge, technology and artificial intelligence, for large groups of the population, particularly the youth.

Never before has social and human development worldwide been so influenced by technology as it does today. And never before have we been so challenged by a new world that needs taming through appropriate legislation and regulations.

In the recent years Albania has secured widespread use of online public services. About 95% of all the services in the country are now offered online, reducing time of interaction, as well as fighting corruption in services delivery.

However, we have to keep in mind asymmetrical developments, as the provision of online services has advanced faster than the preparation of the population to access these services, especially in remote areas, among the older population and marginalizes groups, a challenge that we are addressing energetically.

The challenges are increasing also due to the risk of cyber-attacks, which have risen as a result of Albania's unwavering and clear stance against terrorism.

Albania has faced and will continue to successfully face these risks with the assistance of our partners, a stark reminder that advanced technologies can also be used for malicious purposes, distribution of disinformation and hate speech, to undermine democracy.

We are working on legislative and oversight functions and regulatory frameworks, to ensure that technological advances and innovation are used in an ethical and responsible manner.

In April, the Parliament of Albania established the ad hoc Committee to coordinate institutional effort to fight Des-information and other forms of foreign interference into the democratic processes of the country. The committee will work on the legislative and oversight framework that protects the public and our system from these serious threats.

The Parliament of Albania, in addition to supporting the broad use of technologies for providing online public services, has also promoted the enhancement of knowledge, skills and capacity-building of the population in using new types of services.

This not only aligns our country with contemporary trends in the use of science and technology, but also increases the effectiveness, efficiency and practical utility of public services, while simultaneously helping to avoid corrupt practices.

Furthermore, supporting parliamentary functions, activities and processes through scientific and technological progress is imperative for the legislative process. We learned that hard lesson during Covid, which tested our limits and pushed us to implement new technologies in parliamentary processes like online committee meetings and beyond. To this day permanent committee meetings are broadcasted online in real time ensuring transparency and public involvement.

We are pursuing several paths to create synergies between parliamentary processes, science and technology, among which:

The incorporation of scientific achievements into the legislative process;

- The creation of special structures of parliamentary services to assist the parliamentary processes;
- The establishment of institutional collaboration with universities.

The contribution of experts has been effective and useful also in the legislation Parliament of Albania has approved recently, concerning online public services, cyber-security, electronic communications, the production of military equipment and technologies, legal regulations in education, healthcare, and more.

The involvement of scientific achievements in lawmaking and parliamentary scrutiny, is become an added value and a public good for the country.

Relying on the best expertise, contemporary knowledge and technological novelties helps the legislative cohesion, its impact to the development of the country contributes to building a more just, democratic, and inclusive society.

Thank you!