

Mr chair, dear colleagues,

I would like to split the question of good governance into two parts: first, governance that works well technically; and second, people's trust that their government works for them. Sometimes I feel we focus much more on the first – transparency and procedures – and much less on the second: do people actually feel that their government is working for them?

In Latvia, we have achieved a lot in transparency. All committee meetings, draft laws and debates of our parliament are available online. When I vote in plenary, every citizen can see my vote and ask me why. And, believe me, they do ask!

Latvian society has also built its own tool: ManaBalss – "My Voice". Civic activists launched it in 2011, in response to the governance failures behind the 2008 financial crisis. Since then, 118 citizens' initiatives have changed national laws, and 38 have succeeded in municipalities. In 2019, an initiative started on ManaBalss even changed our Constitution, introducing an open election of the President. But there is also a lesson: last year this platform was close to bankruptcy. Civic infrastructure for participation needs stable and independent funding – otherwise it disappears.

Still, according to the OECD Trust Survey, trust in our national government has grown only slightly since 2021. **And we are not alone: low trust in government is a challenge in many of our countries.** Why?

The research says: the strongest lever is political voice, not efficiency. People who feel they have no impact on decisions trust government far less than those who feel they do. Transparency and digital tools cannot make miracles alone. What shapes trust most is genuine responsiveness – whether public feel that they can change decisions. And here parliaments, including my own, must honestly admit that our decisions **do not always reflect people's needs**

People also need real ways to make their voices heard. At this Assembly, we are discussing inclusive social development for all to promote the rights and empowerment of persons with disabilities. But it is not enough to include the needs of persons with disabilities – they must be at the table when these needs are discussed because they know best what works and what fails. "Nothing about us without us" must apply to women, to young people, to rural communities – to everyone whose voice is usually the quietest. Parliaments must make this the rule, not the exception.

So why do parliaments still fail to hear people, even when participation and transparency are in place? I see two reasons.

First, the influence of smaller but more powerful interest groups. We have seen this very clearly in climate and environmental policy. In Latvia, we have reduced the dependence of political parties on lobby groups by increasing public funding for parties and requiring more transparency. We must continue.

Second, social networks, and now artificial intelligence, shape public opinion – fuelled by the same interest and lobby groups and by foreign interference. We all defend freedom of expression. But is it freedom when one group can amplify its voice out of all proportion to others, using disinformation and lies?

Parliaments shall act: by demanding transparency of lobbying, of platform algorithms and of artificial intelligence. Very powerful players stand behind them, and no single country can counter their influence alone. Therefore, I ask you – parliamentarians from all over the world – to join our voices, so that in the digital world, too, the voice of people is stronger than the power of money and narrow, vested interests.

Thank you.