

General Debate

Strengthening good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all

Address by the Head of the Delegation of the Republic of San Marino, Lorenzo Bugli

Madam President, distinguished colleagues,

I bring you the greetings of the Great and General Council of the Republic of San Marino. Sixty-one square kilometres. Just over thirty thousand citizens. Seventeen centuries of freedom.

We are small. We know it. But history has taught us one thing: the size of a State is no measure of the greatness of its ideas.

We meet in Arusha, a city whose name the world associates with peace accords. It is the right place to speak of trust. Because accords, like constitutions, are words written on paper. Trust alone brings them to life.

And trust, colleagues, is in crisis. It is not I who say so. The numbers do. Across OECD countries, 44 per cent of citizens say they have little or no trust in their government. Almost one in two. That is not a statistic. It is a warning.

But there is a second number, and it weighs more than the first. Among citizens who feel they have a say, trust rises to 69 per cent. Among those who feel excluded, it plunges to 22. Trust, then, is not a feeling. It is a relationship. And relationships are built in one way only: by listening.

Václav Havel tells of a greengrocer who places a slogan in his shop window. He does not believe in it. He displays it because everyone else does. Too many of our institutions have become shop windows. Good governance begins when we take down the slogans and put the real goods back on display. Saying what we think. Doing what we say. Answering for what we do. Three simple sentences. Three revolutions.

On this, San Marino has a story to tell.

First: accountability. Since 1243 our Republic has been led by two Heads of State, the Captains Regent. They remain in office for six months. Not one day more. And at the end of their term they must answer for their conduct. Power that is brief, shared and held to account. It is an ancient idea. It is an idea that does not grow old.

Second: listening. Twice a year, every citizen may address the institutions directly through the Istanza d'Arengo, the citizens' petition. And the institutions are bound to consider it. It is that 69 per cent, translated into eight centuries of history: an open door. And the certainty that on the other side, someone answers.

Third: young people. Half of humanity is under thirty. In the world's parliaments, members under thirty account for 2.8 per cent. In more than a third of chambers, there are none. I had the honour of serving my country as Head of State at the age of thirty-one. I say this without pride, because the merit is not mine. It is proof that it can be done. A parliament that excludes the generation that will live longest with its decisions does not govern. It administers the present, at the expense of the future.

A few weeks ago, Pope Leo XIV visited our Republic. He spoke of the value of a State on a human scale, where politics stays close to the needs of citizens and democracy can be more effective. And he pointed to San Marino as a possible "laboratory of good politics", able, without departing from the secular nature of the State, to draw on principles that belong to everyone: the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, social justice.

He also recalled that care for others is a distinctive mark of our history. In the summer of 1944, as the war swept through Italy, a Republic of fifteen thousand souls opened its doors to tens of thousands of refugees. The accounts of the time speak of one hundred thousand people. We did not ask who they were. We asked only what they needed.

A laboratory, colleagues, does not claim to have all the answers. It experiments. It measures. It corrects. That is what this debate asks of us: decisions grounded in data, the honesty to assess results, the humility to change course. As our Association Agreement with the European Union becomes operational, San Marino intends to bring this spirit into a larger family. Sharing its results. And its mistakes too.

The same holds for technology. It can bring institutions closer to citizens, or drown them in noise. It can widen participation, or offer only the illusion of it. It must remain at the service of the human person. Because, as the Pope told us, “the quality of a civilisation is measured not by the power of its means, but by the care it is able to offer”.

Distinguished colleagues, trust cannot be decreed. It is earned. One decision at a time. One citizen at a time.

According to tradition, our founder, Marinus, left his people a single legacy, contained in a single sentence: “Relinquo vos liberos”. I leave you free.

He left us no riches. He left us no armies. He left us free.

It is the same charge that awaits each of us. We will not be remembered for the power we wielded. We will be remembered for the freedom, and for the trust, that we leave to those who come after us.

Thank you.

Notes for the speaker • data sources

44% little or no trust in national government; 69% trust among those who feel they have a say versus 22% among those who do not: OECD, Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results (30 countries, around 60,000 responses).

2.8% of MPs aged 30 or under; 37.1% of chambers with no MP under 30; around half of the world's population under 30: IPU, Youth participation in national parliaments 2025.

1944: population of around 15,000; Minister Balducci estimated 60–70,000 refugees, other accounts up to 100,000.

Papal quotations: address to the authorities, San Marino, 22 August 2026 (“laboratory of good politics”; “The quality of a civilisation is measured not by the power of its means, but by the care it is able to offer”).

“Relinquo vos liberos ab utroque homine”: words attributed by tradition to the dying Saint Marinus. The text quotes only “Relinquo vos liberos” to avoid the reference to emperor and pope contained in “ab utroque homine”.

Six-month Regency: since 1243. Istanza d’Arengo: may be submitted twice a year, on the first Sunday following the investiture of the Captains Regent.

Length: around 865 words, roughly 6 minutes at a solemn pace. To be timed aloud.