



Peter Beyer

Member of the German Bundestag
*Coordinator of Transatlantic Cooperation of the Federal
Government*

IPU Belgrade

Speech by Peter Beyer MP, Germany

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this distinguished group of parliamentarians from around the globe. It is a true honor to speak on behalf of the German IPU delegation. I want to share some thoughts and proposals with you on the importance of parliaments and parliamentarians and what role they should play in strengthening democratic structures. I will also give some concrete examples of projects that could serve as both a role model and motivation for each and everyone of us to engage more in interparliamentary actions.

Apart from IPU, we know other platforms in which national parliamentarians are organized and share their views and opinions, striving for democratic majorities in what they want to achieve:

- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)
- Parliamentary Assembly of NATO
- Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE.

All of these are bodies of supranational organizations and have different focusses and means to express and execute their political will.

IPU is somewhat unique in this regard, being not a mere body of, or annex to, an entity or supranational authority, but defines its uniqueness in being self-standing.

With this having said, I want to share with you my conviction that it is time for us as parliamentarians to adopt more “ownership” of our role. Having been elected for a period of some years to represent the interests of our constituents comes with a huge dimension of responsibility. Only if we understand this core underlying principle of what a parliamentarian should be, can we gain a level of “ownership”, quality and political power that genuine and functioning democracies are made of.

We need an upgrade on parliamentary powers. Maybe not all of us, but reality shows as everybody knows that there are big differences in the standing, reputation and powers of parliaments throughout the world. I hence take it that some of us feel that they do not have sufficient influence as they should have in their respective countries. We need to change this. That is why I repeat: We need to upgrade the citizens’ voice, that is us.

How can we do that? – Here are some examples and proposals I trust you may find worthwhile considering:

- German – French joint parliamentary assembly which was only very recently established, bringing together former war enemies (50 French and 50 German MP);
- The bi-lateral friendship groups almost all parliaments have.

And since we are in the so-called Western Balkans region, consisting of six countries, of which Serbia is one, I want to make it a point to specifically mention the following examples of cross-border cooperation of parliaments and parliamentarians:

- Cetinje Parliamentary Forum, which aims at exchanging best practices on how to implement European Union standards in national laws;
- Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in South Eastern Europe;
- Annual meeting of the spokespersons of the parliaments of the WB6 countries.

There is however, a high potential to do much more. Whereas there are many formats for intergovernmental regional cooper-

ation, there are only comparably few regional inter-parliamentary platforms.

Oftentimes the parliaments of the WB6 are left out of important political decisions – although they have a mandate and are thus highly legitimized to engage and take up responsibility. Part of the problem is that parliamentarians here are perceived as part of the old elites. What is unique about the Western Balkans is that they are united in their common goal to achieve full EU membership. In 2014, German Chancellor Angela Merkel initiated an intergovernmental platform, the so-called Berlin-Process. This format aims at securing long-term stability and transformation of the region through economic growth and stronger regional cooperation. Many meetings and concrete projects have come out of this process.

Last year, I initiated together with the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) an Interparliamentary Initiative (IPI) adjacent to the Berlin-Process, bringing together the parliamentarians of the WB6, fostering their role as elected MPs and boosting their understanding that the responsibility for whether or not they use the opportunity to open and step through the door to the EU lies only in the hands of the active parliamentarians of the region. We need to build up an awareness of their political clout and

responsibilities so as to strengthen the promotion of democracy and the rule of law in strong parliaments.

Let me finish with encouraging all of you fellow parliamentarians from around the world to reach out to your neighbor countries' parliaments and intensify personal and institutional contacts, engage in exchange more frequently. Build core groups that lead the crossborder, interparliamentary exchange and work on concrete topics and projects such as judicial reform, freedom of the press, promoting protection and respect for human rights and promoting women in politics and society.