

**SPEECH BY THE HEAD OF THE
ITALIAN DELEGATION TO THE 141st IPU ASSEMBLY**

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Belgrade, 15 October 2019

This debate is, I believe, very timely indeed.

Our Organisation is the offspring of the concept of multilateralism, which is precisely why anyone like myself, who had the honour of chairing this Assembly, cannot fail to voice their extreme concern about what is taking place in the world today.

We are confronted today not by some passing crisis in the workings of international cooperation. We are witnessing the greatest political developments taking place since the Second World War.

The world's leading countries, beginning with the United States of America, that worked to establish, support and defend multilateralism, appear to be pulling back from it today. Expediency is becoming more important than rules. Abuse of power is being tolerated, and multilateral Organisations are being rendered powerless: the world lacks rules or benchmarks.

The IPU played a crucial role as a forum for informal parliamentary diplomacy during the years of the Cold War, which no-one wishes to see ever again.

Here, the Palestinian State has seen its representatives working hard, and countries divided by the Cold War Iron Curtain have been able to talk to one another, through their parliamentary Representatives.

IPU's historic role has been confirmed by so many crucial events.

Parliaments have taken centre stage in world politics, and have overcome the inability to communicate which sometimes existed between governments.

Countries with different political systems have found the strength, through their parliaments, to speak with their traditional adversaries.

The value of multilateralism is precisely in the establishment of neutral fora where we settle disputes. Today, this is all past history.

Conflicts are once again being settled by the use of force, and many even seem to consider the regulatory function of international fora a nuisance.

I teach my students what the Peace of Westphalia meant for International Relations. Today, perhaps we should also be studying it, not just our students.

Colleagues, if this is the situation we are experiencing today, even the way the Inter-Parliamentary Union operates is under serious threat. Some will perhaps argue that multilateralism is too costly for the national Parliaments to bear. But politics has a cost, democracy has a cost, and complaints about the cost of politics are often disingenuous.

We must react to this representation of reality and defend not the survival of our organization but of multilateralism, which is the greatest achievement of the 20th century and that, in spite of all its problems, is the only opportunity to ensure peace and freedom in the progress of man.