

## STATEMENT

Chairperson in Office

H.E. **Miroslav Lajčák**

### 141<sup>st</sup> IPU Assembly: General Debate

*Ms. President of the National Assembly,*

*Ms. President (IPU),*

*Mr. Secretary General (IPU),*

*Dear colleagues, friends,*

I would like to start by quoting the esteemed President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, from her address at the 140th Assembly in Doha last April,

She said, “**Today’s world is full of contradictions**”. And, I could not agree more.

**Trade patterns and supply chains** have brought us closer together, and made us more inter-dependent, than we have ever been.

**Technology** has expanded our markets. It has created jobs we could not even have imagined just a decade ago.

Our countries are more equal. Our people are less poor.

So, it sounds like we should be **more connected – with more opportunities ahead of us**.

But, as we know, that is **not always the reality**.

...The tools designed to bring us closer together have been weaponized to spread **hate**, crime, and **disinformation** at an **unprecedented rate** and with **little risk of prosecution**.

...**Technology** has indeed created new sectors and jobs – but, in doing so, it has put others in danger.

...And, while **inequalities** between nations lessen, and more people rise from extreme poverty, the inequalities between us – the inequalities between different groups of our own societies – are getting deeper.

There is also another **contradiction** to address.

Which begins with the fact that, in today’s world, **cooperation is not a luxury**. It is not an opt in,

or add on, solution.

Actually, it is now a fact of life. Whether in tackling terrorism, or pushing back on climate change, the days of **being able to go it alone** are over.

But, at the same time, our methods and means of cooperation look to be more at risk than ever.

Which is why I am so glad to be here – addressing the **world's largest forum for cooperation and dialogue among parliamentarians**.

And, I really do appreciate the theme you have chosen: The role and mechanisms of parliaments in **strengthening international law** and the **contribution of regional cooperation**.

I want to make three points in addressing it.

## **I. Role of Parliamentarians**

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### **First: the role parliaments play in strengthening international law.**

Let's be pragmatic here. **Parliamentarians have a lot of power**. You can launch initiatives. You can cast deciding votes. You can be the difference between legislation being passed, or blocked.

And, together, **you hold the keys to the future** – not just of your own constituencies, or countries, but also our international order.

International law has noble aims. It stipulates how we navigate our seas. It protects the rights of people. It regulates our trade, and helps us to preserve our environment.

So, it influences us all. But not all of us are involved in its development.

As we know, international law often stems from **conferences and conventions**.

It is drafted and negotiated by **diplomats, delegates and experts**.

But, if we want to **bring international law to life**, we need **more** than just those diplomats, delegates and experts.

In fact, we need you.

You are where you are because people elected you.

You do not spend your days only in big conference rooms like this one.

Instead, you are out there, talking to people...hearing their **concerns and their grievances**. And, because of this, you **speak in a way that people can understand**.

So, no matter how good – or how noble – our international treaties, resolutions or compacts are.....they will have no impact without you, the parliamentarians.

You will be the ones to **ratify** them....to **integrate** them into national legislation.....to assign any necessary **budgets**.....and, to act as the **watchdogs** of the government, in ensuring commitments are being kept.

In short, you bring international law out of rooms like this one, into the real lives of people on the ground.

## II. Regional cooperation

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**Now, for my second point, I want to look at the second element of our theme today: regional cooperation.**

So, why do we need regional cooperation? Why can't we just operate on international and national levels?

Well, one reason is the rise of **regional challenges**.

From issues of peace and conflict..... to food security or economic growth, different regions face **unique dynamics**.

And, the countries *within* these regions need a platform. They need to be able to talk about their common experiences and challenges. In short, they need a way to find **regional solutions to regional challenges**.

That is why the value of regional cooperation is more and more being **recognized**.

When I was the **President of the UN General Assembly**, I saw this first-hand.

More resolutions coming from the **United Nations'** main organs emphasize the need for regional engagement. And, more delegates than ever are calling for **closer regional cooperation** in their speeches.

I also have first-hand experience about the value of regional organizations, as **Chair** of the world's largest regional organization – the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**.

Over the past year, I have visited all of the OSCE's field missions.

I have seen that regional organizations have **unique tools**.

They often have **localized knowledge** and expertise.

Their decision-making processes are designed to enhance **buy-in**.

They have strong **convening power**, which can accelerate **inter-regional cooperation**.

And, they are often seen as a **friend** – and a true partner – by actors on the ground.

This is true for the OSCE's work in *this* very region. It has a presence not only here, in Belgrade, but throughout the Western Balkans.<sup>1</sup> And, the work it does – from **monitoring elections** to boosting **dialogue between communities** – has been designed in line with the priorities of **national actors**.

So, I am a firm believer in the added value and the role of **regional cooperation**, and **regional organizations**.

And, given the theme of this assembly, I am sure many of you are too.

But we cannot take for granted that everyone is convinced. There are still some disconnects.

For example, when we are at the **UN**, we do **not** always hear about the valuable work being done by **regional platforms or organizations**..... And, inversely, some of the issues discussed on a daily basis in **New York** [e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals] are less visible, in some regional formats.

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<sup>1</sup> Croatia the only exception.

So, there is still **some work to do**. We need to keep **connecting the dots** – in making sure regional cooperation is **not standalone**, but rather part of our **wider multilateral order**.

And, here, again **parliamentarians** can play a valuable role.

In fact, the **OSCE Parliamentary Assembly** is a key player for us, at the OSCE.

But also having all of you here today, to listen to the stories of both international and regional actors is crucial. It will allow you to take home ideas for new projects and more cooperation, And, I hope we see more initiatives like this.

### **III. Multilateralism**

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**For my third point, I want to talk more broadly – about the lessons of history.** And what they can teach us when it comes to **cooperation and dialogue**.

The **Inter-Parliamentary Union** was created **130 years ago**<sup>2</sup>.

It lived through the **First World War**. And it saw the **League of Nations** being created as a way to prevent such a war from happening again.

Of course, we know that this, tragically, did not go to plan.

Which meant that the **IPU** also lived through the **Second World War**. And, it witnessed the creation of the **United Nations**...followed by many of the multilateral, regional organizations we know today.

I see a pattern here.

Whenever we nearly destroyed ourselves, we turned towards a stronger multilateral order. This was a way to bring ourselves back from the brink – and to **prevent the same conditions**, which had allowed such inhumanity to flourish, **to grow back**.

As we know, there is no police force for international law. There is no way to keep us all in the systems and frameworks we signed up for.

They depend on our **goodwill** – on a principle of *pacta sunt servanda*. They depend on us knowing what we **stand to lose**, if we go down the wrong path.

It is no secret that our multilateral systems are being questioned.

And, some questions – some challenges – are **healthy**. They can allow us to close gaps; they force us to think outside the box, to find new ways of working.

But, the real danger arises, I believe, when we start to question the **very need for these systems** – when we start to believe that **going it alone** is better than real **dialogue, cooperation and compromise**.

Because that is when we run the risk of ignoring history – and repeating the mistakes of the past.

So, thank you all for your belief in IPU, as a platform for dialogue and cooperation.

And, thank you for putting the spotlight on these crucial – and, frankly, urgent – issues today.

Good luck in the discussions ahead.

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<sup>2</sup> 30 June 1889