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SPEECH

**PRESIDENT OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL**

WOLFGANG SOBOTKA

Opening address at the virtual meeting of the
Fifth IPU World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2020

„As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, parliaments have a key role to play in meeting the current challenges. It is therefore crucial that we also see the corona pandemic as an opportunity to acknowledge the great value and strength of a functioning parliamentary democracy.“

Wolfgang Sobotka
President of the National Council



Madam President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Distinguished colleagues,

It was more than a year ago that the Austrian Parliament was chosen to host this conference. Since that time we have been preparing intensively for the world's largest meeting of parliaments under the auspices of the IPU. For the first time in history, this conference was to take place in Vienna.

Since the corona pandemic has made it impossible for us to come together in Vienna in person, we would like you to consider this virtual exchange as a token of the unbroken multilateral cooperation between parliaments, including – and, perhaps, especially – in times of crisis.

While video conferences and digital diplomacy will never be able to replace face-to-face meetings and dialogue, they offer us the opportunity to share views and ideas under these very special circumstances and to fill the cooperation between parliaments with content and life.

This is why it gives me great pleasure that we have managed to arrange for today and tomorrow an interesting programme that addresses the current challenges

In the programme you will find discussions and presentations on areas as diverse as health, climate, economy, science and technology, as well as the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. We will address the tasks of parliaments in empowering women and children and in encouraging youth participation in the political decision-making process. We will also talk about migration and mobility and the role of parliaments in the 21st century.

To my mind, the wide range of topics covered is an unmistakable token of how important and enriching multilateral exchanges are for the work of our parliaments worldwide.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank you all for not shying away from the challenge of daring to try something new and for organising, for the first time, a virtual segment for a Conference of Speakers of Parliaments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since its outbreak, the corona pandemic has spread across the globe like wildfire. It has become a global challenge for our health systems, for our economies and for the social security of our populations. But it also represents a litmus test for parliamentary democracy and the values upon which it is founded.



Many democracies were forced to take tough decisions during the corona crisis when it came to restricting fundamental freedoms. Situations such as these represent a challenge to the resilience of our democratic and constitutional structures. Crisis management will only work well if parliaments are involved. As far as I am concerned, this is one of the key lessons to be drawn from the corona pandemic.

As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, parliaments have a key role to play in meeting the current challenges. It is therefore crucial that we also see the corona pandemic as an opportunity to acknowledge the great value and strength of a functioning parliamentary democracy.

As mentioned earlier, I firmly believe that video conferences such as this one can be a well-functioning and efficient tool for multilateral exchanges between parliaments. But they can never replace face-to-face meetings and direct dialogue.

For this reason I am particularly pleased that our virtual segment of today and tomorrow constitutes only the first part of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and that the second part will take place in physical form in Vienna in the summer of 2021. I am grateful to the IPU bodies for having taken this decision.

The Austrian Parliament will be just as delighted and ready to host this conference next year.

Let me conclude by wishing you all successful and exciting discussions over the next two days. It would give me great pleasure to be able to continue this exchange in person in Vienna during the second part of the World Conference.

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