

European Parliament Vice-President's Dimitrios Papadimoulis' speech

General Debate of the Assembly
16 October

“Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue”

Dear fellow parliamentarians,

Honourable colleagues,

Dorogye druzya,

1. Welcome

- On behalf of the European Parliament, I would like to thank the hosts, the State Duma and the Council of the Federation, and the IPU for bringing us together to promote the values of peace, democracy, human rights, underpinning interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue and co-operation.
- The diversity and plurality of voices is an asset, and it is our role as parliamentarians to protect them by upholding dialogue and the rule of law at a national and global level, ensuring peace and stability.

2. GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Violence, war, fundamentalism

- Today, we have to face new unprecedented challenges, which question the core of our values. The economic crisis, the refugee and migration crisis, and the security and terrorism crises.
- In addition, we continue to witness increasingly devastating warfare, leading to destabilisation and redrawing of borders. The world has

witnessed 18 full-scale wars in 2016¹ and an unprecedented number of nearly 66 million people have been forced from home.

- Today xenophobia and calls for racial and religious discrimination have entered mainstream discourse. Such aggressive rhetoric and acts are unfortunately heard in places of worship and parliaments, as irresponsible and populist politicians and self-declared prophets keep stoking up nationalism and extremism.

3. Human rights as foundation of peace

- The only way to empower humans of diverse backgrounds is through a human rights approach to religion and ethnicity. **Human rights come as a package**, ranging from judicial independence, freedom of expression, the right to privacy and the freedom to religion and belief.
- Dialogue is an essential tool to defeat stereotype. We need to constantly promote tolerance from a **global, cross-cultural, human rights perspective**.
- It is necessary to **intensify our dialogue**, being also close to the people, answering their questions, and find common ground. Excluding or demonising other ethnic or religious groups do not help. We have **to enhance cooperation and inclusiveness**, finding the right synergies and building cooperation frameworks, which will synthesize different cultures, societies and religions.

4. SOLUTIONS: invest in HR and education

- What concrete steps should we take to promote peace and understanding? What political solutions do we have in our toolbox?
- The Secretary-General of the UN **António Guterres put it rightly saying: “Protecting human rights prevents conflicts”**. Inclusive societies serve as inhibitors of violence and war. Justice, democracy, transparency and good neighbourly relations are guarantors of peace.
- **Education** shapes the future of the mankind. Therefore, we have to intensify our efforts **to provide the young generations with educational**

¹ 38 highly violent conflicts https://www.hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2016.pdf

systems and school textbooks based on the values of peaceful co-existence and dialogue. It has been proven that technological development and globalisation did not result always, as such, to progressive thinking and openness to other ethnic and religious groups. We have to work hard for this! Let's learn from past mistakes to construct a peaceful future.

5. EU's efforts for dialogue, peace and cultural diversity

- Under the pressure from the European Parliament, in 2016 **the EU appointed a Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief².**
- **The European Parliament** through **resolutions and decisions** has repeatedly supported the importance of inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue to promote solidarity and tolerance to different people, regardless of race, colour or religion. And it will continue to do so! In these efforts, **the cooperation with national parliaments is essential.**

The role of policymakers and the European Parliament

- The European Parliament, which I represent, is the democratic voice of the peoples of Europe. Under its comprehensive approach to support democracy, the European Parliament is engaged in election observation, helps parliaments to strengthen their institutional capacities, enhance conflict prevention and dialogue facilitation in third countries, protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This is also guaranteed by the **informal EP Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance**
- Each year, the European Parliament awards **Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought**, to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.

² May 2016- May 2018 - Former European Commissioner Ján Figel.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Dear colleagues,

- Let's improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue and put more efforts into reconciliation. Let's focus on what we have in common, as genuine dialogue goes beyond mere tolerance through and attempt to understand. Let's invest in young people and engage them into the democratic process.
- Let me conclude by citing to take the human rights pledge of the UN Human Rights Office:

"I will respect your rights regardless of who you are. I will uphold your rights even when I disagree with you. When anyone's human rights are denied, everyone's rights are undermined, so I will stand-up. I will raise my voice. I will take action. I will use my rights to stand up for your rights."

Thank you!