



Speaker of the Andorran Parliament
Mr. Vicenç MATEU
31 August 2015

General debate

Putting democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development : building the world people want

Ms and Mr Presidents,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to congratulate the IPU and the members of the Preparatory Committee for this debate. Democracy, peace and sustainable development are core values and the basic aspirations which we should all share.

Equally, in formulating the debate it appears to be assumed that people, peoples, must want to build a world where democracy is made to serve peace and sustainable development. And maybe this is true, it is quite possible that every citizen who acts in the public interest should sincerely hope that his or her free opinion and responsible use of the vote should not be manipulated to promote intolerance, lack of freedom or conflict or to exhaust the finite natural resources.

And it is clear that despite this generalised statement, reality, depicted in the media as a not-always-fortunate historical legacy and the more-or-less evident game of economic interests make the real situation somewhat different. In many cases, pronouncements by parliaments do not always serve peace or sustainable development.

If we look up and observe the horizons of the world's peoples, it is clear, however, that we still have a long way to go. On the one hand, there is a long way to go to achieve universal respect of human rights and democratic principles, beyond adjectives that classify them or guardianships that condition them. What we need, as far as possible and considering the specific historical and cultural circumstances of each country, is for formal democracy, as in the old Kantian dream, to become a universal reality.

On the other hand, where formal democracy is already in place, we also need to be vigilant that it is applied correctly, and keep watch to correct any defects and improve how it works. In this regard, I would like to highlight the accuracy of the report *The challenges for today's parliaments* which contains good tips for reviving representative democracy.

Nevertheless, and if you will allow me, I would like to take this opportunity to spread the alert about a certain danger to democracy that could come not so much from external enemies, such as absolute regimes or the different totalitarian regimes in their time, but from a submissive, comfortable acceptance when faced with an undemanding, disoriented democracy that seems to abdicate from its principles.

Professor Boada warned us recently about the paradox of a democracy without (self-) critical thinking. He reminded us then that, according to the ideals of the Enlightenment, democracy was only possible with full confidence in man's potential and, at the same time, the conviction that a good education, acquired through patience and effort, was the only way to manage to dominate the use of thinking, a necessary condition for personal liberty and independence of conscience. Moreover, it is on this liberty that thinking gives to individuals that the liberty of all society depended.

Today, one of the dangers to democracy, where there are fully-installed formal democracies, would arise from within, from taking for granted something that took a long time to win. Because we tend to see personal liberty and independence as part of the human condition, gifts received at birth which require no manner of effort from us.

It is indisputable that we are living through times of great technological transformation which are not only changing the way we communicate but also the content of what we communicate. In perspective, McLuhan's thesis is almost prophetic. Effectively, the means can determine the quality of the message, and the message itself. We live in an age of images and screens, of immediacy, of intolerance to slowness, of urgency. This world of successive, random images leads us easily to a feeling of distraction, fragmentation and lack of abstract ambition.

But the image is only of significance if it refers to a previous discourse, and discourses are always thoughts articulated through words. It is only through language that we have the ability to discuss, disagree and build together, beyond each person's opinion or feeling, as Alain Finkielkraut would say.

We could then ask ourselves who controls these model discourses under an apparent formal democracy of images and immediacy.

It is our conviction that there is no democracy without democratisation or without a certain social generalisation of critical thinking. Critical thinking allows us to enter into the discourse, to build it and rebuild it, and we have already pointed out that the exercise of thinking requires effort, both individual and collective.

We must not accept that the cost of universalising democracy is to vulgarise it until its principles become unrecognisable. We must be careful. On education in general and linguistic and reflexive capacity beyond the acritical incorporation of any new technology depends the quality of our democracy and our condition as free men and women.

Thank you for listening.