Human Rights and Parliaments

Our world, our modern societies are tormented by a multi-faceted crisis which cuts through all the aspects of our modern reality. Our human rights, as well as all the individual, political and social freedoms achieved throughout human history, along with the ones defined by the Universal Declaration of 1948 are today actively being called into question.

Long-standing conflicts, the destabilization of an array of countries, religious fanaticism and the economic disparities between developed and developing nations and within nations, even the strongest ones, result in the impoverishment of big parts of the population and the violation of basic human rights.

Undoubtedly, the biggest problem facing not only Europe but the entire international community today is the refugee and migration issue. Conflicts, political instability and the adverse situation in an array of African countries and, mainly, in the Middle East are driving thousands of citizens away, causing an unprecedented migration effort, which reveals the inhumane nature of the radical regimes in their countries, as well as – let's be frank – the intransigence of the West, which, in the worst-case scenario, is fomenting these conflicts and, in the best-case scenario, is tolerating them. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the more powerful states bear great responsibility for this dead-end situation.

Deplorable is the way in which both Europe and the global leaders have handled the refugee flows. The "closed borders" policy, the uneven distribution of the burden – with only a few countries carrying the entire burden – intolerance, the re-emergence of racist and extremist ideologies, but mainly, the absence of an effective will on the part of the West to end the conflicts, all of this demonstrates that we are backtracking on our defence of human rights globally.

Even on the European continent, geopolitical interventions, such as the one in Ukraine, or in Yugoslavia in the past, as well as the long-standing austerity policy, are reasonably cause for concern for

our citizens, driving the United Europe away from its founding values.

The blind commitment to fiscal discipline and the free rein of the markets towards human dignity are pushing states to an uneven competition with lethal consequences for the weaker among them.

The economic prosperity that has been achieved in our time is not enough to guarantee the respect for human rights, as this economic growth is mainly the result of radical competition tactics, which have resulted in either the worsening of another country's economy, or the overexploitation of the labour force, or the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small part of the population. This means that even the affluent societies are showing alarming symptoms, such as high unemployment, insecurity, a rise in crime and terrorism, the re-emergence of neo-nazi and xenophobic views and the questioning of political institutions.

If this is how things stand globally and if the citizens are sounding the alarm, then we need to answer a pressing question. What can and what should parliaments do to prevent an exacerbation of these violations of human rights?

In recent years, the view that the prevalent neoliberal economic model and the manipulation of human life by the laws of the markets are the main cause of this global crisis is gaining more ground.

We need initiatives at a national and international level to counter this policy. Initiatives which will seek to strengthen Democracy and humanism, to protect the Institutions, Peace and cooperation, social achievements, mutual respect and accountability, sustainable development with an environmental and social focus and which will ensure the fairer distribution of wealth.

The national parliaments, the European Parliaments and the international parliamentary assemblies need to agree on a stricter framework of accountability for the rules regarding the defence of human rights by focusing on specific actions, such as:

a) Upgrading and respecting international organizations, and especially the UN, by expanding their competencies, so that they can actively intervene whenever they detect human rights violations. Informing the public on the situation in the Middle East and Africa.
b) Ensuring international legitimacy, transparency and meritocracy.
c) Condemning all acts of war and violence. Drastically tackling the issue of refugee and migrant flows in the framework of solidarity and respect.
d) Bridging the gap between rich and poor, at a national and international level. Condemning austerity policies and promoting growth policies that respect the work force and the environment.
e) Strengthening education on humanitarian issues so that the young citizens can resist the consumerist model and show greater respect for the rights and the personalities of their fellow humans.
f) Strengthening state welfare services, so that all citizens who are struggling to make ends meet can be provided with what is essential for their survival. Special care should be provided to minorities and vulnerable groups.
g) Supporting volunteer organizations and establishing pressure groups to complement the work of social welfare programmes.
h) Establishing a Global Social Charter guaranteeing security, peace and prosperity for all citizens. And finally,
i) Deepening Democracy. Enhancing citizen intervention on issues of exercising power, through local, national and continental referenda. Establishing citizen participation mechanisms in administration and in the procedures of preparatory legislative work.

The full respect for human rights provides all citizens with the possibility to live in freedom and dignity and to develop unimpeded the full scope of their capabilities.

Parliaments need to understand their crucial role and express in a decisive manner their will to overcome the dead-end situations we are facing today. To this end they need to act immediately.

Tomorrow it will be too late.