



**GLOBAL PARLIAMENTARY CONGRESS  
THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD  
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**PLENARY SESSION 2: THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY**

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The theme of our panel is the future of democracy. The future arises from the present and builds on the past. As a Russian, it is all the more difficult for me to discuss the future outside the context of the horror that my country brings to Ukraine today and without analysing the lessons of the past that led to today's tragedy.

We, Memorial and many other Russian and human rights organizations have documented the violence in the North Caucasus - the killings, destruction of homes, kidnappings, torture and illegal persecution - during the two Chechen wars and until recently.

Over the past two decades, the criminal prosecution of dissidents and other undesirable citizens has become an important component of Russian domestic policy. Since 2009 we have been documenting political repression, compiling lists of political prisoners, drawing international attention to the fates of hundreds of political prisoners and to the problem itself.

For decades, Russia's domestic politics drifted farther and farther away from democratic standards, more and more restrictions were placed on civil rights and freedoms, more and more restrictive and repressive laws were passed, and Russian and international NGOs drew attention to them.

This is not to say that it has gone completely unnoticed by the international community, but now, looking back, we can confidently say that the response to these deviations from legal and human rights standards, even after they took the form of external aggression in 2014, remained clearly insufficient.

This tolerance for the violation of democratic standards and human rights was one of the factors that allowed the Kremlin regime over the years to build the foundation for the current full-scale war of aggression.

It is on impunity for government crimes and the system of repression that the Kremlin regime's ability to wage this war is based.

This is nothing new. All these years we have repeated: human rights violations in a particular country - in our country, in Russia - are not just a matter of moral, humanitarian or legal concern. It was quite a pragmatic question of concern for our common future. As Andrei Sakharov said

back in 1975 in his Nobel lecture, peace, progress and human rights are inseparable; one is impossible without the other.

It is likely that consistency and firmness in the defence of democratic principles and human rights at one time could have prevented today's developments, when the defence of the future of freedom and democracy is much more expensive in economic terms, and most importantly, paid for with the lives of tens of thousands of heroic defenders of Ukraine and peaceful Ukrainians.

But after the victory of Ukraine and the defeat of the Kremlin, these lessons of the past will again become relevant.

I am sure that Russia will become a democratic country, the Russian people simply have no other choice, no other way to respond to the challenges and demands of the time, meanwhile researches show that Russians belong to the European family by their values and attitudes.

Of course, building a free democratic Russia is the responsibility of the Russians themselves, and no one will build it in their place. However, the outside world will be able to assist them or not. Approaching the creation of a democratic, peaceful and good-neighbourly Russia is in the common interest of Europe and the democratic world. And building relations with Russia in the future will require not repeating old mistakes and not making new ones.

In this sense it is impossible to consider the sometimes-declared intention to fence off Russia with a moat with crocodiles as a constructive plan. Such an approach does not solve the problem of a potential threat emanating from Russia, but rather the opposite.

On the other hand, in re-establishing and building relations with the Russian state, it will be crucial to put human rights and democratic principles at the forefront much more consistently than before.

In particular, just beginning discussions on a minimal normalization of relations with the world, at least a partial lifting of sanctions, it will be important to demand the release of political prisoners and an end to political repression.

On the other hand, it would already be useful to support the self-organization of the Russian anti-war, pro-democracy diaspora on a democratic basis, to build a dialogue with its democratic structures.

Firstly, this would create an important precedent of democratic self-organization, and secondly, it would increase the influence of a democratically oriented and organized diaspora on the processes in Russia now, and more importantly, in the future, when the window of opportunity opens.

But this experience is important not only insofar as a democratic Russia is important for the democratic future of the world.

Russian 19th century philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev wrote: "Sometimes it seems that Russia is destined only to show the whole world how one should not live and what one should not do.

And indeed the extreme experience of problems in the establishment and preservation of democracy which Russia has shown in the last 30 years is important not only for Russia, but also for the future of democracy in general.

*A video of the speech:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tBDUu11kmw&list=PLafTseM15bmGXfMyNS2B41zIF24U8cX6h&index=20>