



58th Joint Meeting of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)

**Remarks by Mr Alain Berset,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

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9.30**

As delivered

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Minister of Finance of Montenegro, Mr. Vuković,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Rousopoulos,
Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank, Mr. Monticelli,
Chair of the Governing Board, Mr. Rusz,
Chair the Administrative Council, Ms. Barwicka-Lofthouse,
Members of the Governing Board and the Administrative Council,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

OPENING

It is an honour to address this gathering of the Council of Europe Development Bank.

I want to begin by thanking the government and the people of Montenegro for welcoming all of us at this year's Joint Meeting.

As Prime Minister Spajić wrote in a recent collection of essays on Europe's future, and I quote: The Council of Europe is "the conscience of our continent."

In the first months of my mandate, I have seen that conscience at work.

The Bank makes it real by turning our shared values into meaningful change in people's lives across Europe.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Ukraine — our number-one priority.

UKRAINE: LEADING BY EXAMPLE

When the Russian Federation launched the war of aggression against Ukraine, the Council of Europe stood its ground.

The Council of Europe Development Bank was among the first to respond — delivering emergency aid when Ukrainians needed it most.

It showed who we are. And it showed what this institution stands for: solidarity, action, and commitment.

Since those early days, the Bank has scaled up its support, with investment projects totalling over €550 million.

Governor Monticelli will speak to that critical work.

SOCIAL JUSTICE & DEMOCRATIC SECURITY

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Council of Europe stands for justice.

Justice is holding those responsible for aggression to account, what we stand for, for Ukraine.

But justice takes many other forms.

It is seeing a doctor when you need one.

It is ensuring access to quality education for everyone, everywhere.

It is helping families find a safe place to live.

It is giving people the chance to live with dignity.

That is what the Council of Europe Development Bank is all about.

With rising inequality and growing distrust in public institutions, this work is essential.

When young Europeans say the cost of living is their top concern, we have to ask ourselves: what kind of future are we building for them?

Study after study shows that these young people are losing confidence in democracy.

If we fail to connect democratic security with social justice, we risk losing both.

Our task is to prove that democracy can deliver — not empty promises, but real perspectives. That is the test of our generation.

A NEW DEMOCRATIC PACT FOR EUROPE

I am pleased that education has been chosen as the theme for this year's Joint Meeting.

There can be no democracy without an educated society.

Particularly not when disinformation spreads faster than facts.

Not when social media bubbles silence our culture of debate.

Not when democratic values are being chipped away, piece by piece.

We need a kind of reset. We need a new Democratic Pact for Europe.

And we need to put education at its center.

The Bank has a key role to play — as the financial arm of the Council of Europe, and as an engine for democratic resilience and social progress.

The Reykjavík Declaration makes it clear: “social justice is crucial for democratic stability and security.”

This is our opportunity to deepen our cooperation — our chance to turn the 10 Reykjavík Principles of Democracy into action.

CALL TO ACTION

As we know, there is no time to waste.

Let us restore trust in democracy,

invest with purpose.

And let us lead with conviction.

For more accountability, for more dignity, and for more solidarity.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you all a fruitful meeting here in Budva.

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