

Madam President of the Youth Parliament to the Alpine Convention!

Minister Achhammer, Mayor Rösch, Councillor Rohrer, headmaster Augscheller

Members of the YPAC, teachers, colleagues and friends!

Welcome to the 14th meeting of the Youth Parliament to the Alpine Convention in Merano/Meran!

Dobrodošli na štirinajstem srečanju Mladinskega parlamenta Alpske konvencije v Meranu!

Bienvenue à la 14e réunion du Parlement des Jeunes de la Convention alpine à Merano !

Benvenuti alla quattordicesima riunione del Parlamento dei Giovani della Convenzione delle Alpi a Merano!

Willkommen bei der 14. Sitzung des Jugendparlaments der Alpenkonvention in Meran!

I spent March 15 in a town called Morbegno in the Italian Alps and was honored to be invited by the youth to talk to them at the Friday for Future rally. I say that “I was honored to be invited” and I truly mean it, for several reasons. First – and foremost – why should they invite a 50+ guy to their event? And why should they listen to him? And second: it was – and is – a call by the youth to the grown-ups of the world to finally get their act together and let the uncounted words of world climate conferences be finally followed by concrete action – action that actually makes a difference; action that actually works.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am going to take a risk now and will share some personal experiences with you. During the major part of my career I have worked in international negotiations. I have dealt with topics as different as data protection and nuclear disarmament, persistent organic pollutants and human rights as well as assistance to victims of the deadly weapons of war and sustainable development in the Alps.

I have also been for several years a member of the Austrian delegation to international climate change negotiations. In this function I was able to witness first-hand the efforts, the determination and the enormous challenges ahead of us. I had the chance to work with numerous people of outstanding capacity, capability and vigor. I had the chance

to contribute to the one thing you will always try to achieve in international negotiations: a workable compromise.

Yet, I was also there in 2006, when the world climate talks collapsed and left a room full of desolation, discomfort and despair.

In 2006 – as on so many other occasions in climate negotiations – we have gone to our limits. Physically and also sometime mentally. At the time our task as negotiators was to elaborate the international norms necessary to operationalize the Kyoto Protocol – a very complex piece of international legislation.

We had prepared this meeting for several years, and in the year before the meeting we spent numerous weeks in preparatory sessions. Finally, we met in The Hague to sort out the hundreds of remaining issues in a two weeks session.

As EU-members, we would meet for internal coordination already the Saturday before the official meeting started and work through the whole weekend. We reconvened on Monday at 08:00 and settled into a meeting routine, which was as follows: EU-coordination meeting starting at 08:00 (or seven, if needed) everyday, 10:00 to 13:00 meeting on the level of the United Nations, 13:00 to 15:00 EU meeting, 15:00 to 18:00 official UN level meeting, which was followed every evening by so-called informal consultations that would start around 18:30 and last as long as needed – which regularly meant around midnight.

Hotel rooms were on short supply in The Hague for the many thousand participants of the meeting. Our delegation was in a hotel about one hour away from the conference center. So at midnight I would take the public transport and drive to my room, grabbing a burger at the central train-station, the only spot that was still offering something that at least resembled food at that time of the day. At around 01:00 I would collapse on my bed, get up at between 05:30 or 06:30 have a quick coffee in my room (breakfast was only served starting from 07:00), grab a sandwich at the train station and be at the EU meeting at 07:00 or 08:00.

We would do this for two weeks. Every day, including weekends. You can imagine how you feel after a week or ten days of that program. But the worst was still to come.

On Thursday of the second week, the president of the Conference announced that too many issues were still open and that the conference would from that time onwards meet in permanence as long as it took to resolve the outstanding issues. And, so it happened. It

was Thursday morning when we started. At lunch time we were still there, in the evening we were still there, at midnight the same, at sunrise the next morning the meeting was still on and continued into the day, lunchtime, afternoon, evening, night. After 10 days with extremely little sleep already and additional 36 hours without any sleep at all my energy was finally gone.

“I need to rest”, I told a colleague and went to a small room that we used as our delegation office. I lay down on the floor, using a bundle of negotiation drafts as pillow and collapsed into two hours of restless sleep. I forced myself up again, stretching and shaking my bones, went to the bathroom, saw myself in the mirror looking like a Zombie, splashed some water in my face and the only thing I was capable of doing, was feeling tired, weary, exhausted and worn out; I was tempted to leave the negotiations behind, go to my hotel room and finally sleep.

However, I managed to put myself together and started walking towards the meeting hall. On my way, I had to pass through a long corridor occupied by journalists waiting for news. Any news. Good or bad.

Suddenly I found myself in front of a camera and a microphone. “Hello my name is Piet from Dutch TV”, the guy told me. He was incredibly fresh and unbearably awake. “I have one question for you as delegate”, he said, and paused. “Do you think that all this really makes sense?”

You can imagine that in my state of mind this was exactly the question that I needed to be asked. The question was rubbish and I hated it, but it was a good question and deserved an answer. Using the few remainders of my energy, I mumbled something of which I hoped that it would sound smart and diplomatic, something like: we need to try. It’s our planet that is at stake. But I knew exactly: I did not sound super convincing that day.

Yet, it was a good question – and, I tell you what, it still is. And until now, I have not found a better answer. We need to try; it is our planet that is at stake. And with our planet: it’s us that are at stake, and with us, every living being. Not more; not less.

Ten days ago in Morbegno, I was shouting through a megaphone at the climate protest and I made three main points, which I do want to repeat here today as well – albeit with the luxury of a proper sound system:

- 1) First, climate change is not a question of belief or faith. It is a fact. It does not matter, whether you believe in climate change or not; it happens. And it happens to you whether you believe in it or not.
- 2) Second, climate change is intrinsically unfair: it hits those the most that contributed the least. And among those who so far contributed the least are *you*. The youth of today! In the last 50+ years I have contributed much more to climate change than you in the last 16, 17 or 18 years.
- 3) And third – and I guess most importantly, we still can act to make a difference. I believe – and this, indeed, is a believe, not a hard fact – I believe that we still have a chance to turn this thing around and avoid the worst effects of climate change. But we need to act. We need to start acting now. Not in ten minutes, not tomorrow, not next week. Now.

I told you about the failure of the 2006 climate negotiations at length for various reasons:

First of all, I want you to understand how tough these negotiations are and that there is no guarantee for success.

Second, it should also help to illustrate how big the achievement of the Paris Agreement was – to bring these enormous numbers of enormously different interests under one hat.

Third, that whatever we are and will be able to achieve in protecting our climate from us, will always be a team effort – and cannot be accomplished by single individuals alone.

And fourth, if we want to be successful, we need to have endurance, tenacity and perseverance.

We should not, however, have too much patience.

In Morbegno – as in many other places around the world – the slogans on the banners of the students were great. Full of wit, creativity and truth. They also showed a good deal of engagement in the topic, and a can-do-attitude that we all need to tackle climate-change.

Be part of the solution, not pollution, one said. Or: *If you make your homework, we will do ours*. Or: *Grandpa, what is snow?* Or a bit more risqué: *My planet is hotter than my boyfriend*.

But, let me air a word of caution: saving the world's climate requires more than nice slogans. And it requires more than one person alone.

Madam President of the Youth Parliament to the Alpine Convention!

Dear Minister Achhammer, Mayor Rösch, Councillor Rohrer, headmaster Frigo

Dear members of the YPAC, teachers, colleagues and friends!

Participating in a youth parliament is serious business.

Almost 15 years of YPAC give us reason to be proud. Countless discussions were lead, proposals were tabled, possible compromises were evaluated, analysed, amended, accepted or withdrawn. In other words, we experienced democracy at work!

Democracy, with all its shortcomings, its deficiencies, is still by far the best governmental system that humankind has ever developed. If you have any doubts about it, look at the places, where democracy is still elusive: look to countries lead by dictators and autocrats. Look at all the places where human rights and civil liberties, like to right to life, free speech, private life, freedom of and from religion are only theoretical concepts - if at all.

Democracy does not just happen. We have to earn it! We have to work for it, demand it and live it. Democracy only exists as far as we practice it.

So it is up to us, to make democracy happen.

This is why the Youth Parliament is so important!

This is, why it gives me hope to see so many of you interested in the challenges that surround us, in our future and in our Alps. So many of you joining in the effort of shaping our lives. Shaping the future for your lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Next week the highest political organ of the Alpine Convention, the Alpine Conference, will meet in Innsbruck. Two main items will be the top priorities for the meeting of the ministers of the Alpine countries and the EU: climate change and soil.

Both issues are center stage in the work of the Youth Parliament of this year and last year. This clearly shows that you are working on hugely important issues. And it also highlights that your findings and resolutions are relevant for political decision making.

I am very happy that this year – that is: next week – a delegation from the Youth Parliament will participate in the Alpine Conference, sitting at the conference table and participating in the discussions like all the

other delegations.

For me, accompanying the Youth Parliament over the last six years has been a special and very rewarding journey. I am proud that the ties between the Parliament and the Convention have grown ever stronger and that last year we formalized these ties in a memorandum of cooperation. But more importantly: that this cooperation and cross-fertilization is actually and seriously implemented.

So, today – during my last participation in a YPAC meeting as Secretary General of the Alpine Convention – let me express my heartfelt thanks to all for these years of cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Youth Parliament is, indeed, an important occasion to express thanks and appreciation.

Let me start, by thanking those who contributed financially to this year's YPAC session: The province of South Tyrol, the municipality of Merano/Meran, the Federal Republic of Germany and several others. I warmly welcome this support also as a token of appreciation for the work that is carried out by the Youth Parliament.

Second, I wish to thank all that contributed through their personal engagement. Let me thank all the teachers that support the YPAC and support your participation in the youth parliament. I can only say: I would have wished to have teachers like yours, when I was at school. I also like to thank the politicians that join this year's session for their support. In particular, I want to mention Madeleine Rohrer who showed an exemplary engagement for the youth parliament.

And third, and most importantly, I wish to thank you, the Youth Parliamentarians, for participating and devoting your time and energy to this endeavor.

So what rests for me today is simply wishing you an exciting week full of debate, discussions, inspiration –and the occasional party.

Good luck to you all and thanks for your attention.