



Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments

8 – 9 April 2019, Vienna

Conclusions of the Presidency

Preliminary Remarks

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments was held in Vienna on 8 – 9 April 2019 and was attended by the Speakers and Presidents or their representatives from 39 Parliaments/Chambers of 28 Member States, as well as by the First Vice-President of the European Parliament. Also taking part were the Speakers or their representatives from 5 EU candidate countries, and 4 countries attended as observers. The Conference was chaired by Mr Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the Austrian National Council, and Mr Ingo Appé, President of the Austrian Federal Council.

Recalling paragraph 5.1 of the Stockholm Guidelines, it is recognised that due to their constitutional position certain Chambers¹ cannot directly associate themselves with substantive political statements, and therefore should not be seen as indicating specific support for all sections. Nonetheless, on behalf of their Chambers they recognise the importance of the issues raised and the intentions of colleagues in proposing particular ways forward.

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments takes place at a time when the United Kingdom and the European Union are dealing with a withdrawal procedure. The Speakers express their hope that a negotiated solution will be found in order to put an end to the current uncertainty and to enable Europe to respond to the challenges it faces.

¹ Including the Danish Parliament – Folketinget

The Conference was divided into two sessions:

I. The European Union and its neighbours

II. The European Union ahead of the 2019 European elections – further development of cooperation between national Parliaments and European institutions

The European Union and its neighbours

1. The Speakers recognize the need to keep the questions of enlargement and the relations with neighbouring countries on the agenda and to maintain a credible European perspective for the Western Balkans, despite internal challenges within the European Union. They agree that stability in the Western Balkans is essential for stability on the entire continent. Considering the growing influence of external actors in the region, it is of utmost importance that the European Union keeps promoting its values and protecting its interests in the Western Balkans, as this is an investment in peace, democracy and security. Popular support in the Western Balkans for a pro-European course is best maintained by visible progress in the accession process. Taking these factors into account, the Speakers reaffirm the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans and the commitment to the enlargement of the European Union. The Speakers reaffirm that the enlargement process must be based on strict compliance with the membership criteria. While recognizing the progress that has already been made by the countries in the Western Balkans in recent years, the Speakers urge them to continue their reforms. At the same time, the Speakers call upon the countries of the region to overcome still existing conflicts, increase regional cooperation and establish good neighbourly relations.

2. The Speakers underscore the need for the European Union, in its relations with neighbouring countries to its east and south, to pursue without hesitation its values and principles such as the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, the protection of fundamental rights and human dignity, including of refugees in transit through these neighbouring countries.

3. The Speakers warmly welcome the entry into force of the Prespa agreement between the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of North Macedonia putting an end to a 27-year dispute in South Eastern Europe. The Speakers consider this agreement as well as the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia to be strong examples for others in the region to strengthen good neighbourly relations.

4. The Speakers reaffirm the importance of the EU's relations with Turkey, a candidate country and a key partner. In this context the Speakers maintain that the EU and Turkey should remain

committed to pursuing an open and frank dialogue, to addressing common challenges and to cooperating in essential areas of joint interest such as migration, counterterrorism, energy, transport, economy and trade. The Speakers expect Turkey to unequivocally commit to good neighbourly relations and international agreements.

5. The Speakers support the concept of macroregional strategies as they provide an effective framework for strengthened cooperation between Member States, Candidate Countries and Third Countries. The EU Strategies for the Danube Region, for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, for the Alpine Region and for the Baltic Sea Region cover Member States, Candidate Countries and Third Countries and serve as a good example for increased cooperation that contribute to the promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the region. The European Union Parliaments express their openness to support commonly agreed initiatives of Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up new macro-regional strategies.

6. Saluting the 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, the Speakers acknowledge its impressive achievements to date and welcome the strategic reflection on further objectives of the Eastern Partnership for the next decade. They underline the importance of the Eastern Dimension of the EU Neighbourhood Policy and endorse cooperation between the European Union and the six Eastern European states participating in the Eastern Partnership, as this policy contributes to increasing the stability and resilience of the European Union's neighbours and their approximation with European values, standards, and legal norms. Stronger economies, stronger governance and stronger societies, including a vibrant civil society, are mutually beneficial for all states in the region and the European Union itself.

7. The Speakers express their support for efforts aimed at a sustainable and peaceful settlement of the conflicts in the Eastern neighbourhood. They reaffirm their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Eastern European States. In particular, the Speakers express their support for all efforts aimed at a sustainable and peaceful settlement of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. While reaffirming the strong condemnation of the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and the EU policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea, the Speakers agree on the need for complete implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides.

8. The Speakers consider the Southern Neighbourhood Policy an essential instrument to contribute to peace, stability and security in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Partner states in the Southern Neighbourhood and EU Member States face numerous common challenges, notably migration flows, climate change, sustainable development, and the fight against terrorism and international crime, that can only be overcome by an intensive regional cooperation. The Speakers therefore welcome the first ever European Union – League of Arab

States Summit that took place on 24 – 25 February in Sharm El-Sheikh and consider this meeting a further step towards closer collaboration in the region around the Mediterranean area. In this context, the Speakers consider it essential to pursue and expand cooperation with the Parliaments of neighbouring countries.

The European Union ahead of the 2019 European elections – further development of cooperation between national Parliaments and European institutions

9. The Speakers reiterate that the European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. It is one of the key tasks of the European Parliament and the national Parliaments to cooperate among themselves and with all stakeholders at both European Union and Member State level, including civil society, in order to effectively preserve and promote these values. The promotion of these fundamental values of the European Union will enable the Union to address the various challenges it currently faces. The Speakers recall that the Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. The European Union shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.

10. The Speakers are aware that the Parliaments play a key role in enabling people with disabilities to participate in society, and especially in political life. The principles of accessibility for all persons and of promoting an inclusive society should be considered in all parliamentary decisions.

11. The Speakers support the EU Institutions' efforts to combat all forms of antisemitism, racism, xenophobia and intolerance. They express their concern about the rise of antisemitism across the European Union and welcome the adoption on 6 December 2018 of the Council Declaration on the fight against antisemitism.

12. The Speakers encourage all state and non-state actors to intensify their support for religious, interreligious and intrareligious dialogue on fundamental rights and shared European values, aiming at increasing mutual respect and tolerance for different religious traditions and eliminating prejudices.

13. The Speakers stress that the European Parliament is an absolutely essential component of the European Union's democratic life, securing, together with the national Parliaments, the legitimacy of the Union's actions and serving as a strong voice for the citizens of Europe. The Speakers call on the citizens of Europe to actively participate in shaping Europe's future through exercising their right to vote in the upcoming European elections on 23 – 26 May 2019, as the future success of the Union relies on the support of its citizens.

14. Having in mind the utmost importance of free and fair elections, the Speakers consider it crucial to strengthen democratic resilience and political empowerment of the citizens of in Europe. Effective measures to fight hate speech, disinformation campaigns, the misuse of personal data and threats to cybersecurity must be implemented consequently, in full respect of fundamental rights. Recalling the Presidency Conclusions of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments held in Bratislava on 23 – 24 April 2017, the Speakers reaffirm that the rise of anti-European extremist tendencies across Europe needs to be addressed, inter alia, through better communication of the positive results of European policy-making and effective functioning of European institutions in accordance with the Treaties.

15. The Speakers highlight the essential role of national Parliaments in the functioning of the European Union and call on them to engage and to contribute actively in shaping EU policies and legislation by making full and effective use of existing mechanisms, such as policy-setting and oversight by Parliaments vis-à-vis their respective governments, subsidiarity checks, political dialogue with EU bodies and interparliamentary cooperation. The Speakers encourage all EU citizens to exercise their democratic rights proactively and at every level.

16. The Speakers of national Parliaments underline that subsidiarity and proportionality are key principles to make the European Union stronger, more efficient and more united. Only a Union that focuses on doing what delivers clear benefits over measures taken at national, regional or local levels can further improve its positive perception among the citizens of Europe. Measures taken by the Union should not, in substance and formally, go beyond what is necessary for the full and effective achievement of all the objectives of the Treaties. It is key that the Commission explain in detail the chosen instruments in relation to the intended objectives and justify its proposals as regards subsidiarity and proportionality. Furthermore, directives should be used according to their intended purpose by giving appropriate flexibility to the Member States as regards the means to achieve the objective of legislation.

17. The Speakers of national Parliaments emphasise that an effective implementation of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality is absolutely necessary. The Speakers of national Parliaments welcome the proposals presented by the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently” and invite all stakeholders to take concrete steps to further strengthen the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, building on the achievements of the Subsidiarity Conference held in Bregenz, Austria, on 15 – 16 November 2018. In particular, the Speakers of national Parliaments stress that an active participation of national Parliaments in subsidiarity monitoring, by following their own internal procedures, is of vital importance, inter alia, for bringing the European Union closer to its citizens.

18. The Speakers call on the incoming Finnish Presidency of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments to organise a working group to put forward a proposal for an

update to the 2008 Guidelines for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the European Union. The Speakers agree that the working group should be open to all EU Parliaments and should define its own working methods. The working group is invited to prepare a report for the next Conference of Speakers in Helsinki in 2020 on the following subjects:

- A technical adaptation of the guidelines to the existing conditions, including a more stringent use of references to the treaties and a linguistic review of the guidelines as a whole.
- Inclusion of new conference formats into the Guidelines, such as the Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union, the Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol.
- Better use of modern means of communication to facilitate interparliamentary cooperation.

19. Furthermore, the Speakers ask the incoming Finnish Presidency to prepare, in a suitable manner, a common understanding on the Interparliamentary Committee Meeting for the evaluation of Eurojust, regarding aspects not regulated in Regulation (EU) 2018/1727, so that the Conference of Speakers in Helsinki will be able to reach conclusions on these matters.

IPEX (Interparliamentary EU information exchange)

20. The Speakers welcome the Conclusions on IPEX, adopted at the Meeting of the Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments in Vienna on 27 – 28 January 2019.

21. The Speakers thank the Estonian Parliament for its work during the year of its Chairmanship of the IPEX Board – in particular in implementing the Work Programme and its actions plans on promoting IPEX and enhancing the IPEX Network – and for hosting the annual meeting of IPEX Correspondents. The Speakers thank also the Belgian Senate for its continuous availability to formally employ the IPEX information officer and the European Parliament for hosting one of the IPEX Board meetings and for ensuring the management and maintenance of the IPEX Digital System together with the IPEX-Information Officer.

22. The Speakers note with satisfaction that IPEX as digital system and as network of people plays an increasing role in interparliamentary cooperation and is becoming a reliable “one-stop shop” for interparliamentary exchange in EU affairs.

23. The Speakers welcome the further progress made to integrate the COSAC website into IPEX and to host the documents of the Europol Scrutiny Group on the IPEX website and encourage the Austrian Chair of IPEX to further increase the cooperation between IPEX and

COSAC and between IPEX and the other interparliamentary conferences and thus look forward to the improvement of the IPEX Digital System to be elaborated by the Work Programme during the Austrian Chairmanship.

24. The Speakers call on the Austrian Chair of IPEX to implement the new legislation on the General Data Protection (GDPR) in line with the European Parliament's guidelines and to continue the debate on IPEX and its approach to social media.