

**18th Inter-Parliamentary Conference
for the Common Foreign and Security Policy
and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)**

3-4 March 2021

via video conference

Statement by the Co-Chairs

Preliminary remarks

The 18th Inter-parliamentary Conference (IPC) for the CFSP/CSDP was held in the context of the parliamentary dimension of the Portuguese EU Council Presidency on 3-4 March 2021. Due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the event was held for the second time via video conference. It was attended by parliamentarians from the EU Member States and the European Parliament. Also taking part were parliamentarians from EU candidate and potential candidate countries, and the European member countries of NATO which are not EU members, namely Albania, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and the United Kingdom.

We, the co-chairs of the 18th IPC:

- Underline that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have economic, social, political and - in particular - geopolitical consequences that will inevitably affect key aspects of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Stress that the EU's security environment is today more volatile, more unpredictable, being one of the most complex and ambiguous at any time since the end of the Cold War.
- Consider the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic a game changer in the international environment and a catalyst of change in the global order. Stress, in this respect, the fundamental importance of the EU's internal resilience, developing of new partnerships and strengthening the EU's multilateral vision on a global scale. Welcome the Team Europe and Coronavirus Global Response initiatives, which are helping partner countries to tackle the impact of the pandemic.
- Commend the action of the European Commission in the unprecedented decision to acquire and distribute vaccines for the Covid-19 disease, as a remarkable moment of affirmation of European unity.
- Call for a need to quickly adapt and adjust our EU response to this new geopolitical reality. Remind that the European Union is a "partner of choice" for third parties, guided by the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Underline that the EU is a reliable actor and mediator in conflict

resolution, but also a leader in promoting multilateral frameworks. Welcome the Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism.

- Call for a genuine political will from Member States to jointly push EU foreign policy goals and counter third countries' attempts to divide the EU. Note that there is still a large untapped potential in combining and integrating all strands of the EU external action's hard and soft power to achieve our CFSP and CSDP goals.
- Call on the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission and the NATO Secretary-General as the guardians of the EU-NATO Joint Declaration to drive EU-NATO cooperation further with a view to improving capability development and to contributing to peace and security in Europe and in the world. Invite the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to ensure with his proposals that the directions provided by the future Strategic Compass will be consistent with the role of NATO as recognized by the Treaties. Encourage the Member States to enable more progress in the EU-NATO relations by resolving issues relating to the exchange of information, by enabling the participation of non-members in activities of either framework, and by addressing European and transatlantic defence and resilience in a comprehensive manner.
- Stress the need to strengthen the EU's global influence, to consolidate our strategic alliances with like-minded partners across the world and also to diversify our cooperation on an ad hoc basis. Believe the importance of reinforcing the EU's "strategic sovereignty", to enable a quicker and more effective decision-making process, to strengthen the capacity at EU and Member State level to establish a fully-fledged defence union in order to enhance the EU's capacity to act.
- Welcome the Joint Communication on "the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean". Reaffirm the strategic importance of the EU's southern neighbourhood and the need to promote political, democratic and socio-economic stability and to support our partners in the southern neighbourhood to advance the necessary reforms and create new opportunities for their youths. Reiterate that all actors in the region must commit to pursue dialogue in good faith and abstain from unilateral actions which run counter to the EU's interests and violate international law and the sovereign rights of other countries, especially if this affects EU Member States. Point to the value of parliamentary diplomacy and the role of the European Parliament and the national Parliaments of EU Member States in providing a deeper capacity of dialogue, commitment and cooperation with our partners in the Southern Neighbourhood. Stress the role which the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for Mediterranean, currently presided by the European Parliament, can play in reinforcing the objectives of the Joint Communication, with particular reference to joint efforts in defence of the climate and renewed joint efforts for an environmentally preserved and sustainable Mediterranean sea. Support the organisation of a summit between the EU and our partners in the southern neighbourhood to advance dialogue and cooperation on the new agenda for the Mediterranean and the implementation thereof.

- Reaffirm the importance of the EU-Africa partnership, which can only be successful if it is truly a partnership of equals, built on own responsibility and solidarity and a common vision for our future. Call for a true partnership between the European Union and the African Union, with focus on increased coherence between EU policies, the result-oriented transparent allocation of EU resources and a reinvigorated political alliance, which must go beyond the traditional development and humanitarian cooperation in order for our partnership to fulfil its potential. The common work shall address five trends: a partnership for the green transition and energy access; a partnership for digital transformation; a partnership for sustainable growth and jobs; a partnership for peace, security and governance; and a partnership on migration and mobility. Underline that a prosperous, peaceful and resilient Africa is an essential EU foreign policy objective, which should focus in particular on multilateralism, peace, security and stability, sustainable and inclusive development, and sustainable economic growth. Support the organisation of the EU-Africa summit of Heads of State and Government in 2021.
- Express concern that recently several countries in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood became the hotspots of political and military crises and witnessed the re-emergence of assertive regional players. Recall that the situation in the region has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social impact. Underline that while satisfactory results have been achieved in many areas, further progress needs to take place in areas such as the judiciary and rule of law as well as in the fight against corruption and in the de-oligarchisation of the economy.
- Strongly condemn the ongoing crackdown against the democratic forces and the independent media in Belarus. Deplore that despite condemnation by the international community, the Lukashenka regime continues to deprive Belarusians of their most basic rights and to persecute representatives of the democratic forces, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists and independent trade unionists. Call on the regime to stop these repressions and to accept a genuine national dialogue leading to a smooth power transition. Reaffirm our continued and unwavering support to the people of Belarus in their brave struggle for the respect of their dignity and fundamental rights.
- Reiterate a call for a renewed commitment to a credible enlargement policy through a consistent integration of the Western Balkans, firmly embedding the region into the EU processes and structures, upholding democracy, rule of law and reconciliation. Stress the need for an enhanced cooperation and solidarity in jointly tackling challenges, including foreign interference, disinformation, migration and socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Look forward to holding of the first intergovernmental conferences with Albania and North Macedonia. Believe that the Conference on the Future of Europe should actively engage representatives of the Western Balkan countries, both at the governmental and at the civil society and the youth levels.
- Condemn the decision of the Russian authorities to arrest and sentence to jail Mr Alexei Navalny, which clearly breaches international law and the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Call on the Russian authorities to immediately release Mr Navalny and all

other peaceful protesters arbitrarily detained during and after the demonstrations held in January and February, as well as to stop the violence and intimidation against political activists, human rights' defenders and journalists. Believe that the recent developments in Russia confirm the necessity to rethink and reframe the EU strategy vis-a-vis the Russian government and to strengthen the EU's support to Russian citizens. Call for the use, where appropriate, of the recently adopted EU global human rights sanctions regime (EU Magnitsky Act) by the EU to punish all those responsible of human rights violations in Russia.

- Welcome the conclusion of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which is a balanced agreement that protects the integrity of the Internal Market, the indivisibility of the four freedoms and limits the negative consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU by providing legal certainty for citizens and businesses. Regret that the agreement does not contain provisions on foreign and security policy, even though the Political Declaration of 2019 had envisaged such cooperation. Underline that it is in both sides' interest to maintain close and lasting cooperation in these fields. Support the establishment of a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly for Members of the European and UK Parliaments, as foreseen by the Agreement.
- Welcome the renewed commitment from the US administration to strengthen global alliances, in particular the transatlantic one, and to rebuild trust in the multilateral rules-based order. Welcome the initiative of the Commission and the EEAS to design a new transatlantic agenda fit for today's global landscape as presented in the Communication on a new transatlantic agenda for global change. Believe that cooperation between the EU and the US can be strengthened regarding the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences, multilateral cooperation, support for and reform of international organisations, climate change, security and defence, democracy, the protection of human rights worldwide, technology, trade and standards.
- Underline the need to establish a renewed and unified EU-China strategy to take into account the complexity and scale of the EU's relations with China. In line with the Conclusions of the European Council of October 2020, support the appeal to the Commission and the High Representative to present a progress report on the EU-China Strategic Outlook by March 2021. Recall the need to continue to address all issues on the agenda of both sides, and acknowledge that while efforts to achieve stronger cooperation with regards to climate change and the environment should continue, the EU should firmly state its opposition to recent developments in Hong Kong and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in the Chinese territory and urge for a stronger Chinese commitment in the field of human rights.

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