

## PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

### CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF EUROPEAN UNION PARLIAMENTS

*Vilnius, 6-8 April 2014*

#### Introductory remarks

1. The Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments took place on 6-8 April 2014 in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in Vilnius. The Conference was attended by Speakers or their representatives of 27 national Parliaments, Vice-President of the European Parliament, one Speaker and one Deputy Speaker from the candidate countries and 4 Speakers or representatives of Parliaments of the Eastern Partnership countries.
2. The Conference was opened and chaired by H. E. Ms Loreta GRAUŽINIENĖ, Speaker of the Seimas. H. E. Mr José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission, welcomed the Speakers via a video address.
3. In session I, on the *Role of Parliaments in Tackling the Consequences of the Economic and Financial Crisis*, the following keynote speakers took the floor: H. E. Mr Algirdas BUTKEVIČIUS, Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, H. E. Mr Mogens LYKKETOFT, Speaker of the Folketing of the Kingdom of Denmark, and Mr Miguel Angel MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ, Vice-President of the European Parliament, speaking on behalf of H. E. Mr Martin SCHULZ President of the European Parliament. .
4. In session II, on *Five Years after the Coming into Force of the Treaty of Lisbon: Lessons of Subsidiarity Checks in Parliaments*, the following keynote speakers took the floor: H. E. Mr Milan ŠTĚCH, Chairman of the Senate of the Czech Republic, H. E. Mr Pietro GRASSO, President of the Senate of the Republic of Italy, H. E. Ms Anouchka VAN MILTENBURG, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, and Lord Timothy BOSWELL, Chairman of the European Union Select Committee of House of Lords of the United Kingdom.
5. In session III, on *Interparliamentary Cooperation with the Eastern Partnership Countries*, the following keynote speakers took the floor: H. E. Ms Loreta GRAUŽINIENĖ, Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, and H. E. Ms Solvita ĀBOLTIŅA, Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia. Interventions were also made by: H. E. Mr Oleksandr TURCHYNOV, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (video intervention), H. E. Mr Igor CORMAN, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, H. E. Mr David USUPASHVILI, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, H. E. Mr Hovik ABRAHAMYAN, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, and Mr Stanislav SHUSHKEVICH, former Speaker of the Supreme Council of Belarus.

6. Before the start of session IV, Speakers commemorated the International Roma Day. H. E. Ms Barbara PRAMMER, President of the National Council of the Republic of Austria, spoke on the occasion. A declaration commemorating the International Roma Day was adopted (please see enclosed as an annex).
7. In session IV, on *Interparliamentary Cooperation in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice*, the following keynote speakers took the floor: H. E. Mr Evangelos-Vasileios MEIMARAKIS, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, H. E. Ms Ewa KOPACZ, Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, H. E. Ms Laura BOLDRINI, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Republic of Italy, and H. E. Mr Per WESTERBERG, Speaker of the Riksdag of the Kingdom of Sweden.

### **Role of Parliaments in Tackling the Consequences of the Economic and Financial Crisis**

8. Speakers note that the EU economy is showing signs of subdued recovery and macroeconomic rebalancing. Economic growth, even if very timid, and the return of business and consumer confidence should eventually translate into more jobs.
9. Speakers, however, remain concerned about the state of economy and especially about the social situation in the EU, as more than 26 million people across the Union remain unemployed, while the level of youth unemployment continues to be a particularly acute problem. The level of unemployment of young people, reaching 22.9 per cent in February 2014, was more than twice larger as that of adults, standing at 10.6 per cent<sup>1</sup>. While fostering the measures taken to tackle unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, such as the Youth Guarantee scheme and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Speakers urge institutions to seek a more dynamic balance between fiscal discipline and the priorities of growth and job creation. Speakers welcome the decision by the European Council to frontload €6 billion for the 2014-2020 period for the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative. Speakers emphasise that addressing the problem of youth unemployment would also contribute to improving the worrying demographic situation in Europe.
10. Speakers note that macroeconomic imbalances are among the biggest challenges in the euro area. Speakers therefore are of the opinion that in order to return to stable economic growth, create jobs and reverse macroeconomic imbalances, Member States should continue their efforts to meet the budget deficit targets, implementing the necessary structural reforms in their economies, particularly in the labour market, the taxation and social welfare systems, also in reducing the administrative burden for businesses, especially the SMEs, improving public administration to make it leaner and more efficient, as well as taking measures to fight tax fraud and tax evasion.
11. Speakers wish to express their support for the creation of a banking union in the euro area and welcome the provisional agreement on the Single Resolution Mechanism reached between the European Parliament and the Council on 26 March 2014. Speakers also look forward to the Single Supervisory Mechanism to start operating in autumn 2014.
12. Speakers are aware of the far-reaching reforms in the architecture of the Union's economic and financial governance and of the European Parliament's role in it that have taken place

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<sup>1</sup> According to Eurostat.

over the last five years. Speakers underline that these reforms should be followed by improved mechanisms to ensure effective parliamentary control as well as democratic legitimacy and accountability of the new governance structures.

13. Speakers welcome the commitment of the Commission to develop an ‘enhanced political dialogue’ with national Parliaments within the framework of the European Semester, which would take place twice a year, and look forward to an effective implementation of this proposal. Speakers also underline that in the cycle of the European Semester national Parliaments should assume a more pro-active role, especially in terms of scrutinising the National Reform Programmes and the Stability/Convergence Programmes before they are submitted to the European Commission.
14. Speakers note the progress that has been achieved with regard to the setting up of the new interparliamentary conference under Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG). Speakers take note of the inaugural meeting of the Conference, under the title Interparliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union, that took place on 16-17 October 2013 in Vilnius during the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council, and the second meeting of the Conference, under the title Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union, which took place on 20-22 January 2014 and which was co-organised by the European Parliament and the Hellenic Parliament in Brussels in the framework of the European Parliamentary Week. Although the role, scope and title of the Conference are yet to be defined, it is clear at this point that the Conference can serve as a useful parliamentary forum to discuss and exchange ideas, information, and best practice. Speakers consider that the Conference could have its own Rules of Procedure and may adopt non-binding conclusions. Speakers recall Article 11 of the Conclusions of their conference held in Nicosia in 2013 concerning the review of the arrangements of the interparliamentary conference under Article 13 of the TSCG for the Conference of Speakers to be held in 2015 in Rome. Speakers furthermore welcome the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania to conclude all meetings of the parliamentary dimension of the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council during the second semester of 2013 with a non-binding political document and consider that such practice could continue in the future.

### **Five Years after the Coming into Force of the Treaty of Lisbon: Lessons of Subsidiarity Checks in Parliaments**

15. Speakers welcome the greater involvement of national Parliaments in the EU legislative process during the last five years, which is a direct outcome of the new powers and instruments provided to national Parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon.
16. Speakers take note of the fact that national Parliaments have become increasingly more active in using their right to issue reasoned opinions and that in the period from the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon until 10 March 2014 national Parliaments issued in total 278 reasoned opinions.
17. Speakers note that a second ‘yellow card’ was issued in October 2013 by 14 chambers from 11 national Parliaments with regard to the proposal by the Commission to set up the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO) and that the Commission decided to retain the original proposal, based on the judgement that many of the arguments did not concern

subsidiarity. In the view of the Speakers, reasoned opinions should also lead to dialogue with the Commission on all concerns raised in these reasoned opinions.

18. Speakers stress that the current system of subsidiarity checks in effect limits national Parliaments to expressing either a positive or a negative view with regard to subsidiarity. Efforts should therefore be made to make the engagement of national Parliaments in the legislative process of the Union more constructive aiming to empower national Parliaments to positively shape EU legislation.
19. Speakers consider that more effective interparliamentary cooperation, more intensive sharing of best practice, including on subsidiarity checks, and greater involvement of national Parliaments in the *ex-ante* scrutiny of the Commission's flagship initiatives, would positively contribute to making the process of subsidiarity checks more inclusive and efficient and would engage national Parliaments more effectively in the process of EU policy-shaping.
20. Speakers support the *political dialogue* initiated by the President of the European Commission Mr José Manuel BARROSO back in 2006 and invite the new Commission, formed after the 2014 European Parliament elections, to continue this important initiative. Speakers wish to emphasise, however, that the replies of the Commission to the political dialogue opinions and to reasoned opinions of national Parliaments could be more timely and nuanced.
21. Speakers recall that the eight week period to submit a reasoned opinion is not always sufficient to all national Parliaments, especially if the period coincides with holiday periods and parliamentary recesses, given the importance of national parliaments discussing legislative proposals with each other
22. Speakers are of the opinion that the existing weaknesses in subsidiarity checks should be first corrected within the framework of political dialogue by making full use of existing tools and thus avoiding the need to amend the Treaty. Speakers propose that COSAC explores the possibilities for more efficient use of subsidiarity checks, and that the next Conference of Speakers could consider any such work undertaken by COSAC. Consistent work in COSAC could give positive impetus to a systematic improvement of the system of subsidiarity checks, and Speakers would be regularly informed at the Conference of Speakers about progress and actions taken. In any future Treaty revisions consideration should be given to extending the time period to submit a reasoned opinion. In advance of this, there should be a political agreement with the Commission to improve the existing subsidiarity check procedure, including extending the time period.

### **Interparliamentary Cooperation with the Eastern Partnership Countries**

23. Speakers express deep concern about the Ukrainian crisis and its consequences for international security, the international rule of law and global governance. Speakers condemn Russia's military intervention in, and illegal annexation, of Crimea that undermines international law and is contrary to Russia's existing commitments and obligations including the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act and the Budapest Memorandum. Speakers state that the so-called referendum held in Crimea on 16 March is unconstitutional, and condemn in the strongest terms all acts that compromise the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Speakers firmly believe that there is no place for the

use of force and coercion to change borders in Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Speakers also recognise the motions showing solidarity and support by many EU Parliaments and encourage other EU Parliaments to consider similar measures.

24. Speakers strongly support Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, standing by the Ukrainian government in its effort to stabilise the country, undertake reforms, and restore the economy. Speakers wish to invite Ukrainian authorities, political parties and the civil society to engage in a genuine national dialogue and cooperation grounded on inclusiveness, respecting regional diversity and ensuring the full protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Speakers strongly condemn any separatist activity and provocations stoked up by external forces in efforts to destabilise Eastern Ukraine and the whole country.
25. Speakers consider that the referendum that took place on 16 March 2014 in the Crimean Autonomous Republic on its legal status was unconstitutional and therefore its results can only be regarded as unlawful, null and void.
26. Speakers welcome the financial support package to Ukraine of up to €11 billion presented by the European Commission to the European Council on 6 March 2014 and the initiatives to provide additional financial aid to Ukraine by the US and other international partners, as well as such international bodies as the IMF, the World Bank and the EBRD. Speakers encourage the relevant bodies to process the first batch of financial support to Ukraine as soon as possible in order to ensure economic stability in the country and swift implementation of the necessary structural reforms.
27. Speakers support the targeted sanctions adopted by the EU against the Russian officials who are directly responsible for the military intervention in Crimea and take note of the decision of the G7 to suspend Russia's membership in the G8 until Russia changes course. Speakers urge Russia to take significant steps to de-escalate the crisis and support additional measures, including economic sanctions, in case of any further steps by the Russian Federation to destabilise the situation in Ukraine. . Speakers welcome the recent deployment of the OSCE mission to Ukraine and support efforts from all parties to facilitate and engage in a meaningful dialogue involving Ukraine and Russia, with a view to finding a political solution.
28. Speakers welcome the signing of the political provisions of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) on 21 March 2014 and hope that the remaining provisions of the Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), will be signed shortly after the presidential elections in Ukraine, scheduled to take place on 25 May 2014.
29. Speakers underline the strategic importance of the European Neighbourhood Policy, including the Eastern Partnership countries, for the EU and the wider European region and stress that the long-term stability and security of these countries will only be ensured through the consolidation of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, market economy and good governance – values and principles that are at the core of the Eastern Partnership policy and that have been reiterated by the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius.

30. Speakers stress the need to strengthen the strategic nature of the Eastern Partnership programme and ensure its continuity, its strengthening and further implementation by providing for the most effective uses of existing instruments: the bilateral and multilateral dimensions, sectoral cooperation, thematic platforms, formal and informal cooperation, and strengthening people-to-people contacts. Speakers reaffirm the sovereign right of each Eastern Partnership country to freely determine its future and the ambitions and objectives when developing relations with the EU.
31. Speakers congratulate Moldova on completing its Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP) and the subsequent decisions of the European Commission, European Parliament and the EU Council to grant Moldova visa-free travel to the EU, which should take effect on 28 April 2014. Speakers also commend the progress that has been achieved in the VLAP negotiations with Georgia and Ukraine.
32. Speakers note the efforts of the political leadership and the civil society of Georgia and Moldova for maintaining a strong and consistent pro-European course in the run-up to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013 and since then. Speakers acknowledge that the long-term security and well-being of these countries depends on the depth of political association and economic integration with the EU.
33. Speakers also note the successful conclusion and the initialling of the AA/DCFTA with Georgia and Moldova during the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013 and expect the agreements to be signed at the earliest possible occasion and no later than June 2014.
34. Speakers welcome the successful conclusion of the Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA) and the Readmission Agreement with Armenia, which entered into force on 1 January 2014.
35. Speakers note the progress that has been achieved on negotiations with Azerbaijan on the AA since 2010 and look forward to the completion of the process as soon as possible. Speakers welcome the signature of the VFA and the Readmission Agreement with Azerbaijan and look forward to their ratification. Meanwhile, Speakers expect that cooperation will continue to be developed under the existing agreements between the EU and Azerbaijan.
36. Speakers welcome the launch of negotiations with Belarus on Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements in January 2014 and consider that a functional facilitated visa regime with Belarus would have the potential to significantly strengthen people-to-people contacts with this important European country, which has not had a democratically elected government or parliament for almost two decades now.
37. Speakers recall that the Eastern Partners have a European perspective and may apply to become members of the European Union, provided they adhere to the principles of democracy, respect fundamental freedoms, human and minority rights, and ensure the rule of law. Speakers consider that the implementation of the AA/DCFTAs is an important step in fulfilling these European aspirations.
38. Speakers emphasise the crucial role of civil society in the transitional period of democratic reforms and believe that the involvement and inclusion of civil societies in both the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries are critical to the success of the Eastern Partnership

policy, and therefore there is a need to continue strengthening communication and cooperation at all levels and to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy to increase the visibility of the EU in the Eastern Partnership countries.

39. Speakers commend the effort and the results of the European Parliament Monitoring mission to Ukraine, which made in total 27 visits to Ukraine in the period from June 2012 to November 2013, and take note of the efforts of Mr Pat COX, former President of the European Parliament and Mr Alexander KWASNIEWSKI, former President of the Republic of Poland to resolve selective justice problems and facilitate the necessary judiciary reforms in Ukraine.
40. Speakers reiterate that the representation of national Parliaments in the Euronest PA should be investigated as some national Parliaments have expressed their willingness to become engaged in the work of the assembly.
41. Speakers encourage more active engagement between national Parliaments and parliaments of the Eastern Partnership countries outside of the formal structures currently in place and especially in the context of the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency of the EU Council. In this regard Speakers welcome the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania to organise together with the Parliamentary Forum for Democracy the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Foreign Affairs of EU Parliaments during the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council on 27-28 November in Vilnius on the eve of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Eastern Partnership Summit, as well as a separate session of this Conference of Speakers together with Speakers of Parliaments of the Eastern Partnership countries. National Parliaments could explore various other forms of interparliamentary dialogue with the Eastern Partnership Parliaments in smaller groups, including at party-level.
42. Speakers also note that once the AA/DCFTA agreements are signed with the first group of Eastern Partners, EU Parliaments will have a special role to play in ratifying these agreements. To send a strong message of support to the Eastern Partners, Speakers take their responsibility for smooth ratification process
43. Speakers encourage EU Parliaments to provide support and assistance, at the bilateral level, to Parliaments of the Eastern Partnership countries by sharing expertise on democratic reforms, the rule of law, and the adoption and consolidation of European legal traditions.

### **Interparliamentary Cooperation in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice**

44. Speakers recognise the achievements of the Stockholm multiannual programme in the area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ) during the last five years. Speakers regret that the adoption by the European Council of the strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning in the AFSJ (pursuant to Article 68 of the TFEU) in its forthcoming meeting in June 2014 may take place without proper consultation of the national Parliaments and the European Parliament. Being convinced that Parliaments should make a strong contribution to the debate on the priorities of the AFSJ in the forthcoming period, Speakers welcome the efforts of the Hellenic Parliament to hold the Meeting of Chairpersons of the Committees on Justice and Home Affairs on 16-17 February 2014 in Athens and the Joint Committee Meeting together with the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (*Priorities for 2014-2019 in the field of Civil liberties, Justice and Home Affairs*) on 19 March 2014 in Brussels.

45. Speakers are of the view that the new strategic guidelines in the AFSJ should strengthen the AFSJ after the Stockholm programme comes to an end. Existing policies and legislation need to be better implemented both at EU and national level which requires adequate action by all EU Institutions and Member States, especially of the Commission as guardian of the Treaties, as well as completing those proposals brought forward under the Stockholm programme that have not yet been concluded.
46. Speakers also emphasise that the strategic guidelines should reflect the economic and social needs of the Union. For example, even though ensuring cyber-security and fighting cyber-crime should be among the top priorities in their own right, the protection of the cyber space also has an important economic dimension in that it can encourage a greater use of the internet by consumers. The European Commission has estimated that implementing new rules on data protection and internet security could bring more than €2 billion euro of extra revenue for the EU each year. Another priority in the AFSJ with positive economic externalities is common visa policy, which, being applicable to the Member States participating in the Schengen Agreement, could help the EU attract the much-needed qualified labour force from abroad.
47. Speakers underline the need to promote the full implementation of the common immigration policy and of operations at the European Union's external borders, which should save lives at sea while fighting against trafficking in human beings, and to promote the principle of solidarity and of a fair responsibility-sharing between Member States.
48. Speakers hope that the new strategic guidelines in the AFSJ will give proper attention to the empowerment of women, the elimination and prevention of violence against women and the principle of non-discrimination and equality of individuals and social groups. Speakers also support the establishment of effective mechanisms to ensure respect for fundamental rights in the Member States.
49. Speakers note that national Parliaments together with the European Parliament are entitled to jointly establish and implement procedures for the scrutiny of Eurojust's and Europol's activities, as stipulated in Article 12 of the TEU and Articles 85 and 88 of the TFEU, and also recall Article 9 of Protocol 1 of the Treaty of Lisbon.
50. Speakers recall that a second 'yellow card' was issued in response to the proposal to set up the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), and take note of the Commission's Communication regarding the 'yellow card' of 27 November 2013.

#### **On the work of IPEX (Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange)**

51. Speakers welcome the conclusions of the Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments held on 26-27 January 2014 in Vilnius concerning the setting up, on the EU Speakers page, of new subpages dedicated to the new interparliamentary conferences. Speakers acknowledge with satisfaction the willingness of the national Parliaments chairing those conferences to exchange relevant information and documents via IPEX.
52. Speakers wish to thank the German Bundestag for its successful chairmanship of the IPEX Board during the last four years. Speakers note with satisfaction that it was during these years that IPEX became a reliable and effective tool to exchange documents and

information relevant for interparliamentary cooperation, thanks also to the continuous financial and human resources commitment of the European Parliament. Speakers congratulate the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania upon assuming the chairmanship of the IPEX Board following this Conference and wish successful fulfilment of the Chair's mandate.

53. Speakers acknowledge the decision of the Commission to transmit to the national Parliaments, the European Parliament and IPEX documents the Commission formerly transmitted only to the Council.
54. Furthermore, Speakers recognise the efforts of the IPEX bodies together with the IPEX correspondents to promote the correct use of the symbols and the correct upload of relevant documents in order to keep IPEX a reliable tool for interparliamentary cooperation and exchange as well as an important source of information for the European citizens.

**Declaration  
of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments  
on the occasion of the International Roma Day**

**Vilnius, 8 April 2014**

We, the Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU Member States and the President of the European Parliament –

- Today, on the occasion of the “International Roma Day”, commemorating the first international Romani Congress convened in London on 8 April 1971 which established the “Romani Union” as an international representative organization;
  - Considering the fact that approximately ten to twelve million Roma live in Europe as one of the largest vulnerable groups, about half of them citizens of the European Union;
  - Concerned that Roma are being confronted with prejudices, intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion on a daily basis and live as a marginalized group under extremely precarious social and economic conditions;
  - Expressing appreciation for efforts made to date, especially by the European Union, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, to implement measures at European level;
  - Expressing special appreciation for the EU framework adopted in 2011 for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 and the steps already taken by the EU Member States towards its implementation through their national Roma further-inclusion strategies;
1. Believe that cultural and linguistic diversity is an essential feature of the European Union and that the Roma people enrich this diversity;
  2. Believe that advancing Roma inclusion is a common concern and interest of the Member States and the EU and cooperation at EU level brings significant added value, whereas responsibility and competence for the implementation of measures rests primarily with the

Member States, given the fact that different national circumstances should be taken into consideration and that the Roma, above all, are minorities in their respective countries and do not constitute a homogeneous group;

3. Believe that strategies chosen by the individual Member States must be aimed at ensuring acceptance of the Roma people and their integration into the society concerned;
4. Believe that concrete steps are indispensable in the following areas:
  - a. Access to education
  - b. Access to employment
  - c. Access to health care
  - d. Access to housing and basic services
5. Believe that strategies for the improvement of the situation of the Roma people are to be implemented not only for the Roma, but in cooperation with them, and that their integration can only be achieved together with Roma, their representatives and their organizations, which in turn depends on their adequate social, economic, political and cultural participation in society as an essential prerequisite.