

CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF THE EU PARLIAMENTS**BRATISLAVA, 23-24 APRIL 2017****CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY****Preliminary remarks**

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments was held in Bratislava at the Bratislava Castle on 23-24 April 2017, and attended by the Speakers and Presidents or their representatives of 44 Parliaments/Chambers of 28 Member States as well as by the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani and the Vice-President of the European Commission Jyrki Katainen. Also taking part were the Speakers or their representatives of 3 EU candidate countries and one country attended as an observer. The Conference was chaired by Mr Andrej Danko, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

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

The Conference was divided into two sessions:

- I. Future of the EU as a global player in the context of the current global changes, and the role of national parliaments.
- II. Bringing parliamentary agenda closer to citizens in the modern era – sharing best practices.

**Future of the EU as a global player
in the context of the current global changes, and the role of national parliaments**

1. The Speakers acknowledge that the last 60 years have been the most peaceful and prosperous times in the history of Europe, in which the European Union has had an essential role. The European Union was founded on values such as respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, rule of law and equality, which are as valid now as they were 60 years ago.
2. The Speakers recognise that the European Union has proved to be the best existing common instrument we have to address the various challenges we are facing today. Challenges such as terrorism within and outside our borders, the migration and refugee crisis, economic and social imbalances, debt crisis, or climate change need to be addressed in cooperation with the Member States.

3. The Speakers note with concern the emergence of a lack of public confidence in the recent years towards the European project and institutions, as well as political life more generally, and acknowledge the urgent need to respond to this phenomenon. In this respect, the Speakers express their concern with the rise of extremist movements and political parties across the European Union that seek to undermine the fundamental principles and values upon which the European Union stands, and recognize this trend as additionally contributing towards the decrease of public confidence in the European project.
4. The Speakers take note of various concepts of the reform of the European Union, and they wish to continue the dialogue already opened in this realm. The Speakers recognise and welcome the efforts already made in this field by the European institutions and the Member States; however, there is still room for improvement. Communication among Member States, National Parliaments, European institutions, but most importantly communication with European citizens needs to be improved. The Speakers recognise that this communication needs to go both ways – politicians and institutions need to be more effective in explaining and communicating EU issues, but they also need to carefully address the concerns expressed by citizens.
5. The Speakers take note of the efforts of the European Commission (“White Paper on the Future of Europe”) and the European Council (Rome Declaration) and the European Parliament (resolutions adopted on 16 February 2017) to provide a framework for debate on a new and modern vision for the European Union that would reflect all the internal and external challenges we face. The Speakers welcome the fact that this debate is taking place at every level of the European society, including in and with National Parliaments. The Speakers thus welcome and appreciate the contributions made to this process of reflection by the Parliaments of the European Union during the Informal Parliamentary Summit in Bratislava in October 2016 as well as during the Extraordinary Conference of Speakers held in Rome in March of this year. We must work to ensure that the European Union has robust prospects for sustainable social and environmental development, strengthening the competitiveness of its economy, enhancing the potential of human capital, fighting effectively against unemployment, social exclusion and poverty.
6. The Speakers take note of the United Kingdom’s invocation of Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union, thus beginning the process of its withdrawal from the European Union, as well as President Donald Tusk’s call for an informal meeting of the European Council regarding this issue. The Speakers hope for a fair, balanced and transparent negotiation process about the terms of the withdrawal and about the framework of the future cooperation with the United Kingdom, in which the National Parliaments and the European Parliament have their roles, the latter being fully involved at EU level. In this context, the Speakers are of the opinion that National Parliaments and European citizens should be regularly informed of the progress of negotiations, by their respective national governments as well as by the European Commission itself.
7. In the context of the current changing international geopolitical landscape, the Speakers stress the need for a stronger European Union on the global stage, which requires well-balanced relations based on international rules and standards, as well as common effort and enhanced cooperation with global partners and the European Neighbourhood to fight global threats and challenges, not neglecting multiscale reflexions on future perspectives of the Transatlantic bond. The Speakers recognize this can be achieved only if the European Union acts together. In this regard, the Speakers also take note of the efforts by some Member States to engage in closer defence cooperation.
8. Despite existing internal challenges, the Speakers recognize the need to keep on the agenda the question of enlargement and the neighbourhood of the European Union. Cooperation between Member States and partners, is essential for the continuation of much

needed reforms in these countries. A secure, stable and prosperous European neighbourhood is beneficial both for these countries, and for the European Union.

9. The Speakers reaffirm the importance of the Global Strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy, as presented in the "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe" document by the Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy in June 2016. The Speakers encourage the office of the High Representative to strengthen its communication with National Parliaments regarding the implementation of the Global Strategy, and to intensify activities in respect of the High Representative's initiative to visit all National Parliaments across the European Union.

Bringing parliamentary agenda closer to citizens in the modern era – sharing best practices

10. Noting the Presidency Conclusions of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments held in Warsaw on 19 – 21 April 2012, the Speakers reaffirm their commitment to parliamentary openness ensuring transparency of the legislative process and recognizing public ownership of parliamentary information. The Speakers recognize that citizen engagement and participation in political life is an important cornerstone of democracy, and that National Parliaments and the European Parliament have a crucial role to play in bridging the gap between citizens and policy-making. The Speakers also note that Parliaments and parliamentarians are directly elected representatives of our citizens and therefore uniquely placed in order to communicate both European and national policies to the public. Recalling the discussion of the Informal Parliamentary Summit held in Bratislava on 6 – 7 October 2016, the Speakers believe that closer cooperation between Parliaments and the exchange of good practices between them can be useful in addressing this communication gap and enhancing democratic legitimacy and accountability.
11. The Speakers consider that more needs to be done on all institutional levels, whether national or European, in order to bring Europe closer to its citizens in an understandable and publicly attractive manner emphasizing common history and values that European citizens share. The Speakers consider that strengthening the social dimension of national and European policies may contribute significantly to this end.
12. Reflecting the Presidency Conclusions of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments held in Stockholm on 13 – 15 May 2010, the Speakers acknowledge that ongoing rise of new electronic forms of communication may facilitate public involvement in the decision-making process, particularly that of younger generations. The Speakers note that use of modern communication tools, such as social media and electronic applications, is already widespread in some Parliaments.
13. The Speakers note with concern the rise of extremist tendencies across many Member States of the European Union. The Speakers consider that such anti-European developments need to be addressed, inter alia through better communication of the many positive results of European policy-making and effective functioning of European institutions in accordance with the Treaties. The Speakers also note that in current era of hate speech, fake news and rise of disinformation, it is more important than ever to provide for transparency, openness and proximity of the political processes to our citizens in the European Union.

IPEX (Interparliamentary EU information exchange)

14. The Speakers welcome the Conclusions on IPEX adopted at the Meeting of the Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments held in Bratislava on 20 - 21 February 2017.
15. The Speakers thank the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies for its work and results produced during the year of its Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, in particular in their efforts to finalise the discussions on IPEX Digital Strategy and to bring out the IPEX Handbook and Leaflet. The Speakers also thank the European Parliament for providing logistics and the infrastructure of IPEX digital system and for hosting one of the IPEX Board meetings, and the Senate of Belgium for its availability to continue the administration of the IPEX Information Officer.
16. The Speakers acknowledge the adoption of the IPEX Digital Strategy and call on the IPEX Board to start its implementation via carrying out of the mid-term work programme. The Speakers express the hope that the IPEX Digital Strategy will serve as an effective guide for the IPEX Board in its endeavours regarding the future development of IPEX.

Europol Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group

17. Pursuant to Article 51 paragraph 1 of the Regulation 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), and in accordance with Article 9 of Protocol 1 of the Treaty on the European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Speakers establish the Europol Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group according to the provisions in Annex I.
18. The Speakers expect that the Europol Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group itself will define further details of its work, including information rights vis-à-vis Europol and possible participation of observer parliaments. In principle, the Europol Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group will work on the basis of consensus.

ANNEX I

**To the Conclusions
of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments
of 23-25 April in Bratislava as pertaining to the Europol JPSG**

The Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union pursuant to:

- a) Article 88 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- b) Protocol Number 1 on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union to the Treaty on the European Union,
- c) Regulation 2016/794 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol),

And in accordance with the Conclusions of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments of 22-24 May 2016 in Luxembourg,

Recognizing that:

- I) the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) is meant to be a scrutiny and monitoring body, as opposed to an inter-parliamentary conference and that the JPSG must be able to exercise its rights of scrutiny efficiently;
- II) that the JPSG shall politically monitor Europol's activities in fulfilling its mission, including as regards the impact of those activities on the fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons;
- III) that the tasks and responsibilities of the JPSG are set out in Article 51 of the Regulation 2016/794, inter alia including the right to question the Chairperson of the Management Board of Europol, the Executive Director of Europol or their deputies as well as the European Data Protection Supervisor and including the right to be consulted in relation to Europol's multiannual programming and including the right to request relevant documents necessary to the fulfillment of its tasks and including the right to draw up summary conclusions on the political monitoring of Europol's activities;

Agrees that as concerns the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) to carry out scrutiny of Europol's activities:

- 1. Members of the JPSG shall be selected individually by each Parliament/Chamber, bearing in mind the necessity to ensure substance matter expertise as well as long-term continuity and recommending to draw from the responsible committee/committees in Parliaments/Chambers. Where possible, members of the JPSG should be nominated for the duration of their parliamentary mandate;
- 2. Each Parliament shall have the right to nominate up to four members of the JPSG, in the case of bicameral parliaments each Chamber shall have the right to nominate up to two member of the JPSG.¹ The European Parliament shall have the right to nominate up to 16 members of the JPSG. The number of members nominated by each Parliament/Chamber does not affect the equality of Parliaments/Chambers. Additionally and where appropriate, each Parliament/Chamber may nominate substitute members to replace full members in case of absence.
- 3. The JPSG shall be presided jointly by the Parliament of the country holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament;
- 4. The JPSG shall meet twice a year. In the first half of the year, the JPSG shall meet in the Parliament of the country holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European

¹ This shall be without prejudice to the transferability of seats between chambers of a parliament, when agreed.

Union. In the second half of the year, the JPSG shall meet in the European Parliament. If necessary, extraordinary meetings can be convened upon agreement of the Parliament of the country holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, or upon agreement by at least one third of the Parliaments/Chambers, to address matters of urgency or matters that cannot be reasonably included in the agenda of the ordinary meetings. Time and place of the extraordinary meetings shall be decided by the Parliament of the country holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament;

And recommends that a constituent meeting of the JPSG should be held as soon as possible in order to adopt its rules of procedure so as to enable full work to begin in the second semester of 2017;

And recommends conducting a review of these arrangements for the JPSG after two years from its first meeting, and submitting conclusions from such a review by the relevant Presidency of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments.