

Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments 23–24 April 2018, Tallinn

Conclusions of the Presidency

Preliminary Remarks

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments was held in Tallinn on 23–24 April 2018 and was attended by the Speakers and Presidents or their representatives from 39 Parliaments/Chambers of 28 Member States, as well as by the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani. Also taking part were the Speakers or their representatives from 5 EU candidate countries, and 3 countries attended as observers. The Conference was chaired by Mr Eiki Nestor, President of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia.

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 was divided into two sessions:

- I. The future of the EU
- II. European security and defence

The future of the EU

1. The Speakers reaffirm that the European Union since its creation has brought peace, stability and prosperity to its citizens, and that it is imperative to protect and strengthen these values. In the past few years, the European Union has faced a number of challenges, such as migration, Brexit, different security threats, as well as growing economic and social inequalities. The Speakers acknowledge that the best way to overcome these difficulties is with a common and unified front in line with principles laid down in the Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017, whereby all Member States and the European Institutions play an essential role. The Speakers reiterate their commitment to the values that the European Union was built on such as respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality. Social convergence and wellbeing of European citizens has to remain a priority to the EU. They believe that through unity and solidarity we will make the European Union stronger and more resilient.
2. The Speakers recognise that the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by the European Union creates an opportunity to carry out necessary reforms and improve the inner workings of the EU while protecting and maintaining the achievements of European integration. This, in turn, would have a positive effect on the external dimension of the Union and would deliver added value for future generations. The Speakers acknowledge that the European Institutions have provided

¹ Including the Danish Parliament – Folketinget

the framework for a debate on the future of the European Union. The Speakers highlight the essential role of national parliaments in the functioning of the European Union and call them to engage and to contribute actively in related discussions. The wide engagement of the national parliaments would enhance the democratic legitimacy of unified Europe.

3. The Speakers emphasise the importance of the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the EU and take note of the difficulties that this might pose for both parties. The Speakers highlight that the rights of the EU and the United Kingdom citizens living in each other's territories, the financial settlement and the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland should be considered as priorities during the negotiation process. The Speakers take note of the European Commission Draft Withdrawal Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community that was published on 28 February 2018. They call to maintain the unity of the 27 throughout the second phase of the negotiations.
4. Taking into consideration that the discussions surrounding the next Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020 are in their initial phase, the Speakers take note that the European Commission will present its budgetary plans in May 2018. With this in mind, the Speakers hope that the European Institutions will make sufficient progress in the coming negotiations to reach a timely political agreement to ensure adequate financing to the long-standing and new priorities.
5. The migration policy should be based on the strong protection of the external borders. We must focus on tackling the root causes of migration on the spot, in particular in Africa, supported by a European plan for this continent. With regard to the management of refugee flows, the reform of the European common asylum system is essential. To this respect, the EU should work actively towards resolving conflicts in its neighbouring regions. This would help save lives, reduce migratory pressure and irregular migration.
6. Considering the importance of stability and prosperity in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods of the EU, in particular Western Balkans, the Speakers underline that enlargement should remain a key policy of the EU. It is an investment in the peace, democracy and security of our continent and our citizens. The Speakers reiterate that EU enlargement should be based on the respect for the values of the EU, strict compliance with the membership criteria, and the principle of own merit. A European perspective for states in concerned regions must remain credible, keep its momentum and be based on successful reforms in prospective Members on the one hand and actual progress in accession negotiations on the other. Taking into account the growing external influence in the Western Balkans it is of utmost importance that the EU keeps protecting its values and interests in the region.
7. The Speakers welcome the sturdy framework for the debate on the future of the EU, which has been laid down by the EU institutions. The Speakers recognise the important role of national parliaments and the European Parliament in actively engaging in such debates, as well as in engaging with the citizens and placing them at the centre of the discussions. These debates should also address the role of national parliaments, including procedures that would give them a more active role in the decision-making in the EU. Doing a better job in explaining to citizens what the EU is and what it does is an important foundation for a future, where EU citizens understand and trust the Union. Understanding and trust of citizens in political decision-making can only be attained if European and national institutions observe the principles of integrity and transparency.
8. The Speakers underline the importance of active engagement of the citizens in political life, in particular through elections at regional, national and European level. National Parliaments and the European Parliament encourage all European citizens to use their democratic rights at all levels, including the need to use their right to vote in the upcoming European Elections on 23–26 May 2019.

European security and defence

9. The Speakers affirm that the EU should stand for international peace and stability, based on its fundamental values. The Speakers reaffirm the guiding principles of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy that emphasise the need for a stronger Europe. The implementation of initiatives stemming from the EU Global Strategy is of utmost importance, including for the development of the EU military capabilities. The Speakers acknowledge, however, that in the interest of efficiency the implementation of the EU Global Strategy, while remaining a priority, requires focus, purpose and determination.
10. The Speakers acknowledge that the external and internal dimensions of security are interconnected. The spectrum of threats in today's world is wide and varied, requiring a delicate, mutually reinforcing balance between the provision of security on the one hand and respect for fundamental human rights and liberties on the other. The altered security environment impels the European Union to be more decisive and effective in order to protect its citizens. The Member States should work more closely together in the areas of security and defence to face these new challenges. The strengthening of the common security and defence policy should lead the European Union to develop a common and credible defence capacity complementary to NATO, while respecting the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.
11. Considering the current security environment, the Speakers underline the importance of the recent steps taken to enhance defence cooperation. The establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) strengthens the security and defence cooperation between those Member States who are willing and able to work closely together. This increases the EU's capacity as an international security partner and thus contributes to the security of our citizens.
12. The Speakers welcome the launching of the European Defence Fund (EDF), which contributes towards a more secure Europe by supplementing and amplifying national investments in defence. They call Member States to increase their defence effort, to encourage the pooling of costs and resources, to develop their capabilities to bring closer their defence industries and to strengthen the interoperability of their forces.
13. In view of the changing global security situation, the Speakers encourage the close cooperation between the European Union and NATO. The EU-NATO Joint Declaration signed by the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council and NATO Secretary General in Warsaw on 8 July 2016 is the basis for the partnership of the two organisations. As NATO will remain the cornerstone of collective defence for its allies, a stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing, while also recognising that not all Member States are members of NATO. Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond.
14. The Speakers acknowledge that the modern global world is facing non-traditional security challenges and hybrid threats. We are increasingly dependent on digital technologies and vulnerable to cyber threats. The EU should strengthen its capability to collectively respond to these threats. Strategic communication is an important element in improving resilience to hybrid threats, dealing with disinformation campaigns and providing a positive narrative on EU policies and actions. Another positive development is the Commission's adoption of the cybersecurity package that presents new initiatives to further improve the EU's cyber resilience and response. The EU should support big data solutions in order to be in a strong position and competitive on the global scene.
15. The Speakers reaffirm that Europe faces multiple security challenges both from inside and outside of the European Union, ranging from terrorism, information war and cyber threats to conventional military threats and frozen conflicts. Solidarity and cooperation are instrumental tools in responding to these common threats. Deepened security and defence cooperation as well as proactive engagement with contemporary threats is crucial for better facing the changing security

environment. They underline in particular the role of the exchange of information between the competent services and call for a strengthening of cooperation in this area.

IPEX (Interparliamentary EU information exchange)

16. The Speakers welcome the Conclusions on IPEX, adopted at the Meeting of the Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments in Tallinn on 28–29 January 2018.
17. The Speakers thank the National Council of the Slovak Republic for its work and results produced during the year of its Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, in particular in their efforts to ensure the implementation of the IPEX Digital Strategy through the IPEX Work Programme 2017–2020, approved in Bratislava on 19 May 2017.
18. The Speakers would also like to thank the National Council of the Slovak Republic for hosting the annual meeting of IPEX correspondents, the Swedish Parliament for hosting the second IPEX Users Conference, the Belgian Senate for its availability to formally employ the IPEX information officer, and the European Parliament for hosting one of the IPEX Board meetings and for providing the logistics and the infrastructure of the IPEX digital system.
19. The Speakers call on the Estonian Presidency to continue the implementation of the IPEX Digital Strategy and the execution of the IPEX Work Programme through three working groups: Promoting IPEX, Enhancing the IPEX Network and Improving the IPEX Digital System.
20. The Speakers look forward to increasing cooperation between IPEX and COSAC and between IPEX and the Europol Scrutiny Group that would allow IPEX to host documents for further interparliamentary conferences alongside the existing webpages for the Conference of Speakers, the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the EU.