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Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments, 22-24 May 2016

Background Note

Session II: Strengthening the European Union

1. The « Rome Declaration »

On **14 September 2015**, the Speaker of the Italian Camera dei deputati, Ms Laura Boldrini, together with the Speaker of the German Bundestag, Mr Norbert Lammert, the Speaker of the French Assemblée nationale, Mr Claude Bartolone, the Speaker of the Luxembourg Chambre des Députés, Mr Mars Di Bartolomeo called for **significantly greater political integration within the European Union**. The four Speakers of representative Assemblies of the founding countries of the European Union stated in a declaration signed in Rome that they believe « that more, not less, Europe is needed to respond to the challenges we face, both internally and externally ». The declaration lists the challenges: the « greatest refugee and migration crisis since World War II », the threat of climate change, growing social inequality, the economic and financial crisis, alongside international crime and terrorism. The Speakers esteem that Member States are not able to master these challenges alone, but only **through greater and improved integration** in the European Union, as laid out in the Treaty on European Union.

In specific terms, the Speakers of Parliaments suggest completing the economic and monetary union by creating a veritable financial and fiscal union, while at the same time strengthening the institutions that control it and ensuring genuine democratic accountability and legitimacy. Overall, the Speakers advocate seeking to transfer greater powers to the European institutions, while ensuring that national Parliaments play a greater role in the decision-making process of the European Union.

On 7 December 2015, the Speaker of the Italian Camera dei deputati, Ms Boldrini presented the „Rome Declaration“ to the President of the European Parliament, Mr Martin Schulz.

As of 28 April 2016, 12 Parliaments/Chambers have signed the declaration and two candidate countries have manifested their support:

- the National Council of Austria,
- the Bundestag of Germany,
- the Senate of Belgium,
- the House of Representatives of Cyprus,
- the National Assembly of France,



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- the Hellenic Parliament,
- the Chamber of Deputies of Italy,
- the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg,
- the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal,
- the Chamber of Deputies of Romania,
- the National Assembly of Slovenia,
- the Senate and the Congress of Deputies of Spain,
- the Parliament of Montenegro,
- the Assembly of Albania.

2. Social dimension

The financial and economic crisis has left behind a legacy of unemployment and poverty in the European Union. Among his ten priorities, the President of the European Commission has set the objective of a « social triple-A » and of preserving the European social model as a matter of common concern for Member States. **Shared social objectives** and **coordinated social policies** have a crucial role in defining a European identity and the value added of the European project; a role which should also promote growth and competitiveness on the **basis of common social objectives**. Setting the social dimension at the centre of the agenda is a key requirement for the next steps of the integration process and a fundamental element of democratic consensus, including in the context of the **EU's Europe 2020 Strategy** for employment and fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2015 strived to deepen the EU's social dimension by supporting the European Commission's plans to build a Europe with a « triple A social rating » by **relaunching the social dialogue** and by focusing on **social investment and boosting investment in human capital**. The « triple A social rating » was addressed within the framework of several conferences, as well as during the **Tripartite Social Summit** held on 15 October 2015, which had as main theme: build a social Europe.

Furthermore, the Luxembourg Presidency focused its efforts on **strengthening the social dimension of economic governance within the Union and particularly in the Euro zone**. In that regard, an orientation debate on social governance in the EU, based on the Five President's Report on the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) took place in October 2015.¹

The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) adopted in December 2015 **conclusions on social governance in an inclusive Europe** aiming to strengthen the social dimension of the European Semester so as to ensure a more balanced path towards sustainable and inclusive growth.

¹ On 22 June 2015, the five Presidents have revealed in a report how to deepen the Economic and Monetary Union as of 1 July 2015 and how to complete it by latest 2025.



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In December 2015, the Council also adopted conclusions **on the promotion of the social economy** as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe. Following these conclusions, six EU Member States - France, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain - had adopted **the Luxembourg Declaration calling for more support for social economy enterprises within the EU**.

At the parliamentary level, chairpersons of the Committees on Social Affairs of Member States as well as MPs of candidate countries for accession and international experts met in Luxembourg on 19 October 2015 for a meeting regarding the 'Triple A social rating' organised by the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies. Participants debated on the integration of the social dimension in all of the European Union's policies, the re-socialisation of the European semester and common European values.

3. Reform of the electoral law of the European Union

The EU Treaties (TFEU Article 223) give the European Parliament the right to initiate a procedure to reform the European electoral law and draw up proposals to this end. These proposals would need to be endorsed unanimously by the Council and then approved by the European Parliament.

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs has decided to draft a legislative initiative report to this effect.

The European Parliament **adopted a set of proposals on 11 November 2015** on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union, with the aim to establish a uniform procedure in all the Member States for the election of the Members of the European Parliament.

Although the Treaties foresee the possibility of a uniform electoral procedure, election to the European Parliament are determined by national electoral rules, which differ considerably from one Member State to the next. The discrepancies in national procedures make for a very complex overall process of electing Members of the European Parliament. Furthermore, these deficiencies touch upon core founding principles of the EU, such as the equality of citizens, the notion of European citizenship and the democratic character of the elections. In addition, they are responsible for the high rates of abstention in the previous elections (57,46 % in 2014).

A reform of the electoral law of the EU would enhance the **democratic and transnational dimension of the European elections**. In doing so the European Parliament intends to contribute to the **improvement of the decision- making process** of the EU, by giving it a greater democratic legitimacy.

For 2019 European elections, MEPs would like to see:

- EU- wide lead candidates ;
- Member States should allow their nationals to vote even if abroad ;
- Common minimum voting age (preferably 16) ;



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- Electoral lists established at least 12 weeks before elections.

Some points for discussion:

- What is the opinion of your Parliament/Chamber regarding the “Rome Declaration”?
What should be the next steps regarding this Declaration?
- How should national Parliaments be involved in the strengthening of the social dimension of the EU as well as of the European Semester?
- What is the opinion of your Parliament /Chamber on the reform of the electoral law of the EU? What do you think about the propositions laid out by the European Parliament to reform the electoral law?