

CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF THE EU PARLIAMENTS

BRATISLAVA, 23-24 APRIL 2017

MINUTES

Opening of the meeting

The Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak republic, Mr **Andrej DANKO**, opened the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments on Monday 24 April 2017 by welcome address. He welcomed all participants and briefly presented the key historical points connected with Bratislava Castle and the baroque Winter Riding School where almost all events of the parliamentary dimension of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the EU were held. He expressed his pleasure of the high participation and broad interest of the conference - there were 46 delegations. Within this number of present delegations, there were 29 Speakers of the EU Parliaments (including the Speaker of the European Parliament), 9 Deputy Speakers (plus Vice-President of the European Commission). All 28 EU Member States, 4 candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) and Norway as a special guest were present. He also spoke personally that the conference would send a clear signal in this sense of the indubitable importance of the European unity and the place of national parliaments in it. He briefly presented the basic organizational and technical-logistical aspects related to the course of the conference and recalled the procedure and deadlines for submitting amendments on the draft Conclusions.

After that, the agenda of the meeting was adopted without any objection.

Then he directly introduced the speakers who spoke at the opening session of the meeting - the Prime Minister of the Slovak republic Mr **Robert FICO**, President of the European Parliament Mr **Antonio TAJANI**, Vice-President of the European Commission Mr **Jyrki KATAINEN**, and Vice-President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Malta Mr **Vincent GALEU**.

The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Mr **Robert FICO**, stressed in his speech the contribution of inter-parliamentary cooperation to the debates on the future of European integration. He emphasized several times that Europe, thanks to its unique historical and cultural wealth, united in diversity, or achieved political success, is an ideal place to live. He added that Slovakia is the best example of how EU membership can help a small state - both internally and also internationally. Despite the undeniable progress brought by European integration, for example, in the economic or financial-monetary area, he perceives a growing disrespect in society for the EU as well as for the authorities as such. He believes that this is how simply looking, populist and often extreme solutions are supported. In this context, he questions whether the Union and its political representatives at all levels are doing enough to offer sufficient and determined responses to these tendencies, or whether they stagnate in their action, whether our common Union is not too much "preoccupied with itself". According to his opinion in the last period several unsuccessful European initiatives have not ended by taking responsibility, or by the evaluation of the causes and the obstacles - are rather "mended" by other new projects, which in his eyes can result in the same way without deeper self-reflection.

He believes that the basis for the perspective future of the EU, which brings value-added also to individuals, must be mutual respect among its Member States, the cultivated spirit of the Europe and the clear communication of political leaders towards their citizens.

Thereafter the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak republic, Mr **Andrej DANKO**, summarized the key aspects of the parliamentary dimension of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the EU. As he noted, the National Council of the Slovak republic welcomed more than 1,500 guests - parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, academics, non-governmental sector officials and diplomats during the "presidency". Besides traditional inter-parliamentary conferences and meetings in October 2016 the first ever informal meeting of Speakers of the Parliaments was hosted and gave a clear signal on the importance of further developing of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the shadow of the results of the referendum on UK membership in the EU.

He expressed his special thanks to the partners from the presidency Trio - Netherlands and Malta. He is convinced that the Joint Memorandum on Cooperation has created a useful framework for intensifying contacts between all three parliaments and mutual support, in particular in the form of highly valued consultations. He also appreciated the willingness of both Lithuanian and Latvian parliament to share their presidency know-how.

He noted that despite the high organizational difficulty and the need to mobilize sometimes limited resources, there is no better life lesson for Slovakia and especially for the National Council of the Slovak republic. He is also pleased with the fact that the National Council of the Slovak republic succeeded in bringing into the European debate an authentic deposit and constructive contributions. On the other hand the Slovak Parliament has gained invaluable experience and wants to offer them to parliaments whose presidential role is still waiting.

The next speaker was Mr **Vincent GALEA**, Vice-President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Malta. He presented the experience and insights of the current, historically the first Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU and its parliamentary dimension, within which 6 inter-parliamentary conferences and meetings will take place. As one of the key challenges in this context, he emphasized limited resources - whether financial, material or personal. However, he recalled, the Maltese Parliament has made fundamental changes, for example in the field of communication strategy - launching a television channel, interactive website (www.parl.eu2017.mt) and smartphone application, they are immediately trying to inform the general public about current issues, ongoing events or related Presidency priorities. He also highlighted the opportunity to use the experience and know-how of the partner parliaments, which, in his opinion, is a key element, particularly in the preparatory phase of the Presidency and its events.

The President of the European Parliament, Mr **Antonio TAJANI**, framed his speech by the appeal to the present that is full of challenges requiring constructive and sustainable solutions. The most important point is the unemployment of young people (he emphasized that the European economy must work on its competitiveness and must reflect real needs, while the common economic governance should continue to be strengthened), the security situation in connection with terrorist threats and migration (according to his opinion, it is necessary to focus more actively on the root causes of these phenomena) and, last but not least, the increase of populism.

He noted that 60 years of European cooperation proved to be the best mean of fulfilling both national and common interests, but it must be borne in mind that past achievements are not enough to secure the future of the European project. He feels that while much time and energy is devoted to promises and visions, however, with the minimum political or technical barrier, there are major complications, or even stagnation.

He is convinced that the basis of the Union must be a unity, of which one of the pillars is the cooperation of the European Parliament and the national legislatures. The engagement of national parliaments in the control of the subsidiarity principle, the review of contractual documents, or the debate on Union policies in the area of freedom, security and justice has proved more than justified.

He appealed to Europe be more "citizen and for citizens project" capable of active diplomacy - not only on the international scene but also inside. He wishes every possible failure to be primarily a motivation, and so empowers the Union and its citizens with pride in everything that has been successfully achieved - social and economic development, prosperity, freedom and peace.

Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr **Jyrki KATAINEN**, repeatedly reminded in his speech the strategic interest of the current Commission under the leadership of J.-C. Juncker to strengthen relations with national parliaments in order to deepen the joint ownership of the European project. He believes that in the context of Brexit the Union will not remain in unchanged frameworks and requires a new direction, new content and new commitments - only when it will be able to lead a constructive political self-reflection and find common responses to common challenges.

He stressed the importance of the Bratislava Roadmap, which was adopted during the informal meeting of the Heads of the States and Governments of the EU Member States in September 2016 - in his words, the Bratislava Roadmap succeeded in uniting European leaders on a common platform and at the same time defining the areas in which it is necessary to bring solutions - in this point, he emphasized migration, internal and external security, economic and social development. He also drew attention to the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of the EU, which defines 5 key scenarios for the Union's development by 2025. As he said, none of them is exclusively preferred and each of them is equally possible.

Above the framework of structural and institutional developments, he identified the strategic focus of the European Commission's agenda mainly on the level of building the social dimension of the EU, the qualitative reflection of globalization trends, the deepening of economic and monetary union, building a common European defence, and securing a prospective future for European finances.

He urged national parliaments and their representatives not to hesitate to initiate and manage political debates on the future of the EU in the individual Member States, while he believes that by the end of 2017, each national government and each national legislature will have their own opinion in this context. He noted that the President of the Commission wants to reflect this effort in his report on the state of the Union, which he will present in the autumn, and which is a good moment to deduct the political agenda and the Commission's priorities in the mid-term of its mandate (in this line he emphasized the support of economic growth and creation of jobs, the Juncker Investment Plan, the Energy Union, the Circular Economy Phenomenon, the Single Digital Market, the European Border and Coast Guard and Defence Co-operation).

Session 1: Future of the EU as a global player in the context of the current changes on the global political landscape and the role of national parliaments

The first thematic session of the conference was introduced by the host of the event, Mr **Andrej DANKO**, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The first speaker was Mr **Mars Di BARTOLOMEO**, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. He accentuated the notion that the European Union should advocate its interests in the world, which constitutes a challenge at this point. The global role of the EU should deal with its challenges not just abroad, but also at home. According to Mr Bartolomeo, the EU has never been just a project of a single market. The point was to promote peace, the rule of law and democracy. The EU has focused on strengthening human rights and developing the economies. The EU is a project of peace. However, it should also be a social project. The Speaker mentioned that we live in turbulent times, in times of uncertainty. The future of the EU as a global player is closely connected to the state of the EU as such. It is important that national parliaments have more responsibilities within the Union. The EU should promote its values more assertively. On the other hand, those same values are often

questioned. Current populist leaders are trying to subvert these values. Mr Bartolomeo stated that Turkey is moving away from the values of the European Union. The United Kingdom is leaving the Union. Brexit will have its impact on the future of the EU as such. According to the Speaker, however, the EU has never been more united. The EU has a reputation as a defender of the rule of law, of human rights, social justice, freedom of the press, protection of minorities and so on. The Parliaments should send a clear signal that the EU is about inclusion, about consensus and about protecting minorities. If the EU is able to implement its own values, then we may expect that it will be a reliable global player with global influence. We have to defend and promote our key values of the EU.

Mr **Milan BRGLEZ**, the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia was the second speaker of this session. Mr Brglez critically reflected on the role of the EU as a global player. The EU has had its ambitions, but there was a lack of political will. However, we are more capable of facing the challenges and crises today. There is a series of transnational problems that highlight just how interconnected we are in the EU. In this context, he mentioned unregulated migration, lack of development, climate change and security threats. Additionally, there are internal challenges that could cause the erosion of the fundamentals of the EU. Brexit is a key milestone in EU's history. However, the United Kingdom has to stay a strong partner of the EU even after its withdrawal from the Community. Our common vision of the EU requires us to work more. We have to agree on the goals and on the instruments to realise them, while respecting our values. Our steps have to improve the civilizational standards both within, and without our borders. However, we cannot be everywhere and change everything. The EU should optimise the use of its resources. We have to bolster our activities in the east of the EU and in the region of the Western Balkans. Development assistance must be mandatory. He stressed that he is a proponent of enhanced cooperation within the EU. We have to promote our shared principles and norms. The role of Parliaments is a relatively new one in the current geopolitical situation, especially in the context of the European foreign policy. Parliamentary diplomacy, however, has its limits. The main role of national Parliaments is to oversee their respective national governments. Transposition of international commitments is of key importance. Parliaments cannot pursue a foreign policy, but they can influence it, set limits. Parliaments can thus function as guardians of effective multilateralism. The legitimacy of foreign policy is currently anchored in the national political discourse, in which Parliaments play a key role. Mr Brglez believes that Ms Federica Mogherini will visit all national Parliaments during her mandate, as she did declare. Foreign policy should not be based on personal interests of populist politicians. These tendencies have to be weeded out. It is necessary on the national and the international scene. In this context, he quoted the former United States' president John F. Kennedy: „*Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us.*“ He concluded his address by saying we cannot let our European interests be “killed” if we want to become a key player on the global scene.

The third and final speaker of this session was Mr. **Urban AHLIN**, the Speaker of the Riksdag of Sweden. In the beginning of his address, Mr Ahlin expressed his appreciation for the course and organization of the conference and of the Slovak presidency as such. He specifically noticed the transparency, inclusion and efficiency of the process of creation and distribution of conference documents and of amendments to the draft conclusions. In order not to repeat what had already been said by the previous speakers, Mr Ahlin decided not to read his prepared speech. In his improvised contribution, he talked about lack of trust and confidence in the EU, citing an example from the Swedish parliament. Before every meeting of the European Council, the Swedish prime minister must ask for a mandate from Riksdag's European Affairs Committee. Upon this, the decisions made in Brussels gain legitimacy. Thus, according to Mr. Ahlin, there is no sense in criticizing “Brussels”. This model connects the national Parliament with the prime minister and European Council. European institutions are very complicated. The EU has to concentrate on dealing with practical issues. Discussions

about whether to solve these issues on the EU level or on the national level tend to be extremely difficult. However, these questions have already been dealt with in the Treaties. The proposals of the European Commission should be in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. This accordance should be scrutinized in the national Parliaments. He noted that of the 68 total reasoned opinions 13 have come from the Swedish Parliament, which amounts to 20 percent. He stated that Sweden scrutinizes every single proposal of legislative acts of the European Commission. Some national Parliaments are indeed highly critical of the European Commission, but they rarely submit any reasoned opinions. Sweden is not against the EU, but it thinks that some issues are better dealt with on the national level. He then invited the other participants of the conference to exercise the subsidiarity checks more. After Sweden's entry to the European Community, the Swedish Parliament gained some influence over foreign policy, which is, according to him, a good thing. He mentioned his partaking in the Inter-parliamentary Union in Bangladesh and noted that these kinds of events should be held in Europe as well. The European Union has to be visible and it has to utilize its attractiveness. We have to think about ways to promote the "European agenda" on inter-parliamentary fora.

After the addresses, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak republic, Mr Andrej Danko began the debate part of the session, in which 17 participants asked for the floor.

The first to take part was Mr **Marek KUCHCIŃSKI**, Speaker of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, who stressed the need of organizing inter-parliamentary conferences not just within the EU, but also with the participation of the "Parliaments to the east and the southeast of us". He then stressed the importance of the values of the EU and the discussion about them, as well as the strengthening of the role of national Parliaments of the Member States of the EU. It is necessary to apply more assertively the principle of subsidiarity. National Parliaments should also have a right to submit legislative proposals (green card) and to veto (red card). He stated that the limit to subsidiarity checks should be extended from 8 to 16 weeks. Mr Kuchciński continued with stating that we need to increase the efficiency of the common security and foreign policy of the EU, which has to be predicated on our cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We also need to stabilize our neighbourhood in the east and south of Europe. We further need to decrease the influence of Russia in these partner states.

Ms **Ināra MŪRNIECE**, Speaker of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, stressed the need of the EU's values in the time of crises. Up to a degree, the EU was able to deal with the migration crisis. She noted that cooperation is of key importance to Latvia, as well as for the EU. The EU must achieve unity. According to her, the EU is a union of strong nation states. We also cannot rule out a closer cooperation of certain Member States. The EU should defend and promote its values. The question of security is also very important, as well as convergence and the single market. Globalization causes that people live in uncertainty, which is breeding ground for populism. Latvia was the first to ratify the CETA agreement with Canada. Trade and cooperation can enhance our growth and development. We also need to respond to security threats and a strong transatlantic cooperation.

Mr **Arto SATONEN**, Deputy Speaker of the Eduskunta of the Republic of Finland, stated that the European Commission published an interesting document about the alternatives that may occur in the future, referring to the White Paper on the Future of Europe. It is often said that the EU is an economic giant, but a political dwarf, however, that is an oversimplification. The political weight of the EU depends on its economic success. That is why we need to focus on the single market and on global trade. Popular opinion varies within the different Member States. That is why we also need to think about the citizens for whom globalization is not necessarily a "blessing". The EU has a strong influence in our neighbourhood. We have to be consistent in our external policies and deal with the migrant flows.

Mr **Božo PETROV**, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, pointed out the security challenges of the EU, which are both within our borders, and beyond. He specifically mentioned migration, terrorism, geopolitical power shifts, climate changes and Brexit. The values of the EU are impugned; we have to defend them. National Parliaments should support and control their national governments in the matters of the CFSP and CSDP. In the context of migration, he noted that it is necessary to engage the sources of the crisis; we need to help decrease the extreme poverty in the countries of origin. Mr Petrov expressed hope that Croatia will soon enter the Schengen Area.

Mr **Demetrios SYLLOURIS**, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, stressed that the Rome Declaration is proof of our determination to deal with the problems of the EU. We have to change our functioning; we have to act like states that are united. We have to promote our values of the EU, both inside our borders, and outside them. We need a discussion, a dialogue, not just monologues.

Mr **Jyrki KATAINEN**, Vice-President of the European Commission, focused on the global role of the EU. He stressed that the important topics are tax evasion, financial regulation, social dumping, migration and climate changes. Member States cannot face these challenges on their own. It is important to stabilize the Western Balkans; it is in the interest of the EU. Free trade should be based on rules. The CETA agreement has a thousand pages of rules. The EU's trade policy has to be an instrument for promoting our social values as well. If we want to be a strong global player, our Union needs to be based on values such as democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression. Our fundamental values need to be sufficiently strong.

Mr **Jan HAMÁČEK**, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, noted that the Czech Republic prefers a multi-speed European Union; however, he warned against the existence of parallel clubs within the EU. He spoke positively about the Slovak presidency of the Council of the EU.

Mr **Călin POPESCU-TĂRICEANU**, Speaker of the Senate of the Parliament of Romania, pointed out that it is the responsibility of every Member State of the EU to address the existential crisis of the European project. It is not the first time that our project is questioned. The European project means peace, stability, stronger democracy and economic prosperity. The EU faces various challenges. Each Member State's position should have equal weight. It is important to engage in a free discussion. The Speaker stated that Romania as opposed to the past belongs to the free European world. Romania has suffered much during the times of communism. He warned that with the two-speed Europe, another curtain might be emerging.

Ms **Doris BURES**, Speaker of the National Council of the Republic of Austria, noted that with the coming Brexit, the EU would for the first time shrink. Moreover, Brexit is just one of the problems that the EU faces. The successes of the EU are in jeopardy. Many problems are not being solved sufficiently, e.g. migration. The greater challenges can only be solved on the EU level. We also have to fight against unemployment and focus on social justice. Every challenge is also an opportunity for the EU to become better.

Ms **Ana PASTOR**, Speaker of the Congress of Deputies of the Cortes Generales of the Kingdom of Spain, stressed that Europe is the region with the highest level of democracy. According to her, the EU is already a first rate global player. Its diplomacy has fundamental importance. Spain is interested in greater integration and cohesion as the best response to the challenges we face. We have to build a stronger Union. If Europe is a world power, it must act accordingly. We need to make more efforts towards integration.

The Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr **Nikolaos VOUTSIS**, stated that Europe could be a beacon of stability, growth and of significant influence – in case we act together. The situation is not perfect; principles of solidarity and aid are ignored. We see terrorist attacks and instability at the borders. Our current way of keeping the migration crisis under control is as good as walking on thin ice.

The Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria **Mr Dimitar GLAVCHEV** said that the debate is important for everyone in the EU, especially for Bulgaria. The EU faces challenges such as border protection, security, job creation, populism and Euroscepticism. He stressed that national Parliaments have the right and also a duty to contribute to the debate on the future of the EU. Bulgaria supports building an ever-closer European Union. While making a point about Brexit, he underlined the importance of the status of EU citizens in the United Kingdom and vice versa, the citizens of the UK in the EU. The White Paper of the European Commission is a very good document as a basis for a wide-ranging debate, including the citizens. MEPs can play a key role in this respect.

The Speaker of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, **Mr Stanisław KARCZEWSKI**, said that it is important to stabilize the EU's neighbourhood. The implementation of the EU Global Strategy should be the main axis, around which we will devise our activities. For Poland, support for the EU's eastern partners is extremely important. Our security determines their stability. The EU should increase its degree of engagement. Poland supports close cooperation on the transatlantic basis. Relations with the US are of key importance. The EU must scrutinize the legislative processes more rigorously in the light of the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

Mr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, stressed that the Treaty of Lisbon is the basic framework defining inter-institutional relations in the EU. The European Commission has power based on non-elected technocrats. This is not sustainable. There is a lack of trust in these institutions. It is essential to strengthen democratic scrutiny at the national level. The White Paper opens up new scenarios of the EU's future. In his words, however, this document ignores the positions of the V4 countries. The European Commission is slowly stealing the power from the European states. The European Pillar of Social Rights will be a challenge for some EU countries.

The Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Senate of the French Republic, **Mr Jean BIZET**, reiterated that peace, cooperation and the protection of freedoms are the foundations of the EU. The single market united our economies. The EU is an industrial giant. Brexit was a shock, not a strategic decision. It is therefore necessary to unify and ensure cohesion. We are in the time of crises. Decisive steps need to be taken. Europe has to choose what it wants to be. National Parliaments need to strengthen their capacity to defend the Union. The EU must defend its trade interests.

Mr **Mehmet Akif HAMZACEBI**, Deputy Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of the Republic of Turkey, said that EU membership is essential for Turkey. In 1963, Turkey's association agreement with the EU was signed. Turkey's EU membership is part of the democratization process. Modern Turkey has democratic values. When Turkey joins the EU, it will be mutually beneficial. Turkey's foreign policy will also be beneficial for the European Union. However, some EU Member States are slowing down Turkey's integration process into the EU. Future cooperation between the EU and Turkey is important. At the end of his contribution, he also asked that Turkey be added to the Conclusions of the meeting in the

subject of the EU enlargement talks. Turkey, he said, is of key importance in the process of tackling the migration crisis.

The Speaker of the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr **Norbert LAMMERT**, stressed that our cooperation within the EU is based on common values. We should follow the rules we have set in the EU. However, some countries do not respect democratic rules and standards.

Session 2: Bringing parliamentary agenda closer to citizens in the modern era – sharing best practices

The first speaker was Ms **Ankie BROKERS-KNOL**, Speaker of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, who expressed the view that the referendum is not a suitable tool to bridge the gap between citizens and politicians and to bring parliamentary programs and processes closer to citizens. According to her, the referendum reinforces the differences in society and ultimately leads to the frustration of voters. In order to re-establish confidence in politicians and democratic institutions, four steps are necessary. Namely: 1. politicians taking responsibility for their actions; 2. to be as transparent as possible, to explain political decisions to citizens; 3. to educate citizens about democracy and lead them to the participation in the decision-making process; and 4. evolution, developments in parliamentarianism and democracy, and the use of new tools to increase the substitutability and participation of the public in the legislative process.

President of the Bundesrat of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ms **Malu DREYER**, remarked that she is currently experiencing the rise of the politicization of society, which is reflected in higher involvement of young people in social affairs, the increase in the membership of political parties and higher participation in elections. She also noted that the Parliament is the heart of representative democracy and that its visibility vis-à-vis the citizens must therefore be strengthened by all possible means. She highlighted the benefits and risks of new media outlets such as web portals, social networks, and more. She identified the low culture of digital media discussions, disparaging and often aggressive comments, inclinations towards extremism and populism as some of the risks of these media. This can lead to the manipulation of information. She finds the solution in professional media work, the balance of public and private media, and the courage to challenge misinformation. Other solutions that the Speaker proposes are providing as much information as possible in policy discussions, increasing the transparency of Parliament's work, thereby enhancing the trust of citizens, and addressing the various groups of citizens directly and explaining their individual steps (especially working with pupils and young people). She considers the Bundesrat's website as well as social media (e.g. Twitter) as effective communication tools with citizens.

Mr **Seán Ó FEARGHAIL**, Speaker of the Dáil Éireann of the Oireachtas of the Republic of Ireland, highlighted the need for greater transparency and free access to information in his speech. He pointed to the need for greater openness, fairness and collegiality in the Parliaments. He also highlighted the need to improve communication between Parliament and citizens, including via digital technologies. He argued that social media are particularly attractive for young people and that it is necessary to direct them to the parliamentary process and to the Parliaments' websites. Social media, such as Twitter are means of providing citizens with information and getting feedback from them. As examples, he noted that the last election of the Speaker of the lower house was live tweeted, and that 22,000 people watched a meeting of the parliamentary budget committee live on Facebook. Since 2014, the Irish Parliament has its own television channel, which is available in up to 99% of Irish households. The new Parliament website is more intuitive, transparent and accessible to citizens.

A total of 15 speakers spoke at the panel discussion.

Mr **Eiki NESTOR**, Speaker of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia, presented their efforts and methods to increase citizens' engagement in political life. One of these methods is the option of online voting in elections from anywhere in the world. In the last parliamentary elections, up to 1/3 of citizens voted in electronic form. He also emphasized the importance of electronizing the entire legislative process and live broadcasts of parliamentary sessions. All draft bills, draft amendments and additional documents are available on-line on the Parliament's website. He also stressed the importance of the digital signature of the passed laws - the President of Parliament and the President, which greatly accelerates the publication of the law and its entry into force.

Mr **Demetrios SYLLOURIS**, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, presented the following main methods of enhancing transparency and improving parliamentary communication with citizens: open plenary sessions of the Parliament, citizens' participation in the debate on draft bills, effective work of the Parliament' communication and media department, digitization of documents, organization of parliamentary visits and electronic communication, for example through social media.

Ms **Sonja LEDL-ROSSMANN**, Speaker of the Bundesrat of the Republic of Austria, reported on the activities of the Austrian Parliament designed to bring the Parliament closer to the people, such as democratic workshops (for children aged 8-14), youth Parliaments (ages 15-16), Apprenticeship forums (15-25 year olds), and Parliament tours. The so-called „Democratic workshop” is a very interesting activity where young people can work in one of four workshops: the political workshop, the parliamentary workshop, the participatory workshop or the media workshop. Within these workshops, young people learn information in a playful way about different aspects of political life; they have the opportunity to present and discuss their own visions, to dwell in the law making process, and to recognize the importance and function of the media. On average, there are 450-470 workshops per year, and around 290,000 participants have attended by now.

Mr **Jorge LACÃO**, Deputy Speaker of the Republican Assembly of the Republic of Portugal, spoke about the creation of the working group called the “Digital Parliament”. Its aim is to promote digital communications in Parliament, to manage a website and share information on social media. In addition, work is currently underway on a television channel that will be broadcast on a web TV platform and will also be accessible from mobile devices. In addition, online platforms are being built where it is possible to collect signatures under petitions, initiate referendums, and so on. An electronic alert system is also being prepared to check the deadlines for each stage of the legislative process and the addition of documents to draft bills. Another novelty is the so-called “Stock Market of Questions” that should collect policy proposals and ideas, and at the same time be an effective form of political control for citizens.

In his contribution, the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr **Nikolaos VOUTSIS**, also demonstrated forms of making available the work of the Parliament for citizens. He mentioned website of the Parliament, the Parliament for teenagers, various expositions, visits of the Parliament, etc. The Code on parliamentary transparency, passed last year should be aimed at combating corruption and extremist behaviour but in his opinion these measures have had not significantly facilitate trust of citizens yet as can be seen not only at the national level, but also at the European level relating to the European Parliament.

Ms **Carmen MIHĂLCESCU**, the Deputy Speaker of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies considers the important instruments for approach of the parliament to citizens and for understanding of parliamentary processes are mainly a parliamentary website with live streams of parliamentary meetings, a transcription of the MEPs presentations and a possibility of the citizens to follow a legislative process in parliament as well as amendments from the parliament's interdepartmental amendment procedure. She called attention to importance of young people being involved in parliamentary activity and to communication on YouTube and Facebook.

The Deputy Speaker of the Spanish Senate, Mr **Pedro SANZ**, drew attention to the discredit of the political sphere and to the rise of populism in recent years. As efficient methods of combating these tendencies he marked transparency, control strengthening and democracy recovery. The Act no. 19/2013 on Transparency, Access to Public Information, and Good Governance, that enshrine the principle of the transparency, an active data publication and the right to public access to information, should help in this respect. He stressed the necessity of electronic communication with citizens via website and social networks on the one hand and the necessity of the direct contact with citizens on the other hand.

The Speaker of the Luxembourgian Chamber of Deputies, Mr **Mars di BARTOLOMEO**, mentioned several parliamentary activities targeting young people, e.g. The Youth Parliament, Youth Conference, visits of young people in the Parliament, etc. Among mentioned initiatives, there was an interesting possibility for citizens to participate in the discussion on a new constitution via web page and through public hearings, where citizens have a possibility to advocate their ideas. As a result, several amendments tabled by citizens were adopted. Next interesting activities are so called citizens' forums organised in cooperation with academia. Since March 2014, every Luxembourgian older than 15 years can submit a public petition on parliamentary website. If the petition receive more than 6.000 signatures in 6 weeks, a live - streamed public discussion on it is taking place in parliamentary sitting room. There have already been 19 such discussions in last 5 years. Other initiative of the Luxembourgian Parliament is so called the education of citizen's strategy. In conclusion, Mr Mars di BARTOLOMEO underlined a necessity of a live contact of MEPs with citizens.

A decrease of citizen's interest in a domestic and in a European policy was also mentioned by the Speaker of the Polish Senate, Mr **Stanislaw KARCZEWSKI**. He just so underlined a necessity of an active communication of MEPs with citizens – both as via social networks as through the field trips to citizens.

In his speech, the Speaker of the National assembly of Hungary, Mr **László KÖVÉR**, stressed that politicians may not be detached from reality of citizens and appealed to go back to the citizen's problems and needs.

The Chair of the EU Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Mr **Jean BIZET**, mentioned several methods for approach of the parliament to citizens too. Among them e.g., the Ameli database that provides a possibility to table amendments online and allow citizens to follow a legislative process and to table their amendments. Since the 1990s, the Senate has supported a creating of blogs and participative platforms where citizens can share their opinions. E.g., the Senate received about 15.000 amendments during consultations with local organisations, while adopting a law on the urbanism and land – use planning.

The Deputy Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Mr **Mehmet Akif HAMZACEBI**, introduced in his contribution, activities in favour of civil society strengthening. He informed about possibility of public access to proposals submitted in parliament in electronic form, about a new special committee for collection of complaints, petitions and reviews from citizens, about a special section on web page for persons with disabilities, for children, etc.

The Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament, Mr **Viktoras PRANCKIETIS**, drew attention to the need to renew EU citizens' trust in parliament and policy in general. He stressed the need of spreading of the European values and ideas also towards the east of EU borders.

The Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, Mr **Mark HARBERS**, informed about technological innovations that help the parliament to make its work more accessible for citizens. For instance, he mentioned an opened date portal, which allows citizens to use parliamentary information within their daily work. He called for new technological and social media to be treated as a possibility of an interactive cooperation strengthening not as a threat. He stated that in recent elections all successful political parties were building active communities on social networks, where they answered all citizens' questions. He emphasised the need for connection of online and offline communications with citizens as well. As an example, Mr Mark HARBERS cited a recent discussion on transparency and responsibility for a state budget implementation in the premises of the Parliament. On that occasion there was set up a panel of experts and citizens were invited to the Parliament, where they could analyse and discuss reports on a state budget expenditures in several parliamentary committees.

A presentation by the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Malta, Mr **Vincenti GALEA**, was the last in this panel. He stressed that parliament shall not be too concerned with itself and it should more communicate with citizens. As examples, he illustrated a TV transmission of the parliamentary sessions in 2015 and bringing the committee's work closer to the citizens.

Discussion and adoption of conclusions

In the last part of the program, the Speakers of EU Parliaments discussed about conclusion proposals of the Conference, prepared by presidency and complemented by delegations. Subsequently they adopted the conclusions, which also incorporated a decision of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments on the modalities of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) for Europol.

Concluding words

At the conclusion, the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Mr **Andrej DANKO**, thanked all participators as well as organizers of the event. The Speaker of the Parliament of Estonia, Mr **Eiki NESTOR**, invited the Speakers of Parliaments to the next meeting of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments, which is to be held in Tallinn from 22 to 24 April 2018.