

**Presidency Conclusions
of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments,
Nicosia 21-23 April 2013**

Preliminary remarks:

The Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union (EU) was held in Nicosia between 21st and 23rd April 2013, upon the invitation of the President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus. The Speakers of 42 Houses of the 27 Member States of the European Union (or their representatives), as well as the President of the European Parliament, attended the Conference. The Conference was also attended by the Speakers of Croatia (accessing country) and three candidate countries -Iceland, Montenegro and FYROM. The Conference was chaired by Mr. Yiannakis, L. Omirou, President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus.

On Monday, 22 April 2013, the Conference discussed the following topics:

1. “The role of EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries, emphasizing on the Mediterranean region”; the topic was jointly introduced by Mr. Yiannakis L. Omirou and Dr. Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta.
2. “Bringing citizens closer to the European Union”; the topic was jointly introduced by Mr. Andre Flahaut, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Belgium and Mrs. Antigoni Papadopoulou, MEP, Member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and Rapporteur for the European Year of Citizens 2013.
3. “Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Government in the Economic and Monetary Union” was discussed during the “one plus one” session held within the framework of the Conference.

On Tuesday 23 April 2013, the Conference discussed the topic “Social cohesion in times of austerity – what can national Parliaments do.”; the topic was jointly introduced by Mr. Evangelos Meimarakis, President of the Hellenic Parliament and Ms. Assunção Esteves, President of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal.

With regard to the topic “The role of EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries, emphasizing on the Mediterranean region”.

1. The Speakers note that the presence of the European Union in the world stage has acquired increasing significance. They welcome the fact that the European Union is an important international power, with enhanced bilateral relations with countries around the globe, as well as multilateral relations with international organizations, in which it plays an active role. They further underline that, as stipulated by the Treaty of Lisbon, its international action should be guided by the principles of democracy, the rule of law, universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.
2. The Speakers underline the strong interest of the European Union and its Member States towards the Mediterranean region and welcome the important developments towards transition achieved within the past 2 years. The Speakers express, however, their concern about the continuous bloodshed in Syria and the turmoil in Egypt.
3. The Speakers stress the importance of democracy and human rights consolidation in the Mediterranean region, as a tool for long lasting peace, stability and security, as well as development and prosperity for citizens of the region.
4. The Speakers also emphasise that, when functioning in an effective and efficient manner, Parliaments can play an important role in helping build democratic systems and good governance, while they can also prove to be important agents of stability in cases of transition. Well-functioning Parliaments can provide the conditions for proper democratic systems and are therefore a central institution of democracy. This is why Parliaments in the Arab Spring countries should be supported.
5. In this respect, the Speakers recognise the role of Parliaments of the European Union in enhancing democracy and human rights in third countries. They stress that peer to peer partnership and assistance could help towards establishing well-functioning Parliaments, the characteristics of which should be mutual and reciprocal respect, equal and effective representation, transparency, accountability and effectiveness at both national and international level.

6. The Speakers acknowledge that the Parliaments' expertise in all aspects of parliamentary life can contribute substantially to capacity building in third countries, which would in turn bring about stable democracy.

7. The Speakers encourage national Parliaments and the European Parliament to pursue their activities in this domain, including technical assistance, exchange and twinning programmes, the support of human rights and democracy defenders and the adoption of pertinent resolutions and ratification of treaties and conventions. They underline that any assistance provided needs to be carried out in a spirit of mutual respect, with joint elaborations of projects, so as to ensure a truly effective cooperation.

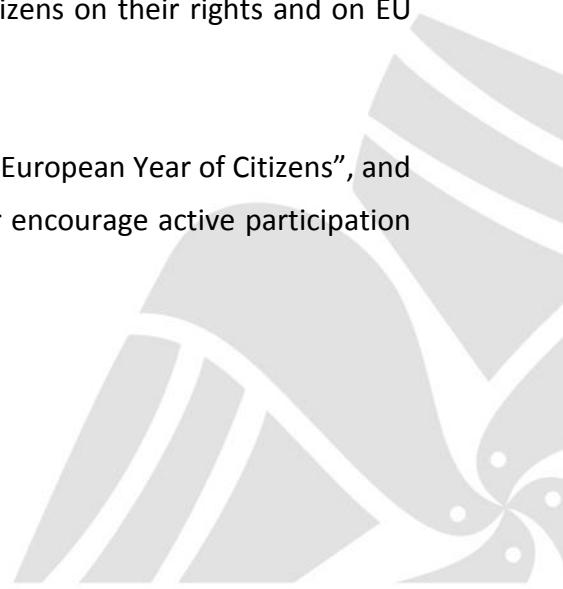
8. Noting the existence of a range of related programmes conducted at both bilateral and multilateral level, the Speakers underline that caution should be used to avoid overlap and duplication, while synergy between different initiatives should be ensured.

With regard to the topic "Bringing citizens closer to the European Union":

1. The Speakers agree that the ongoing economic and financial crisis in the European Union underlines the need for accountability, strong democratic legitimacy in EU decision making and further strengthening of the participation of the citizens in the public affairs of the Union. Since national Parliaments and the European Parliament represent the will of the people, the Speakers reiterate the Parliaments' crucial role in reducing the democratic deficit in the Union.

2. In respect of the above, the Speakers agree that Parliaments should act as facilitators of debates on EU matters, both at the national level and at an interparliamentary level. To this end, and notwithstanding the initiation of any debate on an EU topic at the national level, interparliamentary cooperation should, *inter alia*, include the exchange of information on providing further impetus to raising awareness among the citizens on their rights and on EU topics.

3. The Speakers welcome the designation of 2013 as the "European Year of Citizens", and regard the said designation as a timely opportunity to further encourage active participation of the citizens in the democratic life of the Union.



4. The Speakers underline the great importance of the citizens' strong participation in the elections for Members of the European Parliament, as it further develops the citizens' sense of belonging to the Union, thus minimising the gap between the Union and its people. Therefore, the Speakers encourage the citizens to exercise their electoral rights and stress the need to ensure that the relevance of the decisions taken at the national and the EU level, as well as the impact on their lives is abundantly clear to the citizens.

5. The Speakers reiterate the key role of the media in parliamentary democracy, as it was firmly expressed in the Conclusions of the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments convened in Warsaw on 19-21 April 2012, and suggest that Parliaments should commit themselves in making the best possible use of audiovisual means and social networking, in an effort to maximise the exchange of information between the Parliaments and the citizens, thereby strengthening their active participation in EU public affairs.

With regard to the topic "Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG)":

1. The Speakers note that the democratic legitimacy of the European Semester process is of vital importance and that the national Parliaments should be adequately involved in shaping and implementing the framework for stronger economic, budgetary and fiscal policy reforms in their countries and in bringing the EU dimension into national politics.

2. The Speakers emphasise that the strengthening of democratic legitimacy within the EU is needed especially now, where the discussion on the causes of the crisis, particularly in the Eurozone, focuses on adequate EU economic governance structures.

3. The Speakers stress the necessity for stronger democratic legitimacy and accountability in the economic governance of the EU, particularly in the EMU, and the need for a greater role for national Parliaments. They welcome the acknowledgement of this necessity in both the "Blueprint for a deep and genuine economic and monetary Union", published by the European Commission in November 2012 and the report entitled "Towards a genuine economic and monetary union", published by the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, in December 2012, in close collaboration with the Presidents of the European Commission, the Eurogroup and the European Central Bank.

4. The Speakers agree that the deeper integration of the EU should be accompanied by the strengthening of democratic legitimacy and accountability both at the European and national level, at which decisions are taken.

5. The Speakers note that the cooperation between the European and national Parliaments should be intensified in the context of the new economic governance of the EMU, building on the Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG). They also note that the establishment of an inter-parliamentary Conference based on this Article offers national Parliaments a unique challenge to consider their role in ensuring democratic accountability and legitimacy in the EU, in the context of a more integrated financial, budgetary and economic policy framework.

6. The Speakers agree that the future of national Parliaments depends largely upon how proactively they will use the new opportunities available, so that EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament contribute towards making the EU system of economic governance more legitimate and democratically accountable.

7. The Speakers consider that the deepened economic union requires further parliamentary oversight and to this extent supports the establishment of a Conference, in line with Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. The Speakers note that according to a previous decision of EU Speakers¹ it is important to develop established structures to meet future needs of parliamentary cooperation.

8. The Speakers agree that the Conference should consist of representatives from all the National Parliaments of Member countries of the European Union and the European Parliament, in particular from relevant committees. To this end, they consider that the new mechanism could be built upon the formula of the Conference on CFSP and CSDP, replacing the meetings of the Chairpersons of relevant Committees, organised by each Presidency, thus rendering it cost-effective. The composition and size of each delegation rests upon each Parliament.

¹ EU Speakers Conference, Stockholm, 14-15 May 2010.

"...the Speakers consider that improved coordination of interparliamentary activities within the EU is important. The Speakers stress the importance of developing established structures to meet future needs in interparliamentary cooperation. Overlapping meetings or debates should be avoided".

9. The Speakers propose that the Conference shall meet twice a year and be coordinated with the European Semester cycle. In the first semester of each year, the Conference shall be held in Brussels and will be co-hosted and co-chaired over by the European Parliament and the Parliament of the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, while in the second semester, the Conference shall be held in, and chaired over by the country holding the six-monthly Council Presidency. The Speakers propose that the first Conference be held during the Lithuanian Presidency and the second in the beginning of 2014, at the European Parliament.

10. The hosting Parliaments shall be responsible for providing the secretariat. The secretariat of the European Parliament and their co-hosts and the hosting Parliament of the second yearly conference should stay in contact to ensure the continuity of the works.

11. The Conference of Speakers recommends conducting a review of these arrangements for the Conference and that the relevant Presidency submit the conclusions of the said review to the Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments, in 2015.

With regard to the topic “Social cohesion in times of austerity-what can national Parliaments do”:

1. The Speakers agree that Parliaments of the European Union should be closely involved in shaping and implementing the framework for stronger economic and social reforms at the national level. They also recognise that European Semester process, introduced through the “Six Pack” legislation, is a tool to improve EU policy coordination both on macroeconomic and structural issues.

2. The Speakers underline that Parliaments of the European Union have to ensure that the implementation of the European Semester is conducted in a democratic and transparent way and embodied with democratic accountability. They also agree that the democratic legitimacy of the European Semester can only be achieved through the direct involvement of national Parliaments in all stages of the process.

3. The Speakers emphasise that Parliaments of the European Union should be involved in the discussion of the Stability or Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes of their country before they are submitted to the European Commission. They also highlight the need that the European Commission in implementing these programmes, should take into account the specific recommendations of each country. National Parliaments should also be

informed on the draft of the specific recommendations of their country and send their opinion to the national Governments. During the debates on national budgets, the Parliaments have to evaluate if the specific recommendations of their country have been fully considered, and appropriately reflected in the national budgets.

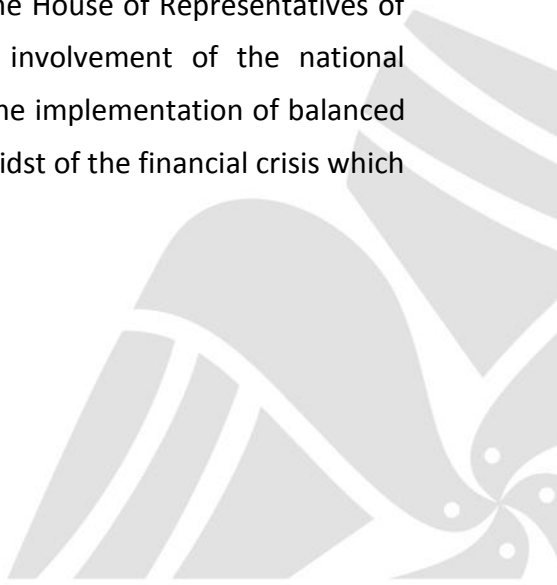
4. The Speakers agree that strict austerity measures alone cannot solve the problems faced by the EU and its member states, without achieving balance among fiscal consolidation, sustainable growth and social cohesion.

5. The Speakers also underline the paramount importance of effective solidarity among EU member states, particularly in conditions of economic crisis.

6. The Speakers stress the importance of the democratic control and accountability that should occur at the level on which the decisions are taken and implemented, including decisions by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund). The Lisbon Treaty has enhanced the democratic accountability of both the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

7. The Speakers note that further strengthening of the EMU, has to be accompanied by the proportionate involvement of the European Parliament and national Parliaments. They also stress that cooperation between the European Parliament and national Parliaments should be further enhanced, building on Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG) and Protocol 1 of the Treaty of Functioning of the European Union. They also emphasise that the European Parliamentary Week on the European Semester for Economic Policy Coordination and the Political Dialogue with the European Commission contribute towards the achievement of this goal.

8. The Speakers also underline the importance of the discussions of the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, hosted by the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, which aim to add to the active involvement of the national Parliaments, in the shaping of economic and social policies. The implementation of balanced and socially sensitive policies is particularly important, in the midst of the financial crisis which has gravely affected the living standards of European citizens.



With regard to IPEX (Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange):

1. The Speakers welcome the conclusions of the Meeting of the Secretaries General of national Parliaments of EU Member States and of the European Parliament held in Nicosia on 10-11 February 2013 concerning the further implementation of the IPEX Action Plan adopted in Warsaw in 2012.
2. The Speakers take note of the determination of the Secretaries General to further develop IPEX as a reliable tool for the exchange of EU information and documents and expressed their support to their efforts to strengthen the role of the IPEX national Correspondents in the performance of their tasks and duties as described in the paper “Description of tasks and duties of the IPEX national Correspondent”. Furthermore, the Speakers endorsed the proposal that IPEX should host documents for further interparliamentary conferences alongside the existing webpage for the Conference of Speakers (paragraph 7 of the conclusions on IPEX).
3. The Presidency was requested to contact the European Commission with the proposal that documents which the Commission currently transmits only to the Council should also be transmitted to IPEX (paragraph 9 of the conclusions on IPEX).