



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
NATIONAL COUNCIL**

Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments

28–29 March 2022

Brdo pri Kranju

Conclusions of the Presidency

Preliminary Remarks

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments was held in Brdo pri Kranju on 28–29 March 2022 and was attended by the Speakers and Presidents or their representatives from 34 Parliaments/Chambers of 24 Member States, as well as by the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola. Also taking part were the Speakers or their representatives from 2 EU candidate countries; a further 4 countries attended as special guests. A special address via video-link was delivered by Mr Ruslan Stefanchuk, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The Conference was chaired by Mr Igor Zorčič, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, and Mr Alojz Kovšca, President of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia.

Recalling paragraph 5.1 of the Stockholm Guidelines, it is recognised that due to their constitutional position certain Parliaments and Chambers 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 Parliaments and 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 Role of Parliaments in Emergency Politics – Building Resilience for Democratic Governance
- II. European Union as the Guarantor of Stability, Security and Prosperity in the Region (and Beyond)

With Europe still recovering from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments takes place at yet another critical juncture with European values, unity and solidarity being put to the test by the deplorable Russian aggression in Ukraine. Acknowledging the strong response to the initiative for EU Parliaments to join the #WeRemember Campaign of the World Jewish Congress and UNESCO in memory of the victims of the Shoah, which was endorsed at the 2021 Conference under the German Presidency, the Speakers emphasise the need to save humanity from the scourges of war and reaffirm their parliaments' commitment to the promotion of fundamental rights, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

On the war in Ukraine

1. The Speakers acknowledge that this Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments takes place in the specific context of the most serious security crisis in Europe since the Second World War. They note that seven EU member states are immediate neighbours to the Russian Federation and the attacked Ukraine and that Russian missiles have already landed only a few kilometres away from the EU's eastern border. The Speakers emphasise that the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which has now lasted for over a month, demands decisive and unprecedented European action as it fundamentally threatens the stability, peace, security, and economic prosperity of citizens living peacefully in Europe and beyond. The Speakers stress that the Ukrainian people's fight is not only their own but clearly also a fight on behalf of the entire community of free nations and a struggle in defence of the fundamental values on which the European Union and the entire democratic world are founded.
2. Considering the above, the Speakers condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's military aggression against the sovereign state of Ukraine, stressing that it constitutes a gross violation of fundamental principles of international law, the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and numerous other instruments guiding relations between states. They reaffirm their unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The unilateral recognition of the independence of the Ukrainian oblasts of Luhansk and Donetsk is inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and is therefore null and void. Hence, the Speakers call on the Russian Federation to immediately and permanently revoke its decision in this matter. At the same time, the attack on Ukraine constitutes an attack on the international order based on democratic values, the rule of law, respect of human rights, and on the fundamental values on which the European Union and peaceful coexistence in Europe was built. The Speakers call on the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally cease all hostilities and to immediately and completely withdraw all military forces from the entire Ukrainian territory and immediately implement the order on provisional measures by the International Court of Justice. The Speakers also condemn Belarus' direct involvement in the Russian aggression and call on it to immediately stop providing assistance to Russian forces by allowing them to carry out attacks from its territory. In light of this unprecedented crisis and the fastest growing refugee crisis since the Second World War, the Speakers stress the imperative need to uphold international law and human rights and to avoid double standards, including in adopting restrictive measures, this being essential for the Union's own relevance and credibility.
3. In light of the European Union's immediate, united and determined response, the Speakers agree that the Russian Federation's despicable actions have not weakened and divided the Union, but rather made it stronger and more united in its goal to safeguard peace, security, democracy, and freedom in Europe. The Speakers welcome and support the decisions taken so far by the European institutions and EU member states in response to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, including packages of far-reaching restrictive measures targeting individuals and sectors, as well as the decisions to use the European Peace Facility and strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities. In this view, the Speakers call on the EU candidate countries to reach full alignment with the EU Common and Security Policy and to refrain from any actions contrary to it. The Speakers call on the European institutions and the EU member states to work together with transatlantic and other partners and step up action against the Russian Federation and Belarus in the event of continued aggression, as well as to strengthen their efforts to facilitate dialogue for ending hostilities and creating conditions for lasting peace.

4. Taking note of the role of parliaments in expressing political support for Ukraine and condemning Russian aggression, the Speakers emphasise the importance of resolutions and declarations adopted by many national parliaments, the European Parliament, the Interparliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP, and the COSAC Plenary.¹ They highlight the calls of parliaments to all parties involved to work towards a peaceful solution to the conflict through diplomacy, as political dialogue based on respect for democratic values represents the only way to lasting peace.
5. Condemning the Russian violation of the international law of armed conflict, their violation of agreed ceasefires, and actions taken to prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid and the departure of refugees from hostile areas, the Speakers express their condolences to the Ukrainian people, civilian and military victims of the aggression, and their loved ones. The Speakers welcome the solidarity of EU member states and neighbouring countries, notably Moldova, and their citizens in receiving millions of Ukrainian refugees, showing that words and deeds matter in equal measure. In light of this, the Speakers also welcome the decision of the Council of the EU, which unanimously approved the introduction of temporary protection for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Speakers note that the principles of solidarity and fair distribution of responsibility must be taken into account when addressing the refugee crisis.
6. While the immediate goal of the European Union is to help put an end to all hostilities, the Speakers are also convinced that the Union, in cooperation with its partners, must take a long-term lead in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. The Speakers express their unwavering support for Ukraine's European perspective and note Ukraine's application for EU membership, stressing that only the Ukrainian people and the democratically elected Ukrainian authorities have the right to decide on their political and social framework and their approach to international integration. Taking into account the words of the President of the European Commission that Ukraine is "one of us and we want them in", the Speakers call on the European institutions to strive for an expedient examination of Ukraine's application for EU membership with the aim of granting it candidate country status within a reasonable time frame, provided it meets the necessary conditions. In addition, the Speakers invite the European Commission to draw up a roadmap for the EU to effectively support Ukraine's European perspective.

I. The Role of Parliaments in Emergency Politics – Building Resilience for Democratic Governance

7. The Speakers emphasise that parliaments, as the fundamental representative institutions of citizens, are an indispensable guarantor for the democratic governance of public affairs, both in normal and emergency situations. The COVID-19 pandemic, whose future course and consequences are as of yet uncertain, is proof, according to the Speakers, that crises often erupt when we least expect them. Recognising that the current Russian military aggression in Ukraine will have profound security, political, diplomatic, economic, and social consequences in Europe and around the world, the Speakers are convinced that parliaments must draw the necessary lessons from the experiences of the past two years and strengthen their preparedness for similar major challenges in the future and work in all possible ways to prevent such emergency situations.

¹ In this respect, at the additional proposal of the Maltese House of Representatives, the Speakers also welcome the activities and initiatives of other interparliamentary fora, such as the Interparliamentary Union, that call for the facilitation of parliamentary diplomacy in formulating feasible peaceful solutions to the situation in Ukraine.

8. The Speakers agree that rapid decisions aimed at safeguarding human lives and health, preventing irreparable property damage, protecting the vital interests of the state, and preventing long-term negative effects on the functioning of public institutions are of primary importance in emergency situations. While acknowledging that the executive, owing to the way it operates and the instruments at its disposal, is traditionally better equipped to take immediate emergency action, the Speakers emphasise that parliament's active involvement in emergency politics is crucial not only in terms of safeguarding democratic values, practices, and institutions, but also in terms of ensuring the effectiveness and strengthened legitimacy of crisis management. Given the fact that the effects of emergency measures are often not entirely predictable and clear due to time constraints, the Speakers highlight the invaluable role played by parliaments in helping governments formulate the best possible responses and overseeing the implementation of unforeseen budgetary changes, earmarked for addressing crises. The Speakers agree that a situation that demands a swift response from the authorities should never serve as an excuse for non-transparent and unaccountable action.
9. The Speakers further agree that the ability and capacity of parliaments to act in emergency situations is a test of the strength and resilience of a democratic system. Recalling the words of the late President of the European Parliament David Sassoli, who at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic said that "democracy cannot be suspended in the midst of such a dramatic crisis" and that "it is our duty, in these difficult times, to be at the service of our citizens", the Speakers highlight the role of parliaments in ensuring that norms and standards of democratic governance, fundamental rights, and the rule of law are respected. In this regard, the Speakers welcome the 2021 Rule of Law Report and the fact that the European Commission, in drawing it up, paid special attention to the indispensable role of parliaments in overseeing measures to curb the spread of the pandemic.² They also welcome the Report by the Council of Europe Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) on the measures taken in the EU member states as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and their impact on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, which explicitly highlights the indispensable role of parliaments in managing emergency situations. The Speakers are certain that the findings of both reports will help to provide the necessary know-how for strengthening the resilience of parliaments and their preparedness for future emergencies.
10. The Speakers emphasise that in order to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of key public authorities and the integrity of democratic processes, it is paramount that countries prepare for emergency situations by establishing appropriate legal frameworks and policies. Given that, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, member states responded with a variety of legal and institutional approaches, in line with their constitutional arrangements, – whether by declaring a state of emergency, adopting special emergency regimes, or amending ordinary legislation – the Speakers stress that these approaches must always follow the fundamental postulates of the rule of law. The Speakers believe that the COVID-19 pandemic represents a unique opportunity for parliaments to work with the executive to rethink and shake up existing legal bases and institutional arrangements for managing emergency situations in a way that strengthens the system of checks and balances, ensures fundamental rights are effectively protected, and enables parliaments to carry out their constitutional mandate without interruptions.

² The Hungarian National Assembly expresses its reservation concerning this statement, as it believes the European Commission Rule of Law Report cannot be considered as a generally accepted instrument within the EU.

11. The Speakers emphasise that in emergency situations, when the executive exercises extraordinary emergency powers and is sometimes given select legislative powers, parliamentary oversight is key to ensuring accountable and democratic governance. The Speakers believe that in these situations, parliaments should be given at least the power to decide when to declare, prolong, and terminate a state of emergency; the possibility to supervise the exercise of emergency powers of the executive, as well as the possibility to effectively oversee emergency measures with far-reaching financial implications and a restrictive effect on fundamental rights. The Speakers emphasise that, given the extraordinary nature of emergency situations, the need for swift decision-making should not be abused to unjustifiably and disproportionately strengthen the power of the executive at the expense of parliaments, as this would run counter to the principle of the separation of powers.
12. The Speakers are aware that in emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, extraordinary measures may be required. These must be temporary, proportionate and limited to the extent necessary for the protection of the population. At the same time, even in emergency situations, the actions of national authorities must always be based on the established standards and principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination of restrictive interventions in fundamental rights, which is why the Speakers emphasise the importance of fully implementing the legislative and oversight functions of parliaments, aimed at establishing whether the executive's emergency measures are compliant with the state's human rights obligations. Taking into account the time pressure factor in emergency situations, the Speakers point out that political parliamentary oversight can be even more effective in practice than judicial protection, as it can have immediate effects on remedying measures that violate human rights.
13. The Speakers emphasise that the effectiveness of emergency politics is conditional on the public confidence in the authorities' actions. The uninterrupted exercise of the representative role of parliaments ensures that the adopted measures and policies and the allocated public funds reflect the real needs of the entire population. The Speakers therefore emphasise that effective leadership in emergency situations necessarily involves dialogue with the widest possible range of stakeholders, with parliaments remaining the central forum for debate. The Speakers commend the work of numerous parliaments that significantly contributed to improving the various government measures proposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular those aimed at preventing severe economic and social consequences, especially when it came to ensuring those measures reach the most vulnerable segments of the population.
14. The actual operational capacity of parliaments is a basic precondition for the exercise of their constitutional functions. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caught most parliaments unprepared, the Speakers welcome the fact that parliaments in Europe have shown a tremendous amount of commitment and innovation in adapting their work, allowing them to continue to work even in exceptional circumstances. The Speakers emphasise that by digitalising parliamentary activities, variously adapting parliamentary sittings and decision-making procedures, establishing special working bodies to deal with and oversee emergency measures, developing new mechanisms for public participation in parliamentary procedures, and taking other related measures, the parliaments had invaluablely contributed to a more transparent, inclusive, and democratic management of the pandemic crisis. The Speakers also take note of the forward-driven developments in using digital technology in interparliamentary cooperation and welcome the on-going joint work on finding the most secure ways of videoconferencing, which, however, cannot replace the benefits of personal meetings in parliamentary diplomacy. In the interests of better preparedness for similar situations in the future, the Speakers believe that parliaments should continue to share good practices and experiences of working during the pandemic and learn from each other's

successes and failures in emergency situations. The Speakers explicitly emphasise that strengthening the resilience of parliaments simultaneously strengthens general resilience to future crises.

II. European Union as the Guarantor of Stability, Security and Prosperity in the Region (and Beyond)

15. The Speakers note that the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine represents a sobering moment, that peace and security on the European continent and in the European Union are not self-evident, and that the crisis is leading to profound changes in the European security architecture, requiring the Union to respond and rapidly adapt. Russia's unprovoked use of force in the Union's immediate Eastern Neighbourhood has confirmed the close interconnectedness of the EU's internal and external security dimensions; therefore, the Speakers highlight the importance of the adoption of the Strategic Compass, which reflects the changing security environment in Europe and around the globe. The Speakers are convinced that member states must strengthen security and defence cooperation, including with its transatlantic partners, and must work towards a strong and enhanced Common Foreign and Security Policy, and that the European Union must complement its soft power in external action by reinforcing its hard power capabilities, including military and civilian crisis management capacities and spending. The Speakers emphasise that security, stability and democracy in the Union and in the region are also threatened by foreign propaganda and disinformation, calling on the European institutions to step up their efforts to strengthen and coordinate the fight against disinformation, as reliable and independent information and media represent key drivers of democracy. Aware of the incomparable challenges posed by the global consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, the Speakers emphasise the need to strengthen the European Union's strategic autonomy in all key areas, allowing the EU to respond to challenges effectively and efficiently, in cooperation with partners when needed, yet independently of third parties.
16. The Speakers agree that efforts to make the EU even more ambitious in its neighbourhood are more important today than ever. Building on the fundamental values of democracy, the respect for human rights, the rule of law, and mutual trust, the Union has created an area of unprecedented freedom, security and prosperity over its more than seven-decade-long history. The Speakers therefore believe that the European Union must further strengthen its role in its neighbourhood and the region at large, with strong and united support from the European institutions and member states for aspiring countries to join the Union being more important than ever and the EU's enlargement policy being a key policy for promoting peace, stability and prosperity on the European continent.
17. Given the fact that EU enlargement to the Western Balkans is in the geostrategic, political, security and economic interests of both the region and the EU and must therefore be a priority of the EU and Western Balkans agenda, the Speakers express support for the Brdo Declaration adopted in October 2021, in which the European Council explicitly reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the enlargement process based on credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits. Welcoming the discussion on making sure countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood can have a credible European perspective, the Speakers emphasise the need to take into account the reform progress made by the Western Balkan partners in recent years as part of the EU accession process, as stated in the European Commission's Enlargement Package presented in October 2021. The Speakers are

convinced that the progress made by the candidates and potential candidates must be reflected in their actual progress towards EU membership. The Speakers therefore call on the European institutions and the EU heads of state to work towards a clear roadmap for granting EU membership to Western Balkans partners, taking into account the progress made in implementing key reforms and meeting the necessary conditions. The Speakers welcome the commitment to maintaining regular dialogue with Western Balkans parliaments shown by national parliaments and the European Parliament, as it also provides additional political support to the European enlargement process.

18. The Speakers emphasise that accelerating the EU's integration processes and enlargement policy to the Western Balkans, on the basis of transformation and enhanced commitment by the Western Balkans partners to the EU values and principles, is all the more important in the light of the current Ukrainian crisis and preventing the influence of third actors in the region. Establishing the EU as the main player and partner in the Western Balkans is key to the stability, security and prosperity of the region itself and of the European Union as a whole. In view of the worrying security situation and the vulnerable stability of the region, the Speakers emphasise the importance of enhancing the Western Balkans partners' cooperation in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and their rapid progress in fully coordinating positions and actions with EU foreign policy. The Speakers welcome the pledge of five Western Balkans partners to fully align with the EU sanction policy towards the Russian Federation. The Speakers further point out that the stability of the region also depends on strengthening its economic position and therefore welcome the establishment of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), which will contribute to the implementation of key priorities of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. The Speakers emphasise the need to pay closer attention to young people, especially by promoting within the framework of existing instruments better employment opportunities and quality jobs that will motivate young people to live and work in the region and thereby prevent brain drain.
19. The Speakers agree that – in light of the changing geopolitical context – more ambitious EU action, both east and south of its borders, is key to guaranteeing security, stability, and peace on the European continent. Highlighting the achievements of the Eastern Partnership as the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Speakers welcome the new EU cooperation agenda with partner countries called “Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities”, endorsed by the Eastern Partnership Summit in December 2021. The Eastern Partnership must remain a priority, with the EU living up to its commitments to partner countries. In the light of the Ukrainian crisis, the Speakers express their unwavering support for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all Eastern Partnership countries and welcome the partner countries' decisions regarding their own European perspective – also noting applications for EU membership by Moldova and Georgia – and their efforts to deepen and strengthen relations with the EU. Like any other country, they are the only ones who can decide on their future, foreign policy orientations, and international partnerships. The Speakers agree that the nature of the EU's relationship and cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries must be based on tailored approaches and incentives for countries that are most successful in implementing reforms, with the aim of building a strong and resilient Eastern Neighbourhood.
20. The Speakers are convinced that the Russian aggression in Ukraine promises to strongly influence the already strained relations between the European Union and both the Russian Federation and Belarus. The Speakers support the decision of the European Union, Iceland, and Norway to suspend all activities with the Russian Federation and Belarus within the Northern Dimension owing to the gross violation of

the fundamental principles underpinning this policy framework. Only a democratic Russian Federation and Belarus, which show respect for the rule of law and human rights, can contribute to stability and peace on the European continent, which is why the Speakers support the efforts of the European institutions and EU member states to strengthen contacts with civil society and democratic forces in both countries with the aim of promoting freedom and democratic standards and values.

21. The Speakers are convinced that a strong European Neighbourhood Policy in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood is key to addressing the governance, security, economic, social and environmental challenges in the Mediterranean, including in North Africa and the Middle East. These can only be addressed through close regional cooperation, which is why the Speakers welcome the New Agenda for the Mediterranean, as it significantly contributes to realising the untapped potential of cooperation and promoting long-term recovery and sustainable development in the region. They call for revitalising the activities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, aware that interparliamentary dialogue can make a major contribution to democratic institution-building. At the same time, the Speakers emphasise the importance of working with all African partners, welcoming the Joint Vision for a Renewed Partnership agreed at the recent 6th EU-African Union Summit.
22. With regard to the Mediterranean region, the Speakers also emphasise the importance of European relations with Turkey, a candidate country and a key partner. They point out that cooperative and mutually beneficial relations with Turkey are of strategic importance, as they can significantly contribute to a stable Eastern Mediterranean and to the strengthening of the resilience of the EU's neighbourhood in the region. They express the desire for improved cooperation between the EU and Turkey in a gradual, proportionate, and reversible manner in various areas of common interest – subject to the established conditionalities set out in European Council conclusions – should the de-escalated situation in the Eastern Mediterranean persist and Turkey demonstrates its commitment to international law, the rule of law, human rights, good neighbourly relations and existing agreements. The Speakers acknowledge that Turkey has undertaken significant efforts in hosting almost 4 million refugees and migrants and reaffirm that the EU continues to support Turkey in this endeavour and to deliver on its respective commitments. The Speakers also welcome Turkey's ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement and its commitment to reach climate neutrality until 2053.

IPEX (Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange)

23. The Speakers welcome the Conclusions on IPEX, adopted at the Meeting of the Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments in Ljubljana on 24 January 2022.
24. The Speakers thank the German Bundestag and Bundesrat for their work during the year of their Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, in particular for their efforts to launch the new version of the IPEX website, to ensure the implementation of the Rolling Work Programme (2021–2023) and to deepen the exchange between IPEX and the Scientific Community.
25. The Speakers would also like to thank the outgoing German Chairmanship of the IPEX Board for hosting the annual meeting of IPEX Correspondents, the Belgian Senate for its continuous availability to formally employ the IPEX Information Officer and the European Parliament for providing the financial and human resources for the development of the new website.

26. The Speakers note with satisfaction the launch of the new IPEX website and welcome its new sections, in particular the section on the Democracy Support Network, and thus encourage the IPEX Correspondents to upload timely and reliable information on the platform.
27. The Speakers encourage the IPEX Correspondents to upload to IPEX all the resolutions that EU parliaments adopted in relation to the war in the Ukraine, and suggest the Board discover the possibilities of accommodating these documents on the new IPEX website.
28. The Speakers look forward to the analysis of IPEX users and call on EU Parliaments to consider hosting the third IPEX Users Conference.
29. The Speakers welcome the initiative of the German Chairmanship to establish a new informal discussion format within the network (“IPEX Now”) and encourage future IPEX Board Chairs to continue to use digital formats.
30. The Speakers call on the Slovenian Chairmanship of the IPEX Board to continue the implementation of the Rolling Work Programme (2021–2023), the further development of the new website as well as to start the revision process of the current IPEX Guidelines, adopted in Rome in March 2015, focusing on the changes resulting from the new website.