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Parliamentary Dimension



Minutes of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments Prague, 24-25 April 2023

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments was held in Prague, 24 – 25 April 2023. The traditional meeting of the Presidential Troika (Slovenia, Czech Republic, Spain and the European Parliament) took place ahead of the general meeting. The Troika members debated the draft programme of the Conference and the Presidency Conclusions.

Opening session

Video message of four highest constitutional officials of the Czech Republic

Welcome addresses

Mr Miloš VYSTRČIL, President of the Czech Senate
Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ, Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies
Mr Vít RAKUŠAN, Minister of Interior of the Czech Republic

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, assembling 54 delegations from 43 European countries, was opened with a video message of four highest constitutional officials of the Czech Republic, Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ, Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, Mr Miloš VYSTRČIL, President of the Czech Senate, Mr. Petr FIALA, Czech Prime Minister, and Mr Petr PAVEL, Czech President. It was emphasised that the security situation in Europe had not been worse since World War II. If we wanted to stand up to the current security crisis, we needed to make Europe stronger and more resilient. Prerequisite for that would be our unity and fostering of community of like-minded countries. Ukraine should be provided with continuous support as long as necessary. The Ukrainians had been fighting for all of us; their heroic struggle had been a struggle for our common values, for our common future and the ability to determine it. The importance of continuous communication in search of common solutions on EU level was highlighted. To conclude, it was reiterated that the EU Member States had to fully free themselves from dependencies on Russia and other totalitarian regimes.

Mr VYSTRČIL and Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ welcomed the participants of the Conference and wished them a successful and fruitful debate.

In his welcome address, **Mr Vít RAKUŠAN, Minister of Interior of the Czech Republic**, mentioned that in the past 20 years, Europe had gone through many serious crises - an unprecedented economic crisis in 2008 and 2009, enormous migration wave in 2015 or recent Covid pandemic. Since last year, we had been standing united, side by side, next to Ukraine and their fight against the Russian aggressor. Europe had been going through one of the most difficult after-war periods, which brought about various challenges. Mr RAKUŠAN reminded that already in 2015, many intellectuals had been drawing attention to the fact that in some Member States, nationalist tendencies had been on the rise and doubts as to whether the European project makes sense occurred. This jeopardized the European project as the unique legacy that had been left here by the strong after-war politicians who had not wanted the war terror to happen again on the continent. Mr RAKUŠAN went on recalling that at the very beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, as a Minister of the Government of the Czech Republic, he had not been sure how the European Union would react. There had been a fresh experience with Covid pandemic, when, in one week alone, more internal borders within Europe had been closed than in 2015 during the migration crisis. Luckily, with the Ukrainian crisis, the situation was different: an enormous level of solidarity had been shown within Europe. According to surveys, 80% of Czechs supported Ukrainians in need in some way. Russia was surprised by swift and uniform reaction by Europe. Great gratitude belonged to the national Parliaments and the European Parliament, coming with clear statements as to who was the aggressor and who was the victim. The EU showed that it was ready to help at the expense of its comfort. In the energy sector, it was possible to find Europe-wide and functional solutions. Mr RAKUŠAN stated that: *“We may not have agreed with each other all the time, nevertheless, we were able to agree on common values we support. The heroic stage was over; now we were facing the number of practical issues and our task as responsible politicians was to communicate with our own public and try to persuade it that our help made sense and that our help needed to be long lasting, as long as the Russian aggression against Ukraine is lasting because Ukraine is defending our values, our democracy”*. Mr RAKUŠAN concluded by highlighting the importance of Parliaments and their role in preserving parliamentary democracy, as the only way to maintain freedom and prosperity, in times of crises.

Session I Russian aggression against Ukraine and the EU response in a broader geopolitical context (EU enlargement, energy security, post-war reconstruction)

Opening speech

Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ, Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies

Speech by the special guest

Mr Ruslan STEFANCHUK, Chairman of the *Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*

Keynote speakers

Ms Elżbieta WITEK, Marshal of the Polish *Sejm*

Mr Andreas NORLÉN, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*,

Ms Meritxell BATET LAMAÑA, Speaker of the Spanish Congress of Deputies

Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŮVÁ pointed out that Russian aggression had started already with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and with the fights and occupation there but also in Luhansk and Donetsk areas. Although the war was still going on and the casualties were still high both among soldiers, as well as civilians, the Ukrainian army controlled significantly greater territory than last year. The Russians were not succeeding and hopefully they would not be able to succeed again and take the initiative on the battlefield. Fortunately, the alarmist scenarios about the possible consequences of the war had not come true. The EU got through the winter without any major difficulties, with storage reserve at 55% at the end of the heating season. The EU had also managed to significantly reduce its dependence on Russian fossil energy resources. According to surveys, majority of EU citizens supported the humanitarian aid to Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia. Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŮVÁ went on drawing attention to the current threats connected to extremism increasing in some Member States. She invited the Members on national Parliaments to fight against demagoguery and polarisation of public opinion because it could create fertile ground for hostile propaganda and disinformation campaigns. The politicians should be aware of their responsibility not only as policymakers but especially as those who influence the general mode of the society.

Quoting the motto of the Czech Presidency, Europe as a task, inspired by former Czech President Václav HAVEL, Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŮVÁ highlighted five major challenges Europe was to face. First one was the EU enlargement. The participants of the working breakfast for Speakers from the EU candidate countries which took place the morning before the EUCS meeting agreed that it had been necessary to take the advantage of this extraordinary historical momentum and to open the door to all those who legitimately felt part of the democratic family of the European Union. This did not mean that the entry requirements could be relaxed, though. Europe was a place where all the rules must be respected, however, the EU had to make sure it did not get caught up in bureaucratic procedures and in interests of individual Member States. On the contrary, the accession process itself had to produce concrete results, confirming the correctness of the course set by populations of the candidate countries. Although public opinion on the EU and enlargement was ambivalent in some Member States, it was not difficult to find arguments in favour. Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŮVÁ mentioned clear correlation between past waves of enlargement and Europe's growing economic power and prosperity.

The second task regarded the reconstruction of Ukraine. Russian occupiers were leaving not only devastation but also huge numbers of land mines behind them, which Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŮVÁ identified as a great safety risk to the returning population, mentioning estimations that the number of land mines that Russians had been able to plant within a year would take at least 10 years to remove at the present pace, so the focus needed to be on providing immediate assistance including demining actions.

The third task was to realise that it was at the battlefield where the main decisions were taken, therefore the idea that supplying arms to a defending invaded state meant only added fuel to the fire had to be absolutely rejected. It was quite the opposite. Even those who were calling for a diplomatic solution, had to understand that peace can only be negotiated from the position of strength. In this regard, Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŮVÁ appreciated recent decision of the European Union to provide Ukraine with weapons and ammunition using the European peace

facility. At the same time, she also emphasised that supplies had to continue to be provided at the level of individual Member States.

Referring to the speech of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Ms Oleksandra MATVIICHUK, delivered during the dinner for female Speakers held the evening before the EUCS meeting, Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŤÁ identified the fourth task for Europe - to ensure that Ukraine would win that war as soon as possible. It should not be thought that the solution to the conflict was an agreement made with Russia to let them keep a certain part of Ukraine occupied territory.

The final task was to conduct a thorough debate on what kind of relationship the EU would like to have with Russia after the end of the war in which it would be hopefully defeated. Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŤÁ concluded by highlighting that the Russian aggression against Ukraine was undoubtedly a global problem, its outcome would clearly affect developments in even the most distant parts of the world and therefore everything must be done to ensure that the dictatorship and brutal forces would not win. The victory of Russian dictatorship and brutality in Ukraine would only motivate further potential aggressors starting from the Middle East to the Taiwan Strait which would have an extreme impact on all of us even in the economic area. At the same time, it was very clear that Europe had difficulty convincing many of its partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America of the reality of the situation and that was also something it should definitely be worked on more. In this regard, Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŤÁ invited the participants to the second Crimean Platform Parliamentary Summit, also including the Parliaments of non-European countries, which would be co-organised by the Czech and Ukrainian Parliaments on 24 October 2023 in Prague.

Next speaker, **Mr Ruslan STEFANCHUK, Chairman of the *Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine***, started his speech by expressing deepest gratitude for providing great support to Ukraine which had been fighting for its right to be free, democratic and European country. According to Mr STEFANCHUK, it was deeply symbolic that the Conference was taking place in Prague, the capital city of the nation, who had gone through many phases of fighting for their independence and had experienced the Russian occupation, terror and persecution, but stood strong and survived to become integral part of the democratic world, member of NATO and the European Union. Referring to Václav HAVEL, former Czech President, who characterized communist regime as captive to its own lies, falsifying the present, past and future, Mr STEFANCHUK added that lies had always been the basis of the communist regimes of the twentieth century and these days, this was the basis of the terrorist and totalitarian regime of Russia who had inherited and perfected the best of those practices. Both then and these days, Kremlin had been ready for everything to keep hold of their power and monopoly.

Ukraine had chosen a different way. The way to freedom and dignity, the way to European values and European community and was paying for this the highest price possible. Despite all suffering connected to the war, Russia had not managed to break the spine of Ukrainians. They were convinced that victory would protect them from the genocide and bring Russia to justice. Mr. STEFANCHUK went on reiterating the call for establishment of a special international tribunal inviting those who were still in doubt, regarding such a decision, to come to Ukraine and see for themselves. Ukraine had lived through many tragedies the culprits of which had never been accused, namely he mentioned the famine 90 years ago, organised by Stalin, that

had killed more than 1 million of Ukrainians. In this connection, Mr STEFANCHUK thanked those who had already acknowledged the Holodomor as the genocide of Ukrainian people and invited others to join these efforts.

Mr STEFANCHUK continued by assuring the participants that the process of liberation of occupied Ukrainian territories would continue till the restoration of sovereign Ukrainian territory in the internationally acknowledged borders. To achieve this goal, Ukraine would need not only ammunition, weapons, tanks and training for soldiers but also modern air defence systems. Mr STEFANCHUK went on confirming the Ukrainian ambition to become a member of NATO, according to the statement addressed to NATO on 30 September 2022. He expressed his expectations regarding the Summit in Vilnius, where Ukraine would like to hear the invitation to join NATO with a specific timeline.

Regarding the EU membership, Ukraine was working hard on implementing the requirements to be able to start the negotiation process possibly yet in 2023. Mr STEFANCHUK welcomed the establishing the EU office to align Ukraine legislation with *acquis communautaire*. Furthermore, he expressed his gratitude to the President of the European Parliament, Roberta METSOLA, for her readiness to use all the necessary resources to help Ukrainian Parliament, mentioning recent agreement on co-operation reached between *Verkhovna Rada* and the European Parliament, inviting national Parliaments to join this dialogue since they had priceless experience of implementing EU legislation into the national legal orders. Mr STEFANCHUK also addressed the Speakers of the Parliaments of candidate countries, reassuring them that they were friends, not competitors. He invited them to co-operate together to achieve common goals.

Furthermore, Mr STEFANCHUK mentioned the big challenge brought about by the war in the energy sector. Ukraine had lived through the most complicated winter in their history. Their energy sector had become one of the main targets of the Russian aggression. Even in those dark days, when Ukraine looked from the space as a black spot, the Ukrainians had not become frustrated. Even in the conditions of war, the Ukrainians were dreaming of peace, of coming back to normal life in liberated territories. In this regard, Mr STEFANCHUK asked representatives on the national Parliaments to support the peace formula as proposed by the Ukrainian President Volodymyr ZELENSKYJ. He also mentioned another initiative of Ukraine's President known as the Crimean Platform, the second meeting of which was to take place in October 2023 in Prague.

Mr STEFANCHUK went on reiterating that rebuilding of Ukraine should be financed by frozen Russian assets, recalling the fact that substantial part of Russian assets was located in European jurisdictions. He called for establishment of a mechanism that would enable using the Russian assets to compensate for the damages made by Russia. To conclude, Mr STEFANCHUK asked the members of national Parliaments, representing citizens of European Union, to stay united vis-à-vis the Russian aggression which was currently the main challenge for the continent. Only the victory in this war would allow to implement the project which was called the united Europe.

Ms Elżbieta WITEK, Marshal of the Polish *Sejm*, offered in her speech the Polish perspective on the issues discussed. In times of continuing cruel war provoked by imperialist Russia, it was not only important to co-operate and engage in open debate within the whole

democratic community but also actively and unitedly contribute to help defeat Russian criminal regime, assist Ukraine to join the European community as fast as possible, prepare financial basis for its rebuilding and ensure Europe's energy independence. Ms WITEK encouraged Members of European Parliaments to make the best possible use of parliamentary diplomacy to support Ukraine, as it was the case in Polish Parliament. She went on explaining, that irrespective of their political affiliation, Polish MPs engaged themselves in humanitarian aid and diplomatic support, were visiting Ukraine and hosting Ukrainian delegations in Poland and were in constant contact with the Speaker of the *Verkhovna Rada*. The Polish Parliament had already adopted 14 resolutions condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine, defining the actions as war crimes, calling for the establishment of an international tribunal, which would hold accountable and prosecute those who had instigated this war, and for establishing an international centre for prosecution of the crime of aggression which would help to protect the evidence gathered. Ms WITEK went on highlighting that Poland had been from the very outbreak of the war an ambassador and an advocate of Ukraine, putting issues connected to Ukraine on the top of agenda.

Ms WITEK mentioned the parliamentary co-operation with Baltic states which brought about concrete results, namely the appeal upon respective governments to strengthen deliveries of arms and weapons, to continue providing humanitarian aid, and also keep taking diplomatic efforts to facilitate Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Ms WITEK called upon her colleagues to condemn by means of parliamentary resolutions the attempts of Russia to use sports and cultural events to return to Europe. The participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in international sports competitions should be opposed since this would have turned a sport competition to a political event.

Furthermore, Ms WITEK drew attention to the fact that Russia was very active in Africa, disseminating there its disinformation. She therefore strongly recommended maintaining contacts with African states, emphasising that they had the same power in terms of voting in international institutions. Ms WITEK mentioned intention of Polish Parliament, together with the Parliaments of the Baltic states, to organise meetings with ambassadors of African states and with opinion-shaping organisations operating in Africa, with the aim to tell the truth about Ukraine, about the war, about who was the invader and who was the victim.

Ms WITEK highly appreciated the meeting of female Speakers the evening before the Conference and thanked Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ for organising that event. In this connection, Ms WITEK mentioned the suffering on Ukrainian women who were used as weapons of war and a reprehensible practice of abducting Ukrainian children to raise them as Russians. Ms WITEK expressed full support to the initiative of the Crimean Platform, whose first meeting had been held the previous year in Zagreb, and to its continuation. Likewise, she greatly supported the voices from Ukraine on organising a meeting of Speakers of Parliaments ahead of July's NATO summit in Vilnius. Such meeting would help underline the unity in face of fundamental decisions for the security of the region in situation when Russia had been planning to significantly increase its military presence in the eastern flank of NATO and to place nuclear weapons in Belarus, posing a great burden to the security of the EU and NATO borders. Ms WITEK called upon the colleagues to support Ukraine in its path towards NATO

and the EU, as the open-door policy and Ukraine's integration with NATO was the only direction which would help defeat Putin. It should be the common priority to start accession negotiations with Ukraine as soon as its adaptation reforms and their progress allowed. She went on calling for a quick and objective evaluation of this process and warning against formulating new conditions.

Ms WITEK emphasised that the war was not just a geopolitical threat. Having experienced the imperial aspirations of Russia, who was using its energy resources as a means of political pressure, Poland had consistently limited its economic ties with Russia especially in the area of energy resources and it went on in the efforts to actively engage and initiate infrastructural projects dedicated to EU countries and Ukraine as well. Ms WITEK mentioned in this context the Three Seas Initiative which had a lot to offer in terms of building energy, transport and industrial infrastructure to cope with the energy crisis and ensure security of supplies. Ms WITEK encouraged all countries in the region to become actively involved in this initiative, adding the need to be prepared for the pessimistic scenarios. A stable future could not be built on non-existent technological solutions. The current crisis had showed that markets were not capable of taking into account geopolitical and technological challenges. Ms WITEK went on mentioning other aspect of the war in Ukraine, namely the recent turbulence in the grain market. The uncontrolled imports of grain from Ukraine had caused damages to Polish farmers.

Ms WITEK concluded reminding three important issues regarding Ukraine's reconstruction: First, Ukraine must win the war and drive out the invader from occupied territory. Second, Ukraine's development towards European integration must be followed; that meant continued support for Ukraine's efforts to join the European Union, connecting the reconstruction process with necessary reforms. Third, sufficient financing should be ensured; it was estimated that between 350 and 750 billion of dollars would be needed to reconstruct Ukraine. Funding programs prepared by the EU international financial institutions and foreign partners should be the basis for this reconstruction, but also the frozen Russian assets, estimated at about 350 billion dollars, should be used.

Mr Andreas NORLÉN, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*, appreciated the topicality of the debate. 24 February 2022 would forever be remembered as one of the darkest days in modern European history but also as a day when people stood up for what was right and refused to accept brutal military force. Expressing his admiration to the courage and determination of the people of Ukraine, fighting the battle for freedom and democracy, for each country's right to choose its own way, he emphasised the importance of continuation of support to Ukraine in any possible way. Subsequently, Mr NORLÉN briefly described the support provided to Ukraine by the Swedish Parliament. Since the outbreak of the war, it had decided on 11 military support packages to Ukraine, including advanced military weapons systems, ammunition and military tanks. The support for Ukraine had also been the top priority for the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU that spring.

Mr NORLÉN supported the idea of intensifying contacts with Parliaments in other parts of the world, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, to make sure that they understood what was at stake, and convince them that they should also be on the right side of history, moreover on the side of

countries representing far more than half of global GDP, and not on the side of an aggressor with a GDP that was a fraction of that.

Mr NORLÉN reminded that the war had created disruptions in the European and global supply chains and forced Europe to examine its dependencies, not least its dependence on Russian fossil fuels. He warned against replacing the dependence on Russian fossil fuels by new dependencies on energy supplies from other non-democratic states. Rather, Mr NORLÉN emphasised green transition and phasing out fossil fuels in total. He pointed out a vital role national Parliaments had to play in preserving democratic systems and societies. He regarded as crucial for democracy that the citizens had high level of trust in the political process, the decision-making bodies and public administration. Ensuring democratic development in the neighbourhood should be one of the EU's most central foreign policy tasks. In Mr NORLÉN's view, the EU enlargement policy's task was to contribute to strengthening the security, stability and economic development in Europe, encouraging comprehensive reforms in the candidate countries and promoting stability and development in the EU's neighbourhood. He regarded it important, that we lived up to existing commitments and drive the accession process forward on the basis of clear criteria where the EU's fundamental values played a central part, bearing in mind that that process may not be hampered by bilateral concerns.

Ms Meritxell BATET LAMAÑA, Speaker of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, started her speech by quoting renowned historian and professor Jonathan RILEY-SMITH who, when asked about the point of knowing history, answered that it was to make us brave. In her view, such interpretation vindicated history as a form of resistance, as an enabler of a spirit for bold action. No one knew more about that than the Europeans who had been able to transform a history of wars into a force of the union of states and peoples. The generations of the founding fathers of the European project had had the courage to opt for stable peace in Europe. Ms BATET LAMAÑA reminded that the present geopolitical situation was once again showing the most devastating and cruel face of the war of aggression against Ukraine, provoked by Russia. In such circumstance, the historical conscience of Europeans once again demanded to be courageous to defend European values: freedom, peace, democracy and the protection of human rights, courageous to support Ukraine with all determination and in various forms, political, economic and military, courageous to protect European way of life and to reclaim it in a changing geopolitical context.

Stating that Europe had held up very well in recent crises, be it pandemic or current war of aggression, Ms BATET LAMAÑA quoted Jean MONNET insisting that Europe was forged by crises. Indeed, European citizens had been able to see that the Union was not a bureaucratic entity, distant from their needs, but that it protected them against threats and guaranteed their way of life. Ms BATET LAMAÑA regarded this as a proof of Europe's effectiveness but also as a challenge for regaining its autonomy, be it the case of pharmaceuticals or energy sources. This would also be one of the priorities of the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, together with the continuation of the political, financial and military support of Ukraine. At the same time, Spanish Presidency would focus on strategic regions of Europe, Africa and Latin America.

Ms BATET LAMAÑA confirmed that despite the geographic distance, Spain had felt itself to be on the board with Ukraine from the very first moment. The Spanish population showed a high degree of solidity with Ukraine. Spanish commitment to Ukraine was firm and would be maintained for as long as necessary, as had been expressed by the Spanish Prime Minister on several occasions. The Spanish Parliament had adopted unanimous position on condemnation of Russia's aggression. Ms BATET LAMAÑA drew attention to the fact that this unanimity was of particular value in a very polaristic Parliament comprising of 10 parliamentary groups and 24 political forces. The solidarity of the Spanish people had been demonstrated by a significant capacity to receive refugees, especially women and children. Spain had received more than 172,000 Ukrainians, benefiting from temporary project status, and managed to include more than 39,000 children into Spanish schools.

Ms BATET LAMAÑA went on mentioning the great political significance of the European Council decision from June 2022 to grant Ukraine the candidate status, the message of which was clear: Ukraine's future laid in Europe. In this regard, Ms BATET LAMAÑA mentioned the Spanish experience with EU accession in 1980s, calling it a turning point in the Spanish history as it had strengthened their democracy and freedoms. Undoubtedly, it would be the case of Ukraine, too. It would be necessary to accompany Ukraine during the complexities of the accession process, though, which Spain was prepared to do. Ms BATET LAMAÑA continued to emphasise that the human rights violations caused by the troops of the invading army constituted a very serious breach of international human rights law, and as such, had to be thoroughly investigated and sanctioned. Therefore, Spain supported the establishment of the office of the prosecutor general, to investigate such crimes. In this connection, Ms BATET LAMAÑA warned against weakening of the level of attention and commitment due to the expected long-lasting nature of the conflict. Regardless of the duration of the war, the support for Ukraine had to remain strong and united. Long and lasting peace could only be built on the basis of President ZELENSKY's proposal, as peace can only be just, provided that the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the attacked state were respected. That also applied to China's possible engagement in resolution the conflict.

The war in Ukraine had been a direct attack on the European model of living together in freedom and democracy. This had been taking place in a geopolitical context in which different regions and political powers were trying to redistribute the balance that had been created in the past decades of globalization. In this scenario, the Parliaments must play a fundamental role, as regards the expression of pluralism of the societies and political centres. Ms BATET LAMAÑA concluded that the history showed the disastrous consequences of the failure of that democratic commitment. Thus, the history was a source of courage and taught us to be brave.

During the ensuing debate, 27 speakers took the floor.

Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, reaffirmed the strong condemnation of Russia's vicious and cruel aggression and reiterated enduring support to and solidarity with Ukraine. In this regard, he mentioned the first Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform held in Zagreb previous October and appreciated that the Czech Republic had decided to host the second reunion of this Platform and organize it with *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine in Prague in the upcoming autumn. He went on expressing his

belief that joint response so far had strengthened the EU's position as a credible geopolitical actor. Delivery of all assistance, including military, had proven as a real game changer. Russia's aggression had had multiple dramatic implications, on Ukraine, on European security, on all European economies and global rules-based order and forced us to adapt our national plans and policies. Mr JANDROKOVIĆ argued that many of these modifications had eventually helped lay bare the depth of Russian strategic miscalculation, mentioning for instance strong political signals on enlargement. He confirmed that all candidates, Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina could count on Croatia's sincere help, and welcomed Finland's, and soon hopefully Sweden's, accession to NATO. He briefly described the efforts made by Croatia to diversify and decouple from Russia energetically, working hard on doubling the capacity of LNG terminals. As regards the safe and sustainable reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine, Mr JANDROKOVIĆ called for creating necessary preconditions for effective demining of Ukrainian territory and providing substantial expertise in this field, announcing that Croatia decided to organise a donor conference on demining of Ukraine in Zagreb in October and encouraging high-level participation. Mr JANDROKOVIĆ concluded by reiterating the plea of the previous speakers to keep showing unity and not to give in to fatigue, because standing firmly with Ukraine meant standing by European values, too.

Ms Bärbel BAS, Speaker of the German *Bundestag*, reiterated the support of Ukraine, underlining the necessity to stay united at Ukraine's side and to further strengthen Europe, also through integration of Ukraine in the European Union. She appreciated great ambition of Ukraine to put into practice the necessary reforms. She expressly mentioned parliamentary support for Ukraine, ranging from equipment for humanitarian aid and counselling to further training and work stays. Ms BAS further appreciated commitment of people to support refugees from Ukraine, naming in particular Ukraine's neighbouring countries, which had been doing an enormous amount of work in this context, as she had had the opportunity to see for instance during her visit to Warsaw. She went on underlining that Germany bore responsibility for Europe's security, reminding that with Finland's accession, the border between NATO and Russia had doubled, and expressing her sincere hope, that also Sweden would become a member of NATO soon. Admitting that the threats on the EU's eastern flank had been underestimated for too long, Ms BAS called for intensive co-operation to support freedom and security in Europe, standing firmly on Ukrainian side.

Mr Boris KOLLÁR, Speaker of the Slovakian National Council, started his contribution by expressing respect to bravery of Ukrainian military forces and to the whole nation of Ukraine. Slovakia could support all initiatives to hold peaceful talks if they take into account Ukrainian interests, including the peace formula of President ZELENSKY and peace initiatives of the European Union. As regards the future of Ukraine, Mr KOLLÁR welcomed last year's decision to grant a candidate status to Ukraine. At the same time, he called for attention to other countries who wanted to become members of the EU, including Western Balkans countries, reiterating that the accession process was not to be slowed down. He supported the idea of funding the reconstruction of Ukraine by frozen Russian assets, reminding that the recovery of Ukraine had to go hand in hand with the integration efforts. He declared Slovakia's preparedness to share its experience with Ukraine. Reminding that Russian aggression in Ukraine had completely changed the energy sector in the EU, Mr KOLLÁR briefly described steps taken by Slovakia

to eliminate its dependency on Russian energy. He admitted, however, that the gas still remained the main commodity, which enabled Russia to influence its prices significantly. In this context, he strongly advocated decoupling of prices of gas from prices of other energy sources, which would strengthen the position of the EU in the energy market. Mr KOLLÁR concluded by informing that Slovakia had managed to achieve the EU target when it came to the proportion of renewable resources, reminding that the greenhouse emission reduction could be facilitated by new nuclear energy resources and arguing that the European Union should not allow further discrimination of the nuclear energy.

Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, emphasised the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in promoting cooperation between countries to address common challenges. He reiterated Georgia's own experiences with Russian aggression and expressed empathy with Ukraine's pain and suffering, stating that fortunately that time a strong united and effective European response to Russia's aggressive actions could be seen. Regarding Georgia's support, he stressed that despite not being protected by NATO and benefiting from US economic solidarity, Georgia had actively used its vote on international fora in support for Ukraine. Talking about the Georgia's European perspective, he stressed that a new chapter in the relationship with the EU had been opened the previous year; however, he warned against negative differentiation, implying on the fact that Georgia had been granted only potential candidate status. He also highlighted Georgia's contribution to European security, such as providing essential support for the EU CSDP missions, and expressed readiness to cooperate with the EU on sea connectivity to open up routes for energy supply and freight transportation.

Mr Mustafa ŞENTOP, Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, emphasized the profound impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the entire world, such as energy, economic, and migration crises. He called for the need to develop a new geostrategic perspective to respond to changing strategic balances, and to reform the EU's current policies, especially enlargement policy, which should be free of prejudices and double standards. He regretted that the EU's reaction to invasions of Crimea in 2014 and Georgia in 2008 had been insufficient, and in this regard stressed the EU's partial responsibility for the current war. Talking about the war in Ukraine, he highlighted Türkiye's constructive efforts for peace, including the Grain Corridor Agreement and prisoner exchange initiatives, while expressing disappointment that those efforts were not fully recognized in the Conclusions.

Ms Edite ESTRELA, Vice-President of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, began by mentioning that the war against Ukraine was part of a broader geopolitical context, where authoritarian regimes aim to undermine democratic values. She stressed the need for collective action and cooperation at the EU level to defend these values, particularly through the European Neighbourhood Policy. She also highlighted the Russia's ongoing destabilization efforts in other countries, emphasising the importance of supporting their integration with the EU. Regarding energy security, she highlighted the progress made in diversifying energy sources, but stressed the need to invest further in renewable energy and efficiency measures to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and imports from countries that do not share democratic values. Furthermore, she stressed the responsibility of parliamentarians to keep the debate on the Ukrainian war alive, urging to promote public debates also with Ukrainian refugees, to

understand the challenges they face in order to support them.

Ms Annita DEMETRIOU, President of the *House of Representatives* of Cyprus, highlighted the immediate and decisive response of the EU to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and praised Ukraine for defending not only its country, but also international law and common European values. She stressed that Russia's invasion of Ukraine posed not only a threat to Ukraine, but also to European and global security, affecting various aspects such as refugee situation, or energy and food security. She also drew parallels between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, mentioning the importance of creating conditions for negotiations to solve the Cyprus problem as well. Addressing the issue of sanctions, she emphasized the importance of a determined and united response to Moscow's aggression, and the need for effective sanctions implemented by both the EU and its partner countries. She called for continued mobilization for the reconstruction of Ukraine and support for its energy sector while emphasising the need for intensified diplomatic efforts to end the war, restore international law, and uphold European principles and values.

Ms Roberta METSOLA, President of the European Parliament, expressed her satisfaction with the progress made in addressing the challenges faced by Ukraine and Europe, namely the adoption of sanctions and decisions to ensure energy independence. She emphasized the need to continue working together, as citizens expect their elected representatives to go further. She acknowledged the importance of dialogue between the European Parliament and *Verkhovna Rada* and stressed the need to support Moldova on its path to the EU membership as well. Lastly, she called for swift implementation of the Fit for 55 package, emphasising the interdependence of climate ambitions and economic security.

Mr Rosen ZHELYAZKOV, President of the Bulgarian National Assembly, emphasized the need for unity and determination in finding solutions to the challenges posed by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. While facing the prolonged nature of the war, he stressed the importance of supporting Ukraine through military, humanitarian, and financial assistance, as well as political backing for its international initiatives and EU-oriented choice. He highlighted the impact of the war on various crises, including energy, food, humanitarian, and economic, and emphasized the significance of cooperation with NATO and like-minded countries. Regarding energy security, he emphasised the need for long-term cooperation with reliable partners, practical application of joint gas purchases, and the importance of investing in electricity grids to support renewable energy production and the electrification of buildings, transport, and industrial sectors. Lastly, he mentioned Bulgaria's capacity to contribute to stable and diversified gas supplies to the EU, naming the "String" project as an example.

Ms Viktorija ČMILYTĖ-NIELSEN, Speaker of the Lithuanian *Seimas*, began by stressing the crucial role of active cooperation between the Parliaments in the face of Russian aggression and other challenges. She highlighted the significance of parliamentary resolutions in support of Ukraine, naming a recent resolution by the *Seimas* calling for a ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes in international tournaments. Despite the intangible nature of the resolutions, unlike heavy weaponry, she emphasised that such resolutions have political implications and play a role in initiating actions by governments. She also stressed the importance of Parliaments in helping Ukraine on its EU path, and the need to double up the efforts to bring Ukrainian systems

in line with the EU's criteria. Talking about the reconstruction, she stressed that the burden of costs should fall on the shoulders of the aggressor, not on Ukraine or supporting international community. She warned of Russia's long-term strategic confrontation, including its recent involvement with Belarus in the deployment of nuclear weapons, and urged to take our defence and security very seriously. Finally, she invited the leaders of the EU and NATO Parliaments to a pre-NATO summit event in Vilnius that year.

Mr Marko LOTRIČ, President of the Slovenian National Council, stated that Russian aggression against Ukraine also aimed to destabilize the entire region. He highlighted the EU's resolute response, focusing on the defence of shared values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. He strongly supported the establishment of an international Crime tribunal to investigate and prosecute war crimes and emphasised the EU's role in post-war reconstruction and its commitment to Ukraine's European perspective. Regarding the EU enlargement policy, he acknowledged its success in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity across Europe and encouraged for further engagement with Eastern neighbours and Balkan countries. Despite disagreements, he emphasised the essential unity of the European family and called for collective efforts in achieving peace in Ukraine and other potential conflicts.

Ms Urška KLAKOČAR ZUPANČIČ, President of the Slovenian National Assembly, informed about the upcoming diplomatic conference in Slovenia to negotiate the Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition Convention, which aimed to establish a global cooperation mechanism for addressing serious international crimes. She also highlighted the importance of engaging African countries and sharing information about the war in Ukraine with them. She concluded by stressing the need for unity within the international community to achieve a just and lasting peace, highlighting the importance of accountability for the crimes committed by the Russian regime.

Mr Lorenzo FONTANA, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, stressed the importance of unity in addressing the security consequences of the conflict. He emphasized the role of parliamentary diplomacy in achieving shared objectives, enhancing cybersecurity, and combating irregular immigration, and stressed the need for closer cooperation between the EU and Mediterranean countries to address various challenges such as energy and food security, migration flows, and hybrid threats. He stated that precisely in these areas the EU should develop real common policies, endowed with adequate financial resources.

Mr Jan Anthonie BRUIJN, President of the Dutch Senate, emphasised the importance of European and international cooperation in finding common solutions to shared problems. The war had significant impact on Ukrainian state institutions, ranging from the destruction of infrastructure, displacement, and disruption of the regular working processes, and in this regard, he highlighted the need to discuss post-war reconstruction already at this point and commended the EU and its Member States for laying the foundation for this. He also stressed the importance of re-establishing the principles of the rule of law and involving Ukrainian civil society in the process once the war is over.

Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian National Council, highlighted that the conflict not only violated international law but also challenged the entire security architecture.

He emphasized Austria's political and financial support for Ukraine, including help for Ukrainian refugees. Lastly, he also stressed the importance of standing in solidarity with Moldova and Georgia to safeguard their sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the fight against Russian disinformation campaigns.

Mr Fernand ETGEN, Speaker of the Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies, began by saying that the peace in the European continent must go hand in hand with integration of Ukraine and other candidate countries into European structures. He also reiterated Luxembourg's support for Ukraine, both at the institutional level and among its citizens, demonstrating solidarity with the Ukrainian refugees, and stressed the need to support Ukraine in its reconstruction.

Mr Søren GADE, Speaker of the Danish *Folketing*, emphasised that the Russian aggression against Ukraine was a wake-up call for the entire world, as it not only threatens Ukraine's survival but also attacks core values and a rule-based global order. Talking about specific actions, he highlighted the importance of providing military support to Ukraine, imposing the strongest possible sanctions, and holding accountable those responsible for war crimes and the crime of aggression. He concluded by emphasizing the need to never take freedom for granted, as it requires constant vigilance.

Ms Valérie RABAULT, Vice-President of the French National Assembly, touched on the topic of domestic extremism fuelled by fake news and supported by Russia, while stressing that countering this phenomenon is crucial to safeguarding democracy. Regarding future sports events, such as the Olympic Games, she supported the decision to exclude Russian athletes from participating. She also expressed solidarity with Ukraine's neighbouring countries, which was crucial to prevent the conflict from spreading.

Mr Edvards SMILTĒNS, Speaker of the Latvian *Saeima*, pointed out that the Russian aggression had shattered basic premises of the security architecture in Europe, and stressed the need to support Ukraine's fighting capability and helping push Russian forces out of Ukrainian territory. Recalling Latvia's own experience of joining NATO, he emphasised the need for the same courage and wisdom to eliminate political uncertainty in Europe and advocated for Ukraine's inclusion in NATO. He also called for more coherent containment policy towards Russia, which requires the necessity of economic cooperation patterns and standing up for shared values globally. He also expressed his concern over Russia's imperialism, which had been deeply rooted in its society and would continue to be a threat even after the war.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, reminded the parliamentary support to Ukraine using the example of the French *Senate*, including receiving Ukrainian representatives, visiting Ukraine, and adopting resolutions, in which the Senate for example emphasised the need to prosecute those responsible for war crimes and protested against the kidnapping of Ukrainian children. He also stressed the importance of documenting these criminal offenses to hold the perpetrators accountable, with the EU playing a significant role in that process. Talking about other parliamentary actions, he mentioned that the French *Senate* had concluded a protocol on cooperation with the Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, aiming to enhance mutual collaboration, share knowledge and best practices, and support Ukraine's integration into the EU.

Mr Juho EEROLA, Deputy-Speaker of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, aligned himself with the strong condemnation of the Russian military invasion in Ukraine, emphasising that Ukraine could count on Finland's support for as long as it takes. He also shared a personal perspective, highlighting the similar proximity of his home in Finland and some Ukrainian cities to the Russian border, and stressed the need for continuous support to Ukraine.

Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese *House of Representatives*, highlighted the impact of the war on supply chains and availability of raw materials, and emphasised how these disruptions affected industries and led to higher energy bills for households. He also mentioned that a ceasefire was essential at this point to reduce loss of people and facilitate the humanitarian aid and stressed that sanctions should remain targeted against specific individuals and entities.

Mr István JAKAB, Deputy-Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, pointed out that Hungary had provided significant financial assistance and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and had welcomed a large number of Ukrainian refugees. He supported the EU membership perspective for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, however, he also emphasised the need to respect the rights of minorities, including Hungarians, and raised concerns about some anti-Hungarian campaigns in Ukraine.

Mr Masud GHARAHKHANI, President of the Norwegian *Storting*, acknowledged the importance of hearing directly from Ukrainian representatives about the situation in Ukraine and the ways how to support their efforts. He highlighted the significance of European cooperation and parliamentary democracy in addressing the war in Ukraine and mentioned a new five-year support programme for Ukraine, adopted in Norway, which includes military support, humanitarian aid, and funding for reconstruction. By taking this action, he emphasised Norway's long-term commitment to assisting Ukraine, demonstrating a dedication beyond the next election.

Mr Martin CANDIDAS, President of the Swiss National Council, said that European Union was not only their main partner in the field of politics or economics but also a partner with whom they shared the same values such as democracy, human rights and the state of law. Moreover, he added that the EU response to the Russian aggression had been a clear proof of unity at times of hardship that had undermined the security architecture in Europe. Switzerland strongly condemned this aggression and believed that it was necessary to seize all military actions in the territory of Ukraine and that the Russian forces should leave this country as quickly as possible. He also stated that Switzerland had adopted all the sanctions taken by the EU, received lots of Ukrainian refugees and delivered more than 400 million EUR in humanitarian aid and that Switzerland wanted to continue with such commitment side by side with the European Union. Talking about the Russian aggression against Ukraine, he also highlighted that this conflict cost thousands of people's lives, the damages were enormous and therefore, a proper and strong political process had to be ensured. In this context he added that that was something that Switzerland had started at the conference in Lugano back in 2022 where the principles of recovery of Ukraine were discussed. He also expressed his belief that Lugano principles could be seen as the basis for that, and greatly welcomed the upcoming conference organized by the UK in June.

Sir Lindsay HOYLE, Speaker of the British *House of Commons*, stated that his Parliament deplored the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the affront to the core Western democratic values that it represented, and it admired the courage and resilience of Ukraine. He added that the participation of Speaker STEFANCHUK sent a clear message of solidarity. Speaking of the Russian invasion, he highlighted that the United Kingdom had committed 2.3 billion in military assistance to Ukraine and hosted training Operation Interflex which aimed to train 30,000 new and existing Ukrainian military personnel by the end of the year. He also stressed that the committees of the Parliament of the United Kingdom were vocal supporters of calls for a special tribunal to prosecute the Russian crimes of aggression in Ukraine. In this context he also said that: “*we must ensure that war crimes were brought, we must stand together, and we must be united in the prosecution of the Russians that have caused the hurt and the death*”.

Lord John McFALL OF ALCLUITH, Lord Speaker of the British *House of Lords*, said that, together with the Speaker of the *House of Commons*, he had been privileged to welcome and address both President ZELENSKY and first lady Olena ZELENSKA. He added that the entire Parliament and indeed country had stood in awe of the bravery, resilience, and fortitude of the Ukrainian people. He also admired the effective leadership of President ZELENSKY and his colleagues.

After the first round of contributions, Mr Mustafa ŞENTOP, Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and Annita DEMETRIOU, President of the *House of Representatives* of Cyprus, took the floor again several times and exchanged their views on the historical reasons leading to the division of Cyprus.

Session II – Role of the EU in global cooperation of democracies and the issue of EU member states’ dependence on totalitarian regimes (information warfare, disinformation, security of supply chains, strategic autonomy etc.)

Opening addresses

Mr Miloš VYSTRČIL, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic;
Mr Jan LIPAVSKÝ, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Keynote speakers

Ms Roberta METSOLA, President of the European Parliament;
Mr Tomasz GRODZKI, Marshal of the Senate of the Republic of Poland;
Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the National Council of the Republic of Austria

Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOŤÁ, Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, opened the second day of the conference, welcomed all the Speakers and Presidents and thanked them for the fruitful and constructive debate during the first session of the conference. She said that during the second session, the discussion should focus more on the role of the European Union in a global corporation of democracies and the issue of EU Member States’ dependence

on totalitarian regimes and presented the subtopics of the second session - information warfare, disinformation, security of supply chains, strategic autonomy.

Mr Miloš VYSTRČIL, President of the Czech Senate, said in his opening address that we should be able to share our experience, so we could learn from each other, show the way how to create democracy and remind how dangerous the totalitarian regimes were. He thought that this was the fundamental benefit of the meeting. He also pointed out that the rules set in the European Union became more and more complicated, and even for the Member States they were sometimes difficult to understand. In this context, he asked how the countries wishing to join the European Union should find their way to understand the rules and added that we should help a candidate or potential candidate countries and concentrate not only on the rules but also on the principles and the values. He also underlined that we were living in the difficult times of the Russian aggression against Ukraine; in a situation when it was very difficult to maintain the support of the population for the free and democratic order and explained to them that they should not succumb to cheap energy, cheap foodstuffs or cheap way of living. He added that all those “rain traders” who offered something cheap and fancy or something for free would come one day and would ask for a heavy payment. He recalled that European prosperity was something we had earned with our hard work. However, he believed that it was time to admit that our prosperity and our quality of life were something that we had because we had been living in debt. Moreover, he stressed that we had a debt to our world and our environment and that we had lived in debt by means of deepening our dependency on authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and deepening this dependency could become very expensive. In this context, he added that our only way was to get rid of dependency on strategic products and raw materials from totalitarian and authoritarian regimes and countries. This would not be a pain-free process and the Parliaments, i.e., those with the highest democratic legitimacy, should play a decisive role in this venture. He stressed that it was the duty of the members of Parliaments to be brave and said the truth that we had been living in a debt and it was time to pay this debt because if we had not paid it, we would not gradually get rid of the dependency on totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. He asked all Speakers and Presidents to cooperate in this respect. In his conclusion, he highlighted that the EU’s Parliaments were places where democratic hearts were beating, and the task was to make this democratic heartbeat heard not only within the EU but around the world. And we ought to be able to create a society, the power and energy of which would be a strong and big democratic heart.

Mr Jan LIPAVSKÝ, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, stated that the meeting took place in times of the large-scale aggression of Russia against Ukraine and sharpen geopolitical tensions. In such moment we needed to demonstrate a tireless unity, support for the victims of illegal barbaric invasion and international law. We should continue to provide the Ukrainians with every possible support we could give them. He also stressed that we needed to engage more with the third countries because some of them were hesitant due to their concerns about possible Russian reaction, some saw a short-term benefits for them thanks to financial and arms support and others were not interested. We needed to offer better partnerships to the third countries and explained the colonial character of the aggression. He added that we faced Russian propaganda, threats, and narratives that were returning Russian information space into the dark moment of Communist totalitarianism. One way how to address

Russian propaganda was to explain and promote common values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law and to support civil society and independent media in our own countries and abroad. The EU needed to lead by showing good examples to be followed. He also highlighted that democracy proved to be a very resilient system and we had to increase this resilience. He called for the reduction of dependency of the EU Member States on totalitarian or authoritarian regimes as regards the supply of strategic raw materials, products or technologies. He also stressed that we had to reinforce our defence, security and support our economies to be technologically advanced, resilient and competitive. We also had to build on a sound single market, and this is not only about following the rules but also about removing the still existing barriers and being well connected, to put in place sufficiently robust and secure energy and digital infrastructure and ensure the diversification of supply chains to secure critical raw materials and strategic products. That would help us to strengthen the strategic autonomy of the European Union and limit our dependency on third countries.

Ms Roberta METSOLA, President of the European Parliament, thanked Mr Ruslan STEFANCHUK for his participation in the Conference, representing the brave people of Ukraine and for standing up and defying the odds. She also said that Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine continued to test our resilience, however, from solidarity with Ukraine to solidarity between Member States, the European Union's response had been remarkable. In this context she added that we were united, more coordinated and our determination to safeguard the principles and values that underpin our way of life remained unwavering. She also said that the European Union had been a success story, but we could not be afraid to reform, to change. We needed to revalue the way that we interact with the rest of the world, re-balancing our political and economic relations with key and strategic partners. Subsequently, she highlighted that we must learn from our former energy dependence on Russia and avoid making the same mistake again. She considered crucial, in this changing geopolitical context, to make our supply chains more resilient by diversifying our resources and reducing dependencies because this was the surest way for us to truly become more resilient as a Union. Afterwards, she stated that we had shown that the EU was effective and united in taking decisions. The European Union was leading not just Europe's, but the world's green and digital transition. However, she also emphasised that we had to explain better, that we had to listen harder and made sure that changes were cushioned, and our economy and our environment were seen as two sides of the same coin. We should invest in our industrial base and manufacturing capacities and not to fence ourselves in or enter protectionist races. In this context, she said that broadening our network of trade agreements with partners by concluding and ratifying the ones we had in the pipeline, were an important pillar in this regard. She added that we were in a situation where wars are no longer simply fought between soldiers on the battlefield. Through the arsenal of information warfare, cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, wars were also fought in the digital sphere. The Russian war on Ukraine was no exception to this and these challenges posed an existential threat to our democracies. She assured that the European Parliament took this threat very seriously. She also emphasised that no institution, no country, would be immune to this threat. She stressed that the European Union must continue to show leadership and our set standards could serve as a blueprint for our like-minded partners across the globe. She added that EU needed to work closer, stronger and further together to detect, analyse and disrupt

attempts of interference in our democratic processes. In this context, she highlighted the work of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference of the European Parliament.

Mr Tomasz GRODZKI, Marshal of the Polish Senate, said that the Russian aggression against Ukraine had highlighted the challenges the European Union faced. He added that some countries perceived the EU and its values as an enemy and actively sought to damage the Union. In addition, he emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic and Russian aggression against Ukraine generated problems that the world had not seen in decades, and which proved to be a serious-stress test for European societies, such as hostile propaganda aimed to undermine faith in democracy and the European community and to interfere in electoral processes in various countries. He highlighted that we had to increase the resilience of our societies against disinformation and support professional and impartial journalism. In this context, he added that without impartial media, democracy would become flawed and slowly dies. He added that no country should be a flawed democracy and follow the path of Belarus where journalists like Andrzej POCZOBUT were imprisoned. He expressed the opinion that, in the fight against hostile propaganda, we must educate the public, particularly young people, promote fact-checking and made the public more resilient to fake news spread often by online trolls or anonymous bots. He added that special responsibility in this context lied with politicians who should conduct political discourse based on substantive arguments instead of resorting to propaganda, thus setting an example and not misleading their voters. Subsequently, he said that the Russian aggression against Ukraine had shown us the ramifications of abandoning the values in trade relations in the name of profits. It had turned out that while importing gas and oil from Russia, many EU Member States for decades had financed preparations for a brutal, genocidal war aimed at wiping Ukraine off the map of Europe. He added that Europe had been consistently moving away from importing raw materials from Russia and once the EU sanctions against Russia had been introduced, we must make every effort to make them effective and to prosecute attempts to circumvent them. Subsequently, he said that replacing some suppliers with others was not simple on a global scale, particularly in the case of raw materials used in modern technologies which were crucial to the achievement of the goals of the Paris Agreement and the implementation of the Green Deal. Talking about the critical raw materials and strategic autonomy, he stressed that the Union needed a secure supply of these materials but must reduce its dependence on imports from countries that did not share European values or were simply hostile to Union. Moreover, he said that Russian aggression against Ukraine had highlighted the role of NATO, which was gaining new members - Finland and Sweden, and added that the Union should focus on strengthening the European pillar of NATO.

Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian National Council, highlighted that parliamentary democracy was a form of societal organisation and its core principles were rule of law, representation and participation. He added that in a functioning democracy there were free and fair elections, system of checks and balances, independent judiciary and freedom of opinion and the press. This kind of democracy guaranteed respect for human rights and a maximum in justice prosperity and stability. Subsequently, he said that Russian attack on Ukraine was a fundamental attack on the core values of a rule-based global order and order that believes in compromise and balance and not an arbitrariness and the law of the strongest. He added that Putin's war had brought suffering, pain, desperation, hatred and death over Ukraine,

however, the consequences of his crime, went far beyond Ukraine. He also added that we must set limits to Putin otherwise authoritarian and totalitarian regimes all around the globe would get the message and act accordingly. Talking about effects of totalitarian states on our democracies, he emphasised that we had to stand by our values, we had to live them, and we had to defend them in unity even if it was uncomfortable. Subsequently, he said that with the Covid-19 crisis it had become apparent that the public democratic discourse in our societies was increasingly receding. The public space seemed heated, aggressive and polarized, the discourses often seemed dysfunctional and social media, which were using AI and algorithms, played a key role in this. He added that conspiracy theories, fake news and the vilification of minorities were part of everyday business and that interference in elections and permanent cyber-attacks on our democratic institutions were on the rise. That is why we needed a committed and effective strategy of a digital self-defence and comprehensive and decisive measures to counter manipulative platforms, campaigns, and algorithms. In this context, he highlighted that the digital service and digital markets act were important tools and they needed to be implemented swiftly. Moreover, he added that regulations were not everything and we also needed education, especially digital education and education to counter the anti-democratic poison of antisemitism. In this context, he said that antisemitism was on the rise again and this was all more concerning as academic analysis had shown that antisemitism was deeply anti-democratic. He also emphasised that Parliaments had to remain committed to resolutely fight antisemitism because antisemitism was not a marginal phenomenon and could be found right at the centre of our society.

During the ensuing debate, 21 speakers took the floor.

Ms Meritxell BATET LAMAÑA, Speaker of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, mentioned the constant attacks on democratic institutions. In this context, she highlighted the role of parliaments, which must take a strong position against such threats. Such debates, concerning defending the parliaments, would be also one of the ongoing Spanish Presidency's priorities. She also mentioned the upcoming high-level Conference for EU parliaments in León.

Ms Viktorija ČMILYTĒ-NIELSEN, Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament, began with the reference to FUKUYAMA's End of history hypothesis. In her opinion, people in many countries including Lithuania had never shared a sense of the final and reversible victory of liberal democracy, and currently, the war launched against Ukraine had reminded us of this in the most painful way. According to Ms ČMILYTĒ-NIELSEN, the EU's contribution to the democracy promotion must be our strategic task supported by the particular action. In this context, she pointed out what was one of our strongest geopolitical tools – an enlargement. At present day, autonomy should not mean autonomy from our like-minded partners, but from the authoritarian regimes. The war had opened the eyes of Europeans to the price of the mistakes made because of wishful thinking about benefits of the economic interdependencies with aggressive authoritarian regimes, reminded Ms ČMILYTĒ-NIELSEN.

Mr Søren GADE, Speaker of the Danish *Folketing*, emphasised that a most important tool in reaching our goal, which was reducing our dependency on totalitarian regimes, was a diversification. In Mr GADE's opinion, the key was to keep pushing for more free trade agreements based on fair terms. He also mentioned that we were doing right while we were

reaching out to our partners in South America, Africa, and Asia, including India. At the same time, we had to keep improving economic relationship with the USA, Mr GADE said. He concluded his speech by stating that we could not and should not strive for being isolated from the rest of the world.

Mr Marko LOTRIČ, President of the Slovenian National Council, aimed the threats that our democratic values were facing nowadays. He also spoke about strengthening of our strategic autonomy and securing our supply chains. To achieve that, we should increase our investments in European production, capabilities and strengthen the procurement policy to prioritize the EU-based companies. Mr LOTRIČ also stressed the importance of the access to raw materials and advanced technologies. He mentioned importance of addressing disinformation as well as promoting democracy and human rights across the world.

Ms Danijela ĐUROVIĆ, President of the Parliament of Montenegro, pointed out that the events in Ukraine had affected all countries and citizens of Europe and the world. The vulnerability of global democracy had been revealed and our perception of security, peace and stability had changed. At the same time, we were witnessing the extraordinary solidarity and cohesion of Europe in effort to restore peace and stability. We must do all possible to stop bloodshed in Ukraine to protect women and children and help to rebuild Ukraine, she said. Ms ĐUROVIĆ also stressed that as EU and NATO partners, also Montenegro had promoted the open-door policy, which meant that these days almost seven percent of the country's population are refugees from Ukraine.

Mr István JAKAB, Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, came back to the fact that we needed to strengthen our strategic autonomy and competitiveness. However, in his opinion, we should focus on the strategic autonomy of the nation states, as the European Union was not a state structure organised on a federal basis and for historical reasons it can never become one, said Mr JAKAB. For Hungary, he explained, there was no realistic alternative that would allow the immediate discontinuation of Russian gas imports or the abandonment of nuclear energy. However, according to Mr JAKAB, Hungary had already taken substantive step to diversify in the last 10 years.

Ms Annita DEMETRIOU, President of the *House of Representatives* of Cyprus, expressed her conviction that the issue of energy security had always been paramount. However, after the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the energy security had merged as additional strong motivation to enhance European strategic autonomy and accelerate renewable energy deployment. She stressed that Cyprus had always been in favour also of strengthening the European Union's defence industry. Ms DEMETRIOU also mentioned that Cyprus shared the vision of France in this matter. To conclude her speech, she singled out that the democracy was a fundamental value for the European Union, and we must take a leading role to confront disinformation, propaganda, all fake news distortion of facts and hate speech.

Mr Boris KOLLÁR, Speaker of the Slovakian National Council, agreed that it was our strategic objective to reinforce the role of the EU in the global world. Global challenges and threats we had to face nowadays certainly required an international cooperation, Mr KOLLÁR said. He pointed out that while we needed to strategically remove our dependencies to boost resilience

of the European economy and to promote our autonomy, we still had to keep the European economy open. For example, the European Union did not have a sufficient stock of critical raw materials, he explained. It was in our joint interest to boost the production, and at the same time we also had to diversify our supply chains, said Mr. KOLLÁR. He also mentioned the fact that the unprovoked Russian aggression in Ukraine had a negative impact on safety and stability of the EU countries. He pointed out that for example in Slovakia, Russian funding invested in the spread of disinformation were much higher than our investments in the fight against disinformation. Therefore, Slovakia supported the European Commission's steps to fight against on-line disinformation.

Ms Edite ESTRELA, Vice-President of Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, warned that we were witnessing an increase in worldwide polarization. Therefore, it was critical to reject a Eurocentric protectionism and to avoid an isolationism tendency, she advised. We should continue to foster new partnerships and consolidating new ones with regions such as Latin America and Africa.

Ms Urška KLAKOČAR ZUPANČIČ, President of Slovenian National Assembly, focused on the topic of disinformation. She emphasised that one of the main issues was that there was no comprehensive understanding and international sharing of practices on how to successfully address the challenge of disinformation yet. In her opinion, it was essential that the European parliamentary leaders provide the basis for true and transparent information regarding absolute all aspects of citizens' lives. It was also very important to listen carefully and respect different opinions but create clear boundaries for hate speech against any vulnerable group and for authoritarian tendencies.

Ms Karin BROUWERS, Vice-Chair of Federal Advisory Committee on the European Affairs of Belgian Senate, appreciated that European Parliament had approved the European Chips Act. That proposal, she reminded, should promote the production of semiconductors in Europe. Ms BROUWERS declared a support for the clear strategy to decrease the dependency on non-democratic countries in all key sectors, not only in the area of semiconductors. Ms BROUWERS also mentioned the need to actively fight against disinformation by detecting them and we also need to observe the resilience of population against disinformation.

Mr Talat XHAFERI, President of the North Macedonian Assembly, draw attention to the difficult security and economic situation in the region, especially considering the most recent development. He stressed that there was a threat over the citizens after an agreement between Russia and Belarus for deployment of nuclear weapons on its territory, especially because Belarus bordered with three Member States of the EU and NATO. Mr XHAFERI also expressed his conviction that it was necessary to secure movement of goods, of technologies and as well as of people.

Mr Lauri HUSSAR, President of the Estonian Parliament, pointed out that the threat from Russia was a long-term challenge and also that the information and influence operations as well as cyber-attacks could affect the functioning of a democratic society. Being in close proximity to Russia, Estonia had often experienced these attacks, but that is why Estonia was also ready to counter them, said Mr HUSSAR. He explained that among other things, that had led to the

establishment of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. He warned that the security environment had changed, and we must all adapt. Firstly, as highly digitalised societies, we needed to make sure that the public services remained available, and data were safe. Secondly, we must step up our efforts in cyber capacity building and increasing our cyber resilience. Thirdly, also in cyberspace we must ensure accountability of the attackers, added Mr HUSSAR.

Mr Günter KOVACS, President of the Austrian *Federal Council*, advised that we had to come up with common responses to great challenges like hybrid threats and disinformation. He emphasised that we could only counter the threats posed to democracy together with a strong EU that focuses on the great challenges, but that also grants Member States the freedom to take decisions in other matters, at national or regional level. It was of utmost importance to safeguard the EU's strategic autonomy to assert our European interests swiftly and comprehensively. Securing and diversifying our energy supply chains was a key, said Mr KOVACS and added that fossil energy sources had to be replaced with renewable energies.

Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI, Speaker of Georgian Parliament, reminded the role for which the EU was created: sustainable regional peace, security, and prosperity. He expressed his belief that the European Union could revitalize its soft power by standing on the side of truth, morality and the values that European Union has long embodied. Mr PAPUASHVILI also singled out three important points. Firstly, European Union must cooperate with other democracies and share its democratic values. Secondly, the European Union strength should come from trustworthy, evidence-based narrative. Thirdly, the promise of the EU membership should be coupled with a consistent approach by its institutions devoid of arbitrary and partisan interests. Membership promise served as a powerful tool for promoting democracy strengthening, the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights in Georgia, he explained.

Mr Fernand ETGEN, Speaker of the Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies, emphasised that the parliamentarians were the first guardians of democracy on the national level as well as on the international level. He stressed that in the time of rising anti-democratic movements, polarization and disinformation, it was clear that it is necessary to be united. In this concern, he had appreciated the meeting as a clear expression of plurality and solidarity on the parliamentary level. He also reminded the Conference on the Future of Europe, which had been unprecedented mechanism of the participative democracy.

Mr Igor GROSU, President of the Moldavian Parliament, spoke about the situation in Moldova in the context of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which led to submission of application for the EU membership by Moldova. Besides of disruption of trade and energy supplies or social and economic consequences, the Republic of Moldova had been facing hybrid and direct attempts to destabilise the reform process and challenge the democratic rule. In response, he pointed, Moldova had maintained home security and accelerated reforms aiming at strengthening of the overall resilience of the country, and the government also had done a lot to improve energy resilience. Mr GROSU also stressed the importance of the cooperation with the EU and other international partners.

Mr Mustafa ŞENTOP, Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, reminded that his country had been a member of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions for more than 70 years. As for a candidate country, the change and transformation of the European Union was of great importance to Türkiye, Mr ŞENTOP said. He also mentioned that the world these days was at a turning point, and the European Union needed to be on the right side of the history. In his opinion, it became necessary for the European Union to get closer with Türkiye. Unfortunately, opposite steps had been taken, Mr ŞENTOP said. He also warned against today's rise of xenophobia, racism and islamophobia, which he can see in almost all EU Member States. Mr ŞENTOP also argued that the EU with its own policies harmed its image and reputation, even without disinformation and fake news. In conclusion, he stated that the world needed the EU, but not the current version of the EU.

Ms Valérie RABAULT, Vice-President of the French National Assembly, highlighted the topics of energy, defence of common values and also partnership with other countries in her intervention. She warned that the energy dependency of the EU had moved from 50 to 60% in past 15 years. Therefore, it was absolutely vital that we reverse this trend and if we wanted to gain the strategic autonomy in the field of energy, we had to invest appropriately. Also, the European Parliament had a role to play, she said. As many other speakers, Ms RABAULT expressed her conviction that the EU had to diversify its supply chains. Another important point was to promote European values such as democracy, freedom and gender equality.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, drew attention of the participants to the recent resolution adopted by the French Senate on the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human rights. In the opinion of the French *Senate*, there are some issues capable of affecting democratic control and circumventing the stipulations of the Treaties, related to common foreign and security policy, as stated also by the Court of Justice of the EU in 2014.

Mr Ignazio LA RUSSA, President of the Italian Senate, appreciated the message of the Conference. European and national institutions must work and were indeed working in order to ensure the freedom and independence of peoples, and this freedom and independence spans many different fields, he said and insisted that this was also the direction taken by the new European industrial strategies launched in 2020 and updated in 2021. The same went for the 2023 REPowerEU plan and we also needed to work hard and implement the Strategic Compass adopted by the European Council in March 2023, he stressed.

At the end of this session, Mr VYSTRČIL briefly introduced the Draft Conclusions of the Conference. He explained that the text had gained support at the Troika's Meeting attended by the Presidents of Parliaments/Chambers of Slovenia, Spain, the Czech Republic and of the European Parliament. In total, there were 64 amendments proposed by 13 countries, 21 of which had already been adopted in the modified version presented by the Presidency. In addition, there were two additional amendments proposed by Hungary and German *Bundestag*. Both were accepted by the Presidency.

In the following short debate, four speakers took the floor.

Mr Jean-Francois RAPIN, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, welcomed that the Conclusions of the Presidency mentioned COSAC. On the contrary, he regretted that the National Parliaments were not mentioned in the Paragraph 14 of the Conclusions.

Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese *House of Representatives*, mentioned the two amendments proposed by Malta had not been accepted. One of them had been proposed with regards to ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia. Mr VYSTRČIL did not agree with Mr FARRUGIA's statement that there was no discussion on this topic, and he also expressed his conviction that the decision about the way the conflict should be ended was to be made by the Ukrainians themselves.

Mr István JAKAB, Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, welcomed the approval of the modification proposed by the Hungarian parliament concerning the national minorities. He also advised that Georgia's European integration should not be forgotten and thus it should be mentioned in the Conclusions. He also supported Mr FARRUGIA's requirement for more detailed debate. Mr VYSTRČIL thanked for the amendment regarding Georgia and accepted it. The last speaker of this session, Mr STEFANCHUK, explained that in his point of view, the proposal of a simple ceasefire was not right, as the goal was to get Russia out of Ukraine completely.

Mr VYSTRČIL, together with Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ, thanked everyone for their participation and for the fruitful discussion. The closing remark was made by Ms BATET LAMAÑA, Speaker of the Spanish Congress of Deputies of who thanked the organisers of the Conference and as a representative of the upcoming Presidency she invited the participants to the next Speakers Conference, which would take place in Madrid in April 2024.