

Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments 28–29 January 2018, Tallinn

Minutes

The meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments took place on 28-29 January 2018 in Tallinn, at the Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia).

As per tradition, the meeting of the Secretaries General of the Troika (Slovakia, Estonia, Austria, European Parliament) took place ahead of the general meeting on Sunday, January 28. Troika members discussed relevant matters about the agendas for the Secretaries General Meeting, the Conference of Speakers of the EU, and IPEX-related issues.

Meeting of the Secretaries General of the EU parliaments took place at the Plenary Hall of the Estonian Parliament and was opened by Mr Peep JAHILO, Secretary General of the Riigikogu. Mr Eiki NESTOR, President of the Riigikogu, delivered a welcome address in which he greeted the delegates in Tallinn, and expressed his respect and admiration for the work they do. Mr NESTOR underlined the progress made in fields such as European defense, the single market, digital agenda, social protections, and climate policy as the most important achievements of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Mr NESTOR thanked member states for their help and cooperation in advancing the priorities set forth by Estonia and the presidential trio, and welcomed Secretaries General back to Tallinn together with the Speakers of their parliaments to the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments in the end of April.

Mr JAHILO discussed some practical matters and gave instructions for signing up for debate through the fully electronic system. The agenda of the Meeting was approved without any comments.

Session I: Presentation of the draft programme of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments

Mr JAHILO proceeded to present one of the most important items on the agenda – draft programme of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments (EUSC), which will take place on 23-24 April 2018 at the Conference Center of Hilton Tallinn Park Hotel.

Two main topics on the agenda of the EUSC are the Future of the European Union, and European Security and Defence. Before the thematical sessions, Mr Frans TIMMERMANS (tbc), First Vice-President of the European Commission, and Mr Antonio TAJANI (tbc), President of the European Parliament, will give keynote speeches of the opening session on the topic of their choosing. Each of the thematic sessions will start with three keynote speeches delivered by Speakers of different EU Parliaments, and will be followed by debate.

The discussion on the future of the European Union will concentrate on the wider trends within the Union, and consider the goals and ambitions of the member states regarding further cooperation in fields such as

social and economic affairs, migration, budgetary matters, and the future of the European Monetary Union. In addition to that, the Speakers will be able to share their thoughts on the main issues that will be on the EU agenda in 2018. It can be expected that the progression and results of the Brexit negotiations and its impact on the EU-27 will emerge as major subjects.

Mr JAHILO informed that the Estonian Presidency has updated the title of the second session (formerly 'European Security'), to add the word 'Defence'. In this session the Speakers will be invited to think about the internal and external dimensions of European security. Internally, the EU is challenged by criminal networks, the terrorist threat, cybercrime, as well as natural and man-made disasters. In the field of defence, the year of 2017 brought the establishment of important initiatives such as the European Defence Fund and PESCO. Mr JAHILO noted that the EU has made progress in bringing more security to its citizens, but several important questions about defence spending, EU-NATO cooperation and the link between internal and external security remain.

Secretaries General were advised that the dinner and cultural programme will take place at the Estonia Concert Hall at 20:00 on Monday, April 23. The EUSC will conclude with the Adoption of the Conclusions (which will be sent to Members States beforehand) and lunch on Tuesday, 24 April.

Three interventions followed the presentation.

Mr Claes MÅRTENSSON, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdagen, raised a question regarding the *Task Force on Subsidiarity and Proportionality*, chaired by Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission. Mr MÅRTENSSON suggested that the process through which members of parliaments had to be chosen for the Task Force was problematic since the time period prior to the COSAC Plenary meeting in Tallinn, where the decision had to be taken, was very short, and there was not enough time to discuss the selection procedure.

Ms Agnieszka KACZMARSKA, Secretary General of the Polish Sejm, said that she fully endorses the agenda that has been set forth by the Presidency and would like to put forward Mr Marek KUCHCIŃSKI, the Speaker of the Polish Sejm, to join the first session (Future of the EU) as a keynote speaker.

Mr Philippe DELIVET, Head of the Secretariat of the Committee on European Affairs of the French Senate, said that the issues on the agenda of the EU Speakers Conference are important, and as the French have been working on the topic of the future of the EU and issued several reports, they would also like to deliver a keynote speech. Mr DELIVET seconded to the comments made by Mr MÅRTENSSON on the need to get further clarifications about the formation of the Task Force chaired by Mr TIMMERMANS.

Presentation of the parliamentary dimension of the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency

Mr JAHILO called upon Ms Stefana KARASLAVOVA, Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, for a presentation on the parliamentary dimension of the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency. Ms KARASLAVOVA's presentation included two videos and outlined the central priorities of

the Bulgarian Presidency as follows: (1) European Perspective and Connectivity of the Western Balkans, (2) the future of Europe and of the young people – economic growth and social cohesion, (3) security and stability in a strong and united Europe, and (4) digital economy and skills for the future.

Ms KARASLAVOVA underlined that Bulgaria is going to hold six events of the parliamentary dimension of the presidency, one of them will be held in Brussels. They have set up a website <https://parleu2018bg.bg/en/> where all information about the parliamentary dimension of the Bulgarian presidency can be found. Bulgaria is thankful for being able to learn from the experiences of the Maltese, Slovakian, Dutch, and other Presidencies of the Council of the EU. Ms KARASLAVOVA concluded by saying that Bulgaria takes the role of the presidency as a great opportunity to be in the epicentre of the EU decision-making, and to prove that they are worthy members of the Union.

Session II: IPEX related issues

Mr JAHILO started the session on IPEX related issues by saying that one of the objectives of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU is to promote the exchange of information and best practices between the national parliaments. He maintained that electronic platforms like IPEX allow to exchange information in a more effective and open way, making the work of the parliaments more transparent and also enhancing transparency in the whole of the EU.

Mr Milan HODÁS, Director of the Parliamentary Institute of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, started his statement by saying that the Slovak Parliament has been in charge of the IPEX board since April 2017, and after the Speakers Conference in April 2018, Estonian Parliament will take over the Chairmanship of the IPEX board. Mr HODÁS claimed that the years of 2016 and 2017 have been a challenge for the Slovak National Council as they have held several interparliamentary conferences and organized several IPEX events, including board and working group meetings and the Annual National Correspondents Meeting.

Mr HODÁS thanked Luxembourg for their successful chairmanship of IPEX in 2016/2017 and thanked IPEX Board members who chaired the working groups for their active involvement and dedication in reaching the goals set by the IPEX Board.

Mr HODÁS informed the Secretaries General about two letters that the Slovak Presidency had received. One of them was from Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Estonia, in which he encouraged the Board to analyse and propose ways to interconnect COSAC webpage and IPEX platform. The Board also discussed a letter from Ms Birgit VON PFLUG from the German Bundestag, in which Ms VON PFLUG suggested that the IPEX website should be actively promoted as the platform for the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) for Europol.

Mr HODÁS advised that the Board agreed with both suggestions, and Mr Daniel GUSPAN, Secretary General of the Slovak Národná rada and IPEX Chair, has already sent out the letters. In his response, Mr Raivo AEG, Chair of the delegation of the Parliament of Estonia to the JPSG for Europol, expressed his

support for the idea that the IPEX platform could host the website of the Group, and hoped to receive positive feedback from the European Parliament as well.

Mr HODÁS stated that IPEX board in 2018/2019 will include Slovakia, Estonia, Austria, Bulgaria, Finland and the European Parliament, and concluded his remarks by saying that IPEX, as a platform for the mutual exchange of information between the national parliaments and the European Parliament has gone through many evolutions and developments since its start in 2000, but remains a very helpful and reliable instrument for interparliamentary information exchange and networking. He added that the IPEX Digital Strategy and the 3-year Work Programme show that IPEX is ready to take on new challenges, and encouraged future presidencies to further improve the platform.

Two discussants joined the debate on IPEX related issues.

Mr Claes MÅRTENSSON, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdagen, said that as one of the founding members of IPEX, Sweden considers the opportunities IPEX provides for exchange of information very important, and Swedish Riksdagen is contributing to IPEX by hosting IPEX Users Conference in March. Mr MÅRTENSSON expressed hope that representatives of all parliaments will be able to attend the event. He also noted that avoiding duplication is important, and he supports moving COSAC information to IPEX website.

Mr Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German Bundestag, thanked the Slovak Presidency for their work and reiterated the importance of IPEX as a platform for exchange of information between parliaments. Mr RISSE said that the idea to include all information about the JPSG on Europol to the IPEX platform is a useful one, and invited member states to support this initiative.

Mr JAHILO stated that the IPEX Annual Report 2017 and Conclusions are approved and thanked the Slovak Presidency for their successful work as the IPEX chair. Mr JAHILO promised that the Estonian Parliament will try hard to build on the good experience provided by Slovakia, and stated that during the Estonian Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, the Digital Strategy for IPEX and the IPEX Work Programme for 2017-2020 will be closely followed.

Session III: Future of the EU: organisation of debates in the parliaments

Mr Klaus WELLE, Secretary General of the European Parliament (EP), started his speech by recognizing the period of 1989-1991 as a watershed moment in European history, and argued that we are currently going through a similar time of change. Mr WELLE noted that while the 2004 expansion of the EU and NATO was broadly accepted, Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine suggest that this is no longer the case, and the EU's Eastern expansion is in a standstill. In the South, the whole Islamic world is in turmoil, be it in the form of civil war, heavily burdened societies or lack of organization, and the consequences in terms of terrorism and uncontrolled immigration are hitting our continent.

Mr WELLE also referred to the Icelandic financial crisis and Brexit, arguing that the EU is importing insecurity from the North, South, East, and West. The United States that has – largely to Europe’s benefit – been the leader of the global order since the end of World War II is no longer firmly in this position. The rise of populist parties in many EU member states contributes to some fundamental questions about how open or closed should the system be that we live in. Mr WELLE continued by posing several questions, for instance, should the EU be open internally, open to wider Europe, open globally, or closed? How could we protect an open system?

Mr WELLE said that when EU citizens are asked about what they want the Union to do, they increasingly say that the EU should be more active in providing security and fighting against crime. The EU has to realign with citizens’ priorities, but it is tricky as these undertakings are at the core of national sovereignty, and the EU was not created to embark on them.

Mr WELLE stated that the EU is one of the best legislative machines in the world, but it now also needs executive capacity. However, several questions remain about how should the EU countries work together to be the best provider of security. Should these initiatives involve all 27 member states, only the 19 Eurozone countries, or be optional? How to guarantee proper level of scrutiny both by the national parliaments and from the European parliament? Do we have European identity that is developed well enough to allow for the level of solidarity these initiatives require? Mr WELLE raised additional questions about how the EU could finance these initiatives, work out the priorities, and ensure that the decisions taken at the EU level will be implemented in member states.

Mr WELLE noted that in order to discuss these very issues, the EP has decided to invite all EU heads of state and government to the EP to discuss the future of Europe in open debates. The series started with the visit of the Prime Minister of Ireland; Prime Ministers of Portugal and Luxemburg, as well as the President of France will visit the EP in the coming months. The EP approaches these debates with an open mind and open spirit, and the discussions on the future of Europe will conclude on May 9, 2019 when an informal meeting of EU leaders will take place in Sibiu, Romania.

Before giving the floor to Mr Geert-Jan HAMILTON, Secretary General of the Senate of the Netherlands, Mr JAHILO noted that due to his retirement later this year, this is the last EU Secretaries General meeting for Mr HAMILTON and thanked him for his work and commitment throughout the years.

Mr HAMILTON started his statement by saying that Europe is today trying to rise from the crises it has been dealing with for several years. EU is confronted with insecurities globally, Brexit is still reverberating, and the debate on the future of Europe has many participants from the EU institutions and beyond. Mr HAMILTON contended that in both houses of the Dutch Parliament, the debate is very much going on, and he has noted that Dutch politicians are less interested in a general view or grand scenario’s for the future and tend to approach the debate in a more practical way.

Mr HAMILTON stressed that the endeavour on the part of Dutch politicians to regain trust of citizens and to strengthen European democracy has been going on since 2005, and among other things, the Senate

set up a website to inform the public about the scrutiny by the Senate of EU affairs. According to Mr HAMILTON, making the legislative process in European institutions more transparent and promoting timely publication of Council documents is an important goal for the Dutch Senate. This aim is shared by many other parliaments, which signed a letter to the European institutions calling for more transparency and openness.

In conclusion, Mr HAMILTON argued that over the last ten years, the European dimension of the work of the national parliaments has gained considerable impact, and the EU has managed to overcome a number of crises. Mr HAMILTON underlined the role of national parliaments and interparliamentary interaction in overcoming these crises, and expressed content that digital contacts among parliamentary staff have increased tremendously since the Lisbon Treaty. Mr HAMILTON argued that all this contributes to a better fabric of the EU, and any important decisions about the future of the EU presuppose broad support in the EP and national parliaments alike.

The keynote speeches were followed by six interventions.

Starting with Mr Mihaita CALIMENTE, Deputy Secretary General of the Romanian Senate, who said in his intervention that Romania is an enthusiastic promoter of the EU principles and solidarity, and it will continue to emphasize the need for concerted action by member states. Mr CALIMENTE argued that more has to be done in order to facilitate debate in the EU parliaments that offers tangible benefits, and national priorities need to be part of the future of Europe debate.

Ms Pernille DELEURAN, Head of the International Department of the Danish Folketinget, shared the Danish experience regarding the effort to engage citizens in the debate on EU-issues. Ms DELEURAN explained that instead of traditional parliamentary debates, the Folketinget holds citizen hearings that are based on the model of deliberative polling. Participating citizens are selected to represent different political parties, age groups and educational backgrounds. The hearings take place over weekends and take an entire day, during which participants will be divided into small groups to provide neutral environment for discussions among citizens, MPs and experts. Before the hearing, all participants receive an information package with neutral information on the issue.

Ms DELEURAN continued by saying that local media is often involved in these efforts, sometimes the hearing concludes with a debate of the leaders of the political parties which is broadcasted on national television. Mr DELEURAN suggested that a majority of participants have said that their knowledge on EU affairs increased considerably and they would take part in the project again. In order to encourage participation and allow for a more open debate, the event takes place outside of the premises of the parliament. In autumn 2018, the topic of the hearing will be the future of the EU.

Thereafter, Ms Marie-France HÉRIN, Director of the European Affairs Department of the French Assemblée Nationale, said that in June 2018, the French Parliament is planning to organize a round of debates with citizens to discuss the issue of EU's democratic deficit. Several ministers and MPs both from the coalition and opposition parties take part in organizing the event in an effort to bring the EU closer to

the citizens. Ms HÉRIN reiterated that involving local media is important, but the debates should be national, and as politically neutral as possible.

Mr Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German Bundestag, informed the Secretaries General about a resolution that was recently signed by the German and French parliaments to commemorate the Elysee Treaty that was concluded in 1963. Mr RISSE suggested that the resolution does not only mark the further development of the bilateral relationship of the two countries, but will bring important debates about the future of Europe, which might be particularly relevant for other member states in the run-up to the EU Speakers Conference.

Mr Philippe DELIVET, Head of the Secretariat of the Committee on European Affairs of the French Senate, reiterated that France wants to actively contribute to the debate about the future of the EU, and the French Senate has set up a special committee to deal with this issue. Mr DELIVET underlined that it is important that the EU is close to the citizens, faithful to its principles, follows the principle of subsidiarity, and holds parliamentary initiative in high regard.

Ms Vassiliki ANASTASSIADOU, Secretary General of the Cypriot Parliament, underlined that given the challenges the EU is facing, engaging citizens in the European project more actively is very important. Ms ANASTASSIADOU contended that due to Presidential elections on 28 January 2018, the Cypriot parliament suspended its work since mid-December, but the parliament is planning on organizing debates on EU topics that would involve and engage citizens.

In his response, Mr WELLE said that the efforts of national parliaments and the European Parliament are in line, and transparency – especially in the Council – is a key issue. Similarly to Denmark, the EP conducts a number of deliberative polls every month. The EP is also working on a citizen's app which will possibly be launched in summer 2018, and will give the citizens a toolbox to make it easier and more convenient to contribute to the work of the EP.

Finally, Mr HAMILTON expressed his content that there are so many good examples of how the discussion on the future of the EU takes place and engages citizens. Mr HAMILTON argued that there is an increasing awareness that pointing to Brussels as the 'bad guys' is not the right thing to do, and national ministers should be held accountable by the parliaments. Mr HAMILTON added that if ministers think that something should be decided at the EU level, they need to explain this to the people. Keeping up the discussion between national parliaments, including through the IPEX platform, is helpful and important.

Session IV: New technologies and digitalisation: opportunities and challenges

In the beginning of the session on new technologies and digitalization, Mr JAHILO gave a brief overview of the general trends of the digitalised environment, increasingly characterized by phenomena such as sharing economy, digital currencies, and block chain technology. Mr JAHILO introduced the Estonian electronic identity system that allows for different digital services such as submitting tax declarations,

receiving medial prescriptions, and voting in national and local elections. At the Estonian Parliament, public initiatives can be submitted electronically, and the Riigikogu is present on various social media platforms.

Mr JAHILO assured that public trust for digital solutions is high in Estonia, even though the country just recently overcame a rather severe security issue with the national ID card and has been a victim of massive cyber-attacks. Estonia hosted the world's largest and most advanced international cyber defence exercise, and actively looks for and fixes vulnerabilities, facing a challenge of preserving security and maintaining reasonable operating costs. Mr JAHILO added that breaches of ransomware into government key infrastructure halt important work processes and can cause considerable damage and confusion, and must therefore be taken very seriously.

The keynote speech was delivered by Ms Kadri KASKA, Senior Analyst of the Information System Authority of Estonia. Ms KASKA gave an overview of how Estonia goes about defending its digital society and ecosystem, arguing that building up more than 5000 public and private digital services that are available was possible thanks to Estonian governments which have encouraged these developments since the early 1990s. Ms KASKA suggested that as Estonia is a small country, providing digital services is a necessity, and today, more than fifty percent of all our services from the telecoms to the energy sector are critically dependent on ICT, meaning they cannot be substituted with a non-digital alternative.

Ms KASKA reiterated that the work for defending the digital way of life is vigorous and persistent, for instance, in 2017, the authorities discovered 1/3 more cyber incidents than in the year before that. The monitoring and detection mechanisms have been improved, and the society is more aware of cyber threats than it used to be. Ms KASKA reminded that during 2017, the world witnessed several severe cyber incidents, for example a crypto worm that took advantage of Windows operating system in 400 000 computers in more than 150 countries. Cyber hacks were a constant feature of the U.S. 2016 election, and after this precedent, European governments were much better prepared to avoid similar collusions. However, the picture remains complex and tracking the perpetrators extremely difficult.

According to Ms KASKA, the key to building resilience for digital society is building a culture of cybersecurity – making people understand the threats they face and understand that their actions are a core component in overcoming threats. Security cannot be seen as someone else's responsibility, exercising due diligence and good cyber hygiene brings considerable pay-off. Ms KASKA argued that it is important to keep investing in awareness and competence, work together with private sector and international partners – particularly in the EU and NATO – to build resilience.

In the debate that followed, seven delegates intervened.

Mr Marc VAN DER HULST, Secretary General of the Belgian House of Representatives, shared the Belgian Parliament's experience with a new platform for electronic documents. Mr VAN DER HULST said that since 2017, the parliamentary agenda is available on the internet, and not having to print out the documents (in two languages) saves a lot of resources and time, and ensures that the information is up-

to-date. Mr VAN DER HULST thanked countries which have given them very useful suggestions in setting up this new system that makes handling documents much easier.

Mr Matthew HAMLIN, Head of the Overseas Office of the United Kingdom House of Commons, recalled a cyber incident in 2017 in which there were attempts by outsiders to break into the the parliament's network. Mr HAMLIN explained that the main problem was that many users used very basic passwords, and there was a present danger that their accounts could be hacked. The decision was taken to temporarily suspend the parliamentary network, switch off the whole system, and attempt to make it less reliant on passwords. However, as Mr HAMLIN contended, not everything can be done in the 'back office', and users have an important role in ensuring the security of their data.

Thereafter, Mr Carsten U. LARSEN, Secretary General of the Danish Folketinget, emphasized the importance of updating systems, and stated that the Danish Parliament is conducting regular software updates that are implemented at the central level. Since it can take up to 2 hours, users are not always happy. Mr LARSEN reiterated the importance of increasing user awareness, adding that the MPs are a principle point of entry for cyber criminals. The Danish Folketinget is planning on conducting cyber security related trainings for all users.

Mr Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German Bundestag, said that the Bundestag had a very unpleasant experience with cyber-attacks in 2015. Mr RISSE echoed the idea that this is a question of culture, and it is likely that entirely avoiding such problems in the future is impossible. Mr RISSE ended by saying that the conflict between user convenience and security necessities seems to be never-ending.

Mr Konstantinos ATHANASIOU, Secretary General of the Greek Parliament, introduced to his colleagues the new electronic voting system at the Greek Parliament that comes together with paperless communication, digital submission of draft laws, and digital signature for staff and MPs. Mr ATHANASIOU proposed that since many of the challenges the parliaments face in the cyber domain are similar, it might be useful to establish a (permanent) system of exchange and cooperation between parliaments on issues related to cyber security.

Mr Albino AZEVEDO SOARES, Secretary General of the Portuguese House of Representatives, said that the Portuguese Parliament fits the definition of e-parliament and is open, transparent and accountable thanks to different ICT solutions. Mr AZEVEDO SOARES added that they actively use digital means of communication to engage with the society. Parliament's new website will be launched very soon, there are nine channels that can be used to follow plenary sessions as well as committee meetings.

In her response, Ms KASKA reiterated that parliaments are not immune to any cyber threats, and political parties as well need to become aware of their lucrative nature for cyber criminals. Mr KASKA added that using easy passwords is a major problem as hackers use automated processes to guess the passwords of different accounts. For this reason, two-way authentication should become the norm.



Ms KASKA also addressed a question posed by Mr Geert-Jan HAMILTON regarding international and criminal law with regard to cyber-crime. Ms KASKA said that fortunately we have not witnessed any cyber incidents that would have risen to a level that would define them as a use of force according to the international law. The main reason for that is that states intentionally operate below these thresholds. With regard to the criminal law, Mr KASKA said that the Council of Europe Convention of Cyber Crime is quite useful, but the problem lies in the procedural law as in most of the incidents, predator and target are in different countries, and we are highly dependent on mutual legal assistance across countries.

In the section of any other business, Mr Jiri UKLEIN, Secretary General of the Czech Senate congratulated Estonia on the successful organization of the event and on its upcoming centenary, and claimed that the Czech Republic will also celebrate several important birthdays in 2018 (including that of 100 years since the creation of Czechoslovakia), and this should be taken into account while scheduling bilateral meetings.

In the closing remarks, Mr Peep JAHILO thanked the keynote speakers and delegates for the constructive debate, and indicated that the photo and video materials will be made available on parleu2017.ee web page, on the Riigikogu Flickr account, and on YouTube.