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**CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES
(Strasbourg, 20-22 February 1992)**

**CONFÉRENCE DES PRÉSIDENTS DES ASSEMBLÉES
PARLEMENTAIRES EUROPÉENNES
(Strasbourg, 20-22 février 1992)**

Report of the second sitting held on 21 February 1992 at 3.00 pm

Compte-rendu de la deuxième séance tenue le 21 février 1992 à 15h00

Delegations are requested to submit their amendments to the Secretariat by 15 March 1992 at the latest

Les délégations sont priées d'envoyer leurs amendements au Secrétariat pour
le 15 mars 1992 au plus tard

The sitting was opened with Mrs Rita SÜSSMUTH, President of the German Bundestag, in the chair.

Mr Ilkka SUOMINEN, Speaker of the Finnish Eduskunta, referred to the farsighted pioneers of European co-operation who had realised that peace, prosperity and mutual understanding could only be guaranteed through the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council of Europe was now becoming a real pan-European organisation and every effort should be made to guarantee sufficient resources.

However, the climate of uncertainty and tension our continent is living in, must not be ignored. The Yugoslav crisis, the population movements, the situation of certain minorities, exacerbated nationalism and poverty illustrate further perils. A summit meeting at the level of the Council of Europe might be helpful to give the necessary political backing and provide formulae for eliminating those threats.

Although the CSCE is playing an important role in the new emerging Europe there seems to be a need to clarify the pan-European tasks of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe's experience and capacities should be used to its best and in the CSCE context it should co-ordinate the European contribution at least on the parliamentary level. The Finnish parliament was now also considering its application for membership to the European Communities on 16 to 18 March this year and in case of a positive vote the application would be handed in on 19 March.

Mr Suominen further considered that the areas in the immediate vicinity of Finland could be changed into a part of the continent which will benefit all parties concerned, in particular since it will take some time before Russia will be able to organise itself into a market economy with a genuine and stable democracy. Finland had 1,300 kilometres common border with Russia and was therefore committed to assisting its positive development both in economy and on the democratic path. The creation of an adequate stabilisation fund for the rouble would be a most appropriate step. Finland was also the most Baltic of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea and it was therefore natural to build good and warm relations with the newly-found neighbours. Assistance to the Baltic states should be not only material but by making our know-how available in various fields.

Since the economies of the Baltic states used to be part of the Soviet economy they find themselves today in a particularly difficult situation and face considerable competition from the Western market. The revival of the Russian economy would be in their interest as well as it is in the interest of us all. Expertise is needed and could be provided by the West without extensive costs.

As it has already been mentioned in this conference, Central and Eastern European countries show similarities but also large differences, each of them having a distinct national identity. Bilateral relations are therefore important. Although some tensions between different nationalities inside many of the countries persist, there is no doubt on their sincerity when they declare their wish to become true European democracies. All of us including the Council of Europe should be at their disposal.

M. Stefan SAVOV, Président de l'Assemblée Nationale de Bulgarie, souligne la pertinence et l'importance du thème choisi pour cette conférence. Ces valeurs sont indivisibles et sont d'ailleurs formulées dans des instruments internationaux tels que la Charte des Nations Unies, la Charte internationale des Droits de l'Homme, etc. La démocratie, avec des élections libres, le respect des droits de l'homme, est un préalable nécessaire pour toute politique étrangère orientée vers la paix et la sécurité. C'est une nécessité pour la Bulgarie et la démocratisation y est devenue irréversible.

L'orateur retrace les principales phases de ce processus qui a abouti fin 1990 à attribuer à l'opposition des postes-clef au sein du gouvernement.

La Constitution récemment adoptée n'a pas été signée par tous les députés en raison de ses défauts, mais la nouvelle répartition des sièges au sein de l'Assemblée nationale (110 sièges à l'union démocratique, 104 aux socialistes et 24 au mouvement de Droits et Libertés) est une garantie de sa stabilité et d'un progrès continu vers une société civile démocratique. Un programme ambitieux de réformes législatives politiques, économiques et sociales est actuellement en cours afin d'atteindre notamment à une renaissance économique et à la création d'emplois. Ces réformes se feront sans recours à la force, malgré la crise économique, l'augmentation du chômage, la misère, les tensions ethniques et les risques de réactivation de certains mouvements du passé.

La Bulgarie désire se joindre à la famille des Etats démocratiques et s'intégrer dans les structures européennes, notamment dans leur dimension parlementaire. Elle veut l'adhésion au Conseil de l'Europe et remplira toutes les exigences pour y participer et elle apportera son soutien aux activités des autres institutions internationales telles que la CSCE, l'Atlantique Nord, etc. pour la promotion de la paix et de la sécurité.

M. Hüsamettin CINDORUK, Président de la Grande Assemblée Nationale de Turquie, voit dans l'Assemblée d'aujourd'hui le miroir de l'évolution démocratique intervenue sur notre planète. Le désir de la démocratie est intense et s'étend; mais il reste toujours des obstacles sur cette voie: les forces communistes, le militarisme, le fondamentalisme, etc.

L'expérience de la Turquie montre bien que la transition vers la démocratie est toujours difficile et que les autres parlements libres ont un devoir d'aider à cette transition, et à la réalisation de certains objectifs, difficiles à mettre en place tels que des élections libres, la création de grands partis, etc. Le Conseil de l'Europe a également une contribution importante pour l'établissement d'institutions démocratiques.

Le Parlement turc a pris pour sa part deux initiatives: la création d'une union parlementaire de la région de la Mer Noire et l'organisation en avril 1992 d'une conférence à Ankara. La démocratie parlementaire doit devenir le système de référence appliqué dans tous nos pays et cet objectif ne sera pas atteint tant qu'il restera un seul parlement qui ne puisse s'exprimer librement.

Mr France BUCAR, President of the Parliament of Slovenia, greeted the participants on behalf of the Republic of Slovenia which had been invited to participate for the first time and was delighted to be able to contribute to European co-operation. The Republic of Slovenia was granted special guest status in February 1992. He appreciated the support the Council of Europe had given to his country in taking this step.

The Republic of Slovenia was a newly independent state. It had covered a lot of ground towards parliamentary democracy but numerous obstacles still remained to be surmounted.

Since the first multi-party elections, reforms had taken place gradually. The new constitution had all the characteristics of modern European constitutions.

The Republic of Slovenia deemed democracy necessary for survival. After its independence and international recognition, many tasks had to be fulfilled, most important of them being the new legislation which had to incorporate inter alia economic regulations. Currently, introduction of market economy was the primary goal.

The Republic of Slovenia desired to contribute to the creation of the new Europe and was seeking to work together with other European parliaments. During the process of its independence, several Western European states regretted that the Republic of Slovenia had to separate from Yugoslavia. For his country independence, however, was a precondition for joining the rest of Europe.

To conclude, Mr Bucar said that the Republic of Slovenia was a small country but faced problems of very great size similar to those of the other Eastern European countries. The philosophy of the new Europe was based on quantity and quality. Mr Bucar said that the Republic of Slovenia, although being a small state had the ability to co-operate with the rest of Europe.

Mr Alfred GOMOLKA, President of the German Bundesrat, underlined the unique events that Germany had experienced during recent years. Rapid changes, increasing insecurity amongst the people necessitated strong democratic structures. In order to build confidence in the state, citizens had to feel committed to the work of their parliaments and to seek to participate in their countries' political activities. Co-operation between European parliaments could provide support for such participation.

Mr Gomolka said that federalism was an organising principle and it reinforced democracy. Furthermore, it promoted citizens' participation and allowed control of executive powers. Federalism helped to make government activities transparent and thus coincided more with the principles of democracy than a unitary state.

The German experience has shown that while the regional identity had to be taken into account, strong central structures were also needed. At a time of increasing nationalist and separatist movements, higher level administration was able to draw up common policies. Federal structures were, at the same time, able to accommodate ethnic diversity and to care for the wider interests of the country.

Mr Gomolka was impressed by Mr Dubcek's statement earlier today encouraging the European states to be satisfied with today instead of seeking to return to yesterday. Mr Gomolka added that the European states should set their sights on the Europe of tomorrow.

M. Alexandru BIRLADEANU, Président du Sénat de Roumanie, part de l'idée que les participants sont tous au courant de l'évolution récente de la situation dans son pays. L'effondrement du communisme dans les pays d'Europe centrale et de l'Est représente le triomphe de la démocratie pluraliste. Il s'agit du grand message dont est porteur notre siècle. Pour ce qui est de la Roumanie, il ne s'agit pas d'une découverte de la démocratie, mais bien d'un retour. A l'heure actuelle, les autorités roumaines doivent se confronter non seulement avec la dimension politique des événements, mais également avec la tâche très ardue de jeter les fondements économiques de la société. En effet, tout le monde sait que le facteur économique peut influencer, voire gêner, la politique.

M. Birladeanu déclare que les Roumains sont au courant que les pays occidentaux les observent. Eux aussi pour leur part sont des observateurs attentifs des sociétés occidentales. Ils constatent donc que dans ces dernières, les problèmes qui demeurent sans solution, sont nombreux. Toutefois, la réponse à l'ensemble des problèmes que connaissent les sociétés, tant de l'Europe occidentale que de l'Europe orientale, réside dans la démocratie elle-même. Les Roumains savent que la démocratie n'est pas le paradis, mais ils sont conscients qu'elle les aide à échapper à l'enfer. Les restrictions économiques que le passage au libre marché impose au peuple roumain, sont malheureuses: il est dommage en effet que de larges couches sociales soient amenées à penser que la transition vers la démocratie aille de paire avec la crise économique.

La Roumanie demande à l'Occident la mise en oeuvre d'une politique basée sur la coopération économique et sur les investissements. Elle demande une intégration plus rapide des pays ex-communistes. En effet, de graves risques se manifestent un peu partout dans l'Europe centrale et orientale. Le chauvinisme est un virus qui ne connaît pas de frontières et qui peut engendrer des conséquences néfastes.

M. Birladeanu se dit convaincu que la Conférence des Présidents de l'Assemblée parlementaire européenne facilitera la mise en exergue d'une conscience fondée sur une foi commune dans le pluralisme démocratique.

M. Jacques GENTON, Président de la délégation parlementaire pour les Communautés européennes de Sénat français, remplace Mme Süßmuth au fauteuil présidentiel.

Mr Harold WALKER, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, thanked the President and the Council of Europe for hosting the conference. He conveyed the regrets of the Speaker of the House of Commons, whose responsibilities at Westminster made it impossible for him to be present.

Although the Speaker and his Deputy were required to be absolutely impartial regarding political parties and any matter that might come before parliament, he could however express a view about multiparty parliamentary democracy. He saw it as the best available system for giving expression to the many different interests in society. The revival of multiparty democracy in so many countries gave us all reason to reflect again and to reaffirm what were the essential elements of parliamentary democracy.

First and foremost there was the need for parliaments to be free institutions. The essential freedom of speech in parliament meant that members might raise any matter that might affect the rights of citizens or wider issues such as the development of European institutions and the challenges of the post-cold war world.

Another key aspect of parliamentary democracy was the ability it gave to individual parliamentarians and political parties to scrutinise, test and criticise the activities of the government of the day. At Westminster and in virtually all other parliaments, committees provided additional mechanisms for inquiring into the performance not only of ministers but of the officials who acted in their name. Perhaps of over-riding importance in parliamentary democracies was the knowledge that governments had no inalienable right to govern. Nothing should temper the actions of a government more than the knowledge that those who elected it might one day throw it out.

Mr Walker pointed out that the older democracies had no cause to be complacent about their institutions. Some parliaments had not been fully democratic for so very long. Nor did they have cause to be entirely satisfied with the way in which their modern democratically elected parliaments did their work. He stressed that in their composition parliaments should reflect the societies which they served. Along with the initial wave of euphoria which swept the countries where old undemocratic regimes had disintegrated, went high expectations about what democratic institutions might achieve. Democracy by itself, however, could not remove political and economic difficulties. While democratic parliaments might not be "efficient", their other virtues far outweighed that apparent disadvantage. Parliaments were free institutions first, and efficient institutions second. Gatherings like the present conference provided presiding officers with a valuable chance to exchange experiences.

As far as the task of speakers was concerned, Mr Walker felt that it should not be their purpose to seek popularity. No greater duty lay on the shoulders of the Speaker of a parliamentary assembly than his duty to guarantee all members of the assembly a fair hearing, however unpopular or even outrageous their views. There was no single ideal model of parliamentary democracy and no parliament should seek to impose its individual working methods on others.

The British Parliament had established co-operation with a number of parliaments of Eastern and Central Europe. Bilateral contacts had been too numerous to mention. It was looking forward to more such professional interchanges in the future. As to the parliamentary dimension of European co-operation and integration, he realised that some aspects of this issue were acutely controversial and would remain so. However, in the House of Commons the awareness of European issues had constantly grown. No politician in the UK or anywhere else in Europe could any longer afford to regard European issues as an arcane specialised academic subject. It was up to all parliamentarians to discuss ways in which they might usefully work together.

Mr Bronislovas Juozas KUZMICKAS, Vice-President of the Supreme Council of Lithuania, thanked the President for the invitation extended to his parliament to attend the conference. Since Lithuania had regained independence, the Supreme Council and the government had been working together intensively to achieve a number of closely interrelated aims, such as the protection and the re-establishment of Lithuania as an independent state and the abolition of the remnants of the occupation. Furthermore, they had carried out deep reforms in economy, finance, justice and education, necessary to enable the transition from a command to market economy, from a closed to an open society and the insurance of the conformity of Lithuanian law with standards

of protection of human rights based on European norms and international treaties. Not only politicians but also the vast majority of the population was eagerly waiting to know in what kind of society they were going to live in the near future. Guidelines for the democratic development of the country were being worked out. On 15 March 1992 a public discussion on the draft for the new constitution would start. It would be submitted to parliament for final consideration. The democratic development process however did not only depend on legislation but also on its successful implementation. In this area, Lithuania was facing some problems. It often happened that new laws had to be amended or supplemented. New laws had not always been accompanied by sufficient instructions for implementation.

In several localities the implementation of new laws had been impeded by former Soviet officials. Those who had recently lost power had not lost all hope of recuperating it. In these circumstances the withdrawal of foreign troops was a most imperative need. In the new state the armed forces should protect the country's independence, political pluralism and freedom of opinion. The dissolution of three local councils in September 1991 had been interpreted in certain circles as if it were directed against ethnic minorities. This criticism, launched in a former Soviet propaganda style, was unjustified. In the provisional basic law of Lithuania the protection of human rights was based on the relevant European and international standards, notably with regard to the protection of ethnic minorities. Mr Kuzmickas said in the preparation of new laws the help of Western experts was greatly appreciated. Lithuania would bring its legislation in line with Western European standards. In this respect it was important to note that at its first meeting in January 1992 the Baltic Assembly had recommended the general principles on which a common Baltic market should be based.

He concluded by expressing the conviction that the Council of Europe and other European organisations would adopt a stronger stance on the involvement of the Baltic states in the process of European integration and engage more effectively in the solution of regional tensions and conflicts.

M. Massimo ROSSINI, Représentant du Grand Conseil Général de la République de Saint-Marin, tout en s'exprimant au nom d'un Etat de petite taille, qui ne saurait se mesurer avec les grands pays, estime cependant avoir un point de vue original à faire valoir. L'histoire des institutions de Saint-Marin s'est caractérisée par la vaste participation des citoyens, la collégialité, et le jugement du peuple. La démocratie parlementaire y a développé des formes particulières et uniques de gestion politique. Saint-Marin est aujourd'hui présent sur la scène internationale, au Conseil de l'Europe, à la CSCE et aux Nations-Unies. Cela n'a de sens que dans la perspective d'une complémentarité mondiale. Les occasions de rencontres comme celle d'aujourd'hui doivent servir à mieux connaître les réalités. La représentation parlementaire qui caractérise des démocraties européennes peut inspirer d'autres pays. Il souligne qu'il s'agit d'inspirer - et non d'étouffer - en respectant les traditions et l'histoire.

Pour que les gouvernements soient stables il faut une démocratie pluraliste et la participation aux décisions du plus grand nombre de représentants possible. Pour cela le choix des représentants doit être fondé sur une connaissance des réalités et des problèmes.

Cela n'est possible que si un flux continu d'informations honnêtes, vraies, sert de base au jugement du parlement.

Disposer de données vraies est donc la condition pour la démocratie parlementaire et un parlement est démocratique lorsqu'il peut garantir ce flux d'informations.

La constitution d'un parlement supra-national devra tenir compte des diversités existantes et respecter les informations venant des différents parlements.

Aussi l'orateur est-il favorable aux rencontres comme celle d'aujourd'hui et se déclare prêt à les accueillir. Il est important que les parlementaires puissent se rencontrer plus souvent. Il espère que l'Europe parviendra à un nouvel équilibre dans le respect de l'identité de chacun et la participation des citoyens à la gestion des affaires publiques.

M. José LABORDA MARTIN, Président du Sénat de l'Espagne, craint une certaine confusion, notamment au sein de l'opinion publique, dans le fait de traiter dans cette même conférence, à la fois des nouveaux problèmes rencontrés par les vieilles démocraties et des problèmes auxquels doivent faire face les nouvelles démocraties. Ces problèmes sont souvent similaires mais peuvent aussi être différents: rôle des parlements, des partis politiques, décentralisation d'une part et d'autre part rôle du parlement dans la transition vers la démocratie, fragmentation territoriale, etc.

Un effort de rationalisation s'impose qui doit consister à garder à l'esprit, pour bâtir la démocratie, les principes mêmes de la construction européenne, ceux-là mêmes qui ont à l'époque mené à la création du Conseil de l'Europe et de la Communauté européenne. Bâtir la démocratie demande d'abandonner l'obsession des guerres du passé et de rechercher la réconciliation. Le passé appartient aux historiens et il faut l'expurger du débat parlementaire. La démocratie se construit via les citoyens et les partis politiques qui doivent se fédérer au niveau européen et coopérer entre eux.

Cette obligation de coopération joue pour les parlements entre eux et avec les gouvernements au niveau européen également. Le fédéralisme aide à asseoir la démocratie comme l'a souligné le Président du Bundesrat, M. Gomolka; et ainsi en Espagne, 17 parlements régionaux viennent s'ajouter au parlement national.

La démocratie, c'est aussi le strict respect de la constitution qui interdit toute discrimination, car à la base de la démocratie parlementaire on trouve l'égalité de tous les hommes et des citoyens. Ainsi, on aboutira à l'abolition des frontières, et on mettra fin à la logique des conflits nationaux.

Les mots d'ordre doivent être la participation, la tolérance et la règle de la majorité; et c'est là la seule possibilité pour la construction d'une Europe de la paix et de la solidarité.

Mr Alexis GALANOS, President of the Cyprus House of Representatives, particularly welcomed his colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe and stressed that Europe was now synonymous with democracy. However certain problems remained and a new equilibrium had to be found to replace the old equilibrium of the cold war.

Economic assistance had continuously to be kept alive through practical assistance to all those countries in need. Human rights and minority issues also caused concern and one had to remain vigilant. The recent events in Yugoslavia should be a warning to all. Europe had to be

prepared for a future comprising countries which were big and small, rich and poor. The destination was clear but the ways and means to reach it had to be considered cautiously. Increasing democracy meant increasing the role of parliaments and in particular direct representation.

Referring to the CSCE Assembly he expressed the opinion that it was complementary to but not competitive with the Council of Europe. The latter now played a pivotal role in a pan-European approach where there was no place for double standards or any type of aggression.

Without wanting to enter into polemics, he recalled that his country was the last divided state in Europe which had been aggressed and where human rights had been violated. Europe as a whole, and all national parliaments had a responsibility to help solving this issue; for our children should live in a united Europe in the best tradition of this continent. Our own house had first to be put in order to achieve world peace.

Mr August CHELKOWSKI, President of the Polish Senate, recalled that for a long 50 years, parliamentary democracy and participation in European structures had been a remote dream for his countrymen. They had been victims of the Yalta system that had divided Europe, leaving its central part as prey to the Communist system. The struggle waged by Solidarnosc smashed the Iron Curtain and made free elections possible.

To participate in European co-operation it was now indispensable to consolidate these achievements. Although his country was on the way to market economy, the change was proceeding in an unfavourable external context. Many former economic links were ruptured and searching for new markets turned out to be a formidable task. The debts incurred by the Communists added to the burden of the country.

Much had already been achieved: 70% of trade, 50% of services and 20% of industry had been privatised. These changes required not only education but also initiative and entrepreneurship. Taking into account that in the 70's and 80's about 1 million people emigrated from Poland it was difficult to make up for such a drain rapidly. Many social groups perceived the market mechanisms more as a threat to their current interests than a chance for improving their standard of living and the farmers demanded that the state protect them against competition from abroad. Workers of former state plants had to give up certain privileges and accept a dramatic drop in income or even the loss of their jobs. Over 2 million people were faced with possible redundancy and this was used by groups engaged in demagoguery and populist rhetorics.

The economic reforms had therefore to be complemented by a social safety net covering especially those who were most defenceless with regard to market laws. Such social problems were also present in other post-Communist countries including the Eastern part of Germany which had already become part of the European Community. The awareness by the Western public of these difficulties and of the transformation already under way was a prerequisite for mutual co-operation.

Mr Joseph BIEDERMANN, Vice-President of the Liechtenstein Landstag, said that he appreciated this valuable exchange of views and the friendly discussion taking place in this conference and supported wholeheartedly the efforts of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their quest for democracy.

He pointed out that Liechtenstein was a very small country and could only contribute little to the economic rebuilding of the countries concerned. The members of parliament of his country were not full-time politicians and could therefore not always meet expectations, however he was grateful to the Council of Europe and the CSCE which had enabled Liechtenstein to play an active role. His country would contribute as much as it could to the multilateral structures which had been set up and he hoped that the other European states would not be disappointed. Liechtenstein was a mixture between monarchy and democracy with highly developed rights for the citizen. They were thinking in regional terms and acting on a local level.