

## **Opening Speech by the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you in Athens for the 51<sup>st</sup> COSAC Meeting, the third organized in our country.

This conference is taking place at a crucial time for the EU.

A few weeks after the European elections in May, we have the opportunity, as representatives of national parliaments and the European Parliament, as representatives of the peoples of Europe, to exchange views regarding the outcome of the elections and to think about the future of Europe, as well as the role of Parliaments in the European construction.

The signs were already visible prior to the elections.

The trust of the citizens in the European Union has fallen to an unprecedented low. The percentage of Europeans who claim not to trust the EU has more than doubled since 2007, i.e. since the beginning of the global financial crisis of 2008 – 2009, reaching 60%. The outcome of the EU elections, marked by the rise of radical right and left wing parties, reflects a tendency towards euroscepticism and emphatically projects the pressing call of society to connect politics with the needs of the citizens anew.

Against the “clamorous” declarations of the populist forces, at European and mainly national level, the answer should be to focus on economic growth, and, in particular, on employment and growth, as well as on a strong leadership with a clear vision, goals and programmes.

The protracted period of recession and austerity measures has induced not only fatigue and reservations to the citizens towards Europe, but disappointment and indignation as well.

This does not mean that we should cancel out everything that is positive about the EU, especially in the long-standing course of its members.

The role of national parliaments in this endeavour is decisive, ladies and gentlemen colleagues.

Whether we want to or not, we are, as national parliamentarians, the ones who tackle along with the citizens their daily problems, we are the ones who listen to and interpret their claims and needs and it is us who have the duty to convey the latter in the clearest way possible to the national governments and the European institutions. At the same time, it is us who are called upon to remind the citizens of the added value of the work done on a European level and to draw attention to the significance of the European issues, which are, at the end of the day, also national issues.

The Treaty of Lisbon has introduced very important regulations regarding the role of parliaments. There are possibilities of active

engagement in the legislative process, always in the framework of the provisions of the Treaty, and in the implementation of European legislation. The cooperation of the national parliaments with the European Parliament can be fruitful, whether it is official or unofficial. Recent initiatives for informal cooperation demonstrate this, as reflected in the answers of the parliaments in the bi-annual report of the COSAC drafted by the Greek presidency. It is important that we overcome any syndromes of competitiveness or primacy that may exist.

The issue here is not to raise a yellow card and block legislative initiatives by the European institutions, nor is it to reduce the role of national parliaments to the mere act of ratifying.

We are all elected representatives of the peoples of Europe and as such we have received the mandate to work and to cooperate for the production of effective policies benefiting our citizens.

The parliamentary dimension of the Greek presidency is concluding with the COSAC Conference, following the election of the new European Parliament. Greece is now passing the baton of the Presidency to neighbouring Italy, a country with strong historical, cultural and political ties to our own.

During the Italian presidency the new composition of the European institutions will be established. Before this procedure is completed and with the review of the Europe 2020 policy in mind, as

parliaments, we will have an excellent opportunity to define and contribute in a coordinated manner our input to the European institutions for the future of the European Union.

I wish every success to the work of the Conference!