

Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)

Vienna, 11 - 12 October 2018

Presidency Summary

Opening session

At the Interparliamentary CFSP/CSDP Conference on 11 and 12 October 2018, issues such as the humanitarian situation in Syria and the enlargement process in the Western Balkans were on the agenda in three working sessions, along with other issues, such as security, migration and the protection of the EU's external borders. Three workshops dealt with the future of the nuclear agreement with Iran subsequent to the US withdrawal, facilitating military mobility within PESCO and the role of the OSCE as an important partner in the East-West dialogue.

In his welcoming address, **President of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotka** called for the EU to position itself more effectively on the global political stage. To this end, the unanimity principle for certain areas should be reconsidered. In migration policy, it is necessary to recalibrate the EU's partnership with Africa in order to place it on equal footing. He also underlined the central importance of the Western Balkan countries for the "peace project Europe", but also stated that accession must not take place "on the cheap". The Austrian parliament offers assistance to help integrate the region more closely into the EU, for example by organising democracy workshops in Montenegro and Kosovo* or by setting up a planned scholarship programme for employees of parliamentary administrations.

President of the Austrian Federal Council Inge Posch-Gruska set forth that it was the EU's responsibility to ensure a balance between social and economic aspects. Alluding to the Austrian government's motto for the Council Presidency, "A Europe that Protects", she emphasised that although citizens' need for security must not be overlooked, such efforts must also include social protections and safeguards for prosperity. Maintaining security, stability and peace, not only in the EU, but also in the European neighbourhood is a shared challenge, which necessitates a viable Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy, she said.

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Austrian National Council Andreas Schieder called for development cooperation with Africa to be placed on a new, more equal footing in order to put an end to exploitation and establish fair relations between Europe and Africa in the spirit of a new North-South relationship. The question of migration is not primarily about further expanding the "Fortress Europe". Improving the humanitarian situation in Syria is essential in this context as well. Moreover, he advocated an inclusive dialogue with the candidate countries of the Western Balkans.

Chair of the Defence Committee of the Austrian National Council Reinhard Eugen Bösch called for increased cooperation with the migrants' countries of origin and for a holistic European approach that would efficiently merge military and civilian instruments, cover all migration routes, be based on compliance with international law and uphold European values. Such an approach would protect EU citizens, as well as those who have decided to migrate. Combating human smuggling is of particular importance in this context.

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, who attended the opening session via video, reiterated the EU's commitment to consolidating the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. She characterised the process as a great opportunity for the region, especially as the three states currently holding the trio presidency, namely Bulgaria, Austria and Romania, were close to the region and had a special interest in integrating the Western Balkans.

Session 1

The first working session focused on “**Security, Migration and External Border Management**”. Three keynote speakers provided impetus for the subsequent debate on the challenges posed to Europe by migration and flight movements.

Secretary General of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence Wolfgang Baumann emphasised the Austrian model of cooperation between civil and military authorities in border security, which has proven to be flexible and cost-effective. A loss of control at the border as in 2015 must not be allowed to happen again, he said. Good border management must guarantee security and at the same time give refugees the opportunity to apply for asylum and to avail themselves of regular procedures. In the future, it is important to contribute to stabilising the Western Balkans and to guarantee the protection of the EU's external borders on the Mediterranean. The planned increase of FRONTEX is a commendable decision, he said.

Deputy Executive Director of FRONTEX, the European Agency for Border and Coast Guard, Berndt Körner presented his institution and described its remit, which has evolved rapidly since October 2016 and has been equipped with additional staff and expanded functions. The Schengen area can only function if the protection of the external borders can be guaranteed as well. FRONTEX is responsible for the operational tasks of border management, as well as for risk analyses and cooperation with third countries. FRONTEX sees CFSP actors as important partners; moreover, the agency is undergoing a significant expansion of its capacities and sees itself as an integral part of the CFSP. Consequently, Mr. Körner welcomed the CFSP and CSDP's increased focus on the issues of migration and border protection.

Melita H. Sunjic, a long-time UNHCR staff member and current head of *Transcultural Campaigning*, called on politicians to find more nuanced answers to complex questions and put forward seven hypotheses. Border closures, as a means of migration management do not reduce migratory pressures, quite the opposite, just as more dams increase water pressure during flooding. The closer migrants are to Europe, the more they will risk in order to reach their destination. Moreover, Europe needs separate systems to manage economic migration on the one hand, and flight movements on the other. Moreover, it would be cheaper and safer for everyone if refugees in the countries of first asylum were properly accommodated. There was a need for fast-track asylum procedures and the rapid repatriation of those not entitled to protection. Traffickers must be stopped, she stated, adding that in some cases the necessary information on trafficking was available on social media. She concluded by emphasising that borders must of course be protected, but not closed to those in need of protection, as otherwise Europe may be in danger of losing its soul.

The **interventions in the subsequent debate** highlighted the struggle for a unified European position. There was a broad consensus that the issue would continue to dominate the discourse in the next several years. Unilateral action on the national level must be avoided, and only a united front could provide the right answers on the international level. There were calls for Europe to combat the causes of flight, which included not only political instability but also climate change. The expansion of FRONTEX, the further development of the Dublin system and the role of a common European foreign policy were addressed. A variety of positions could be heard despite the general recognition of the need for a common European stance. Sea rescue was referred to as a humanitarian duty, but also acknowledged as an incentive for smuggling.

Session 2

The second working session focused on the **European contribution to improving the political and humanitarian situation in Syria**. The fighting in Syria, ongoing already for over seven years, and its devastating effects have triggered one of the worst humanitarian crises since the Second World War, said **Andreas Schieder, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Austrian National Council**. He called on the international community to support the work of the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and for increased European efforts to prevent a possible disaster in the Idlib region. Three keynote speakers provided food for thought for the subsequent debate.

For Secretary General of the European External Action Service (EEAS) Helga Schmid, the focus has been on a military rather than a political solution for far too long. From the outset, the EU has been committed and has provided assistance at many levels, for example through the "EU Strategy for Syria" from April 2017. As a specific measure, Ms. Schmid emphasised the promotion of women's networks. An important aspect was also the support of the neighbouring countries Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, which have played a key role in taking in refugees. Ms. Schmid insisted that only a political approach would lead to a viable solution. The convening of a constitutional committee would be an important step towards a unified, free and inclusive Syria, she said.

Jean-Louis de Brouwer, Director for Europe, Eastern Neighbourhood and the Middle East in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, focused on the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis. The European Union plays a key role in this area and is the largest donor, earmarking a total of € 5.5 billion for various actions since the beginning of the crisis. The situation remains dramatic, however, with some 13.1 million people in need of humanitarian aid, almost 3 million of whom live in areas difficult for relief organisations to access. It is now crucial to develop sustainable approaches to humanitarian aid and educational opportunities. One challenge that has arisen in recent months is the spontaneous return of 700,000 internally displaced people who need humanitarian assistance. Neighbouring countries, which have taken in the majority of the refugees, have also received considerable funding. Turkey alone has 3.9 million Syrians, the highest number of refugees in the world.

Salam Kawakibi, political scientist and Executive Director of the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies in Paris, called on the international community to deny support to dictatorships, as dictatorships only achieve apparent stability and do not tackle the root causes of the problems. He called on the EU and the international community to match their words with deeds. However, as long as the most important global political actors continue to pursue diverging interests, there will be no political solution in sight. He pointed to the Syrian government's "Decree No. 10", which has more or less expropriated the refugees, thereby preventing Syrians from returning and thus continuing the demographic shift initiated by President Assad. It is precisely because so many actors are involved in Syria that he found it regrettable that there was no international response to Syria's recent statement saying that the crisis had brought about "a healthy and homogeneous society"; Mr. Kawakibi also pointed out that the situation was reminiscent of 1930s Europe.

The **subsequent debate** focused on the question of EU involvement in the reconstruction of the country and the fear that other regional powers, such as Russia, China and Iran, would step in to fill the void should there be a lack of EU involvement. A common tenor was the desire for the European Union to take a strong, common position.

Session 3

The **EU enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans** was the focus of the third working session and was the final issue on the agenda. Three keynote speakers launched a subsequent debate in which there was no doubt as to the pivotal importance of integrating the candidate countries of South East Europe into the EU to ensure stability in the region and in Europe. There is a new focus on the strategic significance of the enlargement perspective, stressed David McAllister, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, in his introductory remarks.

Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl stressed that the Western Balkans were part of Europe and should therefore be referred to as South East Europe. The future of this region lies within the EU, and the EU cannot be complete without its integration. However, the challenges posed by the accession process are great. She said that the emigration of young people was particularly problematic, as well as the continued preference given to ethnicity over achievement. It is important to create a meritocracy, promote the establishment of the principle of citizenship and fight corruption. The current momentum must be exploited, especially as EU enlargement urgently needs to achieve a breakthrough in South East Europe. The key to this lies in political engagement. The countries must accept Europe's outstretched hand and achieve regional reconciliation in order to overcome the obstacles of the past.

Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia of the European External Action Service Thomas Mayr-Harting also stressed that the new momentum must now be seized. It is in the EU's interest to extend its area of stability and peace to the Western Balkans. The agreement between Skopje and Athens to settle the name dispute is a key moment for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and should be signed quickly so that the country does not miss out on an opportunity that may not come around again for a long time. A future agreement between Belgrade and Pristina must lead to full recognition of Kosovo* by Serbia. Despite undeniable progress, it is incumbent on Montenegro to intensify its reform efforts. Bosnia-Herzegovina has already produced some positive surprises in the past, and now the hope is that the government can be formed quickly after the elections. In Kosovo*, it is key for all political camps to participate in the dialogue with Belgrade. Combating corruption and further expanding the rule of law are top priorities in all of the countries of the Western Balkans; accession in 2025 remains an ambitious goal, he stated.

Theresa Töglhofer from the Alfred von Oppenheim Centre for European Policy Studies, highlighted a new urgency in the accession process in light of the growing dissatisfaction as well as the hopelessness and a lack of prospects among the people of the region. The prospect of accession is just as relevant for the region today as it was two decades ago, but enlargement now seems to be less within reach, she said. This is due on the one hand to more stringent requirements on the part of the EU, and on the other hand, to growing scepticism about enlargement among the people, who have not perceived any positive changes in many key areas in the last 18 years. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on Europe to link progress in the accession process to fulfilment of the accession criteria and not to give stability and geopolitical considerations precedence over political reforms. At the same time, however, candidate countries that implement reforms must not be denied the ability to take the next step in the accession process.

The basic tenor prevailing in the **subsequent discussion** was that the Western Balkans are part of Europe; there can be no stability in Europe without stability in the Western Balkans. Consequently, maintaining the prospect of accession is essential. Many expressed the view that powers such as Russia, China or Turkey might otherwise gain influence in the region; there is a favourable window of opportunity at the moment that must be seized.

Workshop A

In a workshop moderated by **Member of European Parliament Ana Gomes**, participants debated the future of the nuclear agreement with Iran after the US's withdrawal. **Stephan Klement, Special Advisor of the Iran Task Force of the European External Action Service**, opened the session by highlighting the security and economic components of the agreement, which is based on a unified and joint initiative. Since its entry into force in 2016, there have been numerous reports detailing its implementation in Iran. However, it is important to bear in mind that the agreement only represents a basis on which to intensify cooperation with the EU as mediator, despite the US's withdrawal. **Independent political analyst Cornelius Adebahr of Carnegie Europe** said that the US withdrawal has severely weakened the agreement, but also demonstrated Europe's unity and flexibility and consolidated the position of the EU as a strong and coherent player. A further challenge will be to strengthen regional cooperation on the one hand and to expand economic capacities on the other, in order to counteract disintegration within Iran and confrontations within the region, and to facilitate further agreements with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the future.

Workshop B

At a workshop moderated by **Member of European Parliament Fabio Massimo Castaldo**, participants discussed facilitating military mobility within the framework of PESCO. **EEAS Deputy Secretary General Pedro Serrano** gave an overview of the different activities at EU level from PESCO projects to the European Commission's Action Plan. He stressed the need to promote more hybrid projects in the context of military mobility, i.e. enabling the military use of civilian infrastructure. **Margriet Drent, Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael**, outlined the links between activities at NATO level, Member State level, within PESCOs, the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the European Commission. In particular, she presented the PESCO military mobility project, which is driven by Member States and provides the momentum for further development.

Workshop C

In a workshop moderated by **Member of European Parliament Ioan Mircea Pascu**, the participants discussed the OSCE's role as an important partner in the East-West dialogue. **President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly George Tsereteli** began his remarks by stressing the importance of this organisation as it promotes universal values and has made a historical contribution to overcoming the division of Europe. Its consensus-based approach enables dialogue on equal footing. The OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly play an important role in these activities, as do its many field activities, particularly in the framework of international election observation missions. **Ambassador Christian Strohal, former Special Representative of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship**, also reaffirmed the importance of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue. He acknowledged the development of mechanisms that enable a continuous and hitherto uninterrupted dialogue between the USA and Russia at the same table as a remarkable achievement of the OSCE. He also pointed to progress in EU-OSCE relations, stressing that the EU is already speaking with one voice at the weekly meetings in Vienna. Now it is essential to breathe life into a recently signed memorandum between the European Commission and the OSCE Secretariat by taking concrete measures, he said.