

Presidency Conclusions

Athens- May 24, 2003

A. Preliminary remarks

1. The regular annual Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union and the European Parliament took place at the seat of the Hellenic Parliament on May 23 and 24 2003. From the outset, the Speakers of the acceding countries as well as the candidate countries were invited to participate in the Conference, whom the Presidency, on behalf of all the Member States of the Union, welcomes and congratulates.

2. The general subject of the Conference "Europe evolving" was approached through two specific topics: "The European Parliaments and the Convention on the Future of Europe" and "The Role of the European Parliaments in an Enlarged Europe: the institutional and political dimension". In his introductory speech, the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Mr. Apostolos Kaklamanis pointed out that the European Union is at a historic junction in the face of world challenges and laid down his concerns regarding its reform and enlargement.

3. The Speaker of the French National Assembly Mr. Jean-Louis Debré thoroughly analysed the multi-faceted role of the National Parliaments in the context of the Convention and in other fora and emphasised the importance of redefining the aforementioned role in an enlarged Europe. The Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament Dr. Szili stressed the need to improve the existing procedures of the European Union instead of creating new institutional bodies. The Speaker of the European Parliament Mr. Cox reviewed the role of the Parliaments in the European and world system of governance and suggested concrete steps to improve the cooperation between the respective National Parliaments and the European Parliament. Finally, the Speaker of the Italian Parliament Mr. Casini referred mainly to the external relations of the EU and inter-parliamentary cooperation.

B. Points of intervention The Speakers of the Parliaments underlined the following points:

1. They agreed that the European Union is at a critical junction in its history, faced with the current developments on a European and international scale. The European Union should modernise its structures and enhance its international presence.

2. They noted that the European Union has to play a more substantial role in international relations. The Convention on the Future of Europe should submit positive proposals in order to redefine the Union's stance on the international sphere so that it is able to exert a more dynamic influence on international affairs.

3. They noted in a positive spirit, the gigantic, concurrent and parallel effort that, for the first time, the European Union is undertaking in order to reform its structures- through the Convention on the Future of Europe and the Intergovernmental Conference on the one hand -and, on the other hand, to integrate in a fully-fledged entity a great part of the European continent- through the admission of new Member States of Central and Southern Europe and the Mediterranean. They declared the full support of their Parliaments for that grand endeavour and considered it necessary that the Convention on the Future of Europe submit its proposals to the National Parliaments and the European Parliament in due time before the proceedings of the Intergovernmental Conference commence. They expect that all acceding countries will fully participate in the works of the above mentioned Intergovernmental Conference.

4. They reaffirmed the primary role of the parliamentary institutions in safeguarding democratic dialogue as well as the need to further reduce the Union's democratic deficit. They retained a positive stance towards the process which had commenced with the

Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties and the Declarations of Nice and Laeken. Nevertheless, they stressed that the participation of the National Parliaments in European developments should be reinforced and their role further promoted, and that is now the duty of the Convention on the Future of Europe and the Intergovernmental Conference. They expressed their will to enhance their cooperation in the field of European Security and Defence policy.

5. They expressed their satisfaction about the course of the European Convention to date and expressed their wish to retain this procedure in the future. In particular, they praised the proposals made at the Convention on incorporating the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the EU, on abolishing the three pillars, simplifying the legal procedures and the enhancing the role of the National Parliaments. They showed their preference for improving procedures rather than creating new institutional bodies.

6. They considered that the proposed Protocols regarding the role of National Parliaments and the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality constitute a positive step in the right direction, particularly as to the improved control of EU bodies, the need for a more effective provision of information to the National Parliaments by the Council and the European Commission. They noted, however, that innovative ideas are needed relating to the enhancement of the role of representative bodies sought.

7. The Speakers of the Parliaments noted the proposal of the Swedish Parliament on setting up a Working Group with the aim of exploring further cooperation between the Parliaments of the European Union.

The Speakers agreed with this proposal, and empowered the Swedish Parliament, in cooperation with the outgoing Greek Presidency and the incoming Dutch one, as well as the four Parliamentary Assemblies of the Rapporteurs to this Conference (European Parliament, France, Italy, Hungary) as well as all those who wish to participate in this task, to examine this proposal and present their recommendations at the forthcoming regular, or at an extraordinary, Conference in order for a decision on this matter to be taken.

The next Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments will take place in the Netherlands in July 2004.