

Keynote speech of Mr. Péter Sárdi, Director for Foreign Relations, Office of the Hungarian National Assembly at the Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments
(Budapest, 10 February 2025)

Thank you, Mr. Director General for the floor.

Distinguished Secretaries General, dear colleagues and guests!

May I begin with a personal memory. In this Upper Chamber Hall exactly 20 years ago, just one year after our accession together with your predecessors, and most probably with some of you we could achieve a historical result in our common work on February 2005. Namely, after 30 years of Babylon challenges in the Speakers' conference, we could find an appropriate solution to save money for our taxpayers. If I remember well, in 2004, in the Hague, the interpretation cost for the Dutch parliament amounted 160 thousand euros for the Speakers' Conference. After the reform achieved in Hungary, in the Budapest Conference of EU Speakers in 2005 the language regime resulted in saving minimum this sum of money for us and for the incoming organising parliament. I wish COSAC could follow our example. Sorry, Mr. Sjövall.

And now let me turn to the specific content of this agenda topic. As the Director for Foreign Relations since 1991 I had the privilege to be an active actor in the evolving interparliamentary cooperation from two perspectives: first, as the parliament of a candidate country and after the accession of Hungary in 2004, as the parliament of a Member State.

We know that the accession process requires a huge effort from parliaments of the candidate countries. The pressure and the excitement had always been with us before 2004, and I can tell you that we made the necessary changes in our structure well on time. From human resources point of view the establishment of the EU Department already in 1998, the increase of staff not only in the foreign relations office, but also in the EU committee secretariat have been a great achievement. Furthermore, from procedural point of view this meant the changes in the Rules of Procedure of the House, and thirdly, from legal point of view, the elaboration of the necessary legal provisions, for instance

about the cooperation between Parliament and Government in EU-decision-making, or the status law of the Hungarian Members of the European Parliament, just to mention a few. This is our know-how and our institutional memory of the EU accession process.

Ever since our accession, the Hungarian National Assembly considered it important to support the parliaments of EU candidate countries through the instruments of the parliamentary diplomacy in the bumpy road of European integration.

Allow me now, Distinguished audience, to introduce our practice from two aspects: the bilateral cooperation agreements of *Országgyűlés* with the parliaments of candidate countries, and the participation of our Office in the parliamentary capacity building programmes. These are all coordinated by the Directorate for Foreign Relations.

With regard **to the bilateral cooperation**, according to our experience, institutionalising the parliamentary diplomatic cooperation, signing of agreements happens when relations get more specific and involves concrete areas of exchange of practices.

The two pillars of the bilateral parliamentary relations are the **Partnership Framework Agreements** at political level, and at administrative level. The Hungarian National Assembly has quite a few political bilateral agreements with partner parliaments mostly in Europe. For the time being at administrative level we have signed Partnership Framework Agreements with 9 parliamentary offices also in Asia and Latin-America.

In general, the main areas of interest are promotion of parliamentary democracy, transparency and accountability. In case of candidate countries, the specific objective is to transfer the experience related to the integration into the European Union. Sharing experience on practice of parliamentary oversight over the executive bodies related to the transposition of the EU *acquis* into national legal systems is very important. Usually, budgetary, IT and e-parliament, human resources and operational issues of parliaments are also included in the agreements. An added value of these agreements is that they provide an opportunity for establishment of direct contacts between the departments of parliaments.

In terms of bilateral cooperation, please let me shed light on one of our Parliaments' direct political engagements for the countries of the Western Balkans: the **Conference of the Speakers of Parliaments of South-Eastern European Countries**. The political commitment of our Parliament to the region is demonstrated by the fact that every two years the Hungarian National Assembly organises this speakers' level conference in Budapest on the current issues of EU enlargement. Since its creation in 2004, **we have organised 11 conferences**, the last meeting took place in November, 2023. In previous years, taking advantage of the current political opportunities, the Speakers of Parliaments of the Visegrád Group, the V4 countries have also been invited to the event. The outcome of this high-level conference is manifested in a closing statement, which is forwarded by our Speaker to the leaders of EU institutions. The next conference is expected to take place this autumn, the exact date will be set soon, and we look forward to welcoming the Speakers of Parliaments of South-Eastern region of Europe.

Dear Colleagues!

And now let me turn to the second, wider and more comprehensive areas of multilateral cooperation and support to parliaments of candidate countries, the **involvement of the Hungarian Parliament in capacity building programs**. Altogether we have participated **in 24 capacity building programs since 2004**.

The main goal of these programmes are the knowledge-transfer and the exchange of experience and best practices with our partners. I can report you that the Hungarian National Assembly **is among the first parliaments from all EU national parliaments in winning and implementing of EU twinning and assistance programmes**. Since the accession of Hungary to the EU, the Office of the Hungarian National Assembly has been transmitting its experiences gained during the accession process to the beneficiaries through EU or other international assistance programs. We have implemented **18 of such programmes so far** in the South-Eastern European countries, the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood. Of course, our successful participation depended not only on our professional experts but, to a great extent, on the close and friendly cooperation with many of your chambers. We are grateful

for that! This involved **an impressive number of 24 parliamentary chambers** from all over the European Union, from Portugal to Denmark, from Croatia to France and Belgium, and also civil servants from the European Parliament. We are grateful and honoured for this joint work so far!

Forgive me to bore you with some statistics, but this wall of fame proves its importance. We implemented

- **14 EU twinning programmes** in the parliaments of Romania, Turkey, Moldova (two programs), Croatia, Kosovo (three programs), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (three programs), Tunisia, and Morocco,
- **3 EU technical assistance programmes**, in the Bulgarian Parliament before its accession, and furthermore in the North-Macedonian Parliament, Moldovan Parliament, and
- **even 1 bilateral capacity building program** in the Parliament of Laos, which is unique, and resulted in a book: “How to manage parliament” by Mr. Krisztián Kovács, Head of EU Department of the Directorate for Foreign Relations.

We are also proud to be involved in the most recent twinning program which officially started last week. From February 2025, the Office of the National Assembly participates in the implementation of the 3rd Moldovan Parliamentary Twinning Programme, led by the Hellenic Parliament, and with the participation of the 2 chambers of the Romanian Parliament, the Austrian National Council and the Italian Chamber of Deputies as junior partners. Together we will do whatever we can to support the Moldovan Parliament for its role in a successful EU accession.

Distinguished audience! Last, but not least, let me highlight the Hungarian participation in the **Inter Pares program**. This initiative has proved its validity with the success of several partnerships implemented all around the Globe. In terms of the parliaments of candidate countries, the Inter Pares-type assistance may go hand in hand with other, more resourceful EU support measures for parliaments, be it either twinning or technical assistance project. I am convinced that candidate country parliaments may use successfully the advantages of Inter Pares program, such as flexibility, short procedures

for implementation, nevertheless this cannot replace the more comprehensive, longer cooperation which is more the characteristics of twinnings.

Having said that, we are also happy to be actively involved in Inter Pares partnerships, as in the first phase of the programme the Hungarian National Assembly participated in the parliamentary partnerships with Bhutan, Malaysia and Montenegro. Currently we are involved in three partnerships, with the Parliament of Uzbekistan, with Nepal and as a candidate country with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. I am sure that challenges of project implementation can be overcome together with other EU parliaments and with the support of the Inter Pares managing team. I am sure that Mr Jonathan Murphy, Head of the Inter Pares Programme will provide more information in this respect.

To sum it up, the Hungarian National Assembly is ready to continue our support to candidate countries through various types of instruments of the parliamentary diplomacy, be on bilateral, or multilateral basis.

Thank you for your kind attention!