

MINUTES of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments

– Budapest, 11–12 May 2025 –

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments (EUSC) was held in Budapest on 11–12 May 2025 under the title *“The Future of Europe”*, marking the conclusion of the parliamentary dimension of Hungary’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024.

In line with established practice, the meeting of the Presidential Troika took place prior to the main event. The Troika comprised the delegations of the national parliaments of Hungary, Spain and Denmark, as well as the European Parliament. Members of the Troika debated the programme of the Conference and the draft Presidency Conclusions.

Opening Session: Challenges facing Europe

Welcome address:

- **Mr László KÖVÉR**, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly

Introductory remarks:

- **Mr Viktor ORBÁN**, Prime Minister of Hungary

Mr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, welcomed the participants in the Upper Chamber Session Hall of the Hungarian Parliament at the closing and highest-level event of the parliamentary dimension of the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union. In his remarks, he quoted Mr Lajos KOSSUTH, a key statesperson of Hungarian constitutionalism, on the essence of democracy: *“All for the people, and all by the people. Nothing about the people without the people. That is Democracy”*. Following his address, the Speaker invited **Mr Viktor ORBÁN, Prime Minister of Hungary**, to deliver his opening remarks.

Prime Minister ORBÁN underlined that the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments serves as a forum for setting the strategic directions of cooperation among national parliaments. In this spirit, he proposed a dialogue on two issues of fundamental importance for the future of Europe and its Member States: the protection of national sovereignty and Ukraine’s accession to the European Union. The Prime Minister emphasised that the ongoing global transformation is of a magnitude comparable to the formation of modern nation-states. At the same time, he noted a

profound shift in the mindset of the Western world. According to him, progressive liberalism in the United States has been replaced by a more patriotic political approach, while China's technological advancement and India's growing economic influence have created new geopolitical dynamics. In contrast, he argued, Europe is unprepared and unconvincing in its responses. He remarked that, had Hungary been governed in the same way the European Commission led Europe, the country would have been ruined by now. With regard to Ukraine, **Mr Viktor ORBÁN** stated that the Western strategy aimed at weakening Russia has failed: the Russian economy has not collapsed, sanctions have not achieved their objectives, and Russia has prevented Ukraine's NATO membership. He reaffirmed Hungary's firm commitment to peace, stressing that a protracted war claims lives and further deteriorates Europe's position. He also noted that the sanctions have had a disproportionately severe impact on the Hungarian economy. He added that, according to Hungary, the accession of Ukraine to the EU would, in effect, amount to admitting a country at war into the Union, something the EU has never done before. He concluded by stressing that Ukraine's accession would impose an unsustainable economic burden on Member States.

Session I: The future European Union:

- **General perspectives**
- **Federalism or national sovereignty**

Opening speech:

- **Mr László KÖVÉR**, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly

Keynote speakers:

- **Mr Walter ROSENKRANZ**, President of the National Council of Austria
- **Ms Roberta METSOLA**, President of the European Parliament

Session I was opened by **Mr László KÖVÉR**, who drew attention to the uncertainties surrounding Europe's future. While all desire peace and prosperity, the European Union is currently threatened by war, dictatorship and impoverishment. In his view, the European Union lacked the strength and perhaps political will to prevent the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the sanctions imposed have caused greater harm to Member States than to Russia. He criticised the rhetoric of war and the push towards the centralisation of EU decision-making, warning that such efforts would place power in the hands of actors lacking a proper democratic mandate. He stressed that the balance between the European Commission and the Member States, as well as between the European Parliament and national parliaments, has been disrupted. According to **Mr KÖVÉR**, transatlantic cooperation has broken down, one indication of which is that EU foreign policy appears to be invested in the continuation of the war, while the growing influence of private economic powers poses an increasing threat to public authority. He interpreted federalist ambitions, the suppression of debate, and attacks on national sovereignty as part of that trend. In conclusion, he

asserted that the future of the European Union must rest on nation-states, in full respect of the original spirit of the Treaties.

Mr Walter ROSENKRANZ, President of the National Council of Austria, taking the floor as one of the keynote speakers on the agenda item, emphasised that cooperation at the EU level holds real value only if it delivers tangible and visible results for the people living in the Member States. He cautioned that integration pursued for its own sake is bound to fail. In his view, the central question should be which policy areas and forms of joint action could genuinely add value to European integration, and conversely, which challenges might be more effectively addressed by individual Member States. He underscored that the principle of subsidiarity serves as a fundamental bridge between the various levels of governance. According to him, the future of European integration—whether it moves towards deeper cooperation or the reinforcement of national sovereignty—will depend on the Union’s ability to address problems that no single Member State can resolve on its own.

Ms Roberta METSOLA, President of the European Parliament, underlined in her address that the strength of the Union lies in the spirit of cooperation, which she described as essential for Europe’s progress. She noted that interparliamentary conferences, including the Conference of Speakers, serve this very purpose, while also stressing that national parliaments must take a more active role in shaping Europe’s future. She emphasised that in the current climate of uncertainty, unity and coordination are indispensable. On the subject of Ukraine, she reaffirmed the European Parliament’s steadfast commitment to enlargement and to supporting Ukraine’s fight for freedom. In conclusion, she reported on the establishment of the European Order of Merit, inviting the Speakers to submit nominations for the award with the involvement of their citizens.

During the ensuing debate, 35 speakers took the floor.

Ms Francina ARMENGOL, Speaker of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, voiced her support for Ukraine’s accession to the European Union. She underlined that, in light of current geopolitical challenges, institutional reform and greater efficiency in the EU’s decision-making mechanisms are imperative. She added that Europe must preserve its leading role in climate protection and also stressed the importance of remaining faithful to its core values: democracy, solidarity, and human dignity.

Mr Pedro ROLLÁN OJEDA, Speaker of the Spanish Senate, highlighted that European cooperation should not be seen as a loss of sovereignty, but rather as a shared exercise of sovereign rights for the sake of common prosperity. He stressed the need to strengthen the Union, particularly in the areas of industry, defence, housing, and social policy, warning that failure to do so could put at risk the peace and prosperity Europe has enjoyed for the past 75 years.

Mr Søren GADE, Speaker of the Danish Parliament, stated that the debate over having to choose between national sovereignty and federalism presents a false dilemma, as cooperation among nations does not undermine, but rather strengthens

their autonomy. He reaffirmed the importance of supporting Ukraine to uphold territorial integrity and international law, condemned Russia's aggression, and stressed that Ukraine's fight for freedom is also a fight for Europe's own freedom.

Mr Miloš VYSTRČIL, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, underlined that federalism and national sovereignty are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary concepts, and that setting them in opposition is a misguided approach. In his view, the European Union should function as a community in which Member States, while preserving strong national identities, act as "one team" in pursuit of common objectives. Echoing the views expressed by several previous speakers, he reaffirmed the necessity of supporting Ukraine in its struggle for freedom.

Mr Claude WISELER, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg, stressed that support for Ukraine is not merely a moral obligation, but a cornerstone of the European Union's future. In his view, federalism and national sovereignty are not incompatible; on the contrary, they can reinforce Europe's global role when pursued in tandem. He expressed his firm support for EU enlargement, the deepening of a common defence policy, and the development of new approaches to address migration.

Mr Marko LOTRIČ, President of the National Council of Slovenia, stated that in light of the current crises—including geopolitical tensions, climate change, and migration—the European Union must adopt a more decisive and strategic shift in direction. He emphasised that the Union's future hinges on enhancing competitiveness, fostering innovation, and strengthening the common security and defence policy. He underscored the importance of accelerating decision-making processes and reducing bureaucracy, while preserving core values and diversity, which are indispensable to building a credible and united Europe.

Ms Annita DEMETRIOU, President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus, delivered a strong critique of those who have failed to express unequivocal support for Ukraine, emphasising that the European Union was founded not on interests, but on shared values. In her view, the EU can only act as a credible global actor if it consistently upholds its principles, particularly in defending sovereignty and freedom. She further pointed out that the European security architecture remains incomplete as long as any part of a Member State remains under military occupation.

Mr Jussi HALLA-AHO, Speaker of the Finnish Parliament, stressed that the global environment is becoming increasingly unpredictable and that the rules-based international order has weakened. He highlighted Europe's excessive dependence on external resources, particularly Russian gas and raw materials, as a key vulnerability. He warned that defence capabilities have long been overestimated and urged the larger EU Member States to show greater solidarity with Eastern Europe, noting that it is unsustainable for the burden of defence to fall solely on the front-line countries. He emphasised the importance of supporting Ukraine as a key element of common security policy. He also criticised the EU's slow decision-making mechanisms and advocated for a more results-oriented Union.

Mr Jan Anthonie BRUIJN, President of the Dutch Senate, emphasised that the strength of the European Union lies not in federalism, but in the harmonious balance between unity and diversity. He stressed the need for enhanced joint efforts to counter external threats, particularly Russia's aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, he drew attention to internal challenges, notably the importance of safeguarding democracy, the rule of law, and European values. Expressing concern over the growing threats to liberal civil liberties posed by hatred and societal division, he called for reinforcing dialogue and shared responsibility at the EU level.

Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta, reiterated that the European Union is not merely an economic bloc, but first and foremost a peace project founded on solidarity. He argued that Europe should prioritise diplomatic and humanitarian efforts over militarisation, underlining the continued relevance of neutrality. While affirming his support for Ukraine, he also urged attention to the ongoing tragedy in the Gaza Strip. Instead of further increasing defence spending, he suggested redirecting 10% of national budgets into a European Social Resilience Fund to address poverty, housing and social challenges and thereby reinforce the EU's commitment to social responsibility.

Mr Lauri HUSSAR, President of the Estonian Parliament, emphasised that the security of Europe hinges on the protection of Ukraine's sovereignty. He stressed that the issue of Russian aggression must remain continuously on the agenda and urged the EU to accelerate the accession processes of both Ukraine and Moldova. He cautioned against the release of Russian central bank assets, stating that such funds would risk fuelling the war effort. In conclusion, he reaffirmed that Russia is not a partner and that Russian gas serves as a tool to finance the conflict, making a united European stance indispensable.

Mr Richard RAŠI, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, stated that the European Union is more than an institution or an economic bloc—it is an organisation of peace, solidarity, and shared dignity. He identified four key pillars for the Union's future: preserving peace as a fundamental value, enlargement based on merit and preparedness, regional development in infrastructure, education and healthcare, and the reinforcement of the European social model. He stressed that economic viability and social justice must remain in balance, as they together provide both purpose and stability to the European Union, an entity shaped not solely by treaties, but by the everyday lives of its citizens.

Mr Mark DALY, Speaker of the Irish Senate, underscored the historical ties and shared values that unite people across distances. He reaffirmed Ireland's unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and EU membership, and also strongly condemned the serious violations committed by Hamas in the Gaza hostage crisis. He concluded by emphasising the EU's vital need for steadfast commitment to its core values, which safeguard democracy and human rights.

Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, pointed out that the contemporary world is marked by uncertainty and crises, including war, climate change, and economic shocks. He stressed that the EU is a crucial platform for

overcoming such challenges, where aligning national sovereignty with European values is essential. He reaffirmed Croatia's commitment to unity, solidarity, and collective action, especially in support of Ukraine, and reiterated the importance of upholding the rule of law and international law.

Ms Daiga MIERIŅA, Speaker of the Latvian Parliament, warned that Europe's security is primarily threatened by the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine. She called for strengthening defence capabilities and societal resilience, expanding sanctions and taking effective measures against disinformation. She stressed the importance of protecting the freedoms of the internal market and the unity of the EU, as well as reaffirming her commitment to democracy and enlargement strictly based on merit.

Ms Nataliya KISELOVA, Speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, stated that the future of the EU depends on its ability to uphold its core values — democracy, freedom, justice, and rule of law — even in times of uncertainty. She cautioned against overregulation, highlighted the role of national parliaments, and defended consensus-based decision-making as a source of democratic legitimacy. On enlargement, she confirmed that Bulgaria supports only merit-based accession, while considering solidarity and the EU's capacity for reform as essential.

Mr Mircea ABRUDEAN, President of the Romanian Senate, stressed that the EU must preserve its unity amid the current challenges and reclaim its role as a school of democracy and a source of hope and prosperity. He warned against the dangers of populism and urged for transparent institutions, a Union that responds to citizens' needs, and the strengthening of civil society and human rights. He affirmed Romania's commitment to the enlargement of the Eastern partners and Western Balkans, as well as to regional security, contributing to building a stronger and more cohesive Europe.

Ms Verona MURPHY, as the first female **Speaker of the Irish House of Representatives**, emphasised the role of national parliaments in EU decision-making, highlighting the importance of early involvement. She praised the EU's collective strength in addressing geopolitical and economic challenges and underscored the value of enhancing interparliamentary dialogue. She cited the climate activism of young students as an inspiring sign of hope for the future of European cooperation.

Ms Florence REUTER, Vice-President of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, invoked the spirit of Mr Robert SCHUMAN, stressing that European unity can only *"be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity"*. She argued that only a unified Europe can respond effectively to global challenges such as international trade conflicts. Reaffirming her support for Ukraine, she also called for the necessary reforms to accompany EU enlargement. She advocated for a federal, values-based, strong, and globally competitive Europe that strives for strategic autonomy and its own defence capabilities.

Ms Rasa BUDBERGYTĖ, Vice-President of the Lithuanian Parliament, stressed the importance of EU unity in preserving peace, stability, and prosperity. She reaffirmed Lithuania's strong support for Ukraine on political, economic, and military

levels, and firmly rejected Russia's territorial ambitions. She expressed her support for merit-based EU enlargement, which principle should be equally applied to all candidate countries, and called on the host country, Hungary, not to obstruct Ukraine's accession process.

Mr Athanasios BOURAS, First Vice-President of the Hellenic Parliament, warned that the European Union bears a historic responsibility for preserving peace and stability in a world marked by severe geopolitical tensions. He emphasised that striking a balance between federalism and national sovereignty is crucial for the Union's political future. While commending efforts to advance common defence, he criticised the EU for supporting third countries that do not share its core values.

Ms Meira HOT, Vice-President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, stated that the EU must become a more active and strategically coherent global actor. She stressed the importance of boosting competitiveness, fostering technological innovation and green transition, particularly through the free flow of knowledge, energy, and data. She underlined Slovenia's support for strengthening Europe's defence autonomy, including investment in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. She concluded that a united, values-based Europe can only remain sustainable and credible through balanced cooperation between national parliaments and EU institutions.

Ms Kerstin LUNDGREN, Third Deputy Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, underscored that the real conflict lies not between federalism and sovereignty, but between defenders of democracy and those who seek to weaken it. In her view, supporting Ukraine is a moral duty and a cornerstone of Europe's security. Finally, she highlighted the vital role of national parliaments in controlling EU decision-making and reminded that democracy is not a given, but a value that must be continuously protected.

Ms Agnieszka POMASKA, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Polish *Sejm*, stated that Europe must once again remember the true meaning of solidarity. She criticised those leaders who undermine EU unity from within or cooperate with the Russian aggressor. She emphasised that security can only be achieved if EU Member States invest in energy independence and critical infrastructure. In her view, a fast-reacting, forward-looking, and united Union is needed, not a divided one.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, stressed that the EU stands at a turning point, requiring strengthened strategic autonomy and budgetary reform, while fully respecting the sovereignty of Member States and the principles and values of the Treaties. He further underlined that national parliaments must actively safeguard the principle of subsidiarity and promote the use of the so-called "green card" mechanism, which ensure harmony between national and EU-level democracy.

Mr Bruno FUCHS, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly, highlighted that the post-Second World War vision of a Europe based on multilateralism and respect for regional identities is currently facing

significant challenges, hence the need for a strong and cohesive EU. He also emphasised the role of national parliaments and the importance of subsidiarity, advocating for the introduction of the new “green card” mechanism to allow Member States to propose legislation aimed at strengthening security and defence. He expressed firm support for Ukraine, noting that European unity is rooted in solidarity, which is reinforced by Ukraine’s courage. In his view, the war can only end once Russia ceases its aggression.

Mr Ruslan STEFANCHUK, Chairman of the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine, stated that Ukraine has been suffering from the unjust Russian war of aggression for over three years and expressed deep gratitude to the EU for its continued support. He emphasised that Russia’s aggression is currently the greatest challenge facing the European continent, shaping the future of the EU itself. In response to this threat, European unity and determination are the most important answers. He concluded by stating that Ukraine is ready for a ceasefire and peace, but will not accept being lectured.

Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, reaffirmed Georgia’s strong support for Ukraine in its fight for independence. While reiterating Georgia’s commitment to European integration, he voiced concerns about European institutions often imposing obligations on Georgia without granting adequate representation and rights, undermining the principle of democratic pluralism. He stressed that democracy should not be imposed, but rather based on cooperation and respect for the rights of all Member States and partners. He also emphasised the need for a critical examination of the shift towards majority decision-making, arguing that smaller countries must have an equal voice.

Mr Igor GROSU, President of the Parliament of Moldova, pointed out that the EU must adapt to a rapidly changing world and to new challenges, including changes in information flows and the development of artificial intelligence. For Moldova, EU accession is not about relinquishing sovereignty, but about strengthening democracy, statehood, peace, and the preservation of identity. He drew attention to Russian hybrid threats and underscored the importance of cooperation in the fields of energy, security, and defence to ensure a strong and united Europe.

Mr Andrija MANDIĆ, President of the Parliament of Montenegro, reaffirmed Montenegro’s commitment to European integration and highlighted that the country could soon become the EU’s next Member State. He proudly noted significant progress in the accession process, stating that three chapters had been closed by the end of 2024, and the goal is to close all chapters by the end of 2026. He emphasised that over 80% of Montenegrin citizens support EU membership and that the country’s leadership is serious about a European future, which they view as a pillar of stability and peace in increasingly challenging times.

Mr Nikola ŠPIRIĆ, Speaker of the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, reaffirmed his country’s commitment to EU accession. He voiced criticism of the interventions by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina in amending the constitution and legislation. He listed several internal issues and

emphasised that those require a dialogue within the country, rather than imposed solutions out of the country.

Mr Denis ZVIZDIĆ, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stressed that Europe remains incomplete without Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans, reaffirming that EU accession is a fundamental foreign policy goal. He expressed concern over the most serious political crisis in the past 30 years, and called for support to preserve the European perspective and to strengthen of EUFOR to preserve stability.

Mr Bekir BOZDAĞ, Deputy Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, emphasised that the EU must act in a unified and coordinated manner, prioritising common values over narrow national interests and respecting diversity. He argued that the EU has a responsibility to take a more active role in addressing regional and global challenges and criticised the Union's response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which he deemed inadequate. Finally, he highlighted the strategic importance of EU–Türkiye relations in the context of current global crises.

Mr Andrea CARONI, President of the Swiss Council of States, noted that although Switzerland is not a member of the EU, it maintains close political, cultural, and economic relations with the Union and recognises the importance of balancing sovereignty and integration. He emphasised that today's cross-border challenges—such as war, migration, and climate change—make European cooperation and joint action indispensable. In his view, “unity in diversity” remains the best path forward.

The final speaker, **Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, spoke about the symbolic and linguistic significance in politics, as they reflect shared values and common goals. He underlined the importance of the European flag, which represents unity, harmony, and the rule of law, and stressed that the Council of Europe supports EU enlargement, provided that aspiring Member States respect these shared values. He warned that democracy is threatened when common symbols are attacked or destroyed.

Following the conclusion of the first agenda item, **Speaker KÖVÉR** expressed his gratitude for the contributions and informed the participants that all delegations had received the draft text of the Presidency Conclusions, which enjoys the consensus of the Troika and into which every effort has been made to incorporate the previously submitted written amendments.

Session II: Closer to voters: regionalism in Europe, and safeguarding Europe's cultural identity

Opening speech:

- **Mr László KÖVÉR**, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly

Keynote speakers:

- **Mr Lorenzo FONTANA**, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy
- **Ms Ana BRNABIĆ**, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia
- **Ms Maja RINIKER**, President of the National Council of Switzerland

In his opening remarks, **Speaker László KÖVÉR** emphasised the Christian values developed over more than two thousand years and the sense of national belonging formed over the past three hundred years are elements of the cultural identity of Europe he believes remain indispensable today. He argued that these values constitute the “soul” of Europe, and are grounded in historical and social realities, yet currently are subjected to deliberate intellectual and political warfare. This hybrid attack, he said, begins with the weakening of national identity and ultimately aims at the elimination of sovereignty. He pointed out that, due to the unique development of nations and states in Europe, national and state borders often do not coincide. Therefore, 21st-century legal and political solutions are required to ensure peaceful coexistence-solutions which could be guided by Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). He proposed that the right to national identity should become part of a new generation of human rights, thereby contributing to the global protection of the right to human dignity.

The first keynote speaker on the agenda, **Mr Lorenzo FONTANA, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy**, stated that promoting regional and local needs, as well as protecting cultural identities, constitutes one of the fundamental cornerstones of the EU. He stressed that these elements play a key role in bringing citizens closer to the European idea and in deepening the process of integration. He underlined that a genuine European identity can only exist through respect for the identities of individual countries, and therefore it is essential to nurture and preserve diversity, as enshrined in the TEU. In his view, respecting national and regional autonomy, together with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, ensures the local applicability of legislation. He also emphasised that the active participation of national and regional parliaments is indispensable in the European decision-making process.

The second keynote speaker, **Ms Ana BRNABIĆ, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia**, emphasised that the legitimacy of democratic institutions and their proximity to citizens are of fundamental importance for strengthening a diverse Europe. She underlined the significance of preserving cultural identities and involving local communities, as well as Serbia's commitment to European values, reforms, and integration. She highlighted the importance of regional cooperation, particularly the partnership with Hungary, and affirmed that Serbia seeks to join the EU not as a beneficiary, but as a confident and equal partner.

The third keynote speaker on the agenda, **Ms Maja RINIKER, President of the National Council of Switzerland**, stated in her speech that trust begins at the local level, and that Switzerland's system of direct democracy allows for genuine civic participation. She explained that Switzerland views its linguistic and cultural diversity not as an obstacle, but as a resource. Its federal institutions are structured to ensure that regions can express their views. She stressed that the essence of modern democracy lies in inclusion, dialogue, and in the pursuit of common ground, while also respecting the distinctiveness of individual communities.

During the ensuing debate, 16 speakers took the floor.

In his remarks, **Mr Søren GADE, Speaker of the Danish Parliament**, underlined the importance of regionalism and cultural identity, while cautioning that these should not become divisive lines within Europe. He stressed that despite its diversity, the European Union rests on close cooperation among its Member States, which guarantees peace, prosperity, and democratic stability. He concluded by pointing out that safeguarding democracy requires not only national, but also cross-border collaboration.

Mr Claude WISELER, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg, emphasised that for Luxembourg, European identity is an integral part of national identity, and being Luxembourgish and European are one and the same. He underscored the importance of supporting artists and cultural creators, who serve as critical witnesses of contemporary developments. He stressed that safeguarding their freedom and independence requires appropriate public funding, and that the role of the state is not to exert control, but to provide financial support not on condition of their loyalty.

In his intervention, **Mr Marko LOTRIČ, President of the National Council of Slovenia**, underscored the importance of a strong, resilient and stable cohesion policy in promoting balanced regional development and reaffirmed Slovenia's commitment to decentralisation and effective responses to economic and demographic challenges. He also stressed the role of preserving cultural diversity and identity in maintaining the people's trust in the EU.

In her address, **Ms Annita DEMETRIOU, President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus**, called for strengthening the connection between the EU and its citizens, with particular emphasis on protecting regionalism and cultural identity. She stressed the need to counter growing distrust, disinformation, and extremism by addressing the democratic deficit, enhancing participatory decision-making, and safeguarding cultural heritage. She specifically highlighted the problem of illicit trading in cultural property, and called on governments to ratify relevant international instruments, such as the Nicosia Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property.

Mr Jussi HALLA-AHO, Speaker of the Parliament of Finland, addressed the causes of the rise of nationalist movements, and criticised their political marginalisation. He emphasised that voters' concerns — particularly regarding the

consequences of mass immigration — must be taken seriously, or societal frustration and distrust will increase in the system. In his view, preserving democratic stability requires that every citizen feels that their voices and votes truly matter.

Mr Richard RAŠI, Speaker of the Slovak National Council, underlined that the strength of the EU lies not in uniformity, but in the respect for cultural diversity. He highlighted Slovakia's multicultural heritage and affirmed that nurturing regional identities reinforces European cohesion. He argued that the Union will be stronger when decision-making remains close to the people and when identities are valued, fostering a genuine sense of community.

In her speech, **Ms Daiga MIERIŅA, Speaker of the Latvian Parliament**, emphasised that EU membership contributes to the development of the Latvian language and culture. As an example, she mentioned the international success of a Latvian animated film, which symbolises the power of cooperation. She pointed out that despite Europe's diversity, modern challenges such as climate change, migration, and security can only be addressed through joint efforts.

Ms Andrea EDER-GITSCHTHALER, President of the Austrian Federal Council, underlined that the European Union is a community of values, which must be further developed through responsible dialogue and reduced bureaucracy. She stressed the importance of a Europe of regions and the principle of subsidiarity, as well as Austria's role as a bridge-builder in the heart of Europe. She emphasised the necessity of supporting Ukraine not only economically, but also on humanitarian grounds. She described the EU as a peace project and a cultural meeting space, bearing responsibility for future generations.

Mr Nils T. BJØRKE, Vice-President of the Norwegian Parliament, emphasised that Europe's values are at stake in Ukraine, and noted that Norway, with broad political consensus, is providing €12 billion in aid to countries affected by the Russian invasion. He highlighted the importance of protecting democracy, the rule of law, and civil society, emphasising the role of the EEA and Norway Grants. He stated that free elections are a cornerstone of democracy and must be safeguarded from foreign interference and disinformation. In conclusion, he expressed regret over the banning of the Budapest Pride and urged the Hungarian government to lift the prohibition.

According to **Ms Věra KOVÁŘOVÁ, Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic**, Europe is facing challenges that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. She highlighted the war in Ukraine and the weakening of international alliances as key lessons, urging European political leadership to respond more swiftly and responsibly. She emphasised that the EU is not only an economic or defence project, but also a political and cultural one, whose strength lies in unity and in the trust of its citizens. In her view, national parliaments play a key role in thoroughly considering proposed changes and ensuring that they truly serve Europe's future.

Mr Andries GRYFFROY, First Vice-President of the Belgian Senate, expressed his support for Ukraine and voiced his conviction that the EU will be strong

only if it not only criticises, but also seeks solutions. He underlined the importance of regionalism, bringing decision-making closer to citizens, and strengthening multi-level governance. He described diversity as an asset of Europe and called on participants to listen to all stakeholders in order to make the EU great again.

Ms Kerstin LUNDGREN, Third Deputy Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, stressed the importance of European unity and diversity, which are rooted in the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. She placed special emphasis on the protection of the rights of the LGBTQ community and condemned hostile and discriminatory statements made by certain governments. Sending a message to oppressive regimes, she pointed out that defending LGBTQ rights is not a sign of decadence, but a cornerstone of democracy.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, stated that agenda topic has always been a delicate matter for France, which is a decentralised, but unitary state. He explained that although French is the primary language in his country, regional languages are part of the French cultural heritage. He warned against the EU becoming de facto monolingual and urged that the Commission's proposals be translated into the EU languages as soon as possible so that national parliaments can effectively intervene in the European legislative process from the outset. With regard to cohesion policy, which is currently the subject of important debates, he stressed the need to maintain respect for regional specificities.

Mr Bruno FUCHS, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly, spoke of Europe's paradoxical situation. He pointed out that the model of freedom and rule of law is being challenged by both external and internal forces, such as the Russian war and cyberattacks. He underlined the importance of European culture, language, and history, as well as the role of regional policies and minority protection in strengthening European identity. In conclusion, he encouraged delegations to unite in diversity to confront common challenges.

Mr Henryk SIEDLACZEK, Deputy Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Polish Senate, emphasised that it is not states, but peoples that should be united. Referring to Silesia, a border region between Poland and the Czech Republic, he highlighted the importance of mutual acceptance and tolerance, underscoring the relevance of the motto "*United in diversity*" for Europe's future. He stated that Poland is committed to respecting cultural identity, which is both a heritage and a source of hope for future generations.

Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, emphasised that cultural identity serves as a solid foundation for Europe's future, which should be based not on ideological approaches, but on shared values. In his view, European identity must not be hierarchical or monopolised by certain countries, and the European Union should remain open to the broader concept of Europe, including countries that had become independent recently, such as Georgia.

At the conclusion of the Session, **Mr László KÖVÉR** invited **Mr Søren GADE, Speaker of the Danish Parliament,** to present the parliamentary programme of Denmark's upcoming EU Council Presidency, starting on 1 July 2025. **Mr Søren**

GADE underlined Denmark's commitment to addressing common European challenges and announced that seven interparliamentary conferences are planned during the presidency, covering topics such as security, EU enlargement, competitiveness, and the European budget. He extended an invitation to all participants to attend the next Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments, to be held in **Copenhagen from 3 to 5 May 2026**. His address concluded with a short video presentation outlining the presidency's main programmes.

Closing session – Adoption of the Conclusions, final remarks

The conference concluded with the adoption of the Presidency Conclusions. **The Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, Mr László KÖVÉR**, expressed his appreciation for the delegations' spirit of compromise, noting that the final joint document reflects a broad consensus despite existing differences of opinion. He also acknowledged that, at the request of the Bulgarian delegation, a dissenting view was appended in the form of a footnote to points 24 and 25. In his closing address, **Mr László KÖVÉR** reaffirmed Hungary's commitment to a strong European Union, even if there may be diverging perspectives on the path towards achieving that common goal. He cautioned against the growing tendency, observed in recent years, to stigmatise or exclude those who do not align with the majority view. He emphasised that the practices mentioned above have no place in a community founded on the principles of sovereign equality of its Member States. He concluded by underlining that future cooperation must be grounded in realism and guided by the consistent application of equal standards.