

Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments

Vienna, 27 – 28 January 2019

Minutes

As per tradition, the meeting of the Presidential Troika (Estonia, Austria, Finland, European Parliament) took place ahead of the general meeting on Sunday, 27 January. The Troika members discussed relevant matters concerning the agendas of the Meeting of the Secretaries General, the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments, and IPEX related matters.

1. Opening of the meeting

- Welcome address by Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian *Nationalrat*
- Welcome address by Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament

Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament, welcomed the participants and pointed out the historical significance of the Redoutensaal in the Hofburg Palace, its having served as concert hall, ballroom, and venue of the Congress of Vienna in 1814/15 as well as of the signing of the SALT II-Treaty between Jimmy Carter and Leonid Breschnew in 1979. After having been damaged by fire in 1992, the reconstructed hall had already been the permanent conference facility during the first two EU Presidencies of Austria in 1998 and 2006. He further stated that since 2017 it has served as plenary hall of the interim location for both chambers of the Austrian Parliament, the *Nationalrat* and the *Bundesrat*.

Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian *Nationalrat*, welcomed the participants to the second to the last conference of the parliamentary dimension of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and invited them to visit the original parliament building after the completion of its reconstruction in summer 2021. Mr SOBOTKA then referred to the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments taking place in Vienna, 8-9 April and stated that it would also mark the end of the parliamentary dimension Parliamentary Dimension of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Despite the difficult situation Europe finds itself in at the moment, Austria had been able to make positive contributions, not only concerning the negotiations with the United Kingdom, but also in connection with the Frontex mandate, the negotiations for the upcoming EU budget, the reduction of CO2 emissions and the policies for the relations with the European neighbourhood.

He underlined further that Austria placed a special focus on the neighbourhood policy, as close relations were crucial for the future of a united Europe. That is why Austria had made it a priority to establish closer cooperation especially with the Western Balkan partners by offering, among other things, scholarship programmes to civil servants of the parliaments of the region. Mr SOBOTKA was especially proud that the decades of conflict between Greece and North Macedonia (as it would soon be called) had been overcome.

Concerning the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments, Mr SOBOTKA highlighted the two main topics on the agenda: 1) The European Union and its neighbouring countries; 2) Strengthening the cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament.

He accentuated that the topic of the European Union and its neighbours included not only the Western Balkans but also the countries to the east, such as Ukraine and Russia, as well as the countries in the south, above all in Africa. In this context, the Africa Summit in Vienna in December 2018 had shown that it was important to attach more priorities and more focus on the continent in order that the relationship could be strengthened. Mr SOBOTKA also emphasized the importance of the combat against smuggling routes and a clear common commitment to prevent people from becoming victims of trafficking.

Concerning the second topic, Mr SOBOTKA mentioned the conference on subsidiarity that had been held in Bregenz in November 2018. Even though the results had not been as expected, it was clear that a step had to be taken in the direction of fewer directives and regulations and leaving more scope to the national Parliaments. On the other hand, there had to be a clear signal that “big topics” (such as defence policy, security policy, and economic policy) have to be tackled with the rule of common responsibility.

Mr DOSSI concluded the Opening Session by pointing out some practical issues concerning the Meeting.

2. Adoption of the agenda

Mr DOSSI presented the draft agenda of the Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments, which was approved without amendment.

3. Session I: Presentation of the draft programme of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments

Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament, then proceeded to present the draft programme of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments (EUSC), which will take place on 8-9 April 2019 in the Konzerthaus in Vienna. The Conference will have two main topics on the agenda: 1) “The European Union and its neighbours”; and 2) “The European Union ahead of the 2019 European elections - further development of cooperation between national Parliaments and European institutions”.

Mr DOSSI stated that the first session would deal with external relations between the EU and neighbouring countries by addressing aspects such as future cooperation, EU-enlargement, security issues and migration. He further pointed out that as the relations with the Western Balkan partners were among the priorities of the Austria Presidency, all EU candidate countries as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland would be, in agreement with the Presidential Troika, invited to the meeting. Mr DOSSI added that in order to comply with international regulations, all written documents would feature the term “Kosovo” with an asterisk and an explaining footnote the first time Kosovo is mentioned. In addition, following the example of the LX COSAC, flags would be provided only to EU Member States and table flags to Member States and candidate countries. He underlined that the neighbourhood was not limited to the Western Balkans but also comprised the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Partners, but due to limitations of space, more countries could not be invited. Concerning the choice of Keynote Speakers for the session, Mr DOSSI mentioned that Mr Andrej DANKO, Speaker of the Slovak *Národná rada* (as current chair of the Visegrád group) and the French Parliament had already been approached. Furthermore, there had been requests from the Speakers of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Mr Roberto FICO, and the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Nikos VOUTSIS, to serve as Keynote speakers.

Moving on to the second session, Mr DOSSI emphasized that 2019 would be a crucial year for the European Union, as it will probably be reduced by one Member State and face European elections. He further stated that at this point the Speaker of German *Bundestag*, Mr Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE, had confirmed his agreement to give a keynote speech. The President of the European Parliament will deliver his keynote speech at the opening session, as he will have to leave after the first day. Furthermore, there had been requests from Mr LARCHER to serve as Keynote speaker in the second session instead of the first.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council and to the opinion of the ICJ on the declaration of independence of Kosovo.

The two sessions would be followed by the adoption of the conclusions before the conference would conclude with a lunch.

Moving on to organisational issues, Mr DOSSI stated that the invitations and the general information would be sent out shortly. He further added that the conference would take place at the residency of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Wiener Konzerthaus, in the centre of Vienna.

Five speakers took the floor during the ensuing debate, which was opened by a presentation from Mr Claes MÅRTENSSON, Secretary General of the Swedish *Riksdag*, who introduced the Swedish proposal to update the Guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation in the EU. Referring to the various developments in the cooperation (new standing interparliamentary meetings and changes of practices), he underlined the need to bring the guidelines up to date. He further pointed out that the mandate should be narrowly defined and focus on the new functions and meeting formats as well as a closer alignment to the interparliamentary treaty provisions on interparliamentary cooperation and, where relevant, the role of the national Parliaments in the EU, while also providing limited space for revision of certain issues. Mr MÅRTENSSON expressed his support for including a paragraph on the benefit of using modern means of communication as a complement to physical meetings.

Concerning the interparliamentary meeting for the evaluation of EUROJUST, he suggested putting the issue on the agenda of the EUSC in April as well. Even though EUROJUST regulation might provide sufficient guidance for the meeting on EUROJUST and its administrative procedures, it should be discussed with the EUSC that all Parliaments adopt an agreement on the framework of the meeting, so that it could also be included in the guidelines. He concluded by asking the EUSC in Vienna to establish a working group mandate to put forward a proposal for updated guidelines for the interparliamentary cooperation and for the Finnish Presidency to prepare a common understanding on the interparliamentary meeting for the evaluation of EUROJUST, regarding matters such as composition and frequency, by the EUSC in Helsinki in 2020.

Ms Maija-Leena PAAVOLA, Secretary General of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, agreed with the general idea of the Swedish proposal while also underlining that the efforts of previous guidelines had to be considered. She stressed the importance of sticking to the fact that the guidelines are descriptive and not normative. Furthermore, she pointed out that before the issue was put on the agenda of the EUSC, the Troika should formulate a narrow mandate for the working group and seek advanced clearance. Additionally, Ms PAAVOLA suggested introducing modern means of communication into interparliamentary meetings to reduce the number of physical meetings and to make the COSAC Secretariat a joint secretariat for all interparliamentary meetings. Concerning EUROJUST she suggested an exploratory approach first before making a descriptive mentioning in the guidelines.

Mr Giovanni RIZZONI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, supported the idea of having more Keynote Speakers at the Sessions of the EUSC as it would enrich the debate.

Ms Agnieszka KACZMARSKA, Secretary General of the Polish *Sejm*, expressed the interest of Mr Marek KUCHCIŃSKI, Speaker of the Polish *Sejm*, to be a Keynote Speaker in Session II at the EUSC in May.

Mr Jean-Louis SCHROEDT-GIRARD, Secretary General of the French *Sénat*, complimented the topics chosen and pointed out the importance of the European neighbourhood policy as a sign of cooperation. That is, why the Speaker of the French *Sénat*, Mr Gérard LARCHER, has expressed his interest in a keynote speech on that topic.

Mr DOSSI thanked the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, the French *Sénat* and the Polish *Sejm* for their interest in giving a keynote speech and announced that it would be consulted with the Troika.

Concerning the Swedish proposal, he declared that the issue had been discussed among the Troika the day before and agreed with the Finnish Secretary General to put up solely a technical mandate for a working group. Regarding the organisation of EUROJUST, he expressed the view that the questions to be addressed were limited, as most of the framework was already established in the EUROJUST regulation itself. Therefore, Austria would ask the Finnish Presidency at the EUSC to elaborate on this question further.

4. Presentation of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Romanian EU Council Presidency

Keynote Speakers: Ms Silvia MIHALCEA, Secretary General of the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*; Ms Izabela CHENCIAN, Secretary General of the Romanian *Senat*

Ms Silvia MIHALCEA, Secretary General of the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, opened her address by explaining that the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU would focus on four pillars, namely 1) A Europe of Convergence; 2) A safer Europe; 3) Europe as a stronger global actor; and 4) a Europe of common values.

As to a Europe of convergence, she reaffirmed Romania's objective to ensure convergence and cohesion in order to achieve sustainable and equal development and opportunities for all citizens and Member States through increasing competitiveness and reducing development gaps; promoting connectivity and digitalisation; stimulating entrepreneurship and consolidating the European industrial policy.

Concerning a safer Europe, Ms MIHALCEA underlined Romania's intent to consolidate a safer Europe through increased cohesion among EU Member States in dealing with the new security challenges and through supporting the cooperation initiatives in the field.

She then went on to share Romania's intention to support further consolidation of the global

role of the EU through promoting the enlargement policy, the European action in its neighbourhood, further implementation of the global strategy, ensuring the necessary resources and implementing the EU's global commitments.

As to a Europe of shared values, she voiced Romania's aim at stimulating the solidarity and cohesion in the EU, promoting policies on combatting discrimination, ensuring equal chances and equal treatment of men and women as well as increasing the involvement of citizens, in particular the youth, in the European debate.

She further stated that the program of the parliamentary dimension of the Romanian presidency would comprise seven interparliamentary conferences that would take place in the Palace of Parliament. Ms MIHALCEA underlined the strong aim to deliver tangible results while at the same time remaining within the limits of the priorities set. She also mentioned that all documents had already been uploaded on the official website as well as IPEX. Ms MIHALCEA closed her address by pointing out that Romania would be happy to share its experience with the other Trio Members (Finland and Croatia) and thanked the Presidencies of Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria for their support during the preparation.

Ms Izabela CHENCIAN, Secretary General of the Romanian *Senat*, opened her address by congratulating Austria on its successful Presidency. She emphasized that through the topics on the agenda the Romanian Presidency aimed at tackling the most significant issues of the Union and at ensuring that the results of the conferences would draw attention to all the actors involved in shaping the future of the EU. She further emphasized that the priorities aimed at meeting the needs of the European citizens.

Ms CHENCIAN then pointed out the events that were held by the Senat, namely the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC that had been held the week before and focused on the priorities of the Romanian presidency, on cohesion and on how to ensure convergence through the Multiannual Financial Framework instruments. She noted that the outcome of the conference had been the wish to strengthen the European project by permanently applying the principles of cohesion, convergence, transparency, solidarity, equality and equidistance in relation to all Member States. The second event that would be held in the Romanian Senat will be the Interparliamentary Conference for the CFSP/CSDP (7-8 March), providing a platform for exchanging information and good practices among committees on foreign, security and defence policies of Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission. The objectives would be strengthening security, preserving peace, promoting international cooperation and developing democracy. Concerning the Interparliamentary Conference on the Future of the EU, Ms CHENCIAN mentioned the objectives being Europe of common values and the Eastern Partnership.

Following the two keynote speeches, a video about Romania's traditions was presented.

5. European Elections 2019

Keynote Speaker: Mr Klaus WELLE, Secretary General of the European Parliament

Mr Klaus WELLE, Secretary General of the European Parliament, opened his address by pointing out that the European elections in 2019 would most probably be elections with only 27 Member States and for only 705 members. He further stated that the support for the EU and the Euro had been picking up again after difficult years of crisis partly because of the Brexit. Concerning the elections, Mr WELLE mentioned that there would again be the system of *Spitzenkandidaten*, which had led to an increase of voter turnout at the last elections in various countries. It is therefore crucial to open up national television for those candidates to obtain a good level of participation. He further explained that after three revisions of the basic rules governing the European political parties, they would be receiving financing now and therefore prolonging the campaigns of the candidates.

Stressing the need to widen the information outreach, he noted that the European Parliament had set up a website (<https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/en/home>), on which practical points for each region are reflected in order to show what is directly done for citizens concerning their daily lives. Mr WELLE emphasized that technology had made it possible to have a direct linkage between the European institutions and the citizens and as an example named the Citizens' App, where all key information was available,. He further pointed out the option for citizens, who want to take a more active role, to engage directly by registering on a central website. In addition, Mr WELLE argued that content wise there had been a shift of interest, from opportunities, up front the internal market, towards immigration, security and defence, border control but also climate change and unemployment as the top interest of citizens, all under the common headline of security. He further affirmed those to be the areas where citizens wanted more Europe. In this regard, he highlighted that the European Union could not be limited to opportunity but should also find an answer to security concerns, in order to not develop a huge gap between what is done in the European Union and what concerns citizens the most. As to a Europe that can protect its citizens, Mr WELLE voiced his concerns regarding a rising China, a more aggressive Russia and a less reliable United States under the current president.

In conclusion, he stated that all those questions needed to find answers in 2019 and reminded participants that Europe was not the European institutions but rather the 28/27 Member States with its regions, localities and citizens and asked the Member States to raise awareness for an active participation in the European elections.

6. Session II: IPEX related issues

Keynote Speaker: Mr Peek JAHILO, Secretary General of the Estonian *Riigikogu*

Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament, opened the session on IPEX

by referring to one of the main objectives of interparliamentary cooperation in the EU, the promotion of exchange of information and best practices between the national Parliaments of the European Union. This is why IPEX, as a network of people and digital systems, plays a decisive role and why Parliaments should continue to establish it as a reliable one-stop shop for interparliamentary cooperation and to enhance transparency in the whole EU.

Mr Peek JAHILO, Secretary General of the Estonian *Riigikogu* and current chair of the IPEX Board, started his address by referring to the synergy of the IPEX information system and the work of its correspondents. He further underlined that over the last years the role of national Parliaments in the EU had changed due to the introduction of the subsidiarity control mechanism, which had turned national legislators into European actors. That is when national Parliaments and the European Parliament established the IPEX website for the exchange of interparliamentary information.

Regarding the information put on IPEX, Mr JAHILO argued that the quality depended largely on the currency of the updates done by the IPEX correspondents in all languages. As members of the EU Affairs Committees are used to receive that information, the correspondents have the power to influence not only the prioritisation of European dossiers in the national Parliaments but also to help mobilise the national Parliaments to issue yellow cards. He further stated that parliamentary officials had an important task in supporting members in conducting parliamentary scrutiny. Even though the number of staff varied widely, there were certain similarities between all national Parliaments, such as the Brussels liaison officers, being the first step to compare subsidiarity checks among different parliaments. Mr JAHILO then named the European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and the staff of the European Union Affairs committees, with the latter being the core users of IPEX.

Regarding the work of the IPEX Board in 2018, Mr JAHILO pointed out that the basis of the Board was the digital strategy that stressed the importance of the IPEX network and the transparency for the citizens. During the Estonian Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, the work was divided between three working groups on: 1) Enhancing the IPEX network; 2) Strengthening the Promotion of the IPEX Network; and 3) Improving the IPEX Digital System. He continued by stating that the first aimed mainly at ensuring the quality translation of documents, to improving the work of IPEX correspondents, and at enhancing the cooperation with COSAC and the JPSG on Europol. The second focused on the production of tutorial videos, handouts and a paper on best practices. The third named a well-functioning IPEX as central by improving the search function and making the website more mobile device and user friendly.

As a last point, Mr JAHILO stressed that social media had been a topic at all the IPEX related meetings in 2018 and that the week before the IPEX board had decided to form a working group on social media, allowing it to gather information about social media strategies of national Parliaments and analyse their possibilities.

Mr JAHILO stated that the IPEX board in 2019/20 would be composed as mentioned in the

draft Conclusions on IPEX[†] approved in Tallinn on 18 January 2019, and concluded his remarks by saying that IPEX showed willingness to evolve into a more user-friendly environment and to become a one-stop shop for parliamentary administrations.

During the ensuing debate, two speakers took the floor. Mr Remco NEHMELMAN, Secretary General of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, informed participants that the week before the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* had shared its list of priorities with the Commission work programme on IPEX and that *Eerste Kamer* would follow this approach. He suggested that all national Parliaments should upload their priorities.

Ms Pernille DELEURAN, Danish *Folketinget*, agreed with the Dutch proposal for an overview and further suggested creating a page where people could find information about the national representatives in Brussels and their work.

Mr DOSSI then closed the session by proclaiming that the IPEX Annual Report 2018 and the Conclusions on IPEX were approved.

7. Session III: Open parliament - opportunities and limits

Keynote Speakers: Ms Simone ROOS, Secretary General of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*; Sir David NATZLER, Secretary General of the UK *House of Commons*

Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament, opened the last session by presenting an overview of the Austrian situation regarding opportunities and limits of an open parliament, especially in view of the reconstruction of the historical Parliament building. He stated that even though parliaments should be open to the citizens, people working there should also be able to do so in an orderly and secure manner. He pointed out that after various discussions on whether a concept with low-threshold access and later security check for the visitors' centre would be feasible, it had been decided that because it is a workplace of public figures, the visitors' centre would be accessible only after a security check.

Before giving the floor to the two keynote speakers, Mr DOSSI explained that the Austrian Parliament was introducing crowdsourcing to further involve citizens in the legislative process and to decide on how to best involve them in the Parliament's premises. In the context of the renovation of the historical building, a pilot project for future crowdsourcing had been launched

[†] Approved by the Secretaries General on 28 January: Austria (*Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*), Estonia (*Riigikogu*), Finland (*Eduskunta*), Romania (*Camera Deputaţilor* and *Senatul*), European Parliament, Germany (*Bundestag*), Belgium (*Chambre des représentants* and *Sénat*), Bulgaria (*Narodno sabranie*), Denmark (*Folketing*), France (*Assemblée nationale* and *Sénat*), Greece (*Vouli ton Ellinon*), Italy (*Camera dei Deputati* and *Senato della Repubblica*), Luxembourg (*Chambre des Députés*), Netherlands (*Eerste* and *Tweede Kamer*), Poland (*Sejm* and *Senat*), Portugal (*Assembleia da República*), Slovakia (*Národná rada*), Sweden (*Riksdag*). According to the IPEX, Guidelines, COSAC, the ECPRD, the European Commission and the Council participate in and contribute to the IPEX Board meetings.

on Parliament's website. He ended his remarks by pointing out that more on this topic would be discussed during the Meeting of the International Forum of Parliament Visitor Centres in May in Vienna.

Ms Simone ROOS, Secretary General of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, began her keynote speech by highlighting the existing tensions between public access and security in parliaments by telling of an incident in the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* last March, when a visitor wanted to hang himself from the public gallery. She further stated that even though her Chamber aimed at being open and transparent, in order to make it easy for the public to follow the debate, this also gave opportunities to abuse that openness and transparency. That is why the work of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* was based on two core values: openness and security.

Regarding openness, Ms ROOS pointed out that it was an essential aspect of Dutch democracy and its political culture and that the Dutch Parliament was visited by 223 000 people every year. She emphasized that plenary and nearly all committee meetings were open to the press and the public and that the building was also open to the public during weekdays and several Saturdays. These ambitions for an open, accessible and welcoming Parliament should further continue after the renovation that will start in 2020, as they offer opportunities to adapt the buildings in line with them.

Moving on to safety and security, Ms ROOS pointed out that all those ambitions would be possible only if the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* was able to protect its politicians, civil servants and assemblies effectively. She further explained that the Chamber's Security Department played a key role in this context, as it was responsible for the security scan. In addition, the entrance was guarded by military police and once inside the areas for members and civil staff were strictly separated from the public areas. She then stressed that in order to be proactive towards possible incidents a combination of collaboration with external parties, such as the police, security services and the healthcare sector as well as internal cooperation between the departments of security, registry, facilities and the messenger service were decisive. She closed her address by underlining that the challenge was to find the right balance between those core values in order to guarantee security without undermining the openness.

Sir David NATZLER, Secretary General of the UK *House of Commons*, started his address by arguing that the location of Westminster itself, being close to Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace, presented an immense security challenge. He then reminded participants of the terrorist attack on 22 March 2017 when five people were killed in front of the Houses of Parliament and the attacker had been able to run past the gates of the *Houses of Parliament*, which had been less strictly guarded due to a vote.

He stated that the UK *Houses of Parliament* did not have a real visitors' centre for the one million visitors per year yet, but that that might change after the reconstruction, as there might be more space. Sir NATZLER explained that at the moment visitors had to go through very strong security controls that had the negative effect of being very time consuming. He also stated that this was the difficulty of finding balance between guaranteeing security for the people working inside and preventing the Houses of being too secluded from the people.

Sir NATZLER pointed out that all public sittings were broadcast and shown on Parliament TV, but even so, there was also the long tradition that parliamentary meetings should be open to the public. Besides those, there are also education centres, public meetings of various parliamentary and interest groups as well as guided tours through the Houses that are either sponsored by Members of Parliament or paid for by visitors themselves. As over half of the people visiting are foreigners, tours are offered in various languages. Sir NATZLER ended his remarks by underlining the benefit of an open Parliament, open also on weekends, in order to become a bigger visitors 'attraction'.

During the ensuing debate, six speakers took the floor. Ms Maija-Leena PAAVOLA, Secretary General of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, remarked that the Finnish *Eduskunta* had reopened in 2017 after two years of renovation and that the number of visitors has doubled to 60000 per year since then. This is why public access had to be limited for security reasons and currently appointments have to be made in advance in order to get in.

Mr Claes MÅRTENSSON, Secretary General of the Swedish *Riksdag*, emphasized the ambition to perceive the Swedish *Riksdag* as an open and welcoming parliament, through public hearings and debates, guided tours and study visits, because openness was considered as the right to obtain insight into the parliamentary process. He added that there was no special visitors' centre. He also stated that as a rule, committee meetings were not open to the public, though exceptions could be made, such as the consultations of the Committee on European Affairs with the government ahead of the European Council.

Mr Socratis SOCRATOUS, Acting Secretary General of the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, referred to openness as an interconnection between circulation of information and transparency with safety and security and stressed that enhanced security measures should not lead to misuse of personal data nor have a negative impact on parliamentary work.

Mr Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German *Bundestag*, argued that the contributions made so far showed the sphere we found ourselves in, in which a balance between openness and security has to be found. He said that in Berlin the Bundestag police forces together with the state police were responsible for ensuring consistent protection of the external part of the Parliament, stringent access control and patrols within the building. He pointed out that plenary meetings were public with 50000 visitors in the galleries every year and noted that all together – presentation, guided tours, visits of the dome of the building – added up to a total number of more than two million visitors to the *Bundestag* each year. Mr RISSE further argued that the access system had gotten more restrictive for fear of terrorist attacks and that it was now necessary to register in advance and submit personal data. He concluded his remarks by noting that there was a plan to construct a visitors' centre but that it was rather difficult to find a location close to the Reichstag building.

Mr Albino AZEVEDO SOARES, Secretary General of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, underlined the significance of education when it came to an open Parliament and

named public plenary sessions, guided tours, cultural visits as well as youth parliament sittings as ways for the public to enter the parliament building. He also stressed the importance of communication methods, such as Parliamentary TV, social media and an up-to-date website, to guarantee parliamentary openness.

Ms Agnieszka KACZMARSKA, Secretary General of the Polish *Sejm*, argued that an open parliament was very important for the proper functioning of the *Sejm*. She stressed that besides public plenary and committee sittings, there was also a much-used website where the course of sessions as well as the legislative process were documented in detail. Ms KACZMARSKA emphasized that the *Sejm* was ready to work on legislation and referendum requests from citizens which often lead to the launch of special legislative works and argued that these invited people to feel closer to the work and diminish the distance between the state and the citizens. She concluded by stressing that the contemporary world was not free of real nor online threats and that openness went hand in hand with security measures to guarantee that the institution can function.

Sir NATZLER underlined in his closing remarks the importance of cyber security and the risks of being more and more visible on Twitter and Facebook and other social media sites and the fact that Parliaments should focus more on the intellectual access and not the physical access when speaking about openness.

8. Closing remarks

In the closing remarks, Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament, thanked the keynote speakers and delegates for the constructive debate and indicated that the photo and video materials would be made available on the website www.eu2018parl.at.