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Assembleia da República



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**Declaration by the Parliaments
of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Portuguese Republic and
the Federal Republic of Slovenia
on the running of the parliamentary dimension of the
Trio Presidency of the Council of the European Union
from 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2021**

Working towards a stronger post-crisis Europe

At the beginning of this new decade, the European Union is facing immense internal and external challenges, which require more coordinated common action. These include the global health risks, overcoming the financial impact of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring economic recovery, but especially climate change and migration, along with instability and violent conflicts in the European Union's neighbourhood.

In recent weeks, Europe has been shaken to the core by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has already cost several hundreds of thousands of lives across the world, including almost two hundred thousand within the European Union. We, as the parliaments of the Trio Presidency, remember those who have fallen victim to the pandemic and will resolutely assume our responsibility for tackling the impacts felt across Europe.

This pandemic clearly illustrates the fact that infectious diseases know no borders and that scientists and researchers cannot rapidly provide responses to combat new viruses. In the pressing search for an effective vaccine, the potentials of global cooperation must be exploited. Sustainably reinforcing European sovereignty in the development of vaccines, new therapeutics and treatment methods, diagnostic tests and medical systems, however, is of equal importance. The resilience of the European Union to future possible crises must be strengthened. In light thereof and taking into account the lessons learned in the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of joint crisis plans to effectively deal with possible future pandemics or large scale cyber-attacks needs to be identified as one of the priorities.

This pandemic demonstrates once again that global systemic threats require a coordinated reaction by all political leaders at national level, and especially at European level. In the first few weeks after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe, the varying dynamics of the infection in the different member states called for swift reactions. Critically ill patients in some cases received intensive-care treatment in other countries and, after some initial difficulties, countries shared supplies of medicines or protective clothing. Purely national strategies to tackle the crisis were of limited effectiveness. People looked to Europe in the expectation of greater solidarity and cross-border solutions. The European Union reacted with immediate measures to safeguard supplies of medical equipment and support businesses and jobs.

The European Communities were founded 70 years ago to overcome conflicts – some of them centuries old – between neighbouring states. The power of this European idea remains unbroken, the European Union is viewed as a project of peace and community – despite all attempts at disinformation. Today, however, we face different challenges, which are no less dangerous or diverse. Yet polls show that the majority of EU citizens look to Europe with optimism and with expectations of its political leaders.

Alongside effective protective measures to tackle the health crisis, it is vital that restrictions on the Single Market be lifted as soon as possible and all citizens allowed to fully enjoy their fundamental liberties and rights once again. Citizens must regain their freedom to work, study and travel anywhere in Europe straight away once the necessary conditions are in place. As parliamentarians, this is something which is particularly close to our hearts. The four fundamental freedoms form the bedrock of European integration. The Union is, and remains, primarily a community of freedom, solidarity and law. Ensuring that it is able to represent the interests of its citizens in a more unified and stronger way once the pandemic is over and the societal, social and economic repercussions tackled is a political task which falls to both the member states and the EU institutions.

As the beating hearts of our democracy, our parliaments, both national and European, have a special responsibility to collectively safeguard and strengthen democracy, fundamental and human rights, and the rule of law. This not only applies during our efforts to overcome the pandemic and ensure a full return to our European liberties; it also applies in general, to ensure that appropriate weight is given across the whole of the EU to the unconditional application of the Union's values, which includes the rule of law, as stated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. We will therefore work to move forward the discussion on a new strategy for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and on a common rule-of-law mechanism, to apply in equal measure to all.

The status quo is no longer a viable option. We need to be forward-looking in shaping the future of the Union. Indeed the disruptive nature of the current crisis offers an opportunity for greater innovation and dynamism. It is not yet possible to predict the gravity of the economic and social impacts of the crisis. Yet it is certain to be the greatest economic shock in the history of the European Union. We must therefore now get the economy in our member states back on track as quickly as possible, without repeating the old mistakes and excesses of globalisation. The next Multiannual Financial Framework, and the new EU recovery instrument in particular, is intended to provide solidarity and support for our economies in making the investments needed for the key tasks for the future and create fresh impetus in a wide range of areas.

After the crisis, the European Union must be better able to act on issues of key importance for the future. Economic stimulus plans to structurally improve our economy in Europe and return it to a growth trajectory should, as foreseen in the European Green Deal, take account of our responsibility for tackling climate change and preserving biodiversity. Only in this way can the European Union's ecological, social and economic resilience and cohesiveness be strengthened. In addition, more investment in education and research is needed in order for us to play a leading role in essential fields like medical research, or in propulsion technologies. Above all, though, the Union must reinforce its technological sovereignty. It is time to foster digital transformation, artificial intelligence and climate-neutral industrial technologies through massive investments, whilst maintaining citizens' trust in these key fields for the future by ensuring a sound legal framework.

Boosting Europe's competitiveness and sustainability in this way will reduce, rather than increase, disparities in Europe. In order to overcome the current social challenges and disparities, the European Union needs to take advantage of the well-tested policies, such as cohesion policy, and develop new effective initiatives. Cohesion policy must continue to play its role in reducing disparities between Member States, promoting investment and ensuring coherent development. With the creation of the SURE instrument, the European Union has acted rapidly in the field of employment. Other instruments to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights are also under discussion. We should be aware that long-term public support for the EU will largely depend on greater progress towards a Social Europe.

The proposed Conference on the Future of Europe was conceived as a platform for structured debate on further European integration. It will provide an opportunity to rethink how to make the European Union stronger, more efficient and more resilient to the challenges of the modern world on the basis of the existing instruments. The Parliaments of the Trio Presidency firmly believe that the Conference should deliver concrete results for the benefits of EU citizens and contribute to the development of EU policies so that the EU can better tackle current and future challenges in a more democratic, efficient and sustainable way. The Conference should apply the "policy first approach" and provide inspiration for further development of our policies and instruments while its scope being kept open for all possible outcomes including legislative proposals and, if deemed appropriate, treaty discussions or otherwise. The Conference should be convened as soon as circumstances allow. Citizens must be involved in the close dialogue and the direct participation of national parliaments in the Conference guaranteed.

Alongside the institutional debate, a broad discussion on priority-setting in Europe is needed. The pandemic illustrates that the European Union needs greater strategic autonomy in certain areas. The interruption of supply chains and reliance on suppliers outside the Union to obtain medical products, for example, demonstrates the risks of international interconnectivity. In future, European industry should return to manufacturing more strategically important products itself, or make progress in building alternative supply chains. Yet the Union must also remain committed to free international trade and safeguarding rules-based multilateralism. In an evolving multipolar world we should create the framework for a balanced partnership with other major economic powers;

In today's multipolar world, the European Union is expected to speak with one voice and to exert a greater influence on international relations in the future. Thus its ability to take a united and resolute stance in external relations and effectively foster Europe's values across the world must be further strengthened. In particular, the EU will need to do more for security and stability in the conflict-prone regions within Europe and in the world around us, where Europe is a beacon of hope and aspiration for many.

We will focus on and aim at sustained peace and security on the African continent. We will actively work towards sustainable and inclusive growth, investment, job creation and human development and will address climate change, migration and mobility issues.

The European perspective remains a powerful driver in transforming the economies and societies of the Western Balkans. The Union must therefore proceed with the enlargement to the countries of the Western Balkans and, while ensuring consistency with the reform processes, maintain its commitment to the EU membership perspective for the countries in the region.

The challenges associated with worldwide migration, which have not been erased by the pandemic, call more than ever for a comprehensive, lasting and sustainable solution. A reform of European asylum law is urgently needed, not only for humanitarian reasons. We, as the parliaments of the Trio Presidency, support the Commission's efforts to achieve a breakthrough with a New Pact on Asylum and Migration. At the same time, work must continue to ensure that the EU external borders are protected and the full functioning of the Schengen area restored. We jointly propose in this context a High-Level Conference on Migration and Asylum in Europe, which could be held under the auspices of the European Commission and the European Parliament at regular intervals. The aim is to initiate a parliamentary process of discussion and promote a broad dialogue on all aspects of migration.

In view of the wide range of challenges we face, the Trio Presidency and its parliamentary dimension have a particular role to play. The pandemic has not only changed the political environment, but has also made it more difficult to organise events. Interparliamentary exchange has been severely restricted in recent months. Yet direct contact between parliaments facilitates the understanding of different perspectives and allows us to make progress in this spirit on joint goals and projects.

We will therefore strive to ensure progress on interparliamentary cooperation despite the current restrictions on contact and travel.

Against this background, we plan, within the next 18 months, to

- boost interparliamentary activities once again and play an active role in shaping EU policy to tackle the crisis, with reference to:
 - Article 12 of the Treaty on European Union, and the role of the national parliaments enshrined herein;
 - the established interparliamentary cooperation between the national parliaments and the European Parliament in line with the Protocol on the role of national parliaments in the European Union;
 - the role of the national parliaments enshrined in the Treaties in assessing EU policies in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, e.g. Europol, Eurojust and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency;

- make a substantial contribution to central topics in European policy, in line with the European Commission's political guidelines, the European Council's Strategic Agenda, and the goals of the Trio Presidency;

- improve the use of digital technologies to strengthen interparliamentary exchange and update the draft on "enhanced interparliamentary cooperation through modern technology" produced by the working group to update the Guidelines for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the light of experience during the pandemic and practices which are becoming established, with the involvement of the national parliaments and the European Parliament, and aim for it to be deliberated on by the Speakers' Conference;

- take concrete practical measures to boost sustainability, including with regard to the running of our own parliaments and, in this spirit, take into account the principles of sustainability and climate-friendliness in decisions on the running of our parliaments and work to achieve an exchange of experience between the signatory parliaments in a suitable framework to improve their environmental footprints.

We, the undersigned, declare our resolve to engage in comprehensive dialogue, intensive cooperation and mutual support in connection with the parliamentary dimension of the Council Presidency, with the goal of successfully organising and running the relevant events in the period between 1 July 2020 and 31 December 2021. In this spirit, the signatories agree to consult each other regularly at a suitable level and seek to achieve joint positions in the framework of troika or trio formats.

The parliaments of the Trio Presidency will take all necessary and appropriate measures to ensure the successful implementation of this declaration.

Signed on 29 June 2020

Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble
President of the German Bundestag

Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues
President of the Assembleia de República

Igor Zorčič
President of the Državni zbor

Dr. Dietmar Woidke
President of the Bundesrat

Alojz Kovšca
President of the Državni svet