

## **INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN THE AREA OF FREEDOM SECURITY AND JUSTICE**

**Intervention by the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament,  
Mr. Vangelis Meimarakis**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

Greece has assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the fifth time, at a critical point for Europe, in a period where many things are being called into question, are being reviewed, as well as re-organized, in the light of the debate on the future of Europe, leading up to the month of May and the European Parliament elections. Greece has also assumed the Presidency at a crucial time for the specific field of Security, Justice and Home Affairs.

Even if in the recent past the most important and concrete steps towards European integration have been taken in the field of Freedom, Security and Justice, the current climate of uncertainty in the neighbouring regions of Europe, combined with the pressure exerted on member states in a period of economic crisis, constitute a major challenge if not a threat for the Union's progress in this field.

Just before the completion of the Stockholm Programme's implementation period, there is an ongoing debate on defining the new priorities in view of the Council to be held in June. The Brussels meeting co-organised in March, by the European Parliament's LIBE Committee and the Hellenic Parliament Committee on Public Administration, Public Order and Justice, as well as the meeting of the Chairmen of the Justice and Home Affairs Committees which took place in Athens in February, have been important steps in a constructive dialogue between parliamentarians, and we hope that the conclusions thereof will contribute to our discussion today.

The specific issues discussed in the recent Brussels meeting relate to legislative initiatives that have already been debated, I am certain, in the competent committees of our parliaments:

- The proposal for a Europol regulation, which is of particular importance for today's discussion, as Europol's alignment with the Lisbon Treaty's provisions, through an increase in accountability, shall be the new form of inter-parliamentary cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament.
- The package of measures on personal data protection, the debate on which, in the context of the competent working group, has been revived during the Greek Presidency. This is always a timely issue, as the possibilities of electronic surveillance are broadening, due to the development of technology at a pace that is inversely proportional to the development of the European legislative framework.
- The proposal for establishing a European Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), to protect the Union's economic interests, was also discussed; it is a proposal faced with many reactions, both in principle and regarding its provisions. A main cause for concern has been the way in which objections expressed by national parliaments have been handled, during the activation of the yellow card process, i.e. objections indicating a violation of the subsidiarity principle.

Out of all the issues that were discussed, I would like to delve more on the issue of maritime migration flows. My country, as well as Italy, Malta and other Mediterranean countries are called upon to tackle a series of interconnected issues, beyond the dimension of border security and the severe economic implications. Migration by sea causes acute humanitarian crises, as we witnessed with the shipwreck in October in Lampedusa, while similar tragedies often unfold – if to a smaller extent - in the islands of the Eastern Aegean.

My country in particular, due to its vast coastline and the numerous islands and islets, is shouldering a disproportionately great burden in order to manage illegal migration flows, which are trying to reach central and northern Europe; And this is, indeed, happening at a time when the country is afflicted by a deep recession and high unemployment.

The numbers are staggering and unequivocally illustrate a problematic situation. The unrelenting pressure exercised upon Europe's eastern and southern borders cannot be ignored by any member of the European family.

Conclusions reached in the Brussels meeting, which will be the basis for our contribution in the June Council, may be summarized as follows:

- Managing rampant migration must be based on the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility and respect for fundamental rights and dignity. At the same time, we must facilitate legal migration, as well as cooperation with third countries of origin or transit of immigrants and the effective coordination of organizations and institutions handling issues directly or indirectly linked to migration, such as Frontex, the European Asylum Support Organisation (EASO), Europol, and the European External Action Service.
- The European Commission's tendency is to emphasize the codification and effective implementation of rules already established or at the stage of approval, rather than promote new initiatives. Its actions aim at achieving economic growth through justice. National parliaments, as can be derived from the debate, agree with this target, on the condition that it will go hand in hand with guarantees on the protection of the fundamental and procedural rights of the citizens.
- Finally, it was noted that cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament on the aforementioned issues must be further strengthened to include control over correct policy implementation, as I

mentioned earlier. Our capacity as our European citizens' elected representatives gives us the mandate to jointly control not only the adoption of policies and legislative choices, but their implementation as well.

On that note, I would like to come back to the Proposal on a Europol Regulation and the interesting proposals by the European Parliament rapporteur Mr. Diaz De Mera. His report is in favour of establishing a joint parliamentary committee consisting of the EP competent committee (on Political Freedoms, Justice and Home Affairs/LIBE) and one representative from each national parliament or two from parliaments with two chambers. Similarly, the Presidency will be jointly held by the LIBE Chairman and the presiding country's parliamentary representative. Its competencies, were ultimately Mr. De Mera's suggestions to be adopted, shall be broader than the initial ones contained in the proposal for a regulation. Its role will be to control the organisation's schedule of activities, its actions and its budget execution. It will also have a say in the selection of the Executive Director.

This proposal has numerous positive elements. Despite the fact that it limits the participation of MPs from national parliaments in comparison to EP participation, the extent of cooperation described in the report's text is more than satisfactory, in terms of inter-parliamentary cooperation. Moreover, a "few-members" scheme, consisting of parliamentarians with knowledge and expertise on the issue, will guarantee the quality of an in-depth discussion. Considering the above, it is my view that we should support the establishment of this joint Committee.

Another issue we need to examine is whether there will be any further development in inter-parliamentary cooperation concerning Eurojust control ( and, possibly EPPO control if and when it is established) and, more generally, control over the area of security and justice. I believe that a sufficient discussion on these issues is taking place in the fora at hand: in the meetings of Chairmen of Parliamentary Committees and Joint Meetings organized by the European Parliament or jointly organized with the parliament of the country holding the Council's Presidency ( ICM, JCM).

A special case of inter-parliamentary cooperation on issues in the field of security and classified information is the parliamentary network on the oversight of intelligence services (ENNIR). To the extent that the exchange of information between Europol and state security authorities shall be the object of control by the JPC, it could include in its range of activities the exchange of best practices on the control over intelligence services, in order to achieve rationalization and cohesion, rather than fragmentation and overlapping in our cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

The development of the area of freedom, security and justice has been a long-standing, major objective of the European Union. It is our duty as parliamentarians to ensure that, at this critical point in time, Europe will take steps forward and not backwards.

Thank you