

Speech by the Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag, Mr. Per Westerberg

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Madam Speaker,

Dear Colleagues,

Let me start by thanking the Lithuanian Presidency for its efforts in arranging this Speakers' Conference and its commitment to bringing the Eastern Partnership forward.

The Eastern Partnership was initiated during the Swedish EU Presidency in 2009 and it will remain a key priority for us.

Regarding the situation in Ukraine, the door to increased political cooperation and association with the EU, as well as future membership is open. However, it is important to remember that it is ultimately only the people of Ukraine that can make sovereign decisions concerning the country's future.

Ukraine has crucial structural reform work ahead, and is in need of support from parliamentarians. The country needs to strengthen its democratic institutions, battle corruption and increase transparency both in politics and in the economy.

It must continue to strive for democracy, characterised by democratic parties, pragmatism and a society that guarantees the rights of minorities. Ultimately, Ukraine must gain the trust of its citizens in its institutions and in the rule of law.

Parliaments make up the very core of a parliamentary democracy. Supporting parliaments in countries undergoing transition is therefore crucial in order to lay the foundations for genuine democracy.

Sharing methods for parliamentary work can, many times, be essential.

For this purpose, and beginning in 2011, the Swedish Parliament has carried out a project for the exchange of experience on a bilateral level between parliamentarians - first with the Parliament of Moldova and currently with the Parliament of Georgia.

Swedish parliamentarians have shared their experience with their Moldovan and Georgian counterparts. The purpose has been to inspire ideas and generate thoughts for the benefit of political development and maturity.

I believe that Lithuania serves as a good reminder of the importance of building strong democratic political institutions, based on the principle of the rule of law.

If the EU is to continue to serve as role model and a reliable partner, we must practise what we preach. We must continue to protect and respect our common principles such as the rule of law and human rights. This is key, both in our relations and negotiations with third countries, but also within the Union.

Mutual trust between the member states, and confidence in our legal systems are preconditions for the principle of mutual recognition. Let us never lose sight of this.

The interaction between a well-functioning political system at a national level and a smoothly functioning system at an international - and European - level is crucial.

International public law affects national political systems and may sometimes require adjustments in our national public systems. The institutions of the European Union, as well as the member states, must take responsibility for ensuring that the fundamental principles of the rule of law are respected.

Mutual trust between the member states is of utmost importance for EU cooperation. The rule of law rests on a number of principles which, together, make up the overall framework. This requires that the principles are transformed and reflected into more precise rules and regulations. These may differ from member state to member state, but it is crucial that we all have the same measuring rod.

Our national parliaments have an important role as guardians of the fundamental principles of the rule of law. Parliaments have many roles to play; they maintain scrutiny functions, they ensure transparency and they provide information to the citizens about their rights and obligations. Our parliaments must protect and maintain accountability by ensuring the trust of the citizens in the democratic decision-making process.

I would like to call for even greater interaction among parliaments. We have much to learn from each other. We should discuss and coordinate views in order to find common positions and perhaps set more common standards even more frequently than we do today. We could have an even more prominent role than we have today.

As outlined in the Lisbon Treaty, parliaments participate in the scrutiny of the work of Europol and Eurojust. The national parliaments, together with the European Parliament, should jointly determine how regular and efficient cooperation should be carried out.

In my view, parliaments should increasingly make use of the opportunities afforded them by the treaty, and actively contribute to the functioning of the Union.

Parliaments should be active in interparliamentary cooperation alongside the European Parliament - a cooperation that should be jointly decided and characterised by participation on equal terms.

At the same time, it is crucial that interparliamentary cooperation does not get caught up in details, and refrains from excessively complicated rules of procedure. We should strive to maintain a good and clear overview.

For example, Article 13 of the Fiscal Compact envisages further cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament.

We should focus on the substance and not get tangled up in details such as the ongoing discussion on the rules of procedure. I believe that much could be achieved if all parliaments would strive towards a common position and avoid internal conflicts within the delegations at the conferences.

I welcome the fact that the parliaments have been involved in the preparatory phase of the scrutiny of Europol. However, it is important, now, that our parliaments remain involved in the decision-making process regarding the set-up of this arrangement. I believe that it is important for us - the Speakers - to follow up on this matter the next time we meet.

Once again, national parliaments can and should increasingly strive for greater coordination among themselves and discuss common views and visions.

I believe this will bring our parliamentary cooperation forward, and at the same time help to achieve true democratic accountability. We must take part of all the problems and possibilities in the whole of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.