

**Speech to the  
LXV Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of  
Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC)**

31 May 2021

15:00 - 16:30

by videoconference - SPAAK

Session I - The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU

Keynote speakers:

*Prime Minister of Portugal, António Costa*

*Vice-President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola*

*Vice-President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas*

Debate

Dear Prime Minister Costa,

Dear President Ferro Rodrigues,

Dear Vice-President Schinas,

Dear Chair of the European Affairs Committee, Capoulas Santos,

Dear Parliamentarians,

One year and a half after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our lives are still disrupted and many challenges remain ahead of us, but time has come to draw lessons from this unprecedented crisis and build a sustainable, fair and inclusive future together.

There is a window of opportunity for reform. As Parliamentarians, we should lead by example and put forward proposals that will strengthen the European project and enhance parliamentary democracy.

The value of democracy and our responsibility as people representatives is more acute than ever.

The European Parliament was able to remain operational and ensure the continuity of the democratic process and the exercise of its prerogatives during the pandemic, which also pointed out shortcomings.

Therefore, we have launched an internal reflection process in the European Parliament on **rethinking parliamentary democracy** and how the Parliament should be working, with the aim of moving towards a more resilient and effective institution that would also be better prepared to deal with future events.

Stronger parliaments are in the interest of our societies. Stronger parliaments - our parliaments - must be at the heart of the **European recovery strategy**.

A strategy that must fight inequalities, which were aggravated by the crisis as it hit harder the most vulnerable among us. We must fight poverty and promote social inclusion, allowing people to live in dignity.

I know the Portuguese Presidency is particularly attentive to this social dimension and the Porto Social Summit, reaffirmed our joint effort to implement the **European Pillar of Social Rights**.

The Pillar must be a guide for reforms and investments and I encourage you to make sure that it is duly reflected in your national recovery and reform plans.

The European recovery plan makes it possible to finance measures in the field of social and territorial cohesion. We have the means, also due to the work of the European Parliament, to tackle structural problems and reinforce our Social Europe.

Citizens expect this from us. We cannot fail them. Our Europe must leave no one behind.

That is why the European Parliament is working hard to reach ambitious **climate and energy package** before summer.

As co-legislators, we are moving on the **digital transition** as well, with the same level of ambition.

This ambition is not a luxury, and it can not only for the few. If the next ten years are to be truly the **Digital Decade**, we need Europe to lead and that means ensuring a legislative and regulatory framework that is fit for purpose and future-proof.

It is essential if we wish to deliver to our citizens and future generations.

In this regard, the **EU budget** must be financed in a more effective and sustainable way.

All EU National Parliaments have now ratified the Own Resources Decision. This is good news. It will boost our recovery, as we will be able to launch the **Next Generation EU Recovery Fund** and the binding roadmap towards the introduction of the new Own Resources.

With summer approaching, I am happy that we recently agreed on a coordinated approach regarding the **COVID-19 certificate**. Parliament was clear from the outset that this instrument cannot hinder free movement or lead to discrimination. I am confident that it will facilitate people's lives and help our economies re-emerge.

It is fundamental, however, that we keep up our joint efforts regarding the vaccination campaign and look beyond, by building the foundations of a European Health Union.

Our European project is yet unfinished and we must keep our citizens involved in the construction of the EU.

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** will be an opportunity for citizens to have ownership. This is a priority for the European Parliament and I would like to thank the Portuguese Presidency for their efforts to set up this important exercise that must bear fruit.

Ours must be the Europe of the next generation.

National Parliaments will play a crucial part in this Conference and its success will depend as well on your engagement, as Members of Parliament, in encouraging participation and relaying messages, and building bridges between people and the EU.

I am pleased that both National and European Parliamentarians will be substantially represented in the plenary of the Conference, so that the diversity of our systems and opinions can be ensured.

Looking at the future of the EU, does not mean being self-centred. On the contrary, we need a strong EU speaking with a common voice on the **global stage**, defending our strategic interests, and our values.

We need to ensure our common security and foreign policy becomes more closely aligned. As we have seen with the deterioration of the situation in **Belarus**, we are facing threats that can only be properly met by Europe speaking in one voice.

Europe responded and must continue to stand up. **For Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega**, for Belarus, for every person who must feel safe flying in our planes, for every dissident who looks to Europe as a beacon of hope. For us all.

And when we talk of the importance of our values, we cannot avoid the issue of **migration**.

We need a new responsibility-sharing mechanism. The European Parliament will play its part. And we need National Parliaments to work with us to create **a true, lasting, European migration policy** based on solidarity that is compassionate with those in need of protection, fair but firm with those who are not eligible and strong with traffickers exploiting the vulnerable.

We must also do more to push back against the **anti-EU narrative** that takes hold so easily and so quickly. This is all of our responsibility. It is a concern tied to our complacency and the ease to which things can be taken for granted. **The last generation of European politicians to have experienced the nightmare of war first-hand** have passed on their baton to us as the next generation – and we need to keep showing and reminding people that ultimately, **Europe is the world's greatest peace project.**

It is on all of our shoulders to make our voices heard in defence of **strong value-based Union**, or we risk getting drowned out.

We need to see a Europe that is stronger and that respects the diversity that makes us so unique. **A Europe that can respond quickly to shifting geo-political landscapes; that understands that it must keep evolving.**

Parliamentary solidarity will be essential. We are emerging into a time of opportunity to rebuild and recommit. We are facing challenges that are more serious and different from those we faced in the past. **We need to come together like never before.**

Thank you for your attention and I am looking forward to the debate that will follow.