



Deutscher Bundestag



Bundesrat

Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments

Minutes of the video conference, 10 May 2021

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments was held in Berlin on 10 May 2021, in the form of a video conference.

The parliamentary Speakers of the Troika – Finland, Germany and Slovenia – and the European Parliament met beforehand, as has become traditional, to discuss the provisional agenda and the intention to coordinate the conclusions afterwards among the Troika parliaments.

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments opened with a welcome from Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE, President of the German Bundestag. Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE pointed to the new opportunities for participation opened up by the digital transition. He cautioned, however, that more opportunities for participation did not necessarily translate into more participation *per se*, or greater public acceptance. The digital world represented a challenge for the system of representative democracy, he said, and the conventional media were losing their function as filters and mediators of news. He suggested that the business models of major Internet companies needed to be reviewed, considering that they largely rejected any responsibility for hostility and hate speech online.

Reiner HASELOFF, President of the Bundesrat, used his opening address to emphasise that European fundamental values were deeply rooted in our societies. Europe, he said, had long been part of normal life for people whose lives spanned borders. He saw the Conference on the Future of Europe as a chance for the EU to transform itself and continue evolving. Nonetheless, he added, parliaments must remain the beating heart of democracy in the digital world, so rules for the digital sphere needed to be created to ensure that Europe could stay united in diversity in future.

Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE outlined the agenda, which was adopted unanimously. He pointed out that there would only be conclusions from the Conference Presidency after the event and that these would be coordinated among the Troika parliaments. Given the virtual format in which the conference was being held, he explained, the usual intensive coordination of conclusions among all participants would not be possible.

Session I: The digital transition and the changing public sphere – danger and opportunities for representative democracy

The topic of session I was introduced by two experts, Professor Jeanette HOFMANN of Freie Universität Berlin and Francesca BRIA, President of the Italian national innovation fund. The subsequent discussion was conducted by the journalist Anke PLÄTTNER.

Jeanette HOFMANN presented three theses to illustrate her thoughts on the subject of social media. Firstly, she averred, algorithms specialised in reinforcing statements but did not create any themselves. Secondly, she argued that platforms like Facebook and Twitter were key infrastructure for our democracies. These platforms knew more about members of the public than any other institution, she said, and their power therefore had to be constrained. Thirdly, Jeanette HOFMANN proposed there should be a kind of broadcasting board for the digital age, drawn from across society and tasked with regulation. Overall, however, she saw social media as more of an opportunity than a danger. She cited empirical studies as demonstrating that some 90% of the hostility, hate speech and disinformation comes from less than 1% of users.

Francesca BRIA, President of the Italian national innovation fund, gave various examples to show how governments, parliaments and EU institutions could use digital tools to involve the public more effectively in the decision-making process. Particularly after protests, she said, citizens' councils, citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting could serve as a bridge and foster new trust between society and political decision-makers. As she saw it, the COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated what power digital autocratic systems like China could unfold. Now it was Brussels's turn, she urged, to show what open societies could achieve with the aid of digital tools that placed the common good, inclusion for all and climate change front and centre.

Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian National Council, underscored how social media had caused a meteoric increase in the speed of political communication and made it possible, on the positive side, to communicate directly with the general public. But, he said, the digital transition also brought with it great challenges for representative democracy, as a result of which a legislative framework had to be established for digital matters. Following the example of the conventional media, he concluded, the providers of social media platforms should commit themselves to the principle of editorial control.

Maria Elisabetta Alberti CASELLATI, President of the Italian Senate, underlined the point that the new digital networks and media were changing the parliamentary process. Representative democracy, she said, was the only form of government that could speak for our pluralist society.

Andries GRYFFROY, Deputy Speaker of the Belgian Senate, warned that all members of society had to have access to the digital sphere, with access to the Internet being of particular importance. For him, the opportunities outweighed the risks or challenges with regard to data privacy.

Edite ESTRELA, Vice-President of the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, reported that the Portuguese parliament used many digital formats to make the decision-making process transparent and bring the representatives into direct contact with the people.

Jeanette HOFMANN supplemented this by referring to the many small platforms which serve niche interests. This very diversity was what the state had a duty to support, she said.

Francesca BRIA raised the point that it was not only infrastructure that mattered but also bridging the digital divide. She called the Conference on the Future of Europe a historic opportunity and commended it for very good use of digital tools.

Viktorija ČMILYTĖ-NIELSEN, Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, emphasised that the EU had a responsibility to non-EU countries. A shared digital market and a common roaming space was beneficial to democracy, she said, referring specifically to the countries of the Eastern Partnership. She saw risks particularly in connection with cyberspace and urged that the EU protect it vigorously.

Gérard LARCHER, President of the French Senate, spoke about the way the pandemic had accelerated the digital transition. He emphasised the importance of exercising control over the digital transition and proposed setting up a register of good practice for uses of digital technology.

Adamos ADAMOOU, President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus, spoke in defence of users' rights in the digital environment and expressed his confidence that the Conference on the Future of Europe would provide important input.

Meritxell BATET LAMAÑA, President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, explained that the Spanish parliament had adopted an electronic voting procedure during the pandemic, which had ensured that its work could continue. At the same time, she said, it had become clear that deputies had felt the lack of in-person contact and parliamentary processes had in some cases been called into question. She concluded that physical presence in the plenary was therefore vital and could not be entirely dropped in times of trouble.

Ludovic ORBAN, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania, reported that its parliamentary proceedings could be accessed online and that plenary sittings were livestreamed. He commended this as generating a higher level of public trust in governmental institutions. On the other hand, he saw fake news as a great threat to our democracies.

Jeanette HOFMANN noted in summary that many concerns had been raised about the stability of democracy during the discussion. It was important, she said, to reiterate the point that every

democratic society was constantly evolving and that, at least from an academic point of view, one would be more inclined to talk about the continuation of that evolution than about a threat.

Francesca BRIA underlined the potential and the opportunities of the digital transition, outlining the numerous conceivable scenarios, particularly at the local level, in which people could become engaged in democracy through greater participation. She said the EU could give an example to the whole world, as there was nowhere else where fundamental rights, the data sovereignty of citizens and methods of participatory democracy were so widespread and well protected.

Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, declared that a legal framework to combat the threat of cyber attacks and disinformation would have to be adopted at both the European and the national levels in order to protect people's privacy. However, he saw an example of the benefits of the digital transition in the digital platform through which European citizens could participate in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Pilar LLOP, Speaker of the Spanish Senate, proclaimed that the topic of democracy and the digital transition had been chosen at exactly the right time, namely during a pandemic marked by the constant presence of digital media and by abuse of those technologies. Personal data were an essential resource for democracy, she said, which should be protected more strongly in connection with fundamental and human rights.

Fernand ETGEN, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg, declared that illegal conduct on digital social networks, such as fake news and threats, meant that parliaments had a duty to exercise oversight as we moved further into the digital sphere. He said the EU's Digital Europe programme for 2021-2027 set out a roadmap for parliaments, as guardians of living democracy, to create, for example, virtual forums for public dialogue with citizens.

The Speaker of the Senate of Romania, Anca DRAGU, spoke in favour of having parliaments guide digitalisation in such a way as to make the public sphere a more inclusive and democratic space. This, she said, would require a comprehensive approach, which would involve increasing infrastructure investment, boosting innovation and creating a suitable regulatory framework for enhanced economic competitiveness, for the way EU citizens connect to exchange information and for their interaction with the private sector.

Christian BUCHMANN, President of the Austrian Federal Council, described the digital revolution as a paradoxical intervention in our society, combining increased freedom and market opportunities with the misuse of personal data and the creation of monopolies. Social platforms must therefore be made to take responsibility, he said, with a code of conduct for businesses or criminal legislation to tackle cyberbullying. He also highlighted the need for a "data highway" of

fast broadband Internet connections enabling everyone to enjoy fair opportunities to participate in the online world.

Jüri RATAS, President of the Parliament of Estonia, emphasised that the rapid development of modern technologies should be a key policy priority for the European Commission until 2024, which would mean not only promoting the digital transition but also dealing with market distortion and risks to fundamental rights, data privacy and safety. He volunteered that Estonia was ready to share its experience of digital health systems, digital access for citizens and digital waste management.

The Vice-President of the European Parliament, Roberta METSOLA, reaffirmed that liberal democracy could only work through representative democracy and strong institutions. Therefore, she said, the integrity of European elections needed to be protected and the transparency of the EU needed to be further enhanced. She described the Conference on the Future of Europe, with a strong parliamentary dimension, as an opportunity to encourage greater public participation in the EU.

Jeanette HOFMANN also emphasised that elements of direct democracy could expand parliamentary democracy. As she pointed out, many initiatives that existed in Europe thanks to the digital revolution were designed to reinforce parliaments' accountability through, for example, reports on their members' voting records and lobbying activities.

Francesca BRIA made it clear that digital tools improved the operation of representative institutions of democracy by strengthening them at different, closely interconnected levels. To avoid that data is being used by digital platforms to spy on EU citizens, she said, it was crucial to develop new governance models and create rules on how sensitive data should be handled. Otherwise, as she put it, the erosion of digital data privacy and the concentration of artificial intelligence in few private hands would keep growing.

László KÖVER, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, asserted that it had to be left to parliaments to define the concepts of censorship and fake news in the digital sphere. In his opinion, the European left was trying to negate the democratic rights of the "enemies of democracy" whom they themselves defined. In Europe, he said, we had lost the trust that was so sorely needed in view of the shared challenges with which the digital transition confronted citizens.

Jeanette HOFMANN spoke about the term "fake news", which she said was neither legally unambiguous nor straightforward to define empirically. In the public media too, she pointed out, there was a long tradition of spreading untruths, so the phenomenon had not first arisen with digital media. On the contrary, she said, it was only a very small minority who were responsible for the disinformation online, while the vast majority of people using digital media did so with

democratic intentions, to the benefit of society as a whole. In her view, public networks and platforms could therefore not be blamed in blanket terms for such fringe phenomena.

Roberto FICO, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, insisted that strengthening digital democracy would in no way weaken the role of parliaments and representative democracy – on the contrary, he said, new democratic tools (like the petitions platform set up at the Italian Chamber of Deputies, which people could use even before reaching voting age) improved dialogue between the electorate and those they elected, enhanced the legitimacy of parliaments and led to better social cohesion.

Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives, emphasised that he saw the holding of the virtual conference as evidence that parliaments were managing to exercise their representative functions by digital means. As most people in Europe had access to the Internet, new ways of connecting with political decision-makers were evolving, he said. However, parliaments did have a duty to create the necessary safeguards to combat the threat of data manipulation, fake news and influence exerted by algorithms.

Alojz KOVSCA, President of the National Assembly of Slovenia, noted that more robust regulation was needed in view of the constant stream of new technological developments, so that the tech giants would not be left to make the rules. Equal access for all to the digital transition and freedom of expression had to be upheld, he said, and people had to learn to deal with the altered way in which we communicated.

Speaking on the need to regulate Internet companies, Francesca BRIA expressed satisfaction with the efforts achieved by the EU. She pointed to the energetic work being done to combat limitations on competition and raised the proposed e-privacy regulation as a means of enhancing the protection of users' privacy. She suggested there was still room for improvement with regard to a fair model of taxation and the transparency of algorithms. However, she said, it was not enough only to regulate big tech; it was also necessary to develop European technologies with which European citizens' data sovereignty and security could be assured.

In response to a question from Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE about the structural prerequisites for technological sovereignty, Francesca BRIA emphasised that this sovereignty depended on the creation of data infrastructure in Europe. The intellectual property of European start-ups and the data of European users had to be kept in Europe, she said.

On the question of the transparency of algorithmic systems, Jeanette HOFMANN added that their nature as self-renewing systems made them difficult to observe and assess and that this capability still needed to be developed. This, she said, would take systematic and long-term investment. Another factor she raised was that, when it came to the development and use of new technology

like facial recognition software, for example, democratically legitimate institutions lacked the powers to assess and, if necessary, avert its impact on society.

Jan Anthonie BRUIJN, President of the Senate of the Netherlands, gave his assessment that new technologies represented an opportunity to bring citizens closer together. He was convinced that artificial intelligence in particular had the potential to support parliamentarians in their own work by helping them get a better grip on the complexities of legislation and on the information overload we faced in the digital age. On the other hand, he said, there was the unresolved question of who could be held accountable for governance in general when decisions were increasingly mediated by AI.

Talat XHAFERI, President of the Assembly of North Macedonia, reiterated that parliamentarians could not neglect the digital transition, as it had spread to affect every sphere of human coexistence. What he found particularly worrying was the increase in disinformation and hate speech. On the other hand, he said, digital formats had made it possible to adapt the way the parliament worked in the face of the challenges brought by the pandemic.

Andreas NORLÉN, Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag, cautioned against relying too heavily on interactive activities with citizens, which he saw as undercutting the idea of representative democracy. The possibility of direct participation, he said, weakened the role of parties and their ability to bring together interests within society. To counteract this, he recommended that the parties in particular expand their digital competence. He saw a long way still to go on the road to European data sovereignty, with Europeans remaining dependent on American platforms until it was achieved. In order not to create disproportionate obstacles to using them, he suggested that the European General Data Protection Regulation should be revised.

The President of the Hellenic Parliament, Constantine TASSOULAS, reported that Greece had responded dynamically to the pandemic and was making full use of its digital potential. On disinformation and fake news, he warned that democracies had to heighten their readiness to defend themselves. The focus, he said, must not be restricted to algorithms and data protection.

Anu VEHVILÄINEN, Speaker of the Parliament of Finland, expressed concern at the rise in intimidating language used on social media and the marginalisation of minorities. While the digital transition brought great opportunities, she said, a regulatory framework was required to avert gender-based violence, racism and hate speech.

The President of the Slovenian National Assembly, Igor ZORČIČ, spoke about the EU having a broad spectrum of areas in which action was required in light of the digital transition. Those involved should not let themselves be put off, he said, by the fact that the multiplicity of tasks required solutions which may, at first glance, appear contradictory. He gave the examples of

virtual elections and voting demanding anonymity while, at the same time, it was necessary to create a means of identifying those who propagated hate speech and call them to account.

Boris KOLLÁR, Speaker of the National Council of Slovakia, said the pandemic had laid bare a number of sore points. He saw a need for action on the fair taxation of IT companies as well as regarding our heavy reliance on non-European service providers. In his assessment, if the EU wanted to safeguard fundamental rights, freedom and democracy, it had to make progress on its digital agenda. The completion of the digital single market had to be guided by the objective of balancing cyber security, data protection and the facilitation of democratic discourse.

Tomasz GRODZKI, Marshal of the Senate of Poland, made it clear that the Internet had become a permanent feature of social communication. Rather than highlighting the negative aspects of the digital transition, parliamentarians ought, he felt, to confront the new challenges in a constructive manner. Propaganda had been well known for years, he said, but had become more effective than ever in the era of social media. As he saw it, there was therefore a need to teach people the digital skills required to use the Internet responsibly.

Aleksa BEČIĆ, President of the Parliament of Montenegro, reported that a process of digitalisation had been set in motion in the Montenegrin legislature, with the provision of virtual access to the meetings of all its bodies, for example, serving to raise parliamentary transparency. Simultaneously, he said, efforts were being made to promote active participation by the public in decision-making processes.

Marking the centenary of the election of Norway's first female Member of Parliament, the President of the Storting, Tone Wilhelmsen TRØEN, placed a particular focus on the need to protect people and especially young women in the digital sphere. To facilitate integrative discourse, she said, the Internet had to become a place where everyone, irrespective of gender or ethnic identity, was given the chance to freely express their opinions without fear of hate speech or harassment.

Ivica DAČIĆ, Speaker of the Serbian National Assembly, declared that the role of parliaments was to make the benefits of the digital transition accessible to everyone. The legislative branch was not powerless in the face of the digital sphere, he said, but had the capacity, if it took up the challenge, to set the rules by which the Internet operated. Given that the pandemic had pushed political and social life into the virtual realm, he saw a need to establish rules there under which democratic discourse could flourish.

Wolfgang SOBOTKA, urged the participants to support the #WeRemember campaign designed to combat antisemitism on the Internet and commemorate the victims of National Socialism. He proposed that the campaign, which was intended to be held annually in the week preceding

International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, could stand as a joint project of the EU parliaments alongside the member states' national remembrance events.

In her concluding remarks, Francesca BRIA ascribed Europe a leading role in matters of digital democracy, saying tools had been developed that strengthened democratic processes at all levels, from national parliaments to local assemblies. For the future, she proposed that the objective should be to build and scale technologies that would serve fundamental rights. She described the regulation of algorithms, which covered sensitive areas such as personalised medicine and participatory democracy, as a crucial task.

Jeanette HOFMANN explained that the history of technology was marked by society's urge to exert greater control over its own destiny. In the digital transition, she said, there was a major transformation to be observed which need not be seen in a negative light as long as it was accompanied by new standards of oversight and self-regulation.

Reiner HASELOFF expressed wonderment at the fact that, although a Brit had developed it and CERN, a European research centre, had nurtured its beginnings, the Internet was now dominated by American companies. It was this background that European engineers should keep in mind when developing their ideas for global business models, he said, if the Internet was to live up to its original promise as a global village.

Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE closed the session by thanking the two experts, whose contributions, he said, had helped generate an inspiring debate, and Anke PLÄTTNER, whom he commended for her mastery of the task, so fundamental to the role of parliamentary Speaker, of holding everyone to their speaking times.

Session II: Adoption of the reports on interparliamentary cooperation

Reiner HASELOFF announced the start of Session II and briefly presented the report on enhanced interparliamentary cooperation through modern technology as well as the report on the revision of the guidelines for interparliamentary conferences in the EU, which had been circulated in advance of the conference. Both reports, he explained, had been drafted by working groups and then discussed and unanimously approved at the virtual meeting of the Secretaries-General of the European Union Parliaments on 29 March 2021. He underscored the importance of modern technology and video conferencing to the interparliamentary conferences, which formed the basis of the first report. That report, he said, provided for specific action to improve the mutual compatibility of conferencing systems, cyber security measures and exchanges between parliaments. As Reiner HASELOFF underlined, the reports built on the essential preliminary work done by the Finnish parliament, or Eduskunta, during Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, for which he expressed special thanks to the Speaker of the Eduskunta, Anu VEHVILÄINEN.

Anu VEHVILÄINEN thanked her German counterparts for updating and presenting the report on the use of modern technology and commented that video conferencing had swiftly become the norm in the time since it was drafted. Nonetheless, she said, she was confident that the report dealt with crucial questions of principle. She also urged that video conferencing should always maximise access both for participants and for the interested public. The second report on the revision of the guidelines for interparliamentary conferences in the EU, as she described it, gave a good portrayal of the legal basis underpinning each conference and the coordinating role of the Speakers' Conference in addressing the grave issues facing Europe.

Standing in for the President of the French Senate, Gérard LARCHER, Jean-François LAPACHE thanked the German Presidency for taking on board the Senate's proposals for changes, which he said were intended to ensure that in-person conferences would not be replaced by virtual meetings once the pandemic was over.

Reiner HASELOFF noted that both reports on interparliamentary cooperation had been unanimously adopted.

Miscellaneous

Eduardo FERRO RODRIGUES, President of the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, gave a progress briefing on the parliamentary dimension of Portugal's Presidency of the Council of the EU. As he outlined, the European Parliamentary Week marked the beginning and was followed by a conference on the health and social impacts of the pandemic. He predicted that the EU Recovery Fund would be pivotal to the post-pandemic recovery and to the creation of more resilient economies. Further major events lay ahead in June 2021, he said, namely COSAC, the conference on migration, the conference on rural development and the conference on the role of parliaments in deepening EU-African relations.

Roberto FICO announced that the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Italian Senate, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), would hold a preparatory meeting for COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference, in Rome on 8 and 9 October 2021.

Maria Elisabetta ALBERTI CASELLATI, President of the Italian Senate, reported that the Senate together with the Chamber of Deputies and the IPU would host the G20 Speakers' Summit on 7 and 8 October 2021, also in Rome.

Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE introduced an initiative from the President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, Meritxell BATET LAMAÑA, for the German Presidency of the EU Speakers' Conference to write to the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to advocate for the United States' return to the IPU. He pointed out that the US Congress was the only democratically elected parliament not in the IPU.

Meritxell BATET LAMAÑA, President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, thanked him for introducing the issue and emphasised the point that Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU, had shown a great interest in the US Congress once again being part of the organisation. In view of the new US Administration's increased commitment to multilateralism, she said, this was an ideal time to take such a step.

Željko REINER, Deputy Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, raised the concern that, though they made new forms of contact and feedback possible, social media could not replace physical contact. While he did not consider the shift of the political sphere into social media as necessarily representing a risk to democracy, he did fear a loss in terms of compassion and human touch. Over and above this, he flagged up the difficult task of reconciling the intergenerational differences entailed by the digital transition.

Miloš VYSTRČIL, President of the Czech Senate, thanked his counterparts across Europe for the support Czechia had enjoyed during its diplomatic row with Russia.

Igor ZORČIČ invited the participants to attend the next Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, to be held in Ljubljana in early April 2022. In preparation for that, he added, the Slovenian hosts would conduct the meeting of the Secretaries-General of the European Union Parliaments on 31 January 2022.

Concluding remarks

In his closing remarks, Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE highlighted how important he found the exchange of ideas between parliamentary Speakers, especially on the fundamental topics of European democracy. On behalf of the Bundestag, he sincerely thanked everyone for their lively participation. He would be delighted, he said, if they could continue the day's discussions in person in the near future and thanked the Slovenian National Assembly for the invitation to the next conference in Ljubljana.

Reiner HASELOFF aligned himself with the words of the President of the Bundestag, saying that, just as the Bundesrat, as Germany's second chamber and the body representing the *Länder*, cooperated closely with the Bundestag in Germany's federal system, Europe too was a Europe of diversity and of regions. In consequence, he felt gratitude due to the MEPs for the day-to-day work in the interests of European cohesion. The pandemic, he said, had shown that Europe was steadfast and effective in its cooperation and capable of developing good solutions for unprecedented crises. He wished all the participants continued good health together for a strong Europe and a peaceful world.

Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo, 10 de mayo de 2021, Berlín

Conclusiones de la presidencia

I. Observaciones preliminares

La Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo se celebró el 10 de mayo de 2021, por invitación del presidente del Bundestag alemán, el Sr. Wolfgang Schäuble, y del presidente del Bundesrat, el Sr. Reiner Haseloff, en formato telemático por primera vez. Debido a las circunstancias particulares de la pandemia de COVID-19, no fue posible celebrar la conferencia presencialmente. En total, 49 presidentas y presidentes o sus delegadas y delegados participaron en la videoconferencia en representación de 45 parlamentos de los Estados Miembros de la UE, el Parlamento Europeo y los parlamentos de los países candidatos a la adhesión y algunos países invitados.

Las presentes conclusiones de la presidencia son fruto de un acuerdo con los demás miembros de la Troïka (Finlandia, Eslovenia) y el Parlamento Europeo. No fue posible un debate de las conclusiones provisionales en el periodo anterior a la conferencia en el formato telemático.

La Europa de la pandemia

La Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo se inscribe en el contexto de la pandemia de Covid-19, que dura ya más de un año. Las medidas de lucha frente a la pandemia han demostrado, por una parte, la vulnerabilidad de las libertades del mercado único y de las fronteras abiertas que habíamos dado por sobreentendidas. Y, más aún, los retos a los que se enfrenta Europa, incluso sin las dramáticas circunstancias de la pandemia, son de tal calibre que los parlamentos de los Estados miembros y el Parlamento Europeo deben efectuar sus aportaciones. Tienen la legitimidad, pero también la obligación, para con sus electoras y electores europeos.

La conferencia sobre el futuro de Europa

La presidencia se felicita especialmente por la convocatoria de una Conferencia europea común, precisamente en estos momentos de retos existenciales para la Unión Europea y los valores sobre los que se erige. Esta Conferencia debe abordar el futuro de Europa de forma amplia y sus controversias, así como contar con la participación del mayor número posible de personas e iniciativas procedentes de toda la Unión Europea. Debe estudiar en qué dirección y cómo la Unión Europea y sus instituciones pueden y deben continuar su desarrollo. La Conferencia para el Futuro de Europa puede así colaborar con una aportación importante para renovar y consolidar la legitimación de la Unión Europea. Como representaciones democráticamente legítimas de las ciudadanas y los ciudadanos, los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y el Parlamento Europeo deben aspirar a participar en esta tarea ocupando un papel de primera magnitud de forma general y, en particular, durante la Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa.

II. Transición digital y cambios en la esfera pública – Peligros y oportunidades para la democracia representativa

Con la aparición de lo digital, el siglo XXI marca también el inicio de una nueva era. La revolución digital no solo moderniza los procesos técnicos, sino que ha producido en muchos ámbitos cambios en la convivencia entre los humanos de una magnitud nunca vista.

La presidencia de la Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo reitera firmemente que los valores fundamentales en los que se basa la Unión Europea de conformidad con el artículo 2 del Tratado de la Unión Europea (respeto de la dignidad humana, libertad, democracia, igualdad, Estado de Derecho, respeto de los Derechos Humanos y de las personas pertenecientes a las minorías), deben aplicarse sin restricciones también en el ámbito digital. Estos valores son la base no negociable de la vida en común de las ciudadanas y los ciudadanos de la Unión Europea y del trabajo de las instituciones políticas.

Es la paradoja de nuestra época: por una parte, la digitalización ofrece oportunidades para un debate ampliado y una participación libre para que intervenga un mayor número de personas que tenía poco o ningún espacio en el debate público. Por otra, vemos cómo se propagan el odio, la discriminación, las medias verdades y las teorías de la conspiración en el mundo mediante los nuevos medios digitales. Casi ningún otro ámbito se ha visto tan afectado por los cambios debidos a la digitalización como el de la comunicación pública. Las oportunidades y los peligros de la digitalización exigen, por lo tanto, respuestas específicas para que el orden basado en la libertad y el Estado de Derecho también se aplique en el mundo digital.

Protección de los datos y soberanía de los datos

La presidencia ve un peligro significativo en la mercantilización creciente de la comunicación pública. Los algoritmos privan, cada vez más, a las personas que participan en el debate del control sobre la difusión y las consecuencias de sus aportaciones. Los datos de las usuarias y los usuarios se han convertido en un producto para la competencia mundial, que se concentra de forma creciente en algunos proveedores mundiales, cada vez más poderosos puesto que son poco numerosos. Son ellos quienes definen las normas mundiales y las reglas de la comunicación pública.

Teniendo en cuenta el significado fundamental de la comunicación política para las sociedades democráticas, tiene una importancia esencial, desde el punto de vista de la presidencia, que estas plataformas digitales estén sujetas a normas claras y a reglas impuestas por ley. Deben garantizar la libertad de opinión, los derechos individuales y el respeto de la dignidad humana de las usuarias y los usuarios, y sancionar los abusos y los comportamientos incorrectos. Asimismo, deben garantizar la soberanía de los datos, que debe entenderse como la autodeterminación informativa de las ciudadanas y ciudadanos. Debido a la especial importancia y a la influencia de los algoritmos en la comunicación digital, merece la pena analizar en qué medida su uso debe ser transparente obligatoriamente y si esta transparencia debe llegar hasta la completa publicación de los algoritmos. Teniendo en cuenta la actividad y el alcance mundiales de las plataformas digitales, solo se pueden obtener protección y control completos por medio de acuerdos internacionales. El Reglamento General sobre la Protección de los Datos en Europa ha definido normas esenciales que son determinantes para el acceso al gran mercado único europeo, incluidos los proveedores internacionales.

La presidencia apoya firmemente los esfuerzos realizados para lograr la soberanía digital de Europa. Ésta debería incluir también la nube europea de datos, en la que los datos de las ciudadanas y ciudadanos participantes estén seguros de conformidad con el derecho europeo.

Radicalizaciones y amenazas a la libertad de opinión y la dignidad humana

La presidencia aprecia un segundo peligro en la amenaza a la libertad de expresión y en la pérdida de racionalidad que afecta al debate político. Los mecanismos de atención de las plataformas digitales modifican esencialmente la comunicación pública. Se reducen a un número de caracteres limitados situaciones complejas y desaparece la pluralidad a la hora de abordar un tema. Ello favorece las simplificaciones populistas y las teorías de la conspiración. El creciente antisemitismo es, en concreto, particularmente inquietante.

Además, debido a la presencia permanente, ilimitada y global de las plataformas digitales, el ritmo de los debates públicos se ha acelerado a un ritmo exponencial. La presidencia opina que ello favorece que los participantes se atrincheren en sus propias posiciones en vez de implicarse en un intercambio constructivo con los demás y, por ende, incrementa el sensacionalismo de los debates políticos. Todo ello se ve acompañado de un aumento vertiginoso de la agresividad, que se traduce en ataques verbales contra otras personas en forma de “discurso del odio” y se convierte en una amenaza creciente para su integridad física a través de los “delitos de odio”. Las plataformas digitales dan voz a la incitación al odio racista, antisemita e islamista, lo que llega a amplios sectores de la sociedad y se convierte en el caldo de cultivo de una violencia renovada y del terrorismo extremista. En consecuencia, la presidencia subraya con firmeza que todos los parlamentos deben urgentemente garantizar, en los medios digitales, la libertad del debate y de aquellos que participan, así como el respeto de la dignidad humana de cada persona. Esta tarea no puede delegarse en las plataformas.

Peligro para los parlamentos y sus miembros

La presidencia alemana observa con inquietud cómo crece el número y enconamiento de los ataques por medios digitales contra algunos miembros de los parlamentos y representantes de instituciones democráticas. Los asesinatos políticos a menudo tienen su origen en una radicalización por internet. Hoy, los propios parlamentos se han convertido en diana y se han lanzado llamamientos a “asaltar los parlamentos” en la red. El ataque contra el Capitolio en Washington ha puesto de manifiesto que incluso una democracia tan afianzada, de dos siglos de antigüedad, es vulnerable y frágil. En toda Europa, los que desean reproducir este ataque se sintieron y se sienten respaldados. En paralelo, las redes digitales de los parlamentos son objeto de ataques exteriores, hasta por parte de servicios secretos extranjeros. Además, los ataques contra la ciberseguridad y las infraestructuras digitales se combinan con campañas de desinformación en internet y ponen en peligro la celebración de elecciones libres, e incluso a los Estados democráticos en su conjunto. La protección de las redes digitales frente a la ciberdelincuencia política es uno de los grandes retos que debemos superar para preservar las democracias en la era digital.

No obstante, la presidencia destaca que la crítica a los mecanismos de la nueva comunicación digital no puede llevar a confundir las causas y los efectos. La radicalización política, la intimidación y las amenazas a los que piensan de otra manera, la incitación al odio contra las minorías, así como las teorías de la conspiración, se sirven de los nuevos medios, pero estos no son su causa. Sin embargo, los nuevos medios digitales aceleran ciertas tendencias negativas y magnifican sus efectos en un grado superlativo.

Nuevas formas de participación gracias a lo digital

Las nuevas formas de participación de nuestra época digital también ofrecen grandes oportunidades: las ciudadanas y los ciudadanos pueden, gracias a los nuevos procesos digitales,

aportar su punto de vista y su experiencia de forma mucho más directa, específica y rápida en las decisiones políticas. Además, las plataformas de comunicación directa dan a los parlamentos la oportunidad de vincular estrechamente a las ciudadanas y los ciudadanos, en todos los niveles. Ello puede incrementar la confianza en los parlamentos. Incluso sin las nuevas posibilidades de participación digital, la vocación de los parlamentos debería ser representar la diversidad de sus ciudadanas y ciudadanos. La falta de confianza en la política que existe actualmente se ha visto agravada por una “fractura digital”, según la presidencia. El acceso a la comunicación digital se ha convertido en una condición fundamental para la participación social y política de todos los ciudadanos. Ello implica incluir la alfabetización en materia de medios y dispositivos digitales en la educación y la formación del público, tanto en las escuelas como en las universidades y empresas.

La presidencia anima a todos los parlamentos de todos los niveles de la UE a experimentar en sus ámbitos de competencia los formatos de diálogo digital, como las asambleas ciudadanas y aplicar, por tanto, toda la gama de posibilidades técnicas más diversas. La democracia representativa puede salir reforzada si se usan las nuevas formas de participación. No obstante, las asambleas ciudadanas y demás formatos no pueden substituir la función fundamental de los parlamentos en las democracias representativas.

En consecuencia, la presidencia se congratula expresamente por el hecho de que la Conferencia sobre el futuro de Europa haya puesto en marcha su propia plataforma digital y plurilingüe, que da a las ciudadanas y ciudadanos la posibilidad de participar directamente en el debate sobre el futuro de Europa. Esta plataforma digital y sus nuevas herramientas técnicas pueden convertirse en un ejemplo positivo de la forma en la que una tecnología digital desarrollada en Europa incrementa las posibilidades de participación sin ánimo de lucro.

Parlamentos y elección en el mundo digital

Los parlamentos también pueden aumentar la transparencia y la eficacia de sus procesos gracias a los instrumentos y mecanismos digitales. Se han desarrollado nuevas modalidades de elecciones y votaciones telemáticas en numerosos países – la pandemia del Covid-19 ha contribuido a ello sensiblemente – y van a ganar importancia para los parlamentos. Desde el punto de vista de la presidencia, su funcionalidad técnica no es el único elemento que determinará su uso. Las elecciones son el momento de participación más importante en las democracias representativas. Los principios del sufragio universal libre e igualitario deben, por ende, prevalecer también durante las elecciones y las votaciones digitales, independientemente del conocimiento técnico previo de los votantes. Los parlamentos deben garantizar en sus leyes electorales que las elecciones digitales son transparentes, verificables en cualquier momento, y que están protegidas frente a los ciberataques y las manipulaciones, y que no están sujetas a ningún interés de explotación comercial por parte de los proveedores digitales. Unos tribunales independientes deben contar con la capacidad de comprobar la conformidad con el Derecho y también la integridad de las elecciones digitales.

Responsabilidad y memoria

Incluso en el periodo digital, Europa sigue comprometida con determinados valores fundamentales, como el respeto a la dignidad humana, la libertad, la democracia, la igualdad, el Estado de derecho, el respeto de los derechos humanos y los derechos de las personas pertenecientes a minorías. Este compromiso procede de la suma de experiencias de numerosas generaciones que han padecido la guerra, la dictadura y la división, pero también de la herencia de la lucha de las mujeres y hombres por la libertad, la democracia y la paz.

A día de hoy, Berlín es un símbolo de una Europa que ha encontrado su libertad y superado su división, como el Muro de Berlín lo fue, durante muchos años, de una Europa dividida en dos. Situados justo al lado del trazado del Muro, el Bundestag alemán, en zona occidental, y el Bundesrat, en la oriental, tienen actualmente su sede en edificios históricos. Para los miembros del Bundestag alemán y del Bundesrat, una Europa de la libertad, la paz y la justicia es, en consecuencia, un compromiso muy tangible.

A medio camino entre las sedes del Bundestag alemán y el Bundesrat, el memorial de los sintis y los romaníes asesinados por el nazismo y el memorial de los judíos de Europa, recuerdan el genocidio conocido mundialmente como el Holocausto o la Shoah. El campo de concentración y exterminio de Auschwitz, en la Polonia ocupada, dio un lugar y un nombre a la barbarie. La fecha de liberación del campo de Auschwitz, el 27 de enero de 1945, se ha convertido actualmente en el mundo entero en la Jornada de la Memoria de las Víctimas del Holocausto y de la Shoah, asesinadas en innumerables lugares en toda Europa. La presidencia alemana se inclina ante las víctimas del genocidio cometido por el régimen nacionalsocialista y reconoce la culpa histórica de Alemania. Mantener este recuerdo es y será siempre una misión específica y prioritaria de Alemania.

La presidencia alemana se congratula, por tanto, también en nombre de las presidentas y presidentes, por el compromiso del presidente del Consejo Nacional de Austria, Wolfgang Sobotka, con la campaña « #WeRemember » del Congreso Mundial Judío Mundial y de la Unesco, en memoria de las millones de víctimas de la Shoah, y respalda el objetivo de esta campaña: oponerse públicamente, también en internet, a todo tipo de odio, incitación al odio y antisemitismo y comprometerse con firmeza con la democracia y el pluralismo. En este contexto, los parlamentos nacionales de los Estados miembros de la UE y el Parlamento Europeo están invitados, el 27 de enero de 2022, independientemente de sus propios actos con motivo de la jornada de recuerdo del Holocausto, a enviar un mensaje común participando en la campaña « #WeRemember » del Congreso Mundial y la Unesco.

III. Informes sobre la cooperación interparlamentaria

La Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo adoptó **las nuevas directrices para la cooperación interparlamentaria**. La presidencia agradece expresamente a la actual presidencia finlandesa la elaboración del informe del grupo de trabajo sobre la actualización de las directrices. Ve en estas directrices revisadas la señal tangible del significativo incremento de la importancia de la cooperación parlamentaria en la UE y el papel de la conferencia de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo.

La Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo adoptó el **“Informe sobre el refuerzo de la cooperación interparlamentaria con los medios tecnológicos modernos”**, presentado por la presidencia alemana. Este informe se basa especialmente en los trabajos preparatorios del grupo de trabajo que se puso en marcha durante la presidencia finlandesa. La experiencia adquirida durante la pandemia de Covid-19 ha dado lugar, no obstante, a un nuevo enfoque de las conferencias virtuales, hecho que se ha tenido en cuenta en el informe revisado. Durante la pandemia, se ha demostrado que las tecnologías digitales y, en particular, las videoconferencias pueden ofrecer una aportación decisiva al mantenimiento de la cooperación interparlamentaria mientras las restricciones de desplazamiento y número de contactos no permitan la celebración de

encuentros con presencia física. Además, los formatos digitales representan un complemento eficaz y dinámico que reduce costes y es respetuoso con el medioambiente, para la preparación de los encuentros en el marco de la cooperación interparlamentaria.

La presidencia destaca especialmente que en su desarrollo en el formato digital habrán de respetarse las normas tradicionales de la cooperación parlamentaria, es decir, la participación de todos en igualdad de condiciones, la diversidad lingüística reconocida por el régimen lingüístico de las conferencias en su actual formato, así como la transparencia frente a la opinión pública. Asimismo, en un futuro, las conferencias físicas no deberían substituirse por videoconferencias, salvo que no sea posible la celebración de un encuentro presencial. El valor de los encuentros personales y el intercambio en directo son cruciales precisamente para la cooperación parlamentaria.

IV. Conclusiones IPEX

La Conferencia de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo aprobó, tras haber sido informada, **las conclusiones IPEX** presentadas por el Consejo IPEX, que se adoptaron en la reunión de las secretarías y secretarios generales de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE y del Parlamento Europeo de 29 de marzo de 2021.

La presidencia agradece a la presidencia finlandesa saliente del Consejo IPEX la elaboración del nuevo programa de trabajo 2021-2024, actualmente en curso, y el seguimiento de la puesta en marcha de la web actualizada IPEX v3.

En nombre del conjunto de presidentas y presidentes de los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE, la presidencia alemana agradece al Parlamento Europeo los recursos extraordinarios, financieros, técnicos y personales, que ha puesto a su disposición para el funcionamiento y el desarrollo ulterior de IPEX. Asimismo, expresó su especial agradecimiento al Senado de Bélgica por seguir sufragando los gastos del Oficial de Información del IPEX.

La presidencia se congratula por los trabajos realizados hasta la fecha para la nueva versión de la página de bienvenida de la web del IPEX y por la nueva presencia del IPEX en las redes sociales: se trata de una aportación importante para asentar firmemente al IPEX como la plataforma principal de intercambio digital entre los parlamentos de los Estados miembros de la UE, de tal modo que el IPEX sea visible para un mayor número de usuarios e incremente así globalmente la transparencia de la cooperación parlamentaria.