

**24th Inter-Parliamentary Conference
on the Common Foreign and Security Policy
and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)**

Bruges, 3-5 March 2024

Joint Statement by the Co-Chairs

The 24th Inter-Parliamentary Conference (IPC) for the CFSP/CSDP was held in the context of the parliamentary dimension of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council on 3 to 5 March 2024. It was attended by parliamentarians from the EU Member States, the European Parliament, observers from EU candidate and potential candidate countries and European NATO-countries together with distinguished guests. The following statements are non-binding conclusions from discussions of the different thematic issues.

We the co-chairs of the 24th IPC:

1. Welcome the determination of the European Union and its Member States to commit to strengthening the rules-based multilateral order and defending democratic principles globally.
2. Note that the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine as well as the volatile situation in the Middle East continue to cause major geopolitical shifts. Underline that multilateralism is the only viable means to deal with monumental global challenges.
3. Reiterate the crucial role that parliaments play in the scrutiny and oversight of EU external action, call for an increased involvement of national parliaments and of the European Parliament in discussions on the EU's soft and hard power. Note the need for a stronger and more effective parliamentary diplomacy in order to complement EU foreign and security policy and using more efficient decision-making procedures.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine

4. Condemn in the strongest possible terms the illegal, unprovoked and unjustified Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, enabled and supported by the illegitimate Lukashenka regime in Belarus as well as by Iran and the DPRK. Demand that Russia and its proxy forces cease all military action and that they immediately and unconditionally withdraw their troops from the internationally recognised territory of Ukraine and from any other country whose territory, or parts thereof, they unlawfully occupy.
5. Stress the need to prosecute the crimes of the Russian leadership, which include aggression, breaking international law, violating recognised borders, unlawfully transferring and deporting protected persons and children and committing land theft and serious war crimes. Condemn all hybrid attacks used by Russia against Ukraine, as well as any other country and strongly denounce the spread of Russia's propaganda about its war in Ukraine all over the world. Call for the creation of a special international tribunal to prosecute Russia's crime of aggression against Ukraine and support the International Criminal Court (ICC) in its investigation into war crimes committed in Ukraine.

6. Express support for the peace formula presented by Ukraine and urge the EU and its Member States, partners and allies to agree security guarantees with Ukraine as recommended in the Kyiv Security Compact. Underline that the EU's and NATO's commitments to Ukraine are part of a wider internationally coordinated package of security guarantees for Ukraine, including the G7's launch of a multilateral framework for the negotiation of bilateral security commitments and arrangements for Ukraine.

7. Welcome the proposals of the High Representative / Vice President of the Commission (HRVP) for medium to long-term security guarantees for Ukraine and the complimentary financial mechanism for Ukraine under the European Peace Facility (EPF). Stress the importance of the EPF, which has supported the Ukrainian armed forces by financing and delivering military equipment and training while providing coordination for all stakeholders through the Clearing House Mechanism hosted by the EU Military Staff (EUMS). Welcome the setting up of the Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) and its role in enhancing the military effectiveness of Ukraine's armed forces and call for the further extension in the numbers of personnel trained and the type of training provided on the basis of the needs of the Ukrainian armed forces. Call on all Member States to urgently deliver on the capabilities that Ukraine needs at this difficult stage in the war.

8. Welcome the efforts made to support the reconstruction of Ukraine and the swift adoption of the Ukraine Facility, enabling EUR 50 billion worth of assistance over four years. Call on the EU and its Member States to work swiftly in order to establish a legal basis allowing for the use of immobilised Russian assets and related revenues to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine, in close coordination with G7 partner countries.

9. Encourage the EU and its Member States to strengthen security cooperation with Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, particularly in countering hybrid threats, disinformation and cybersecurity. Welcome the deployment of the EU CSDP Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova), the first ever CSDP civilian mission dedicated to strengthening the resilience of Moldova's security sector in crisis management and countering hybrid threats.

The worrying and volatile situation in the Middle East

10. Affirm our condemnation, in the strongest possible terms, of the despicable terrorist attacks committed by the terrorist group Hamas against Israel. Call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages taken by Hamas and for the bodies of deceased hostages to be returned. Recognise Israel's right to self-defence as enshrined in and constrained by international law which outlines that all parties to a conflict must distinguish between combatants and civilians at all times and that attacks must only be directed at military objectives. Express deep concern about the magnitude of civilian suffering in the Gaza strip, aggravated by the Israeli military response and call for a permanent ceasefire and to restart efforts towards a political solution, provided that all hostages are immediately and unconditionally released and the terrorist organisation Hamas is dismantled. Express our deepest sorrow for the innocent victims on both sides.

11. Emphasise the urgency of breaking the cycle of violence and relaunching the peace process. Reiterate unwavering support for a negotiated two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 lines

with two sovereign, democratic states living side by side in peace and guaranteed security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states, and in full respect of international law. Call for a European initiative to put the two-state solution back on track, together with Arab partners and the US. Welcome, in that respect, the Peace Day Effort for Middle East Peace launched just before the attacks by the EU and the Arab League.

12. Call for an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Recall that Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. Call for the de-escalation of tensions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

13. Support an increased role for the two EU civilian common security and defence policy missions – the EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support and the European Union Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point – so that they both participate in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip and in improving the efficiency of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in their unique position where they maintain dialogue with both the state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, in an effort to enhance the EU's peace efforts;

14. Condemn, in the strongest terms, the Houthi attacks on commercial shipping off the coast of Yemen. Welcome the launch of the maritime security Operation Aspides under the common security and defence policy and in close cooperation with regional actors and international partners, as a necessary step to address the maritime security situation from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. Denounce the role played by third states and non-state entities in providing financial, material and operational support to Hamas and Hezbollah. Call on the EU to impose sanctions on the states and entities that facilitated the attacks.

15. Condemn the spike in antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and racism across Europe. Call on governments to take all appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of our Jewish citizens across the European Union.

Enlargement

16. Reaffirm the commitment to an enhanced merit-based accession process, based on fair and rigorous conditionality, enabling a gradual integration into common policies. Reiterate the need to advance on the accession of new Member States and the deepening of the EU in parallel.

17. Highlight the need to match EU funding with its strategic goals and interests, supporting those accession countries that adhere to the fundamental values of the EU and work towards good neighbourly relations, inclusive regional cooperation and sustainable reconciliation.

18. Stress that alignment with the CFSP is an essential indicator of adherence to the EU's fundamental principles and sustainable future membership and reiterate that all accession countries must show unambiguous commitment to EU strategic interest and align with the EU's restrictive measures, including sanctions put in place in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

19. Note the strategic importance of the Western Balkans in the current geopolitical context, as well as for the security and stability of the EU as a whole. Reiterate the need for greater

European presence and visibility in the region in order to deter foreign malign influences and their hybrid activities and to strengthen the region's resilience to foreign interference.

20. Firmly believe that institutional reforms should increase the EU's ability to act, and include simplified and more effective decision-making procedures, moving away from unanimity. Reiterate the call for the Council to gradually switch to qualified majority voting for decisions in areas of the CFSP that do not have military or defence implications.

The Strategic Compass and EU Resilience

21. Reiterate the commitment of the EU's heads of state and government, made in the Versailles Declaration, to take greater responsibility for European security and to provide all the necessary support needed by Ukraine, as well as calling for the full implementation of the Strategic Compass, in order to make the European Union a stronger and more capable security provider with a robust defence industrial base, interoperable and complementary with NATO.

22. Recall that, as clearly stated in the Strategic Compass, the EU's objective is to best prepare for fast-emerging challenges and substantially enhance its resilience. Stress the importance of reducing dependencies in critical technologies and value chains in order for the EU to move towards greater technological autonomy and to strengthen the resilience of supply chains for European defence industries. Recall that the common procurement act (EDIRPA) and the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) can only be first steps towards improving the EU's defence technological and industrial base's (EDTIB) capacities to supply Member States with the products and quantities needed. Therefore welcome the publication of the new European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and in particular the proposal for a new regulation for a European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), for which adequate funding needs to be ensured aimed at encouraging innovation, boosting production and ensuring smarter and more efficient public investments.

23. Welcome the third Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation. Urge the EU and those Member States who are also NATO allies to ensure the coherent implementation of the objectives, synergies and coherence between NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass, particularly in the areas of countering Russian aggression, military mobility, hybrid and cyber warfare, global maritime security and countering terrorism. Welcome the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO.