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Mr Thorjörn JAGLAND, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

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Ms Laura BOLDRINI, President, Chamber of Deputies, Italy

Ms Doris BURES President, Nationalrat, Austria

Mr Ismail KAHRAMAN, President, Grand National Assembly, Turkey

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Ms Ana PASTOR Speaker, Congreso de los Diputados, Spain

Mr Yuli-Yoel EDELSTEIN, President, Knesset, Israel

Mr Jörgen PETTERSSON, President, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

M. Jean-Claude GAUDIN, Vice-Président, Sénat, France

Ms Tsetska TSACHEVA, President of the Narodno Sobranie, Bulgaria

Ms Ankie BROEKERS-KNOL, President of the Eerstekamer, Netherlands

Ms Christine MUTTONEN, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Mr Trajko VELJANOSKI, President of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia

Mr Andriy PARUBIY, President of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine

Mr Stanslaw KARCZEWSKI, President of the Senat, Poland

Ms Ulrike LUNACEK, Vice-President of the European Parliament

Mr Seán Ó FEARGHAIL, Speaker of the Dáil Éireann, Ireland

Mr Milan BRGLEZ, Speaker of the Drzavni Zbor, Slovenia

Mr Azzam ALAHMAD speaking in for Mr Salim AL ZANOUN, Palestine National Council

Mr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the Parliament of Hungary

Mr Milan ŠTĚCH President of the Senát, Czech Republic

Mr Nikolaos VOUTSIS (President of the Hellenic Parliament)

Mr Claude Bartolone, President, Assemblée Nationale, France

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The sitting opened at 11.00 am, with Mr Pedro Agramunt, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in the Chair

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

The Chair

Dear Presidents, Excellences, colleagues, it is an honour for me to declare open the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament and to welcome you to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Today, 15 September, is the International Day of Democracy.

I cannot think of a more appropriate place to celebrate this day. In this Assembly for over six decades the democratically elected representatives of European citizens have met, debated and developed a common conscience of the meaning of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and forged a common European identity.

Moreover, I cannot think of more appropriate company with whom to celebrate this day, with so many Presidents and Speakers of parliament present.

Certain dates define our history and shape our collective memory, our perceptions and our responses.

Exactly two months ago, on 15 July, a coup d'Etat was attempted in Turkey. We all witnessed these dramatic events as they unfolded: violence, blood, tanks, shootings, the bombing of the Grand National Assembly, an attempt to murder the political leadership of the country and an attempt to kill democracy. We also witnessed the reaction of ordinary citizens, the determination of the Turkish people, who took to the streets giving an outstanding example of courage and ultimately sealing the failure of the coup.

What happened in Turkey is a reminder that we should never take democracy for granted and that the best defence against attacks on democracy is through more democracy and respect for human rights and the rule of law, not less. This is a message I passed on strongly when visiting Ankara two weeks ago.

Another defining moment was 13 November 2015. The Paris attacks, including on the Bataclan, jolted the conscience of ordinary people across Europe, making them realise that they were the primary target. It was, however, neither the first nor the last terrorist attack in Europe, but it changed our understanding of the danger.

Despite the pervasive sentiment of a threat, fear and hatred must not prevail.

As politicians and public figures, we should set the example. We must be firm in our condemnation of terrorism, be balanced in our reactions and respect human rights and the rule of law, which are non-negotiable. Shortly after taking up my duties as President of this Assembly, I launched a hashtag campaign *Terrorism: No Hate No Fear*. I invite all of you to join me in this initiative and to bear witness to our commitment to defeat terrorism while remaining true to our values.

Uncertainty and lack of confidence have become a common feature in Europe also due to the consequences of the economic crisis and the austerity measures that were introduced to counter it. This has led to a lack of trust in "traditional" political forces by the electorate, and created considerable support for new movements and parties. Some of these movements and parties are the expression of genuine civic engagement and the willingness to bring about a renewal in politics. However, at the same time, extremism and populism have increased at the right and the left of the political spectrum. Furthermore, by the same token, euro-scepticism has grown while nationalistic attitudes have re-emerged and strengthened.

These tendencies, for me, are a matter of grave concern.

The challenges to which Europe is confronted are so manifold and sizeable that no country can tackle them alone. No country can erect a wall against terrorism or the economic crisis. No country can build a barrier to keep out the instability caused by frozen or active conflicts, which have brought about the occupation and annexation of territories belonging to member states. The only way to protect ourselves and to move forward is to be aware of our inter-dependence and to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us, privileging dialogue over confrontation.

During this conference we will discuss how we can better co-operate to protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This issue will permeate all our discussions but will be specifically addressed as one of our themes this afternoon.

But I would like to spend a few words on another of our three themes: the migration and refugee crisis.

None of us will forget Aylan, a three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned while trying to reach Europe's shores. It was just over a year ago, 2 September 2015, when Aylan became the symbol of a human tragedy to which Europe cannot find an answer. Like the Bataclan tragedy it was not the first such tragedy, but it was the one that became a defining moment in the eye of the European public.

How to tackle migratory flows through the Mediterranean has proven to be a divisive issue between Council of Europe member States and other States, and has highlighted the tension between national interests and the need for solidarity and responsibility-sharing. All Council of Europe member States have to come to grips with the phenomenon of migration and the refugee crisis. Likewise, all of them have obligations, being bound by the principle of non-refoulement and the European Convention on Human Rights.

I hope that the debate on this theme will reflect our different views and sensitivities. But, I also hope that this debate will pave the way for realistic, viable and humane solutions, fully in line with our States' moral and legal commitments.

Europe's unity has splintered on the issue of migration, but this is not a new phenomenon for our continent. Unfortunately, our efforts to ensure that several generations of immigrants feel fully part of our societies have not always succeeded.

This leads me to the third theme of our conference, which will be tackled tomorrow morning: mobilisation of parliaments against hate, for inclusive and non-racist societies. Societies are stronger and more cohesive when diversity is not only accepted but respected and valued as a richness.

In this area, parliaments and politicians have a role to play in taking clear and open positions to stamp out intolerance, racism and hate, in all their forms and manifestations.

Another date: we will not forget what happened in Utøya on 22 July 2011 – the extremist hatred that murdered so many young people.

I am sure that the keynote speakers for this theme will inspire us to mobilise and take concrete actions.

Beyond the themes on the programme, this conference offers us a platform for pan-European dialogue, in which all the Council of Europe member States are taking part.

It also offers us a broader political and geographical perspective, thanks to the participation of political representatives from countries neighbouring Europe, and other international and inter-parliamentary assemblies.

Let us not forget one final date, the end of the Second World War – 8 or 9 May, depending on the history of our countries.

The Council of Europe emerged from the ashes of the Second World War to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage.

The Council of Europe was established to ensure peace and stability in Europe. It is a continuous challenge.

But, if we keep going back to what history has taught us, we can move forward and find solutions together.

Thank you.

Before we begin our first theme, I have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

It is a great pleasure to see so many of you in the Assembly Chamber. I have been President of the Norwegian Parliament, and on many occasions the Assembly hall was nearly empty and I felt quite alone. The foreign minister once came to give his annual presentation on foreign policy. The downhill Winter Olympics skiing competition was on television, so nobody was in the hall, and he began his speech by saying, “Mr President, this must be between you and me”.

We meet on the International Day of Democracy in the House of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. You will discuss migration, which is a challenge for all of us, but we should begin by considering why we have this crisis. The war in Syria is now affecting the entire European neighbourhood. You will recall that the Arab Spring began in Tunisia, where the owner of a grocery store set light to himself in protest at the corruption and misuse of powers. That was where it began, and Tunisia is the clearest success story, with developments elsewhere having helped lead to the crisis we are now witnessing. These events were caused by people no longer being able to tolerate corruption and the misuse of power and by countries not having independent courts, independent media, functioning parliaments and the distribution of power – checks and balances.

History shows that this is an old story that always leads to revolution, instability and sometimes war. That is why we in the Council of Europe speak of democratic security, human rights and the rule of law as guarantors of peace and stability.

The crisis is now impacting on all of us. Many use the influx of refugees to hype up the threats from terrorism and anti-Muslim sentiment. With the economic crisis and the growing divide between rich and poor on this continent, we are seeing a dangerous development at a time when instant communication through social media is so strong. This has led to major political changes in many of our countries. The centre ground is falling out of favour and extremes are gaining traction. Many of the messages coming out of the extremes contain some common threads – for example, blaming hardship on someone else: the Jewish community, Muslims or the elites. There is nostalgia: “Come with us and we will turn the clock back to a golden age”. There is nationalism: “We will be better if we pull up the drawbridge and isolate ourselves from the rest of the world.”

What worries me is the growing populism in the age of instant information. The political mainstream is beginning to imitate the margins. What was extreme five years ago has, to some extent, become acceptable.

As I am in the presence of Presidents of Parliaments, I ask: what is the role of parliaments? The voice of reason, decency and calm is more necessary than ever, and it must come from parliaments. When a national debate becomes hysterical, parliament should be the last bastion of reasoned debate – debate based on facts. I have nothing against the Internet and social media – Twitter and Facebook. But Twitter can never replace civilised debate. There is a huge difference between a discussion on Twitter or Facebook and one around a table, face to face. Opinion is expressed on Facebook, opposition is expressed and opinion becomes more extreme. In a room such as this you have to make your case face to face and are influenced by people in the room. It is the role of parliaments to have such debates in which people can argue strongly yet still have to listen.

Let me return to how the crisis started on the other side of the Mediterranean. You can tweet a revolution but you cannot tweet an institution. You can begin a revolution by tweeting, but you cannot build institutions afterwards by tweeting. We are living in a new world in which the role of politics has to be defined more clearly. When we see something on social media we tend to react immediately rather than reflect, which requires time.

As political leaders we must think about how we do politics. Parliaments must regain the initiative in the political debate. Mainstream politicians and parties must not give in to populism or extreme attitudes but must keep the moral high ground. We must protect what was achieved after the Second World War, when the world had to move from nationalism towards internationalism. Nationalism had hurt our continent so severely that we had to create institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights, which is about protecting ordinary people against arbitrary power and preserving peace and stability. Without them, we are heading for instability and wars. It is vital, therefore, that, in these extremely difficult times when there are so many extreme forces around us, we stay behind the institutions established after the Second World War.

I wish you a good conference and good debates.

The Chair

Thank you, Secretary General.

I now invite participants to adopt the agenda of our conference, which as you know will deal with three themes. We shall start with the first theme: migration and refugee crisis in Europe – role and responsibilities of parliaments. Later this afternoon, we shall address the second theme – National Parliaments and the Council of Europe: Together promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Tomorrow morning, we shall tackle the third and final theme – Mobilisation of Parliaments against hate for inclusive and non-racist societies. At the conclusion of our business, it will be my pleasure to present you with an oral summary of our debates and proceedings.

Are there any comments on the draft agenda? That is not the case.

The draft agenda is adopted.

You have the rules of the conference in your files. In accordance with these rules and past practice I have pleasure in informing you that Mr Thommessen, Speaker of the Storting of Norway and host of the previous conference, will act as vice-chair of the conference.

Theme 1 – Migration and refugee crisis in Europe – role and responsibilities of parliaments

The Chair

Before calling the first speaker on the list I shall call two colleagues to introduce the theme: Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, and László Kövér, Speaker of the Parliament of Hungary.

Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament

I am here to try to provide a few general pointers for our discussions and to sketch out what needs to be done in our parliaments in terms of finding new approaches and fresh solutions.

With migrants and refugees pouring into Europe, we find ourselves in the midst of a major crisis. Together we must put in place the right policies to resolve this crisis. The root of the problem is well documented and lies in the destabilisation of entire regions in the Middle East and North Africa. There is nothing accidental about this influx, the causes are well known: military conflicts, foreign intervention, fundamentalism, religious and other conflicts leading to outbreaks of violence, economic problems and also climate change.

We already know all this, but when it comes to dealing with the situation, courageous decisions need to be taken at international level so that peace can be restored in the affected regions, paving the way for development and enabling the people living there, who make up a significant share of the world's population, to stay in their homelands and enjoy prosperity and security. No one wants to have to uproot their children and set off on a hazardous journey, in the hope that they will be taken in by strangers in far-off countries. We know all that, it stands to reason, yet the international community is still not doing enough. The same criticism can be levelled at Europe. There is as yet no collective understanding of how we ourselves may have contributed to the situation, through our actions or omissions.

By remaining indifferent or even, in some cases, actively promoting policies based on exploitation, we have exacerbated the crisis. It is crucial that we come to a collective understanding of the scale of the phenomenon and its causes. Only if we are prepared to really share the burden and face up together to what needs to be done will we find a lasting solution and will Europe be able to provide dignified reception arrangements and ensure integration. That is not enough, however. Europe needs to be part of the solution, a lasting solution to a situation that is affecting tens of thousands of desperate people.

It is not as though we didn't see this coming. Europe needs to be much more active, and to have a much greater presence everywhere in order to restore peace and security so that gradually, at least, the enormous economic and social disparities can be reduced and eventually eliminated around the world.

We have already heard some very wise words from our Chair and from the Secretary General. In times of crisis, Europe has had an unfortunate tendency to become more inward-looking, more fortress-like. We have seen a resurgence of racist and xenophobic attitudes of the kind that cost us dear in the past. Certain national authorities have even allowed themselves to be seduced by this new nationalist discourse. We have seen fences being erected and borders re-established. Europe, it must be said, has been very slow to react. Its response has been one of surprise, surprise mixed with a good deal of hypocrisy. As though we hadn't seen this coming! There had already been a number of large-scale influxes into certain parts of the Mediterranean, in Spain, Malta, Italy and Greece, for example. The decisions taken at the EU summits, which, unlike Council of Europe gatherings, do not represent all European countries, were notable mainly for their cowardice and timidity, although there were one or two steps in the right direction, such as the development of an international policy that respects the fundamental principles of international law, a policy that genuinely paves the way for effective participation and responsible burden sharing between countries, based on their economic and social capabilities.

The challenge now, however, is to implement those decisions. Any further delay risks aggravating the situation to the point where it becomes unmanageable. Here, as in all international forums and conferences, we have a duty to engage in dialogue in an effort to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon, all the more so in our case as we represent the national parliaments of Europe. I have, until now, deliberately refrained from mentioning the exemplary manner, which has been recognised at international level, in which certain nations, the Greeks and others, have risen to the challenge, despite numerous hurdles. For months, in very difficult circumstances, these nations have followed in the finest tradition of European humanism, with its emphasis on solidarity and hospitality. It is also important that we implement binding international agreements. Our political institutions, which are democratic and parliamentary, must rally round. It is crucial that we abide by international law on refugees and work together to restore security in the face of asymmetrical threats. These are issues that should get us all pulling together. What is needed now is to follow up words with actions, to keep our promises and to reject any xenophobic or racist tendencies that merely fuel hatred, violence and nationalism and create more divisions in our societies.

Mr László Kövér, Speaker of the Parliament of Hungary

Suddenly, unexpectedly, mass migration to Europe has become the number one issue not only in domestic politics but also in interparliamentary debates. Migration has now overshadowed all other topics. It is an issue of the utmost importance. First and foremost, however, these mass migrations to Europe have revealed the scale of the crisis in the European community itself and its institutions. Illegal migration per se is not to blame for the current situation, but if we cannot manage to contain this migration, it will singlehandedly bring down Europe as we know it, a place to which people from other parts of the world are attracted. The greatest challenge today is not only the lack of ways and means for finding a solution. The greatest challenge is the fact that we have not even managed to agree on a common definition of the problem.

On the few occasions when we do agree on what action is required, those agreements are not even implemented. Decisions adopted by consensus are not applied, yet attempts are made to implement others, which are not based on consensus. The most glaring example is the mechanism proposed by the European Commission for sharing the refugee burden. It is clear that political conflicts are undermining the authority of the international institutions, whether the European Commission or the European Parliament. But they also strike at the internal arrangements of individual member states.

How best to define the problem? Some wish to confine themselves to the issue of refugees. We are reminded of the rules, which are *de rigueur*. We are told that some refugees are being persecuted because of their religion, national identity, membership of political groups or philosophy, or that others fear prosecution on the grounds of their ethnicity, religion, national identity, etc. It is clear, however, that many of the 1.5 million-plus people who have come to Europe are not refugees and are not eligible for protection under international law. That is why dealing with these people is a matter of national responsibility. The international treaties cover these irregular migrants only to a certain extent. The agreements on the protection of the EU's borders leave no doubt as to who is responsible for preventing irregular migrants from reaching the European Union's borders. Each country must be free to decide for itself how many people it is willing to admit and from where. Each country must be free to impose its own conditions, to set up its own networks, and to determine its own procedures.

At the same time, countries which opt to host these people must not then attempt to redistribute them through bogus legal procedures, putting pressure on other countries and employing tactics that are little short of extortion. Each country must decide for itself whether migration is an asset or a risk. It is recommended that governments ask their citizens for their opinions and take those opinions seriously. That is precisely what the Hungarian Parliament and Government intend to do with the referendum on 2 October, when Hungarian citizens will have a chance to express their views on the following question: "Do you want the European Union to be able to order the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without parliament's consent?"

Dear colleagues, an issue as complex as this one requires more than the ten minutes that I have been allotted. Even two days would not be enough. The many documents that we have received from the Secretariat, even if I feel they are biased, and reflect extremist positions, do nevertheless show that the chances of us reaching a consensus are extremely slim today. The proposals set out in the document on the need to stop differentiating between economic migrants and refugees or asylum seekers – the document is more nuanced on the subject of mixed migrations – even seek to do away with the categories which up until now have provided us with reliable reference points in the debate. So we do not even have the possibility of finding some common ground, something that is nevertheless essential for any sensible discussion.

For the reasons mentioned earlier, I will merely endeavour to outline Hungary's position on this issue. I am under no illusion that I will be able to change the mind of anyone who thinks mass migration to Europe is a blessing, and not a threat but an opportunity, and that the only obstacle to acceptance of the new arrivals is prejudice and fear in the host societies. That our fellow citizens' thinking is not politically correct and that it is up to politicians to tell them how to turn Europe into one big refugee camp open to anyone wishing to start a new life.

I would like to remind you that tens of millions of people live on less than 2 dollars per day. Every year, their numbers swell by 80 million.

The opinions polls are a daily reminder that the position taken by the Hungarian government is shared by the majority of people in Hungary. They see this wave of illegal migration to Europe as a threat to our countries' political, economic and social stability, to their equilibrium even. One that is undermining our security and poised to change the face of our continent in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Effectively putting an end to two thousand years of European history and destroying European identity. This misguided European migration policy will not stop mass migration. And yet stop it we must. If we do not, and there is much to indicate that failure is a real possibility, then we need to know why. Either it is because we are incapable of putting an end to such migration, which says much about Europe's ability to defend itself, or it is because those who could put an end to it, choose not to.

Hungary, for its part, will continue to abide by the international rules on refugees, but also the contractual obligation to defend the external borders of the European Union. In 2015, before the closure of the "green border", 390,638 migrants arrived in Hungary. Since then, fewer than 20,000 people have attempted to enter our country illegally. Today, Hungary can safely say it has succeeded in preventing illegal migrants from attempting to cross the border. Those who do manage to do so are escorted back to designated crossing points. This shows that protecting borders is a perfectly viable option. Border protection, however, is only the start when it comes to dealing with the crisis in the long term.

As you are well aware, the following principles are vital for proper crisis management:

. it is important to support the efforts of those countries which are on the borders of conflict zones, where they are willing to take in refugees and attend to their needs;

. a filtering mechanism must be set up as close as possible to the migrants' and economic refugees' countries of origin; a distinction needs to be made between these two groups, and suspected terrorists prevented from entering Europe;

. efforts must be made to expedite the resolution of conflicts that are generating migration flows and to prevent the major powers from destabilising other countries;

. a more robust, co-ordinated and effective international development policy needs to be devised to allow more equitable burden sharing and to help war-torn countries create the conditions required to make their countries viable so that people have fewer incentives to leave. This is particularly important given the demographic explosion that is occurring in these countries.

In short, the idea is to help those who are experiencing problems, not to import their problems.

As decided by its government and parliament, Hungary set aside some 530 million from its budget in 2015 and 2016 to deal with the crisis. This sum includes the cost of integrating migrants, humanitarian support and donations, but does not cover the cost of Hungary's participation in the international military coalition in Iraq.

There is no question that people who leave their country as refugees, and even economic migrants, are victims: far from home and cut off from their roots, they soon discover that not even the most generous legislation will enable them to fulfil their dream of a prosperous life overnight. At the same time, however, more and more Europeans feel victimised. They are losing their motherland, this territory for which they have fought so hard for centuries, losing the land of their fathers, after centuries and centuries of toil by each previous generation.

In the words of Aron Tamasi, a Hungarian writer born in Szeklerland, Transylvania: "We are born into this world entitled to find shelter in it".

We firmly believe that human beings, human communities, must have a birthplace, a motherland, must be free to speak their mother tongue, practise their religion, enjoy their culture and seek happiness in the land of their ancestors. No one should be expelled from the land of their birth. But nor should we allow the land of our ancestors to be invaded by others. International communities and institutions must do everything in their power to ensure that everyone has a homeland. If we can agree on this point, we will have taken a significant step towards finding a solution based on consensus.

The Chair

Thank you, Mr Kövér, for your most interesting statement.

The list of speakers has been distributed. In accordance with the rules of the conference the order of speakers was decided by the drawing of lots during the meeting of Secretaries General this morning. I invite Presidents and Speakers of Parliaments who wish to add their names to the list of speakers to do so forthwith at the Table Office.

I remind you that according to our rules speaking time for each statement is limited to five minutes. Furthermore, depending on the time available once the list of speakers has been completed I may allow spontaneous comments from the Floor in response to what is said during the debate.

Mr Demetris Syllouris, President of the House of Representatives, Cyprus

Europe is currently facing the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War, a crisis to which there are many different aspects and which has come about as a result of violent conflicts, persecution and destabilisation in the region.

The latest figures, which are fairly shocking, show the full extent of the suffering of the families and, hidden behind that suffering, the desperate hope of a better future. My fellow citizens know all too well what it means to be violently uprooted, to lose loved ones and to be the victim of large-scale human

rights violations. Cyprus, after all, went through something similar when it was invaded by Turkey in 1974, and still suffers the dire consequences of the Turkish invasion and continuing occupation of part of the country.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been an ardent defender of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. It has been extremely proactive, including even before the current tragedy reached its height, launching an international campaign to raise awareness about what was happening. Our national parliaments could hardly just stand by, of course. Individually and collectively, we have a major responsibility, and a humanitarian duty, to do everything in our power to relieve the pain and suffering of all those who, for whatever reasons, have been forced to leave their countries. We also have a responsibility to provide reassurance to our own citizens, so that they realise the refugees and migrants do not pose a threat.

This is no easy task, and it is made even more difficult by the economic situation and the numerous challenges facing the countries which take in refugees. It is not impossible, however.

We must enact the necessary legislation but we must also communicate with our citizens. We must refrain from playing on their fears for political gain, and instead remind them that they have a role to play in the efforts to relieve human suffering. This is vital work, and, over and above the rhetoric, success will come first and foremost through honest and substantive dialogue with ordinary citizens. The fact that our citizens are worried should not be considered as something out of the ordinary. It would be far more serious if they thought we were not listening to their concerns and merely adding to their problems.

Responsibility for managing the crisis needs to be shared. We know that some countries have been bearing the brunt of the burden.

To conclude, I would like to say that European solidarity needs to go beyond the borders of our continent. We need to show our support for peoples living outside Europe as well. Far removed from political expediencies, personal agendas and blackmail policies driven by personal interests, humanitarian action is most essential.

Mr Olemic Thommessen, Speaker of the Stortinget, Norway

The humanitarian suffering that the ongoing migration crisis entails affects us all as countries of arrival, transit or destination. Europe has received thousands of migrants and refugees. Some will stay for a limited time; others will be granted asylum and make our countries their home. As political leaders, it is our responsibility to welcome these people and to help them to become active contributors to our democracies.

We are stewards of conservative institutions. Our work is defined by constitutions, some of which are centuries old while others are much younger. Durability is their common trait, yet our societies are evolving at an ever increasing pace. I often wonder whether we, the keepers of our parliaments and constitutions, are able to keep up. By their very nature our constitutions must remain conservative, immune to arbitrary change, but we also have a responsibility to ensure that our codes and conventions facilitate democratic development.

I worry about the rise of populism – about quick fixes as a response to fear and apprehension. Might populism be a symptom of institutions not being able to keep up with change? If so, I want to be a counter-balance by encouraging responsible, democratic citizenship. I am convinced that one aspect of the migration crisis to which we as presidents of parliaments can contribute is integration. We must act to ensure that our new citizens feel empowered and trusted to participate. They must gain the self-confidence to take part in debates, to contribute in their communities and to vote in elections. We can do this by recognising them as equals – as fellow citizens – and by promoting good role models.

I shall give two examples. Recently, I have visited several reception centres for asylum seekers and school where migrants and refugees are learning Norwegian. Particularly memorable was a visit to a centre for unaccompanied minors. More than half the residents were young men between 15 and 18 years old. For as many as 80% of them, Norway might become their permanent home. In them, I saw a mixture of uncertainty and expectation, and my visit clearly made a big impression. They wanted selfies and I could see in their eyes that they felt acknowledged and welcomed by Norway. I hope that

they will remember my visit and that it will encourage them to become active members of our democracy. Everyone needs role models: no one more so than new arrivals to our democracies.

In 2014, 18-year-old Faten Mahdi Al-Hussaini was one of the initiators of a large demonstration against ISIL. She came to Norway as a two-year-old. She was a refugee. Now, she is co-founder of JustUnity, an organisation working against extremism and the radicalisation of youth. I have met her on several occasions, and I passionately believe in and support her work. She is a true role model.

As presidents of parliaments we can contribute by giving individuals a stage to spread their influence. I urge you to go out and find examples of democratic citizenship among migrants, refugees and immigrants in your countries. I urge you to identify and promote good role models who will inspire active participation in our democracies.

Mr Claude Bartolone President, National Assembly, France

The refugee crisis is one of the biggest challenges facing Europe today, a test of its history, culture and values. If we persist in failing to face up to this challenge, future generations will have no choice but to despise us, whatever our achievements in other areas.

In 2015, 3,500 people died in the Mediterranean. So far in 2016, the figure stands at 3,200. This state of affairs strikes at the heart of our most deeply entrenched values, values on which the Council of Europe was built. I know that conservative political forces, in France of course but elsewhere too, are keen to gloss over the issue, claiming that economic refugees are taking advantage of these complicated globalised times in which we live, and that hosting refugees carries a cost – there are always people who are ready to put a price on everything! I have heard that a number of countries would like to hold referendums on the issue. I hardly dare imagine what the outcome would have been, had similar referendums been held at the time of the various enlargements. I am not sure how people in certain founding countries would have voted on the question of whether to admit this or that applicant state.

Our concerted efforts need to be enhanced. Our countries need to be more generous in terms of how refugees are distributed. They need to introduce more rigorous procedures for registering and assisting refugees, and refrain from dividing them into “good” and “bad” refugees according to their nationality. Significant action also needs to be undertaken with the relevant countries in the Middle East.

We share a common mission and destiny with these countries, namely to build peace in the new century for millions of human beings. We can all agree on the fact that Greece, Italy and Turkey must be helped by developing bilateral initiatives to alleviate the terrible suffering of the tens of thousands of refugees who are in immediate danger. We must actively support social measures in Lebanon and Jordan because, I am sure you will agree, nobody sets out across the Mediterranean on a raft for fun. These few measures, which have the potential to draw us together, may be enough to save our cherished notions of freedom of movement and European unity. That is the goal. And who better to articulate it than us, as parliamentarians? We are the voice of the people, the watchdog whose job it is to protect their values.

How many of our fellow citizens have longed for the day, a day that has now come, when the right to asylum would finally become a universal right at the heart of humanist values in Europe? Are we condemned to abandon our forefathers’ dream of freedom and equality? Absolutely not. To be sure, some of our fellow citizens are unhappy. We must convince them that integrating refugees does not mean that they, for their part, will be neglected, in particular those of them who are experiencing hardship. Demographic change, social structures and the way jobs are organised within our societies shows that immigration is not a threat, but an opportunity for prosperity and social progress. Some major decisions have been taken to ease the burden on Greece and Italy when it comes to dealing with the vast numbers of migrants arriving on their shores. The truth is, however, that not enough has been done and Greece and Italy are still not getting the help they deserve. With its millions of inhabitants, Europe is well placed to provide accommodation for refugees and to integrate them, much more so than other countries such as Lebanon which has taken in over a million people, roughly a quarter of its population, and Jordan, with 635,000 people, more than 10% of its population.

There is a need to better explain the terms of the agreement signed on 18 March 2016 between the European Union and Turkey, and to stop trying to hide its flaws. National parliamentarians must also

be able to fully exercise their power of scrutiny and to check that migration policies are being applied in practice. They must challenge their governments about their failure to implement measures decided at European level. Is it right that Greece should still not have received the logistical support it has been asking for for months, in order to speed up the processing of asylum applications? The European Asylum Support Office has criticised states for not always honouring their commitments to provide additional support in the form of protection officers.

Another example starkly illustrates the need for closer co-operation with NGOs in the refugee camps in Calais: unaccompanied minors who have family in the United Kingdom are getting caught up in bureaucratic delays, leaving them vulnerable to all kinds of trafficking.

Lastly, national parliaments are the driving force behind development projects in southern countries. At the Valetta summit in November 2015, managing migration was recognised as being the joint responsibility of countries of origin, transit and destination. An emergency trust fund for Africa has been set up to support development projects. Here too, it is important that western countries monitor their implementation.

One last point: looking ahead to the long term, European countries are going to have to deal with migration for many more years to come. Some European countries with ageing populations are going to need young people. And with the population of Africa set to reach 1.5 billion over the next 25 years, who seriously believes that erecting walls and barbed wire here in Europe is any kind of answer? Respect for the rule of law must continue to be our guiding principle, even if we have to harmonise certain aspects of the right to asylum. And once calm has been restored on the international stage and our peoples are able to breathe easy again, I hope we will not forget what got us into this mess in the first place, namely austerity policies, the obsession with preserving rents, policies involving divestiture of the state and public services, economic dependency, and a sense of fatalism over the dramatic rise in inequality. These are all international political trends that we need to get away from. Because sooner or later we reap what we sow and if what we sow is injustice, inequality, rent-seeking and confiscation, the harvest will be one of poverty and suffering. And the only way to deal with that, namely social disasters, is together.

(Mr Thommessen, Vice-Chair, took the Chair in place of Mr Agramunt.)

Ms Laura Boldrini, President, Chamber of Deputies, Italy

Allow me to start this speech with a question: at what point does migration become a crisis? I feel compelled to ask this question following a recent visit to Lebanon, a country with 4.5 million inhabitants which, you will recall, has taken in nearly 2 million refugees. Given that Lebanon is a small country with few resources and considerable interfaith tensions, the arrival of so many migrants does indeed constitute a crisis. But can the same really be said when a million or so people arrive in a continent with a population of 820 million? The answer surely has to be no. Such a situation has the potential to become a crisis, however, if, instead of acting in a co-ordinated fashion, each country thinks only of itself and responds by putting up walls and fences. This is more than a refugee crisis, therefore, it is a crisis in our basic principles, because we are relying on just a handful of countries to pull us out of the mire. Greece for example, and I wish to thank you for recently giving me the opportunity to witness the situation at first hand on the tiny island of Lesbos.

Apart from Greece, only Italy and a few northern European countries have been hit hard. The real crisis occurs when we start thinking that solidarity is a one-way street: we hold out our hand for help when we need it, yet we cross our arms and refuse to help others when called upon to do so.

Roughly a million asylum seekers and migrants have arrived in Europe. Obviously, that becomes a crisis if different countries apply different rules with regard to reception. Naturally, everyone wants to go wherever reception conditions are the best. That's understandable, and only human. People fleeing aerial bombardments and IS want to go wherever they will get the best treatment. You cannot say that refugees are to blame for the crisis. The crisis happened because we responded in a disorganised fashion, with "every man for himself". In these globalised times, with 5 million Syrian refugees living in difficult circumstances in neighbouring countries, it is hardly surprising that some of them should have sought to venture deeper into Europe. Experts, international agencies and civil society warned us but we weren't really listening. In some cases, too, we neglected to translate national policies and

international recommendations, including those made by the Council of Europe, into our codes and legislation.

There are some 63 million displaced people in the world today, people who have fled their homes, i.e. more than the entire population of Italy.

How can we be content with stopgap measures such as temporary border closures when faced with a problem of this magnitude? How can we simply look away and tell ourselves that other countries will manage somehow, even though they are not always very diligent about respecting human rights and the right to asylum? Only 6% of the world's refugees are in Europe, by the way. Can we really afford not to act when countries on Europe's southern and eastern borders are being torn apart by conflict? Dear colleagues. I would like to remind you that 67 years ago, the Council of Europe was set up as the first regional organisation based on respect for, and the protection of, human rights for everyone, both our own citizens and citizens of other countries. Today is International Day of Democracy. On this 15th of September, let's not forget that there can be no democracy unless the rights of all individuals are respected. Without rights, democracy is meaningless.

Ms Doris Bures President, Nationalrat, Austria

The past year has presented numerous challenges for a good many countries. Millions of people from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere have fled persecution, war and lack of prospects for the future. Austria has a population of 8 million. In 2015, some 800,000 people passed through our country, and nearly 90,000 applied for asylum. Many of our countries have found themselves in a situation where there is huge demand yet limited possibilities. Austria has faced up to its responsibilities. Now it is Europe's turn to do the same and I firmly believe that what is required is a common European solution. We are pinning our hopes on that. It quickly became clear, however, that finding a common European solution was not going to be easy. There was the issue of security of external borders to consider, and the question of how refugees should be distributed across Europe. The decisions that were taken some time ago now have still not been transposed. The bulk of the burden is still on the countries which have been affected the most, such as Austria or those which lie on the periphery of Europe. The closure of the Balkans route, and the agreement signed with Turkey have not really provided solutions but they have at least brought a temporary respite.

Since no European solution has been forthcoming, as of the beginning of the year Austria has been forced to adopt national measures. A few months ago, the Austrian parliament decided that between now and 2019, the country would accept 127,000 refugees, which means accepting roughly 37,500 asylum applications in 2016.

Given that the European Convention on Human Rights is part of our Constitution, we feel we have an obligation to assist the refugees. We will continue to do so, we will continue to pursue humane and responsible options, while at the same time rising to the different challenges. The kind of genuine integration that we want to achieve requires major efforts in terms of education, but the idea is also that the individuals concerned should find a place in the labour market, as that will improve their chances of integrating. It is also the only way to avoid any kind of sectarianism.

The impact of these migration flows is something that concerns us; they have their roots in other countries, where people are driven by war and persecution to embark on perilous journeys, endangering their own lives and the lives of their families. On the international front, we must do everything in our power to end these conflicts, to stabilise entire regions and to eradicate the causes of migration. I would also like to mention the peace building efforts made by the United States and Russia. We hope that the ceasefire that has been negotiated will hold and that we will be able to provide relief to the populations. Only once the war is over and there are some basic prospects in the region will we be able to convince people on both sides to return home.

Meanwhile, in our own countries, we have a duty to initiate a debate on the crisis. It has to be a responsible debate, however. No doubt we will come back to this point when discussing our third topic. Populist forces are not interested in sensible discussions and prefer to fuel fear and anxiety, something which they have managed to do all too successfully because our populations are deeply unsettled at present. The reason for this instability is not the refugee crisis per se, but rather the fact that we are still feeling the impact of the economic and financial crisis and many people in our countries justifiably fear for their future. We need a policy that is not divisive, a policy that is responsible. As elected

representatives, we have a special role to play in this regard, in particular in Council of Europe member states which have always served as role models, so that democracy, the rule of law and human rights are preserved.

Mr Ismail Kahraman, President, Grand National Assembly, Turkey

The number of refugees worldwide has seen a very sharp rise, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees putting the figure at 65 million, the highest level the world has ever seen. The waves of migrants, too, are much larger than before. In such circumstances, it is crucial that safeguards be put in place. Close attention needs to be given to these refugees all over the world. Our parliament has been working hard as part of a concerted effort in this area. The other national parliaments of Council of Europe member states have likewise been working individually and collectively to put appropriate solutions in place. Special arrangements are needed, especially in the countries hosting refugees.

Europe needs to make a number of decisions. There are several options. One might be to close all the routes so that the refugees stop coming to Europe. That would, of course, be a violation of their rights. Herding refugees together at Europe's borders is not the answer. Large numbers of people have died under these circumstances, yet some European countries have chosen to take this approach. We should not even have to ask ourselves whether such methods are acceptable. Any action of this kind will tarnish Europe's image for decades. On the contrary, Europe must throw open its doors so that the refugees can find a safe haven there. Efforts must be made to create the necessary conditions so that every man and woman can be provided with shelter and looked after. That is the kind of approach that needs to be adopted if we are serious about respecting human rights. It is certainly the one favoured by the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.

The decision to close certain borders in Europe has led to over 3 million people becoming stranded in Turkey. In recent years, Turkey has done its best to help these men and women who were forced to flee for their lives. Our policy has been to help them. More than a billion euros have been spent on providing assistance for people within our own borders, in Turkey. We have received over 500 million euros in aid from other countries and while this is a considerable sum, it is not sufficient to meet existing needs. When you have 3 million people arriving in your country, every effort must be made to ensure they are provided with decent living conditions.

As regards irregular migration, across the Aegean Sea, this has led to numerous deaths. Everyone must take active steps to prevent such tragedies from unfolding, by implementing the international agreements on illegal migrants. Turkey has sought to address this situation and has been successful thus far; it remains to be seen how the provisions called for by the European Union will be implemented, in particular as regards the issue of resettlement. A number of worrying patterns have been observed: xenophobia, anti-Islam sentiment, racism. Efforts must be made to overcome such prejudice and attitudes, so that the situation improves. Let's not forget either that any attempt to make distinctions between refugees let alone any refusal to accept them on the grounds of their religion would be a serious violation of human rights. We must work together to put an end to racism, and to the wave of anti-Islam sentiment that is sweeping across Europe. Without collective action, we will be powerless to counter negative attitudes of this kind.

Mr Gundars Daudze, Vice-President, Saeima, Latvia

Thank you for giving me the Floor and letting me express my opinion on the topic of migration and the refugee crisis in Europe. We are here today to talk about the role and responsibilities of parliaments in this regard.

The first and foremost role and responsibility of any parliament is to serve its constituency – the people. It is also our responsibility to ensure that our societies maintain a kind and human attitude to other people living in other regions of the world. Part of this responsibility is undoubtedly to render assistance to those in need and to protect people from persecution and the cruelties of war.

At the same time, we have seen reports that the current situation of displaced people is being misused by economic migrants who are not being persecuted at home. Furthermore, it is used by terrorist groups seeking to infiltrate our borders and harm our societies and by criminal human trafficking gangs seeking to profit from these circumstances.

This situation cannot be compared to anything we have seen in the past. In this new situation we must realise that we cannot simply open our doors and welcome everyone, as happened during and after the Second World War. We cannot, however, declare that every person requesting asylum in our countries to be *persona non grata*.

It is our duty as parliamentarians to propose a middle ground by setting a prudent legal base. We as parliamentarians need to evaluate the existing model and look for an appropriate legislative framework that eliminates potential risks. Close co-operation between our parliaments will be essential in this respect. By security authorities vetting and scrutinising the background of each person we can ensure that those in need of protection are helped while those seeking to misuse the situation are rejected. By doing so, we will serve our people to the best extent possible.

(Mr Agramunt, Chair, took the Chair in place of Mr Thommessen.)

Ms Ana Pastor Speaker, Congreso de los Diputados, Spain

It is a great honour but also a huge responsibility to have recently been elected President of the Congress of Deputies. I would like to start by saying that I will do everything in my power to ensure that Spain and the chamber over which I preside play an active role on the international stage, forge ever closer links with the friendly countries represented here today and stand up, boldly and courageously, for the values embodied by the PACE.

The refugee crisis that has been going on for some time now is, in my view, the biggest challenge facing Europe today. It really is a major issue for all our countries. It is a complex situation that calls for joint solutions. Any unilateral measure is doomed to fail, given the complex nature of migration as a phenomenon.

The decision to place this subject at the top of our agenda is most welcome therefore. For a long time now, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been trying to draw our attention to precisely this issue of complexity. It has already made considerable efforts to raise our awareness of the importance of implementing the right to asylum, and of the magnitude of the challenge that that entails. We must make optimum use of this forum of ours to look together for solutions that are more than just a short-term fix. All these discussions will obviously need to be continued in our national parliaments. We must whatever is necessary in our own countries to introduce mechanisms so that we can act much more quickly on the opinions and recommendations of international institutions such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Laws and procedures must be observed, of course, but that should not be a barrier to improving our joint response. National parliaments, for instance, could do more to capitalise on the remarkable work of the PACE, especially in such sensitive and crucial areas as the migration crisis, the fight against racism or electoral transparency.

National parliaments can make a decisive contribution, each in their own way, towards resolving the major migration crisis that we are seeing today. We can implement solutions that respect the law and pluralism, legitimate solutions that reflect the aspirations of ordinary citizens. For a long time now, Spain has been making the case for a common migration policy. The European Union and the other European countries can count on our support in implementing this comprehensive policy. What is required is a synthesis of migration policy, foreign policy and development policy. This is crucial. Spain has been calling for years for more emphasis to be given to the external dimension of our migration and asylum policies. We need to be able to anticipate events, and work with the countries of origin and transit to combat human trafficking. We must defend our borders, but at the same time ensure development. We must show great sensitivity in the face of the human tragedies engendered by war and the proliferation of conflicts. The response must be political but it must also include action on the humanitarian front. The solution must be a joint one, based on solidarity. Spain has already proposed a whole series of measures which would strengthen this common policy. We will carry on working to develop and implement a common policy on migration and asylum. We must all rally round to achieve this goal. The parliaments over which we preside must contribute to finding a solution to this global crisis in keeping with the principle of pluralism and the law. We must be unstinting in our efforts and bear in mind that we all depend on one another.

Mr Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, President, Knesset, Israel

Before you stand an immigrant. Just 29 years ago I arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union, one of the last dissidents to be released. Today I proudly address you as Speaker of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. Nearly a third of Knesset members were born abroad. Our Minister of Defence was born in Moldova. Our Minister for the Environment was born in Ukraine. Current Knesset members also come from the United States, Canada, Morocco and Ethiopia. For most of the past decade, the minister of immigrant affairs has himself or herself been an immigrant.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Refugees and migrants have moved through the world since time immemorial. The groups of people change, their conditions change, but the phenomenon, with its attendant challenges and opportunities, remains the same. Our challenge as leaders of parliaments is to minimise the pains of immigration and maximise the social benefits that we can all reap. As an Israeli and as an immigrant I can say that the task is not easy, but it is possible.

It is true that the State of Israel views its immigrants in a different light from that of many other countries. The people who arrive at our doorstep are our long-lost brothers and sisters coming home to join their people. For nearly 70 years we have developed the tools and policies to bring our people together in a colourful and unique cultural mosaic. We would be honoured to place Israel's experience and knowledge at the service of others, and we have already started co-operation on these issues with several European countries because regardless of the immigrant's motive the experiences and challenges they face are strikingly similar.

I am not here today to give a lecture on immigrant integration or to comment on others' immigration policies, just as we expect our peers not to pass judgment on Israel's domestic decisions. That said, the gaps in language, social norms and customs, and the need to find a job and community are universal challenges that the immigrant faces in Israel, France, Germany or any other country.

Over the years Israel has enacted policies to help immigrants in all these areas, from subsidies for language schools to housing, mortgages and helping to start a small business. As a result, long-time immigrants are in the labour force in the same numbers as Israelis and make it to the highest reaches of the public and private sectors.

For all those who would take a romantic view, integration is not a panacea to the challenges of immigration and it is not a quick-fix solution. Israeli society is still beset by tensions between immigrant groups and it takes time – sometimes decades or more – for immigrants to find their place in society, but they do.

For all the drawbacks to integration programmes, I believe that our society is stronger, more united and healthier for having them. Mind you, successful integration processes probably will not prevent the fanatic wave of extremism that we witnessed recently in Nice, Brussels, Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray and Istanbul, but we must consider that, much like in Israel, the majority of new immigrants arrive at their new destinations with the hope of a new life and a better future for their children. By helping them to integrate we will make it much harder for the extremists and their leaders to spread their bloodthirsty doctrine among the younger generation of immigrants.

We as leaders of parliaments can contribute immensely to this effort. Many of the issues demand legislative amendment, but even more important is the spearheading of efforts in several fields, fighting with full force terror and terrorists while educating our society about its own identity, together with acceptance and tolerance of the other, thus ensuring the future of immigrants via economic, cultural and social integration. Programmes performed and implemented, together with the more positive leaders within immigrant groups, are much more effective, and the result will be much more evident within a shorter period.

This challenge that we are facing together as representatives of our parliaments, our nations and global society at large is our obligation not only for the benefit of new immigrants, not only because unless we do these things the result will haunt us: it is our moral obligation as representatives and leaders of democratic countries and nations.

(Mr Thommessen, Vice-Chair, took the Chair in place of Mr Agramunt.)

Mr Jörgen Pettersson, President, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

On behalf of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference I would like to emphasise the importance of international parliamentary co-operation, especially regarding the current tense situation in Europe – in particular, because of the migration and refugee crisis.

I thank Pedro Agramunt, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, for inviting us to this parliamentary conference here in Strasbourg.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was founded in 1991 with the primary goal of creating a platform for open parliamentary dialogue to overcome the Cold War and to establish the Baltic Sea as a sea of freedom and co-operation. We parliamentarians from around the Baltic Sea are convinced that co-operation and dialogue are indispensable to preventing conflict and promoting joint progress.

This year we are celebrating the BSPC's silver jubilee. In the past 25 years our conviction has not changed. On the contrary the silver jubilee conference this year has once again proven that cohesion within the BSPC is stronger than ever.

We as parliamentarians called unanimously in paragraph 2 of our resolution two weeks ago in Riga on the governments in the Baltic Sea region to take further steps to re-establish mutual trust and dialogue in the Baltic Sea region, in particular within the Council of the Baltic Sea States. We also called on the governments to welcome mutual co-operation and peaceful solutions to international disputes, taking into account best practice in the Baltic Sea region. My own homeland, the Åland Islands, is a great example of crisis management. Thanks to international agreements in 1921 we today are a neutralised and demilitarised autonomy in the Baltic Sea – in daily life referred to as the islands of peace.

Given the current situation in Europe, it is important to remember such an approach: a fair solution that can be accepted by all involved can be achieved only by dialogue and co-operation, particularly in times of crisis.

As we speak today, fathers and mothers across Europe face the worst living nightmare. They cannot guarantee their children's safety. They lack power to make decisions. They flee for their lives with their kids clinging to them. That is not dignified and it is not human. It is not what our ancestors expected from us when they rebuilt Europe after the war. We not only owe it to ourselves to act in a civilised manner; we are in debt to those who shaped our continent, and we are in even greater debt to those who are not yet born but have every right to grow up and shape their own future and their own happiness. We need action to make that happen.

Perhaps each country, as a reflex, feels the need to protect its people and fears that challenge that comes with a high number of refugees, but can we as Europeans refuse to help people who suffer from war? Are we not living on a continent that has suffered so much because of war in the past and has now achieved a union of stability and peace? This union was possible because of good co-operation and vivid dialogue. With a European crisis we might need to find European solutions.

Against the background of the current situation of migration and the high number of refugees to Europe, it is extremely important that all respective countries sit at one table, open-minded to a comprehensive solution. The number of refugees will remain a challenge for years because there are no signs of growing improvements in the countries of the refugees. So how do we find long-lasting solutions to help people in need without overstressing our capabilities? The solution is definitely not that each country deals with its own domestic problems and does not care about those of its neighbours. This crisis is a challenge not only for one or two single States but for all European States and Europe as one. The answer of the BSPC, and our common position on the migration and refugee crisis, which we agreed two weeks ago, is our call on governments closely to work together in coping with the ongoing challenges connected with refugees in the region, to continue to ensure decent treatment and the right to safe asylum for countries in the Baltic Sea region, to foster closer co-operation and, as far as necessary, to follow EU-UN declarations in tackling illegal and irregular immigration.

The background document to this theme prepared on the instruction of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe points out the impact of the recent terrorist attacks. The Parliamentary Assemblies of the BSPC explicitly condemn terrorism in all its forms as a common threat to our citizens and our shared values.

We should not take it for granted that we parliamentarians can always find satisfactory solutions, but we have an obligation to our citizens to contribute to solving conflicts. Further strengthening inter-parliamentary co-operation as well as the influence of parliaments and their common will is of crucial importance in looking for answers to international challenges such as the refugee crisis and the threats posed by terrorism. We parliamentarians, as representatives of the citizens in our countries, need to work continuously on deepening dialogue, on compromise and on co-operation related to democratic values to face future international challenges. I hope that you will note these words extremely carefully today.

The Chair

That concludes our morning sitting. We shall resume our work on the theme at 3 p.m.

Thursday 15 September – 3 pm

Theme 1 – Migration and refugee crisis in Europe – role and responsibilities of parliaments (resumed debate)

The Chair

We will now resume our debate on Theme 1.

I call Mr Jean-Claude Gaudin.

M. Jean-Claude GAUDIN, Vice-Président, Sénat, France

The migration issue, which involves many processes, is a major challenge for Europe. I am therefore pleased that this theme has been chosen for the first part of our discussions. For over a year, Europe has been confronted with a crisis on a scale unprecedented in recent history. It is both tragic and complex and is the result of the murderous conflict which has engulfed Syria, aggravated by the instability affecting Iraq, Libya and a large part of Africa, not to mention Afghanistan.

I would like to begin by focusing on the human dimension of the crisis. Women, children and men, many of whom are young, are risking their lives to flee war or destitution. The terrible toll of drownings in our seas reminds us that it is this human disaster which we must tackle first.

In the French Senate, we are therefore calling for a comprehensive response which is more coordinated and respects the right to asylum. The response must be based on the fundamental values which unite us. It must also involve solidarity, as it is unacceptable for the burden of taking in refugees to be borne only by those countries which an accident of geography has placed at the gateway to Europe. We must work towards greater harmonisation and at last draw up a real immigration and asylum policy with all that this involves in terms of enhanced protection of our outside borders and increased efforts to combat illegal immigration and smugglers' networks. In this area, every state must be able to assume its responsibilities. Given the migration challenge, Europe must also strengthen its ties with countries of origin and transit.

Compared to the figure of 180 million in 1950, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is set to reach 1.7 billion by 2050 according to UN projections. This tenfold increase is a challenge for Africa but also for European countries. Europe must strengthen its ties with its partners in the Maghreb and Africa, building on measures whose effectiveness has been proven. One example here is the "Africa plan" which Spain adopted in 2006 with certain African countries like Senegal, which put an end to illegal migration flows into the Canaries through a comprehensive approach combining co-development, the fight against illegal migration and legal migration routes.

I am speaking to you as the mayor of Marseille, the mayor of a port city with inhabitants of many different origins and nationalities. Beyond the humanitarian emergency, Europe must take action to offer responsible responses to the challenge of migration. Its credibility in the eyes of its citizens is at stake here. Otherwise, we run the risk of fanning the rise in extremism of all kinds in Europe. However,

governments must not shirk their responsibilities either. In response to the migrant challenge, we must take real action, to pick up on the title of a recent information report of the French Senate.

Ms Tsetska TSACHEVA, President of the Narodno Sobranie, Bulgaria

The refugee crisis affecting Europe is one of the most serious problems which our countries have to tackle and resolve. The situation is all the more complicated since a solution has to be found in an unstable geostrategic context. To ensure success here, we need an effective common foreign policy and a security policy. Bulgaria is working towards that goal. Europe's foreign policy must increasingly take account of the security dimension. Only a common European response can produce a stable long-term solution. In this connection, I would refer to the Bulgarian delegation's 2015 initiative, which was adopted unanimously by the Assembly in Sofia in November 2015 and was in fact a call once again to confirm the principles of united European co-operation. The PACE should adopt a recommendation to the governments of the 47 member states so that all these principles are reiterated and confirmed and a fourth Council of Europe Summit is held.

Europe as embodied in the PACE and the national parliaments was in favour of the idea of fostering dialogue so that all the difficulties, including in financial and organisational terms, are overcome and a solution acceptable to our societies is found.

The PACE must act as an international rather than a supranational institution. We must adopt a decision that meets with the approval of the maximum number of our fellow citizens in our various member states. The measures which some countries are tempted to take on their own will not really solve the problem. I would remind you that the slogan of the Bulgarian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was the well-known saying, unity is strength. It is on the basis of that principle that we should be able to find a solution to our problems.

Bulgaria is a European Union border state. We are therefore required strictly to control those crossing the border. We must check the individuals who arrive there and separate those in genuine need of protection from economic migrants. Bulgaria honours all its commitments under the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol and relevant EU directives. But the situation is far from being resolved. We are a long way from the solution which our fellow citizens want. However, the readmission agreement with Turkey is of considerable significance. But Turkey is linking the application of the agreement to liberalisation of the requirements for the admission of Turkish citizens to the EU, in other words, the abolition of visas. The highest authorities in Turkey are exerting pressure to bring about a win-win solution. It is vital not only for us but also for Europe as a whole that Greece and our other neighbours, the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia, succeed in bringing migration under control.

I would point out that the PACE made relevant recommendations to European governments as far back as 2011. They were confirmed in 2015. We have to live together in the 21st century, and the newcomers must be taken in, provided that they accept European values, human rights and the rule of law and adopt these principles as their own values. The measures needed must not be delayed any longer. In any case, I would stress that the Bulgarian delegation to the PACE is a loyal partner and is very keen to seek a common solution to this serious problem affecting all of Europe.

Ms Ankie BROEKERS-KNOL, President of the Eerstekamer, Netherlands

A lot has happened since we last saw each other for the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament in Oslo. The issue of migration has risen to the top of the political agenda. The world's displaced population stands at a record of 65 million people and Europe has been confronted with the largest flow of refugees and migrants since the Second World War. This has led to disastrous situations, such as the children who are sleeping on the streets of Athens, Rome and Calais. We are overwhelmed by this, yet we were warned that it was going to happen. For years, experts alerted us to the dangers of the unstable situation in the Middle East, the insufficient protection of our external borders and the inadequacy of the European asylum system. We were warned, but for too long we failed to recognise the urgency of these problems.

In an effort to reduce irregular migration and encourage a more structured approach, the European Union struck a deal – a deal that was born from a harsh humanitarian and political truth. For now, it appears that the deal has made the influx of people fleeing to Europe more manageable but it remains

an immensely complex operation that has recently been complicated even further by the attempted coup in Turkey.

A structure of co-operation can work only if both parties stick to what was agreed and adhere to the principles of the Council of Europe. That entails upholding the rule of law and respecting human rights. A structural solution also requires solidarity among EU member States in the resettlement of refugees.

At the moment, not all countries are doing enough. I say that with the full realisation that there are limits to what a country can contribute and I sympathise with countries in eastern Europe that are trying to set up a stable, well-functioning State and are bearing a great burden in protecting our external borders. Those aspects need to be taken into account, but those countries that fail to do what they can are the dominoes that knock down the whole system.

The European migrant crisis has made one thing more apparent than ever: it is a problem that none of our countries can manage alone. We have to work together to achieve goals that go beyond the interests of our individual sovereign States. Of course, this applies to not only European countries but countries worldwide. Migration is a global problem, and tackling its underlying root causes requires international co-operation.

That is why I strongly support discussing this subject on this international platform. National parliaments have an important role to play in migration.

Together, our parliaments are uniquely placed to offer a platform for debate and determine whether initiatives for a solution can count on broad public support. Parliamentarians can help to ensure that in future our governments recognise the urgency of migration problems. We need to rebuild trust in in asylum and border protection policies and policies to differentiate refugees from economic migrants. It is the only way in which we can combat growing tensions and fear in our societies about the impact of migration.

Our responsibility does not stop at our borders. If we do not contribute to tackling the root causes of migration together we are bound to be overwhelmed by it time and again. It has become clear that the volatile and unstable situation in the Middle East will continue to provide a migration flow. The number of people arriving from African countries has sky-rocketed and is not expected to decrease. In addition, experts warn us of increased environmentally motivated migration.

Europe, where the global refugee regime began 65 years ago with the refugee convention and where its limits have now been most starkly exposed, can indeed be a catalyst for change, but for that to happen we need to be better prepared. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.

Ms Christine MUTTONEN, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

As we know, our well-being and our future depend not just on ourselves but also on the well-being and future of our neighbours. No state can guarantee the safety of its citizens on its own. Most challenges can only be addressed through co-operation, dialogue and compromises that take account of the interests of all parties. While migration flows involving hundreds of millions of people are clearly one of today's key challenges, it is the opposite that is happening. Instead of co-operating, many states are turning in on themselves and seeking purely national solutions. Xenophobia and racism are spreading and populists are making big gains. They claim to have quick and easy national solutions, albeit based on pure egotism, with no need for negotiations or discussions or to accept compromises.

If we follow this trend, which is that of political divisions, we are headed for disaster. To avoid that, we must co-operate and have alternative solutions to offer. Even though they will not be the easiest or the fastest, they will at least be peaceful and based on solidarity and will take account not only of national security but also of human rights and needs for protection. We need solutions involving inclusion and integration, far from xenophobia and racism.

We must also address the causes of these migration flows by supporting the countries which have taken in most Syrian refugees and which also have major domestic policy challenges.

A month ago, I visited Turkey with an OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation to meet representatives of the government, the opposition, members of parliament and civil society representatives to discuss the attempted coup and also the attacks on democracy and parliament itself.

It is a country which, according to the UNHCR, has taken in the largest number of refugees, in spite of all its difficulties. But we must not forget countries like Jordan or Libya.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will do everything in its power to foster lasting, solidarity-based solutions. We are already working towards that goal. We have arranged a number of fact-finding visits to the Turkish-Syrian border and also to Sicily. We have set up a committee on migration to gather the experiences of all our member states. The first results are reflected in a series of proposals made to the member states. These proposals, experiences and the information gathered are available not only to governments but also to parliaments in the member states which so wish. I invite you to take part in our discussions and conferences, which can only help strengthen inter-parliamentary exchanges. You are always most welcome and I look forward to co-operating with you in future.

Mr Trajko VELJANOSKI, President of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia

Migration is nothing new. It has existed since the dawn of time. But it is now taking on unprecedented proportions. It is a global problem, as underlined by the recent G20 summit, which called for appropriate steps to be taken to solve it. The international community has a duty to help these unfortunate individuals, while restoring peace in the regions and countries which the refugees come from. International instruments, in particular the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and many Council of Europe resolutions clearly indicate the international community's obligations in relation to the countries and individuals concerned.

Allow me to say, however, that this migration crisis is posing major problems for the transit and final destination countries. It is a serious dilemma in political, economic, cultural, population and security terms.

We are not a final destination country, but we are on the much-publicised Western Balkans route that leads from Turkey through Greece, Macedonia and Serbia into Hungary and the EU. According to the official statistics, 900 000 refugees have passed through Macedonia over the last 16 months. That poses a major challenge in many respects to a country of two million inhabitants with limited material and human resources. We have tried to help these desperate people who were crossing Macedonia from Greece en route for Serbia.

Since the start of the crisis, we have adapted our response; we have sought to protect the victims from criminals and have passed new asylum legislation with emergency procedures for registering individuals quickly. We have also mobilised the public transport system and the ministries of health, labour and social policies and the Red Cross and, of course, we have provided assistance through the generosity of NGOs. Our citizens have shown great solidarity in helping the refugees, providing them with a minimum of assistance in terms of hygiene, water and medicines.

But it is a European crisis which has to be addressed at European level. It is therefore desirable for there to be a maximum degree of co-operation between states and institutions. At the start of the crisis, it is clear that our neighbour to the south refused any co-operation, but things have changed and all parties have understood that it is in everybody's interests to work together. With regard to the security aspects, several of our partner countries have helped us by deploying police officers and providing equipment or financial assistance (Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Poland, in particular). Now there are joint police patrols along our entire southern and northern borders. This more active presence on the ground is an excellent development. In August, for instance, there were 588 operations at the border involving joint forces, with Austrian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, Slovakian and Hungarian colleagues. We are continuing this co-operation.

The Macedonian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe contributes actively to the drafting of documents and resolutions. But we are also working on the ground to give people practical assistance. We have signed several bilateral and multilateral agreements at regional level focusing on co-operation with a view to finding solutions to all the problems related to the migration crisis. I hope that this meeting will make a positive contribution to finding a solution. We hope to gain a better understanding of the developments and, above all, to be able to re-establish decent living conditions in the refugees' countries of origin so that they are able to lead normal lives there.

Mr Andriy PARUBIY, President of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine

The migration crisis is clearly one of the key challenges facing Europe. I should like to talk today about the issue of displaced persons in Ukraine. As you are aware, Ukraine has been experiencing Russian aggression for two years now. In September, 1.7 million people had the status of internally displaced persons, which is only 100 000 fewer than the refugees in all EU countries in 2015. The Verkhovna Rada has passed a law on the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons. 900 000 families are receiving social assistance, 377 000 people have received free medical assistance and thousands of students from occupied universities have been transferred to free universities. According to the EU's Frontex agency, 1 822 000 refugees arrived in the EU in 2015.

Although there has been an "avalanche" of refugees on the EU's borders, so to speak, we are not a threat, we are not a transit country towards Europe. The readmission agreements are applied. Ukraine honours its obligations. In my view, there is therefore strictly no reason for not implementing a visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine. We must combat both the consequences and also the causes of the migration, namely Russia's aggression against Ukraine and Russia's military operations in Syria. Russia is involved in destabilising Europe. Russia is no longer an oil exporter but an aggression exporter.

Because of the repression bearing down on them, the Tatars of Crimea have been forced to flee their homeland for the second time in a century and have once again become political migrants. The Kremlin is pursuing Stalinist repression of entire nations. This is terrible for all of us. The values of human rights, dignity, freedom and the free world are being severely tested. How is it possible to look the other way? Should the Duma elections which the Russian authorities in occupied Crimea are also planning to hold be recognised? Personally, I believe the answer is no; that is unacceptable. This European Conference of Presidents of Parliament includes individuals who voted in favour of the annexation of Crimea, who voted for the entry of Russian forces into Ukraine and who have aided and abetted this crime not only against Ukraine but against all those who respect the rule of law.

As the President of the Ukrainian Parliament, I should like to be clear: by inviting the aggressor to this type of event, we only encourage it; Russia has not complied with any of the resolutions adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly in recent years. Russia's return to this distinguished assembly would be a historic mistake with two tragic consequences: it would encourage the aggressor and undermine the authority of the assembly. We must not forget Europe's tragic history and the human cost behind the construction of Europe. Human rights and democracy are fundamental values for us.

We must do everything we can to prevent such mistakes being made.

In conclusion, I should like to thank all colleagues for the support they have given and continue to give to Ukraine. It is vital for us during this extremely difficult period for my country. Everything you do and everything you say helps us to protect freedom, democracy and human rights and helps us to protect the displaced persons. It is unity and solidarity that make Europe stronger.

Mr Stanislaw KARCZEWSKI, President of the Senat, Poland

Poland has supported Ukraine and will always do so.

This conference is very important for our entire continent because we are now facing a crucial choice between freedom and security. Europe is suffering from a spread in terrorism. Our values are being challenged and the migration crisis is also causing a democratic crisis. Our voters feel betrayed and no longer listen to those who speak to them about values and rules; they pay attention to those who give them assurances in terms of security. This involves a kind of self-preservation instinct. At the same time, the political elites no longer speak the same language as voters.

Europe is now divided between countries which have taken in migrants and the rest. Poland has accepted 1 million migrants from the East, yet some people claim that it does not take in migrants. We have been very clear on this issue: Poland has not closed the door to migrants. It is a democratic country which respects international law and human rights, but we are responsible for the safety of our citizens whom we wish to safeguard against any problems while protecting people fleeing from war. As we know that they do not want to come to Poland, we believe that we should help them in a different way. Are the people who have come to Europe worse off than those who are in the refugee camps?

We are taking in people fleeing from war, but is Europe still safe itself? The problem stems not only from migration in itself but also from the system for controlling the people flooding into our continent. Perhaps we should take a more pragmatic approach to this issue. We know that migrants can have a positive economic impact, but are all countries short of labour? We are perfectly aware that Poles work in other countries and have had a positive impact on their GDPs.

We need to see together what can be done to combat racism and xenophobia, which are having a negative influence throughout Europe.

Our system of values should be built on co-operation based on solidarity. Our parliaments should become stakeholders in multilateral dialogue. Our aim should be the broadest possible exchange of experiences, combined with mutual assistance. Laszlo Kövér referred to this in his introductory statement. That is the only way we will be able to step up our co-operation.

The consequences of the migration crisis are very complex, for instance as regards the cultural aspects and the fight against the crime which women and young people suffer. We must reduce the differences between our visions of migration policies. This new process must be based on dialogue and the solidarity which countries can afford. Solutions based solely on automatic relocation are a threat to the cohesion of our continent because they can lead to the closure of borders and wipe out the Schengen effect. No one has yet answered the questions of how to keep the refugees in a given country or of the conditions under which relocation should be carried out. To date, we only know the number of refugees which given countries have to accept, but no one has drawn up the rules for putting this into practice.

This relocation process runs against our system of values. We do not want refugees to feel like prisoners in our country. Poland therefore has a duty to help and not to exile people. Our solidarity is clear to see in terms of humanitarian assistance and development. We agree with the Council of Europe that the solution to the migration crisis should be at the political level, and our key role should be to help with humanitarian assistance and development.

Poland is involved in co-operation with the countries closest to the fighting. It would be more useful to direct this assistance towards the countries of origin and to support the development of the poorest countries in Asia and Africa, which could enable refugees to return to their own countries.

The inadequate assimilation of some migrants in Western Europe is the consequence of the Iron Curtain which paralysed the natural migration process in Europe for 40 years. With the countries in the Višegrad Group, Poland will support the process of integration with these neighbouring countries. We are against the establishment of a zone of rejected people around us.

I would like to underline the importance of the word "integration". We can see clearly that there can be no security in Europe without integration. So we have to give an honest answer to the following question: in the absence of legal solutions, could unity be maintained without solidarity? It is very difficult to achieve integration without sovereignty and democracy. Are we really intent on applying a solution involving a binary choice? In our view, integration is, above all, the solidarity which tends to be forgotten for the sake of security.

I would add that we are staging an exhibition here in this building about Poznań and Budapest in 1956. That symbolises our fraternity, our solidarity and our fight for freedom. Our experiences from the past demonstrate that Europe's future depends on Europe itself. The solidarity between western, eastern, southern and northern countries should enable us to find appropriate solutions.

Ms Ulrike LUNACEK, Vice-President of the European Parliament

A couple of months ago I was invited, on behalf of the European Parliament representing President Schulz, to a conference of female parliamentarians in Amman, Jordan. Participants came from all over the world as well as the Mediterranean region, to an area where millions of refugees from the Syrian carnage are being helped. I was asked, "Why are you taking in so few refugees? Why take only the 1 million you took last year – you have 500 million people? Why are you not paying more? Why are you not showing solidarity, one of the principles enshrined in your treaties?" I sometimes had difficulty in explaining why we are not doing more.

I come from Austria, a small country compared with others on this continent, which has lived with the Iron Curtain for much of my life. When my home country was poorer than it is now it took in tens of

thousands of refugees – from the Hungarian crisis of 1956, from Czechoslovakia in 1968 and from Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav wars – yet now we are closing our borders to the horrible war in Syria.

I am speaking on behalf of the European Parliament, which has argued for many years that we need to change some of the structures of the European Union. We need to change the Dublin Agreement – I apologise to those from Ireland, but it is not about your city; it is about the contract that states that a refugee can apply for asylum in the EU only in the first country in which he or she sets foot. At present, that is Greece, Italy and Spain, but hardly any others. This must be changed, and we will need the support of national parliaments and citizens for that.

We need more common efforts to ensure that the millions of refugees in camps in Jordan and Turkey know that not all of them can or will go to a European Union member State, but there is a resettlement procedure via the UNHCR. We can take in more of the asylum seekers who have been proven to be refugees, can we not? There is also the relocation mechanism of the EU, which some speakers before me criticised, saying that the EU is demanding things of them. Colleagues from the European Union, are we not all one? Did we not create this European Union together, step by step? New member States joined 12 years ago under a common principle of solidarity – of doing things together. I looked up the treaties, which provide that we want a common foreign and security policy based on the development of mutual political solidarity among member States and common policies of asylum and immigration.

There are those within the European Union who say that it should not be Brussels or Strasbourg telling them what to do. Colleagues, it is us, not them. We are the ones who are directly elected to represent citizens – we national parliamentarians and members of the Council of Europe are the people citizens vote for to make the laws and represent majorities. It is up to us, together, and I hope that meetings such as this will convince those of us who are not yet convinced that only together will we be stronger in this world.

We live in challenging times, but the European Union was built on the principles of bridging borders and not building new borders and of co-operation, not confrontation. One of the themes of your conference is No Hate No Fear. No human being should have to live in fear. Fear inhibits a human being's talents and development. That should apply to all those who vote for us and to all migrants. It is difficult, I know; we cannot solve all the world's problems. But as parliamentarians and Speakers of Parliaments we can make a contribution to making this world a better one. That is what we have been elected for.

Mr Seán Ó FEARGHAIL, Speaker of the Dáil Éireann, Ireland

I congratulate President Agramunt on the organisation of the conference and on selecting as the first theme for debate the vital topic of migration.

I am honoured to speak at this, my first meeting of the Council of Europe's Presidents of Parliaments. I am particularly pleased that my few words to you today relate to the issue of migration.

Colleagues, the migration crisis remains one of the key challenges facing Europe. It is perhaps a lesser known fact that migration is a vital issue for Ireland. In the mid-19th century Ireland suffered a devastating famine that saw the deaths of 1 million people – an eighth of our population – and the forced migration, or immigration, as we described it, of a quarter of our population, or 2 million people. At times of difficulty since the famine Irish people have migrated to different parts of the world. That historical, life experience has left an indelible imprint on the psyche of the Irish people.

We therefore accept that co-operation between European partners is of particular importance in addressing the crisis. The high-level meeting on large movements of refugees and migrants, to be held at the UN next week, will also provide a vital forum for the international community to address together the plight of refugees worldwide, including addressing the root causes of migration.

The scale and complexity of the crisis requires engagement by the international community as a whole as well as at regional and national level and co-operation from civil society players as well as public authorities.

Colleagues, Ireland has consistently called for an approach to migration that addresses the root cause as well as the humanitarian challenges, at national level, but, more importantly, at European level.

Ireland's priority, shared with many of our European colleagues, is for the speedy implementation of the key proposals for resettlement from outside the EU and for relocation from inside the EU. Ireland agreed last year to take in 4,000 migrants, which given the size of the population is significant. We continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria and the surrounding region, and to contribute to the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and the Turkey Refugee Fund.

I am proud to state that Ireland's progress on resettlement has been excellent, with more than half of our pledged target met this year; and the Irish Government has recently decided to resettle another group of refugees from Lebanon early next year.

While Irish progress on relocation has been a little slower, I am pleased at our work to date. Ireland has provided over €46 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region since 2012. At a recent conference in London, Ireland pledged a further €20 million in further support for 2016. This amount, to this particular region, represents our largest humanitarian response to any crisis. As we say in Irish, 'tus maith, leath na hoibre, which means "a good start is half the work".

Colleagues, as Ceann Comhairle of Dail Eireann, or Speaker of the lower House of the Irish Parliament, I am immensely proud of the important role played by Ireland's naval service in saving lives in the Mediterranean, with over 3,600 refugees rescued by Irish craft this year to date. When we in Ireland think of the Mediterranean we think of happy times and we think of leisure and of sun. For many, the Mediterranean has become a place of tragedy and sadness – a cruel cemetery for the young and the old – and that cannot be allowed to continue.

One Irish vessel alone, the James Joyce, has rescued 2 413 migrants – tragically recovering 16 bodies in this period. I wish today to pay tribute to the work of Irish sailors and defence forces personnel in this hugely important role in the Mediterranean, as well as paying tribute to all other European naval services deployed in this work. More partners can join this effort. While Ireland's naval service is rescuing many refugees, one death is one too many, and I urge us all to redouble our efforts. To that end, Ireland will – along with Jordan – co-facilitate a UN summit of world leaders on migration and refugees in New York later this month. The summit, at Heads of Government level, aims to agree a new set of global policy principles – the first of this kind – on migration and refugees, and I wish it every success.

Go raibh maith agaibh.

Mr Milan BRGLEZ, Speaker of the Drzavni Zbor, Slovenia

Europe is facing an immigration crisis that has already taught our countries hard and viable lessons. The images of European borders with which we are confronted daily are not images of human dignity and prosperity. On the contrary, they are images that speak of a serious lack of co-ordination and determination and of other errors. Refugees and immigration are challenges that are common to us all that should be dealt with on the basis of shared responsibility. Sustainable solutions to migration require solidarity, political dialogue and practical solutions at all levels and among all stakeholders in all countries of origin, transit and destination.

While few could disagree with such claims, do we walk this talk of ours? The situation in Europe preceding the closure of the western Balkan route illustrated how the nature of compromises taken by States in the absence of a viable common approach is all but sustainable. Truth be told, sustainable solutions to migration can be found only by tackling its root causes. Such action represents a long-term vision, the absence of which makes the effective management of migration nothing but a pipedream.

The current crisis, however, is well beyond Europe's doorstep and we must address the needs of those seeking our assistance here and now. Devising common policies and mechanisms that reflect genuine solidarity through fair and just border sharing is a much-needed step that we are yet fully to embrace. In this regard, I firmly welcome the 2015 resolution of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, entitled "After Dublin – the urgent need for a real European asylum system" and the messages it conveys.

Slovenia remains committed to such solutions and is already taking on its responsibilities under the existing EU refugee relocation scheme. Moreover, we are paying particular attention to vulnerable

groups such as refugee and migrant children, who require special care and protection. In this respect I wish to express my full support to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, who on World Refugee Day called for the full protection of asylum seeking and migrant children from abuse and exploitation by providing them with a safe living environment and appropriate legal guardianship. Nevertheless, effective ad hoc protection is where the management of forced migration only begins. The real challenge lies in successful integration. The latter must begin by ensuring the effective integration of youths in our education systems, with the help of mechanisms based on equal opportunities and appropriate integration strategies, allowing for the empowerment of both pupils and teachers.

The key goal we must keep in mind is the prevention of the social exclusion of asylum seekers and refugees, which can lead to increased social dangers, with disastrous effects. Moreover, if we manage integration successfully it will drastically aid our efforts in preventing the radicalisation of apparently ostracised groups.

I wish at this point to emphasise an idea I have proposed in several international forums. Our vision for the ongoing crisis should be aimed towards not a common asylum policy alone but also common integration standards and sets of rights. This could effectively contribute to the prevention of unwanted asylum shopping by signalling that regardless of where one applies for asylum the treatment will always be comparable.

The role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the crisis under discussion is indispensable. First and foremost, we are responsible for assisting our governments by supervising the measures they propose and the actions they take. We must resist the first choices with which we are sometimes confronted – between security and liberty and dignity. Rather, it is our responsibility to make sure that an appropriate balance between all fundamental values underpinning our societies is struck – a balance that speaks to the best interests of our citizens and reflects commonly agreed norms, particularly those enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and elaborated through the practices of the Strasbourg Court. For us, these norms must represent so-called red lines.

It is our responsibility as politicians to preserve a public discourse that rejects racism, hate and intolerance. Migration in Europe has triggered a worrying rise in populist political movements, promoting xenophobic sentiment. These movements wish to redefine the meaning of freedom by hijacking the human rights vocabulary for the purpose of attacking human rights themselves – the ideal of liberty, dignity and equality. We must stand firmly against such attempts and preserve a dignified public discourse based on reason rather than fear and on inclusion rather than hate.

Europe is undergoing a historical process. Our words and deeds represent a breaking point where Europe, a sanctuary of human rights and dignity, stands in force. I am convinced that we already possess the appropriate tools to uphold this sanctuary. It is up to us together to show the requisite political will.

Mr Azzam ALAHMAD speaking in for Mr Salim AL ZANOUN, Palestine National Council

Mr Salim Al Zanoun has, unfortunately, not been able to come to Strasbourg, so I am standing in for him.

The issue we are dealing with is very complex. There are two dimensions to the migration and refugee crisis in Europe. Firstly, a democratic, humanitarian and legal dimension for the destination countries. Then there is a dimension concerning the countries of origin, which are being torn apart by war or civil war or are living without democracy or the foundations of human rights and the rule of law. Obviously, we will not be able to find long-term solutions unless we resolve the conflicts behind these waves of migration, including those ravaging the Middle East, Syria and Iraq, as well as Palestine. The Palestinian refugee problem will also have to be solved.

We must therefore all join together and focus on finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because we are a people who have been suffering forced displacements for 69 years, in violation of all the principles of international law and the provisions of human rights conventions. Restoring peace would prevent new waves of migrants throughout the world. If a peaceful settlement in line with UN principles were found for the Palestinian problem, a fundamental cause of the instability in the southern Mediterranean would be removed.

Parliaments and their members can play a major part in seeking to improve the situation of migrants and refugees. You should not be afraid of them. They are knocking on your door because they need you and because they want to return to a normal life. Most of them want return to their homes one day. The solutions for refugees and asylum seekers clearly cannot be based solely on security and military considerations. There is a need for a socio-economic dimension, focusing on the restoration of human rights and the promotion of democratic practices, failing which millions of people who are currently suffering will never be able to return to a stable life and live lawfully in their own countries.

The world is experiencing too much rejection, fanaticism, hatred and arbitrary violence. With the Council of Europe and its prestigious assembly, we are trying to combat these fears which are often baseless. We must avoid any hasty generalisations and think of refugees and migrants objectively and with respect, while keeping a sense of proportion. We seek to be responsible individuals. And we have a particular responsibility towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that we in Palestine are currently preparing local elections to be held in October. These are elections which have been deferred for a long time. We want to develop a democratic society for all individuals based on the rule of law, where everyone can be a citizen regardless of their origins. We hope that we will succeed in establishing an independent state, ending the occupation and building a cohesive society where no one is left out on account of ethnic, religious, racial or other considerations. We must overcome our differences. That is vital for peace and stability. Europe must play a real part. It is not just a matter of admitting mistakes or adopting fainthearted half-measures. In this connection, the French initiative aimed at holding an international conference to find a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in line with the UN resolutions is to be welcomed.

We hope to establish an independent state within the borders of 4 June 1967 which would have East Jerusalem as its capital and could solve the Palestinian refugee problem in line with the UN resolutions.

(Mr Agramunt, Chair, took the Chair in place of Mr Thommessen.)

The Chair

I announced in opening that we would devote time to comments from the floor.

I call Mr Köver, from Hungary.

Mr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the Parliament of Hungary

I should like to thank Ms Broeckers-Knol, President of the Netherlands Senate. She was the only one of all the representatives of EU states with a long tradition of democracy to express sympathy towards east European countries, including my own, which are bearing a burden but are nevertheless being criticised by other countries.

I must say that what has been said by some speakers here today runs counter to the respect which we owe one another. Without rules, debate is no longer possible. Although I perhaps do not have an official mandate to do so, I should like to speak on behalf of central and east European countries. I would address my comments to Mr Claude Bartolone, President of the French National Assembly, who wondered what would have happened if referendums had been held every time the EU was enlarged. I can tell you that we would have been very pleased if there had been referendums. Each country should have been entitled to hold a referendum on the accession of new countries. Ms Boldrini spoke about one-way solidarity and seemed to be very much in agreement with Mr Bartolone's views. The underlying message of her comments was that there are beggars, those central and east European countries which beg for aid and assistance but then shy away from their duties if asked to show solidarity.

We have been full members of the EU for over 10 years. We have to make a distinction between the EU and the Lions Club. I can tell you from experience that the EU is far from being a charitable institution providing aid and assistance to central and east European countries. On the contrary, we see it as a community of interests where we seek to overcome differences through objective discussions and where we do everything possible to reach compromises in a decent manner. To say that our countries are only seeking to satisfy their own interests, that they refuse to share the common burden and that

they oppose the policies of the Western countries is very hurtful. I reject arguments of that kind. I would remind you that Hungary Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic made sacrifices in order to create a better life for us all. We made our contribution to the joint budget to achieve a win-win solution although the ultimate outcome was perhaps not positive for the East European countries but that is another debate.

Ms Lunacek contrasted the way Hungarian refugees were taken in in 1956 and the refusal to accept refugees today. I also refute that argument. The tragic fate of those persons cannot be compared to that of the refugees we are talking about today. It is necessary to recall the facts; she was not there at the time and possibly has not had the opportunity to look into the matter in detail, but tens of thousands of people fled Hungary to Austria at the time. After the 1956 uprising, they waited in sealed-off refugee camps until countries adopted resettlement measures. But when they were taken in, they integrated quickly. They were workers and active citizens. Their integration was facilitated by the fact that they came from countries with identical background and similarities which were very important for integration.

Mr Bartolone also referred to 1.5 million people from Africa being held up by barbed wire. Perhaps I misunderstood, but can Europe really take them all in without losing its democratic structures? That may be his position, but I certainly do not share it. We are trying to preserve the democratic system in Europe and to tackle the crisis.

Mr Milan ŠTĚCH President of the Senát, Czech Republic

I was originally going to speak during this debate, but just before the lots were drawn for the order of speakers, I decided not to because my counterparts from Poland and Hungary were going to speak and I know that our positions are very close, if not identical.

I would like to begin by responding to the comments by Mr Bartolone, who wondered what would have been the outcome if referendums had been held in western Europe before new members were admitted to the EU. He also seemed to believe that we do not attach the proper importance to our membership. But we have always been your friends, Czechoslovakia was one of the most advanced countries in Europe in its time and I would remind you that it was the Munich accords that enabled Hitler to commit all those terrible atrocities. I will not talk at greater length about this issue, but I believe that all aspects of our countries' histories must be taken into account.

I have heard some very good contributions. I am a Social Democrat, my country has a 140-year history and I share some of the views expressed here. But the situation is what it is. I have just spent 10 days on holiday in Austria with my family. I often go to the country and I was saddened to see just how the climate has changed. My understanding of the situation is very different from Ms Lunacek's. I do not want the migration issue to have undesirable electoral consequences. We must preserve our democratic values.

Had they heard them, I fear that many of our fellow citizens would not have agreed with several statements made since this morning and would have withdrawn their support from the speakers. As elected representatives, we must preserve national unity and we must be convincing. Yet we have not shown that we were not putting our population at risk.

Many speakers have underlined the effects of migration flows and the need to help the migrants. I understand this, I am a human being and I fully support humanitarian aid. However, we must look at the reality of the situation and tackle the causes of the problem. In this respect, I welcome the agreement reached between the United States and Russia. That is the way to resolve the fundamental problem and avoid chasing after history and having to put out the fires.

The Czech Republic, with a population of 10 million, has taken in half a million refugees from the east, Asia, south-eastern Europe and the Balkans. All these people have been received in decent conditions. If somebody in Brussels seeks to impose quotas on us, that will only foster more radical and more extremist responses. We need to keep our heads and avoid easy pronouncements. I know what happened in my country in the past and I want to avoid it happening again in future.

Mr Nikolaos VOITSIS (President of the Hellenic Parliament)

We have had a very intensive and frank discussion about a crucial issue. But one question now arises: how can we reach a broader agreement when we have such different political and ideological approaches?

I believe that we have very similar analyses of the underlying causes of the problem, even though we have substantial differences about how to tackle it. We should remember that while we are speaking today billions of dollars are available but are not being used. Remember what Mr Juncker said yesterday in his address about the state of the European Union. There are serious economic and social difficulties, at least four Mediterranean countries are on the verge of imploding and if the situation deteriorates still further in the southern Mediterranean, we are going to be confronted with the arrival of millions more people trying to survive by coming to Europe. On that point, we are in agreement, we agree about the causes of the problem and share the same analyses of its origins. Now we must do everything to restore peace, to resolve environmental problems and to prevent millions of people in various places throughout the world, for instance Bangladesh or elsewhere, having to flee for environmental reasons. That will be a major challenge for the 21st century. We must not let ourselves be caught off guard by new waves of migration. We must prepare ourselves, but tackling these types of issues takes several years, and we must get ready to provide safe refuge for these people.

As you are aware, I represent a government of the left, but regardless of political positions, we can reach agreement in many areas, at least regarding the humanitarian aspects. Politically speaking, we cannot avoid these debates or effective measures. Today's discussions are a step in the right direction. Our countries must shoulder their responsibilities. I have listened to our colleagues from eastern Europe. As you are aware, Greece is a welcoming country. 600 000 people were integrated in our country in the 1990s. We are used to welcoming migrants and we have a great sense of hospitality and it is on the basis of those values which we share that we must seek lasting solutions to the problem.

Mr Claude Bartolone, President, Assemblée Nationale, France

I stand by my comments, and not at all because of considerations related to the EU budget or the structural funds. But because this refugee issue which is dividing us seems to be undermining Europe's founding project. Building Europe was not an exercise in mathematics; it was an exercise in philosophy. The founding fathers came to the conclusion that to avoid conflicts in Europe, we had to share values together. I would repeat, if at the time of each enlargement we had asked our voters if new countries should be accepted, I am not sure that they would have voted yes. But politicians had a duty to tell countries which were emerging from sometimes fascist regimes and wanted to return to freedom to come and sit down at the European table which had been built to protect freedom and preserve peace.

Now we are facing a vital question. Can you imagine what it would mean at international and European level for our citizens, regardless of their reservations, if European countries, the countries of freedom, were basically to say just go and drown, put up with war and suffering, we are closing our doors because we cannot take you in? Is that really conceivable after the messages of the founding fathers, De Gaulle, Schuman, Adenauer and so on, and after the handshake between Kohl and Mitterrand?

Why are we putting so much energy into today's debate? It is because it is not a matter of discussing the structural funds and aid for this or that country; no, we are talking about the vital, central founding project of the European ideal.

If we decided to ask our voters whether we should take in refugees, can you imagine what kind of divisions that would cause? Quite apart from this meeting and the discussion of this issue, Europe's very heart is at stake. Any divisions caused here risk undermining European hope.

It is unfortunate that some speakers had the impression that I wanted to quibble about some structural funds. That issue is of secondary importance compared to the philosophy of the European project. The response which we adopt together to the issue of welcoming refugees will determine Europe's image, its hopes and the project for its future. No compromise is possible there.

The Chair

That concludes our debate. I thank the keynote speakers who introduced the theme and all speakers who contributed to the debate on this issue, which is fundamental to our continent.