



# REPORT

## 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Association of European Senates Bucharest, 14-15 June 2018

*Current challenges to the economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe: what role for the Senates?*



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## OPENING SESSION

### Opening Speech by Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu President of the Senate of Romania

Dear Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the European Senates,  
Dear participants,  
Distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and an honor for me to express, on behalf of all Romanian colleagues, members of Parliament, and on my own behalf, our feeling of joy and friendship for hosting today, at the Senate of Romania, the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Association of European Senates.

This is the second meeting that we organize in Bucharest in the history of this forum whose primary objective is *the promotion of bicameralism while strengthening European identity*, which is even more relevant today than it was twenty years ago, when the Association started to assert itself as an original model of cooperation between the upper Chambers of Parliaments.

In today's interdependent world, we are aware that the challenges facing our neighbors will undoubtedly become our own challenges. That is why cohesive approaches promoted at European level enable us to counter the impact of disparities affecting our own communities and regions.

We have to say it openly: in the absence of a solid European identity based on shared values, such as cultural diversity and tolerance, solidarity, cohesion and equal opportunities, the European standards of civilization, sociability and good neighborliness will gradually decline and, according to the most pessimistic scenarios, would eventually lead to a dysfunctional Europe divided against itself.

This is, in general terms, the context in which Romania is preparing itself to take over the Presidency of the EU Council for the period between January and June 2019. The exam that we will have to pass in front of the 500 million European citizens has a decisive test: to manage and bring to a successful conclusion the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework dossier, including the review of the cohesion policy, of utmost importance for the relationship between the Union and the European citizens, in terms of impact and visibility.

For all these reasons, I am convinced that today's debate on the *role of the Senates in a Europe confronted with challenges to the economic, social and territorial cohesion* is taking place in the right place and at the right time.

I hope that we can all agree that today's meeting will give everyone the opportunity of a constructive exchange of ideas and good practices on a subject that will surely captivate the attention of countries throughout Europe in the next period, regardless of their status as Member State, official candidate, potential candidate for membership or partner of the European Union.

Thank you.

## **APPLICATION OF THE SENATE OF IRELAND FOR FULL AES MEMBERSHIP**

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Dear colleagues, before introducing the agenda of the 19<sup>th</sup> session, I have the pleasure to inform you that the Senate of Ireland, the special guest of several AES sessions in the recent years, has informed us of its intention to apply for full membership of the Association of European Senates.

Please, allow me to give the floor to Mr. Denis O'Donovan, the Chairman of the Senate of Ireland, who had this initiative.

Mr. O'Donovan, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Dennis O'Donnovan**  
**Chairman of the Senate of Ireland (Seanad Éireann)**

May I thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words of welcome. It is an honour for me to be here today as Cathaoirleac of the Irish Senate, or Chairman of the Irish Senate, and to be in the position to request formally that the Irish Senate be admitted to full membership of the Association of European Senates.

I believe that the membership of the Association will offer Ireland a valuable opportunity to learn from the experiences of our colleagues across Europe. As members of parliamentary chambers of bicameral systems we have much to learn from each other even though, or perhaps because, our Senates have different characteristics in terms of constitution and functions.

I hope that the Irish Senate, informed by our distinct history and culture, will be able to offer to our colleagues in the Association at least as much as we gain from our membership. Mr. President and colleagues, I trust you will give due consideration to our application and I look forward to an interesting and successful conclusion.

Just briefly, the primary role of the Senate in Ireland is to review all legislation passed by the Lower House. The majority of members are elected by members of Oireachtas, six are elected by university graduates, and the Prime Minister of the current Government, of the government of the day, has the right to nominate eleven. And also a little historic anecdote: in 2013, the then Prime Minister and Government put by way of referendum a plebiscite to the Irish people, a suggestion that the Irish Senate would be abolished. But fortunately the Irish people disagreed with the Government and upheld our Constitutional position, so we are still in place and will be for a long time.

Go raibh maith agat. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your application represents „a first” in the last 14 years of the history of the Association of European Senates and I consider that we can only welcome the particular interest of the Senate of Ireland in strengthening its cooperation with the Senates of Europe.

I will invite you now, dear colleagues, to finalise the affiliation procedure.

I recall that, according to the Rules governing the Association of European Senates, the Association shall decide by consensus the admission of any other European Senate applying for membership.If

you all agree, dear colleagues, I submit to your vote the granting of full membership status to the Senate of Ireland.

Please vote. Who is in favour? Thank you! Votes against? OK.

I want to inform you that yesterday afternoon I discussed with the President of the French Senate and with the President of the Polish Senate. They both agreed on this application and the admission and, because they are not here, in the plenary session hall, I can consider that there is unanimity. Thank you all. The Senate of Ireland becomes today the 16<sup>th</sup> full-fledged member of the Association of European Senates.

Please join me in congratulating Chairman Denis O'Donovan and in welcoming him to our family. A special word of appreciation goes also to Secretary General Martin Goves, who, to my knowledge, played a key role in the expeditious completion of the internal formalities related to the affiliation, thus making sure that the Senate of Ireland becomes a member of the Association on the occasion of our meeting in Bucharest.

Dear colleagues,

As you have already noticed in the draft program distributed to you, we have a full and diverse agenda requiring a strict compliance with the time slots allocated to each item. But since I am quite sure that rigour does not represent a challenge for any of us, I will firstly review several organisational aspects of today's meeting, and immediately afterwards I will open the first session of debates.

Therefore:

- As regards the order of speakers, I will have the pleasure to invite the heads of delegations to take the floor according to the alphabetical order of participating countries in English, with a few exceptions motivated by the individual programme of the respective delegations. Each head of delegation will be invited to speak from the rostrum;
- If you have not yet done so, please provide your printed interventions to the Romanian Secretariat, which will handle reproduction and timely distribution to participants;
- At the end of the first session, scheduled at 10:45, we will have a short coffee break and at 11:00 we will resume our debates;
- At 12:10 we will close the second session, we will stop for the family photo when exiting the Plenary Hall; then we will direct ourselves towards the main entrance of the Senate. Immediately after this, the buses will transfer us to the Triumphal Arch for the wreath laying ceremony;
- Following this solemn moment you are invited at the Diplomatic Club for the official lunch scheduled at 1:30 p.m.;
- We will return to the Senate for the third and last session of debates, which will start at 3:30 p.m.;
- We will allot the last item on the agenda to discussions on issues of interest for the future activities of the Association. After the closure of our 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, around 5:00 p.m., we invite you to you a guided tour of the Palace of Parliament, which is expected to end at 5:45 p.m.;
- A series of bilateral meetings upon request are scheduled from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., at the hours and in the rooms that have already been established.

If there are any comments, please, let me know.

We have a lot to accomplish today, so, if there is nothing else that we need to discuss, let us begin.

**GENERAL DEBATE ON THE MEETING THEME**  
***CURRENT CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL***  
***COHESION IN EUROPE: WHAT ROLE FOR THE SENATES?***

**FIRST SESSION**

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

With your kind permission, I invite to the rostrum the first speaker on today's topic, Mrs Maria Elisabetta Alberti Caselatti, President of the Senate of Italy, who unfortunately will not be able to stay with us until the end of the meeting.

Please, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Maria Elisabetta Alberti Caselatti**  
**President of the Senate of Italy**

Mr. President Popescu-Tăriceanu,  
Dear colleagues,

I am much honoured to take the floor at the opening of the general debates of the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Association of European Senates. I would like to thank the President of the Senate of Romania for the outstanding welcome and excellent organization of this event.

Today's meeting confirms how important it is to keep the dialogue between parliaments in Europe alive, even outside the legal dimension of the European Union.

Many of our Senates participate in the official meetings of inter-parliamentary cooperation coordinated by the European Parliament and the Parliaments of countries holding the Presidency of the EU Council. In the first six months of the year 2019, the Romanian Parliament will have to fulfil this important task.

But there is a whole array of inter-parliamentary relations complementing the institutional architecture of the EU, which we must safeguard and promote. The geopolitical challenges posed by the internationalization of markets and the growing institutional interdependence on a global level require that Parliaments too be able to monitor and follow the official diplomatic relations between governments.

It is in this scenario that we address the role of the Association of the European Senates, which, since its very beginnings, has called upon the Upper Chambers to take the responsibility of their function in terms of democratic guarantees and control.

This function becomes even more relevant in the present political, economic and social context that survived an epochal crisis, but is still ravaged by evident changes in the dynamics of the functioning of contemporary democracy.

I consider in fact that the question at the centre of today's general debates, which focus on the role of the Senates in addressing the present challenges in terms of economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe, is highly topical.

The financial crisis of the last decade has profoundly altered the physiological trend of institutional dynamics, by fuelling decision-making processes that are of high technical complexity, of little

transparency, hardly permeable to the requests coming from below, controlled entirely by Governments, and dependent on self-centred bodies.

Now, the search for antidotes to an opaque and fragmented system of government indicates that the only possible solution is the recovery of spaces for pluralistic debates and democratic control.

This is the task that we are called to perform as representatives of the Senates of Europe. The Upper Chambers can rediscover the relevance of their institutional function by addressing, on grounds of both method and merits, the many legitimacy crises of contemporary democracy.

In terms of method, I believe that one starting point must be the dimension of an “accountable government”, as the real pulsing heart of European parliamentarism.

As far as the merits are concerned, the theme of the meeting is timely focusing today on the prospects of economic, social and territorial cohesion. The economic and financial crisis has raised doubts about the governments’ capacity to provide answers to the needs perceived as priorities by citizens.

The growing unemployment rates among young people, the blocking of investments, the lack of sustainability of social protection systems, the scaling down of education and health care services are common problems to a large part of Europe.

To these we must add the challenges of globalization and the massive emergence of IT and artificial intelligence in the world of labour. Changes are very rapid in these sectors too, and they entail the risk of a progressive loss of jobs not only in terms of manual work, but also in the range of professions.

And then there is the perception of insecurity linked to the terrorist threat that hit many European countries, in a very dramatic and concrete way, and whose international framework is fraught with many uncertainties.

Finally, there is a need to govern in a more cohesive manner and with more solidarity the issue of migration, so that each member state become co-responsible for a burden that has been shared in a seriously unbalanced way so far. We should see to it that cooperation programs are developed, with EU support, in order to improve the living and security conditions in the countries of origin of migrants. This is a difficult issue, which cannot be circumvented, and which has a major impact on the social fabric of my country.

The measures to contain public spending and reduce the government deficit have often overlooked the solidarity dimension, largely inherent to our welfare systems.

We must bring back on the public agenda and face with maturity and lucidity the topics related to sustainable growth, while firmly supporting the common non-negotiable values, such as the unity of a people and of a territory, social cohesion, and economic solidarity.

Our assemblies can do a lot to determine governments to achieve such goals, by using wisely their function of guidance, and by investing seriously in the evaluation of public policies, in the *ex ante* and *ex post* dimensions, as a tool to assess and promote the effectiveness, efficacy and efficiency of Government’s action.

I am pleased to recall that the Italian Senate over the last few years has taken important initiatives to strengthen and structure its capacity to evaluate public policies by making a wise use of scientific evidence and of the most advanced quantitative methods. In 2015, we have established an Impact

Assessment Office, which I have the honour to chair. This office publishes constantly on the Senate's website documents that review and provide in depth analysis on specific activity areas.

Also, in December last year, at the end of the XVII<sup>th</sup> legislature, we proceeded to an extended revision of the Senate's Standing Orders during which over 50 articles were amended, and which was approved by a very large majority.

I like to define this reform as the final act of a regulatory road map having an innovative impact on our efforts to rediscover the authentic meaning of a parliamentary tradition based on cooperation with the government and on pragmatism in the relations with citizens.

There are many innovations of substantive constitutional nature achieved through this reform, in terms of simplifying and streamlining our decision-making procedures.

More precisely, we have strengthened the role of committees in the legislative process, we have redistributed between the committees and the plenary the time dedicated to parliamentary work, we have introduced more rigorous criteria for the establishment of parliamentary groups, and we have revitalized the procedure of questions requiring an immediate answer.

It is very important for the citizens to regard these assemblies as places where their interests, identities, territories, and specificities find their space. I believe that, in order to obtain this result, we have to work hard on increasing the transparency of procedures and decision-making mechanisms. In this respect, the Italian Senate has succeeded to interpret innovation and transparency in so many different and innovative ways. On one hand, we have strengthened to the maximum the instruments of institutional communication, by making the most of all information channels and all IT platforms available today. On the other hand, we have activated various forms of web-based consultations enabling the enterprises and the citizens to participate to the work of our committees in an authentic democratic spirit.

Dear colleagues,

I do believe that the issue of the reform of Upper Chambers, which comes back cyclically in the public debate in many of our systems, must be faced with institutional maturity, without falling into simplifications or taking undemanding shortcuts. Beyond the structural reforms of constitutional weight, there are in fact small and big changes whose meaning we can and must learn to understand, thus anticipating and supporting the political, social, economic and cultural evolutions.

In reasserting the unique function of parliamentary representation, we must not run away from changes; we must learn how to ride on the wave of changes, with enthusiasm and spirit of initiative. This is the goal that I am committed to pursue for the Italian Senate in the legislature that has just started, while being convinced that the inter-parliamentary debate will always offer valid stimuli and themes of reflection.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you for your contribution, which, I believe, is truly useful in understanding the challenges confronting Italy today, as well as the means of action envisaged with a view to ensuring the harmonious development of all Italian regions in the new political, economic and social environment.

Because I am aware of your categorical position on the issue of violence against women and children, I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that the Romanian political leaders fully share this concern.

Dear colleagues, with your permission, I will invite Mr. Reinhard Todt, the President of the Federal Council of Austria, to take the floor.

You have the floor, Mr. President.

**Mr. Reinhard Todt**  
**President of the Federal Council of Austria**

Let me start by thanking most warmly our Romanian host, the President of the Senate of Romania, Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, for the invitation and for organising our annual meeting of the Association of European Senates in Bucharest. It is a pleasure to be here in Parliament. Thank you very much!

Dear Colleagues,  
Dear Mr. President,

Thirteen out of the twenty-eight Member States of the European Union have a Federal Council or a Senate. Outside the EU, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia and Switzerland also have such a second chamber of Parliament. Thus the bicameral principle plays an important role in Europe - for instance, in improving and fostering the involvement of citizens at a regional level in the European Union's decision-making processes.

Distinguished colleagues and distinguished Speaker,

I highlighted before the important role of the Senates in Europe, and I would like to highlight it once again, by giving you an example of the role played by the Senates in the regional interface, especially when it comes to the European decision-making process.

My predecessor as Speaker of the Bundesrat, Mr. Edgar Mayer, during the 8<sup>th</sup> Subsidiarity Conference of the Committee of the Regions, dealt with this important role in much detail, thus making a relevant contribution to the better understanding of the European Union.

Subsidiarity is a fundamental principle of the European Union. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, we determine who does what and where. This also means that we, ourselves, assume a responsibility - both at federal level, at regional level in the provinces, and at local level, in the municipalities.

Let me emphasize in this context that subsidiarity should not be abused as the “nationalism cudgel”, so to speak. In the spirit of the European Union, we must join forces and tackle important challenges together.

The Austrian Federal Council is the interface between the federal level and the provinces, between the European Union and citizens in Austria. However, it not only fulfils its duties as the second chamber, representing the nine Austrian provinces at federal level, but also launches its own thematic initiatives.

The Austrian Federal Council has for instance assumed a pioneering role when it came to topics such as the digital change and technological progress. As an example, I would like to refer to the thematic priorities defined by two of my predecessors.

Earlier I spoke about Edgar Mayer, about my predecessor. Edgar Mayer, during his term as President of the Federal Council, dealt in much detail with opportunities for digital participation in a democracy, those opportunities that may engage citizens in the law-making process. He highlighted and asked questions about, for instance, whether there was a right to a digital vote or whether the digital vote must be carried out by each and everyone. So this is just a set of issues that were discussed, emphasised beyond the framework of the party and beyond the framework of the region. And the second example refers to the former President of the Federal Council, Mario Lindner, who tackled the topic of civic moral courage in the digital field and of the cyber mobbing. As a result of these discussions, legal initiatives aimed at ensuring better prevention of cyber mobbing were proposed in both Austria and Germany.

Almost on a daily basis, digitalisation and the ever faster advancing technical progress present us and the entire legislature with new challenges with respect to shaping our societies. It often seems almost impossible to keep up with developments and maintain control of this new digital world.

As President of the Austrian Federal Council, I have therefore made it a special task of mine to focus in detail on a quintessential aspect of social coexistence, which is influenced by digital and technological change, namely social cohesion.

When addressing social issues today, it is essential to take also into consideration the impact that advancing digitalisation has on various areas of society.

I should therefore like to briefly touch upon the areas of work, education, smart cities and data protection, since, in my view, these play a key role.

1) When looking at the world of work, we see that some professions are disappearing, while others emerge. Today, a permanent job is more the exception than the rule for young people. We are witnessing a constant rise in atypical employment relationships - crowd working, Uber and Foodora, to mention but a few. Within such employment concepts, the employment security aspects associated with a traditional, steady job no longer exist.

2) School education, as we know it, is increasingly losing importance. The internet enables us to retrieve information on any subject, at anytime and wherever we are. Every smart phone can solve mathematical problems in no time at all. People all around the world can attend lectures in Harvard and Yale via the internet. Understanding connections and interrelations is becoming more important, hand in hand with getting access to and being able to use the tool for reflexion and criticism.

3) Smart city projects are shooting up like mushrooms around the world - all with a different focus, including for instance green urban planning, governance concepts, but also broadening access to education and enhanced citizens' participation. All this has become possible thanks to the use of digital media.

4) When enjoying the benefits of smart phones, laptops or sports watches, we – with every single interaction – send at the same time personal data to the global digital machinery. Against this background, data protection and hence the protection of ourselves as individuals, and our personal freedom is evolving into a sensitive issue: on the one hand, we need to address the question of how much transparency is indeed necessary in order to ensure appropriate compliance with our laws. On the other hand, we need to ask ourselves how much data protection and privacy needs to be ensured in order to guarantee people's rights and security. Which raises another issue: do these two questions in fact contradict each other?

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we can see, we have by no means overcome all the challenges posed by digital change. In this connection, there is one thing I should like to draw your attention to: everyone should be able to benefit from advances in technology and digitalization; new technologies should be of benefit to the public at large – and not just to a few profiteers. This is where politics is called upon to act: we have a responsibility to shape the digital future in a socially responsible manner.

I personally attach utmost importance to making progress in this discussion and to finding the right solutions. For my term as President of the Austrian Federal Council, I have therefore prepared a programme covering a wide range of diverse events and measures.

This includes a series of events – as well as an expert symposium – focusing on a study on social cohesion in the digital world. In order to gather the citizens’ opinions on this topic, I used an online consultation tool. Furthermore, I organised a parliamentary conference with the participation of federal provinces, which dealt in particular with future strategies aimed at countering child and old age poverty. I also hosted a number of book presentations and panel discussions dealing with the topic of social cohesion in the digital age.

If we want to find a way out of the division within our societies, we need to develop strategies to strengthen social cohesion in our societies. In this context, the Upper House, as the body representing the provinces at federal level, has a very responsible role to play here, because our Senates are more than watchdogs or chambers of control, even though they are rarely the focus of media attention. Instead, we have the opportunity to work sustainably and to focus on ongoing theme setting. As Chambers that combine stability and vision, we can look to develop platforms, pursue political agendas and think outside the box without the limitations of hectic day-to-day politics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is high time that we rethink social co-existence and develop new approaches. And in this context, it is our task to focus on social cohesion. Politics has to make sure that society is not drifting apart. The digital future has to be a social future – otherwise it does not deserve the name “future”.

I would like to thank you for your attention and I am looking forward to our exchange of views.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr. President.

In fact Austria, as you already know, will assume in short time the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, and will have a mission at least as complex as Romania’s mission, namely to address a series of files of great importance for the European citizens.

I am convinced that the mutual exchange of information and a close and solid cooperation between Romania and Austria, including at parliamentary level, will be instrumental in achieving the continuity of negotiations and maintaining their accelerated pace, so as to avoid a “financial syncope” and major discrepancies between our promises, the citizen’s expectations and the realities of the future European governance.

Let us proceed further. I am very pleased to give the floor to Mrs. Christine Defraigne, the President of the Senate of Belgium. You have the floor.

**Mrs. Christine Defraigne**  
**President of the Senate of Belgium**

Mr. President,

Thank you for the invitation to participate at this meeting of the Association of the European Senates with the topic *Current challenges to the economic, social and territorial cohesion of Europe: what role for the Senates?*

Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We traditionally explain the existence of Senates by the moderating role they play in the legislative process. The added value of Senates resides in the second reading, a different and critical reading which they perform over the work of the lower chambers. In the end, it is the old idea of checks and balances.

But, as suggested by the topic of our meeting, there is another term that characterizes the role and the importance of Senates, and this is cohesion. The etymology of this word suggests the idea of proximity. The Senates represent factors of convergence - convergence between the different points of view, between ideas, cultures, and people.

The search for cohesion is integral to the Senates; in federal states certainly, where the Senates are in essence assemblies where the political communities composing the federation meet. They have different names: states, cantons, provinces, regions, communities, autonomous republics. These communities cannot co-exist by ignoring each other. In the Senate they can talk to each other, they can settle their differences and cooperate.

I would add that the need for cohesion is felt even more if a country is divided. The unifying action of the Senates proves to be essential for countries such as Belgium, which bear the mark of historical cleavages, and even of centrifugal forces, for countries where the national tissue is complex, fragmented and heterogeneous. The Senates can then be places of rapprochement, going beyond the differences; they can be drivers of cohesion and institutional stability.

Let us come to the Senate of Belgium. How do we perform this cohesion role?

The Belgian Senate consists essentially of representatives designated by the regional parliaments. The Senators have a double mandate, not two mandates, but a double mandate - this is important in terms of lapse of time; they have seats in the Senate, but also in their parliament of origin. This is precisely what gives to the Senate a unique place in the Belgian institutional architecture, and allows the Senate to be a bridge-builder.

The Senate establishes its own political agenda and selects the topics to be addressed, based on transversality, a criterion that became sacrosanct in our country.

And many issues arising in a country ignore the distribution of competencies, sometimes difficult to grasp, sometimes a little bit artificial, between the central State and the regions. I am thinking for instance at mobility. The mobility issues represent a daily concern for a big number of citizens. In Belgium, the competencies with respect to mobility are distributed among various political communities. In order to develop an integrated public transports offer allowing fast, affordable and efficient connections, as well as a common approach in terms of ticketing, tariffs or information, consultations are required between all communities involved. The Senate is the ideal platform to conduct a thorough and concrete reflection on these issues.

So the Senators choose transversal topics, which they examine in the committees with support from experts; they formulate recommendations to the attention of different parliaments and governments of the country - Belgium is a complicated country, and to the attention of social actors as well.

We have addressed classical transversal topics, such as mobility - a subject that I have just addressed, but also, for instance, climate, health, air quality, entrepreneurship, administrative simplification and child poverty. We have dealt with more specific, more innovative issues, as well, such as endocrine disruptors, mobile health, shared parenting with gestational surrogacy, or the theft of works of art. And now we are discussing about the digital revolution and artificial intelligence.

All these topics emerging at a rapid pace transcend the competencies of one entity or another. The Senate is the only place where these issues, which may truly become societal challenges, can be examined in their entirety and where coherent, concerted solutions can be identified.

One of the first information reports elaborated and published by the Senate dealt with the transposition of European directives. This is a transversal topic by excellence, since Europe ignores completely and doesn't care about the internal distribution of competencies in member states. In Belgium, a European directive can be transposed, according to its subject matter, by the Federal State or the regions and even by communities, altogether. Hence, a common approach is the only one allowing us to ensure the transposition of directives in Belgium and it can only be defined at the Senate, if only to avoid sanctions and penalties against for our national State.

This consideration leads me to a last comment on the theme of our meeting: the indisputable European vocation of Senates.

Thanks to the Senates, regional parliamentarians have the opportunity to participate to inter-parliamentary cooperation at European level. If the Senates in federal systems are given European competencies, this is precisely in order to allow regional sensitivities and interests to express themselves on the European scene as well.

Our senators, in their double capacity as senator and regional parliamentarian, have the privilege to participate actively not only in the various European mechanisms of inter-parliamentary cooperation, but also in the European Committee of the Regions. The current President of this Committee is a member of parliament of the German-speaking community in Belgium, and also a senator. This multiple membership, this transversal membership, is a source of efficiency, a source of coherence.

The Senate of Belgium is a young assembly; it has functioned in the current membership and form only for four years. The current legislature that will come to an end one year from now is a running-in period when the assembly has to find its feet. The Senate stands out already as a venue for meeting and consultation among regional parliaments and, as such, it has a unique place, an essential place in a complex and fragmented institutional system.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Madam President, for your intervention and for presenting us relevant information on the role played by the Senate of the Federal Parliament of Belgium, a Senate which, starting with 2014, represents the point of confluence for representatives of three regions and three linguistic communities. We thank you for presenting us the mechanisms put in place to address the issues related to cohesion, including from the perspective of your Senate's role as mediator of interests among different institutions and regional parliaments.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Ognjen Tadić, the Speaker of the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Mr. Ognjen Tadić**  
**Speaker of the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Dear colleagues,

I am very glad to be a part of the work of this session. I welcome all your colleagues and your associates!

In spite of all these problems that Belgium is facing as a complex country, I would like to point out that Bosnia and Herzegovina has additional problems which are not present in Belgium and which are in the focus of the activities of the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the Upper House in our country.

Today we talk about cohesion and always when we talk about cohesion we actually illustrate that we have got a problem that can only be solved through cooperation. Cohesion is actually an appeal more than a status, because, as soon as we solve the problems, we divide ourselves again and we think that disunity gives the right result and we come back to our initial, very often confrontational positions.

That is why when we talk about cohesion, we should talk about how can cohesion last longer and how can the current situation, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina, be overcome through the idea of cohesion as a social value that we have to respect and that we have to care for.

All the risks we are facing or the challenges we are facing are obvious to everybody. These are the relations between East and West and we are talking about that in our country, because it seems like a new Cold War.

There are problems with migrants, which became more and more important. We also face economic problems, a high rate of unemployment, and problems on our part with the European Union because of the contradictory requirements imposed by the European Union to our country. All these problems are also related to some internal relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to some different views for which we do not find the understanding. Of course, we have a corruption problem that is present in any other European country.

Why the countries that have two levels of powers in their parliamentary system can be considered as countries with some benefits, with some advantages? I think because we are all aware that the policy is structured mostly on interests and values; some of us have been MPs in the representative bodies and we know how much representative bodies can be brutal when confronted with basic social values. That is why the countries with Upper Houses, with Senates, can use this Senate as the house of values, the house of those good values that will provide to society opportunities to face the challenges, and some of these challenges are present in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We talked about them recently. Bosnia and Herzegovina has got the following structure: the House of Peoples, as the Upper House, is completely equal with the House of Representatives. One law is considered adopted only if adopted by both Houses with the same text. Accordingly, we could say that we have got almost ideal conditions for the balance between interests and values, as a prerequisite for economic, social and territorial cohesion, the topic of this conference.

Unfortunately, there are other problems we face, other challenges. It is first of all the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the future in accordance with the Dayton Peace Agreement, according to which we work and which is not beneficial for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I thank you for your attention and I use this opportunity to inform you at an initial stage that we invite all the members of this Association to Bosnia and Herzegovina on the occasion on the 25th Anniversary of the Dayton Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed in Paris. We could organize in 2020 such a meeting in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Your contribution and your remarks are of great interest for all of us and give me the conviction that living together in diversity is possible in any part of the world. The political and economic path pursued by Bosnia and Herzegovina over the last years strengthens my belief that political leaders, decision-makers in the spheres of economy, education, culture, as well as the civil society, are already on the way to transform the extraordinary ethnic, linguistic and confessional diversity of your country from a challenge to a successful example of cohesion and development.

May I continue having the pleasure to invite Mr. Milan Štěch, the President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, to share with us his experience and opinions.

Mr. President, you have the floor.

**Mr. Milan Štěch**  
**President of the Senate of the Czech Republic**

Dear President of the Romanian Senate, Mr. Popescu-Tăriceanu,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank our host for inviting us and for organizing this conference. Also, thank you for yesterday's pleasant evening.

To open my contribution, I think I have to clearly repeat the position of the Czech Senate and say that we very strongly feel, very strongly perceive the need to maintain and strengthen the European integration in this globalised world of today. And it is really needed, because various perspectives and positions are changing. The United States, the flagship of liberalization of economic relations in the past, indicate with their current administration that their perspective may change, while Europe got used to the liberalization.

I must say that the Czech Republic has a very open and liberal economy; in the past 30 years we have changed very much the character of our economy and any changes back to what it used to be would be harmful, very harmful to us.

Of course, on the other hand, there are super-ambitions of Russia to strengthen its empire, and there are many trends in the globalization process as well. And in that process we have to realize that not so important issues that we dwell on for too long should be replaced by more important issues, issues that will help us maintain Europe at least as strong as it is, and that will make it possible for us to maintain Europe's potential for the future. So we should not make problems bigger than they are and we should rather try to solve them quickly and effectively. Thus, the Czech Senate does not see any other alternative to the European co-existence, to co-existence within the European Union. There is nothing else, no other alternatives that we might come up with, and these bilateral or multilateral relations, groups or other forms like these cannot replace the European Union as such. So, that is the first thing I wanted to say.

Second of all, the Senates, the Upper Houses in our countries may and do play the role of a binding element, of a binding tissue. It is because in many cases, and especially in the Czech Republic, the Senate is formed in such a way that Senators, the members of the Senate, are important individuals in their regions, representing their regions. And we know from our own experience that if inter-state cooperation does not work properly, then if you get down onto the inter-regional level and the regions start cooperating and start addressing various issues, we realize that the regions have basically the same role, the same importance as the state level. And this is even more visible on the local level, the municipal level.

So what I am trying to say is that maybe we should not focus so much on solving some of the issues at governmental level. Sometimes governments are just trying to point out how important they are for our countries, but according with the principle of subsidiarity some issues should be brought down to the lower levels, because I know from my experience that entities and organizations at regional and local levels can be very effective in solving problems, especially in cross-border regions.

When it comes to the European structures and their future development, I think that we should really think about the way to prevent the European Union to be perceived by its citizens as a bureaucratic entity, as being too formalistic. So, we should search for ways to reduce formalism in the work that we do at EU level and bring about more concrete, more specific outcomes to our citizens. And that highlights what I have already said, that we should meet more often at people-to-people level, at regional level, at local level, but also at Senate level, by increasing cooperation between our Senates.

We believe that we have to strengthen the democratic supervision of the political processes in our countries, and see to it that the principle of subsidiarity is there. Subsidiarity means not just to define what needs to be done on European level, on national level, regional, municipal and so forth. Subsidiarity means also that these things should really be done on those levels where we will be most efficient for that given issue. So, what can be solved at the bottom, I mean in the municipalities, in regions, in individual countries, should be solved there, it should be left there.

And, Ladies and Gentlemen, in the past we have violated the principle of subsidiarity many times because we and the national parliaments were not been able to justify why certain issues should not have been solved at the higher level and should have been left at a lower level. And we should really be diligent, because if we are not, then this will harm an effective European integration.

That is what we believe in the Czech Republic. But we have to think of this. It does not mean that we should radically change the division of powers as they are now. I am not saying that we should quickly bring the powers back from the European Commission and European Parliament to the national level. I am not saying that. But what I am saying is that we should look into every single case and see to it that the principle of subsidiarity is out here too, and if issues are solved at a level which is not competent for them, this is something that we will not be able to justify to our citizens. Thus, it harms European integration and it brings more bad results than benefits, and I am convinced about that. So, if we do not achieve a consensus in the European Union of 27 countries today, on that we want to take some issues up to a higher level, then we shouldn't do it. And I can give you the example of the quotas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years ago, if you had a negative view on the system of quotas, then you were perceived very negatively, as the black sheep in the herd of the white ones, and I am really happy that now we all know that the system of forcing quotas onto individual countries was wrong.

The Czech Republic did not accept migrants. We tried it but a few families of migrants that we accepted and welcomed in the Czech Republic said after a few months that they didn't want to stay

with us, that they had relatives in other countries like Germany and they wanted to go there or they wanted to go back home.

But we welcomed more than half a million refugees from the Balkan countries in the past and there was no problem.

We are just not used to those cultures that are coming to us from the East or from Africa and forcing quotas on us, in the Czech Republic, very much harmed the standard right- or left-wing parties, and it very much strengthened the more extremist parties on the left and on the right. Consequently, forcing quotas onto our countries really resulted into the strengthening of anti-European parties. I am sure that we are not the only country that suffered from the problem of quotas, which has cost us the strengthening of extremist parties.

Just one more issue that I would like to present, that I would like to open at this forum: I believe that we must not stop in terms of being all ears; we must not become complacent.

Our membership in the EU helped us a lot and European integration became our arm, so to say. But I really cannot accept saying that Western European countries, the old ones, are losing out when new countries from the East are coming. I am not saying that today the Czech Republic receives fewer funds from Brussels and from the West, including investments, than the money that flows out from our country on dividends, for example, into Western Europe.

So, the integration of Central and Eastern European countries certainly was not to the detriment of the Western, the old Member States. I think that it is a mutually beneficial cooperation, and I believe that the same approach should be applied to the further enlargement of the EU, especially concerning the Balkan countries. And if these countries were given homework to do and they did that homework, we should fulfill our promise. Countries like Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, if they do their homework, then we simply have to give them a helping hand, because apart from economic prosperity that membership brings, there are also other benefits, such as the question of security, and it is very important for these countries to stay in the European family and not to be drawn to super-powers in Asia, in the Asian continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

That is all I wanted to say, four basic issues I wanted to touch upon. Thank you for listening and thank you once again, Mr. President, for organizing this conference.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr. President, for the extremely pertinent aspects you have pointed out, which will clearly enrich our perspective on the cohesion at European level.

In case there are any remarks, despite the fact that we are a little bit late for the break... Are there any interventions? No.

So, let us close the first session here and have a 15-minute coffee break in the Foyer of the Plenary Hall. Please, use the doors at the back of the hall, our staff will show you the way.

**GENERAL DEBATE ON THE MEETING THEME**  
***CURRENT CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL***  
***COHESION IN EUROPE: WHAT ROLE FOR THE SENATES?***

**SECOND SESSION**

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Distinguished guests,  
I would like to open now the second session of debates. Please, take your seats.

I have the pleasure to invite at the rostrum Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol, the President of the Senate of Netherlands.

Madam President, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol**  
**President of the Senate of Netherlands**

Thank you, Mr. President!

Dear colleagues,

Let me first compliment the Romanian Chairmanship for their hospitality and excellent way this meeting of the AES is organised.

Next week, on the 24th of June to be precise, the EU will celebrate 30 years of cohesion policy. Within these 30 years five periods of programming have shown that cohesion policy has changed along with changes in the European society: economic, social and, of course, territorial changes, expanding the policy from reducing disparities between the various regions to a more balanced, more sustainable *territorial development*.

And today, we are here, in Bucharest, to discuss the role of the Senate when it comes to economic, social and territorial cohesion. I would like to compliment the chair for this meeting and for having organised the discussion in this stimulating and challenging way: each session another group of countries take the floor. I am delighted to see that the aim of the Romanian Chair is to actively bring more interaction into our discussions, which is something the Dutch parliament has always applauded. So thank you for that!

Let me start by placing the role of the Senate of the Netherlands into the context of cohesion.

In a decentralised unitary state - as the Netherlands is, with an important role for our provinces, territorial cohesion and unity find expression in the Senate. Throughout history, starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and up until the present day, there has been a relationship between the States-General and the provinces. Currently, the representatives from the provinces elect the members of the Senate of the States-General.

In contrast to a Senate in a federal state, our members do not formally represent regions. This may sound strange, since the members are elected by provincial representatives. But once elected, they do not represent the provinces; they represent the whole country.

However, Senators live in their provinces and are familiar with the specific needs of these regional areas. In practice, members may use the provinces as a soundboard to hear how they regard the feasibility and enforceability of new laws and regulations in their specific regions.

I firmly believe that ultimately - and I have said it here before - a bicameral system is beneficial to the functioning of a democracy because of the necessary checks and balances, but also because Senates often have a particular interest in the regions and can therefore bring democracy closer to the citizens in the regions.

An example of this was the particular interest the Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch Senate took in the 2017 Communication of the European Commission on *Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions*. The committee members repeatedly questioned the government to introduce a so-called 'border test' in this regard.

This means that the government is asked to specifically investigate what influence proposed measures for the country as a whole will have on the regions at the borders of the country, given the regulations in the same field applicable on the other side of the border. For instance specific tax measures on fuel may have the effect that people will buy their fuel where it is cheaper and that can be just a few kilometres across the border, which affects businesses on our side of the border. This can also apply to other policy areas like sustainable development, agriculture and industrial policy. If a large windmill park is placed at the border, the people across the border might have to face the burdens, but not the energy-benefits. The border-test can help to demonstrate the effects on people in a larger region. A cross border approach of a plan (by both countries involved) could benefit all citizens in the wider region.

Last week the Heads of State of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg were present at the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Benelux cooperation. In 1958, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg decided to work closer together in an economic union next to a customs union they had already formed in 1944. The aim of the cooperation is to enhance the welfare and security of citizens in the three countries. The Benelux tries to reach this aim by taking down obstacles in a variety of policy areas, such as trans-border mobility, social cohesion and inclusion, employment, innovation and a shift towards a low-carbon economy. If and when possible, they tune their points of view on EU-issues.

When it comes to the economic and social cohesion of the Netherlands, there is undoubtedly the benefit of a larger territorial cohesion. Once the Benelux countries are able to cooperate in a productive manner in their border regions, this may have immediate effect on the economic and social cohesion. The co-operation within the Benelux as a whole is considered to be sustainable in economics and, through the regional cooperation, safe and secure on - for instance - nuclear safety, migration, tax-rulings and health care.

The Senate plays an active role in the Benelux Parliament. At this moment the parliamentary assembly is presided over by a Senator from the Netherlands. During its spring meeting in The Hague, the Benelux Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution for a generic recognition of professional qualifications in the three countries. This is in accordance with the automatic mutual generic recognition of diplomas in higher education. Not only will this add to a higher employability in the area, it will also stimulate social mobility across the borders.

Social and territorial cohesion also highly benefit from mobility. The Benelux parliament has for many years invested time and energy in taking down obstacles in the railway-system, in order to promote the smooth crossing of borders and bring regions closer together.

The Benelux formula of regional cooperation with a strong focus on cohesion can also be seen in other parts of the EU, such as the Nordic countries, the Baltic States and the Viségrad-4. The parliamentarians from these unions also meet on a regular basis. MPs from the Baltic States and the

Nordics attended the spring meeting of the Benelux Parliament. So we see productive cooperation between larger regions of smaller countries within the European Union, which certainly contributes to a better understanding of and more unity-oriented policy making in the EU!

Economic and social cohesion, as defined in the Single European Act of 1986, aims to reduce the disparities among regions, in particular rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps. In the Lisbon Treaty the element 'territorial' was added to the cohesion policy. Cohesion policy is one of those policies that are built on solidarity: solidarity of one country with others in order to reduce the disparities between them. The key element of the future cohesion policy must therefore be its integration into all policy-areas, such as cross-border employment, accessibility to transport, healthcare and education across borders, as well as cross-border public administration.

With the Multi-annual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 currently under negotiations, the Netherlands expressed certain views and expectations for the cohesion policy beyond 2020. A more modern MFF in the Dutch view will also mean more structural reforms in all Member States and more flexibility and simpler rules. A focus on research and innovation in the MFF can certainly boost the improvement of the overall cohesion in all regions in the EU. As Senates, we have a specific responsibility to look at possible effects of new measures on the regions of our countries and the larger EU-regions, and on our citizens.

Thank you.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Madam President, for your presentation.

Undoubtedly, your comments bring more substance to our debate especially nowadays, when Euro-scepticism is insidiously spreading across Europe, and I am very glad to note that the Senate of the Netherlands has assumed with maximum responsibility its role of mediator of divergent opinions in the society and, even more important, the responsibility of adopting firm decisions aimed at ensuring the continuity of the European project.

I have now the pleasure to invite at the rostrum the President of the French Senate.

**Mr. Gérard Larcher**  
**President of the Senate of the French Republic**

Mr. President of the Senate of Romania,

Dear Presidents and colleagues,  
Distinguished Ambassadors,  
Secretaries General of the Senates,

Allow me first to thank you, Mr. President, and the Senate of Romania for the quality of your welcome and the perfect organization of our work.

As you know, the Association of European Senates was created in Paris, in 2000, at the initiative of one of my predecessors, President Christian Poncelet, for whom I have a special thought at this moment. Our Association aims not only to promote the bicameralism, but also to strengthen the European identity and conscience.

Our meetings seem to me particularly useful in the times we are going through. Whereas everywhere in Europe we notice a rise of populism, I am convinced that the Second Chambers have an essential role to play in strengthening parliamentary democracy.

In this regard, Mr. President, dear colleagues, I would like to confirm the candidature of the French Senate to host the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Association of European Senates in 2019, but also to prepare it together with you, dear colleagues, and ensure throughout a year the continuity of relations between our Assemblies.

The topic that you have proposed for today's agenda is at the very heart of the future of the European project.

The European construction, let us not forget, enabled us firstly to preserve peace, and then to get back together again from one side and the other of a curtain described as being "of Iron", and which we dreamed to see falling.

However, never has the European construction seemed as fragile as today and never has the misgiving of its citizens about Europe appeared to me so strong.

A process of deconstruction, and I weight well the word "*deconstruction*", seems to be threatening Europe.

This existential crisis arises first of all from external factors. Faced with the unilateralism of the American President, with the conquering policy of China, which launches new commercial routes, but also military ones, but also political ones, faced also with President Vladimir Putin's Russia, Europe is struggling to make its voice heard. The recent G7 Summit bears witness to this.

Confronted with a migration crisis of more than four years, unprecedented in scale, the European Union has reacted in a hurry, dispersedly and with insufficient overall coherence. Even today, it struggles to provide effective responses both to a human drama and to the destabilization of the countries of entry of these migrants.

But the crisis of Europe is also the result of internal factors.

The British referendum on the Brexit was not only a shock, but also a signal. I do hope - and I am saying this in the presence of the Speaker of the House of Lords - that the European Union will reach an agreement allowing both to preserve the integrity of the single market and to maintain a close cooperation with our British friends. And I am aware of the essential role played by the House of Lords in this regard.

Almost everywhere in Europe we are witnessing a rise of anti-European movements. Many states are facing centrifugal tendencies and - I do not forget the words of the President of the Spanish Senate, in Tallinn - the rise of regionalism and autonomist claims, of "territorial fractures", actually.

I am convinced that, faced with this existential crisis, we have to strengthen our cohesion and our unity, on both external and internal level.

On external level, Europe has to assert itself as a power. What the citizens want first and foremost is a "Europe which protects" and we have to make progress in the areas of defense and security, migration management and border protection.

Faced with the migration challenge and terrorism, Europe has to protect its external border, and we must not isolate ourselves one from each other or turn against each other. We must, as far as the EU member states are concerned, strengthen further the FRONTEX agency and fight steadfastly

against the criminal networks of smugglers. In order to address the drivers of migration we must also develop partnerships with the countries of origin and transit, especially with African countries. In return for enhancing the development aid, we are entitled to expect cooperation on readmission. Yes, let us promote a true solidarity between our countries. Let us refrain from maintaining cleavages between the East and the West, between the North and the South of our European Union. Mr. President of the Czech Senate, you recalled it earlier. And, at the same time, I believe, we must pursue trade policies adapted to the new state of the world. Multilateralism is between brackets, perhaps.

The European Union, the first commercial power, let us not forget, must defend its interests based on the principle of reciprocity and must equip itself with trade defense instruments enabling it to react to unfair practices or unilateral breaches of trade or customs rules.

Faced with centrifugal tendencies, Europe must also strengthen its internal cohesion. We must avoid the social dumping and the fiscal dumping within Europe.

This is not about moving towards a uniform social model, but about encouraging an enhanced fiscal and social convergence. Despite the resuming of growth, unemployment is still too high in some countries, especially among young people. The European Union has an important role to play in encouraging vocational training, the mobility of apprentices and economic policies that provide support to economic growth and job creation. At the same time - and this is a topic for the upcoming months - we must maintain ambitious common agricultural and regional policies, in order to ensure cohesion and regional balance.

Agriculture is of major strategic interest for Europe's sovereignty and food security, and, let us not forget, for our regional balance. And the sharp decrease of funding, which has been proposed to us, cannot be accepted, in any case not by France and by the French Senate which has just deliberated on this matter.

Similarly, the cohesion policy should have the necessary funds to fulfill its missions. This means regional balance. It also means creating infrastructures. And at the presidential election of the spring of 2017, in the territories forgotten of my country, people voted for the Extremes because they felt that they had been forgotten, abandoned.

I am convinced that the Upper Houses of National Parliaments have an important role to play in strengthening cohesion in Europe and bringing Europe closer to its citizens. I am thinking, particularly, to ensuring the respect of the principle of subsidiarity, thus allowing the EU to focus on the essentials.

I have talked a lot about the European Union, but I do not forget the Second Chambers of other countries, such as the Swiss Council of States or the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Upper Houses are close to concrete realities and less influenced by the everyday events. They are less subject - these Chambers - to impulses and they often act as stabilizers. They can be the driving forces of proposals to enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion, by identifying lucidly the challenges of the moment and outlining the perspectives for the future.

I believe that the citizens are aware of the importance of Second Chambers in ensuring the balance of powers and the cohesion in our states and in Europe, dear Madam President of the Second Chamber of the Senate of Netherlands, as you have pointed out in your address. And the proof is that the two referendums which took place on this subject in Europe in the recent years - I think of Ireland and Italy - have both rejected a diminishing of the role of the Second Chamber. In these times of doubts, the Second Chambers are benefic to peaceful democracies. And I consider this absolutely essential, because peacefulness too is a path for returning to dialogue and cohesion. For

this reason, let us continue to promote bicameralism, not as nostalgia, but as a necessity for democracies. Thank you.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, I would like to express, on behalf of all the members of our Association, our gratitude for your invitation to host at the French Senate the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Association of the European Senates in 2019. It is actually symbolic to celebrate together, in Paris, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Association. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for having highlighted a number of aspects of particular importance, and a series of new opportunities that the European Senates may harness in order to strengthen their institutional capacity and their ability to respond to the socio-economic development needs at both European and national levels.

And, with your permission, I would like to take advantage of the presence of our French colleague and, given that our debate today focuses on cohesion and solidarity, let me touch upon one of the most remarkable programme of bilateral public, economic and cultural diplomacy, which will be implemented between January 2018 and July 2019. I am referring to the *Romania-France Season 2019*, which is essentially an instrument aimed at bringing the two nations closer together, by paying tribute to and celebrating our common historic and cultural heritage. This event will take place under the auspices of the Centenary of the creation of the Romanian National Unitary State and of the First World War Centenary.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The next speaker is Mr. Denis O'Donovan, the Chairman of the Senate of Ireland. On this occasion, Mr. O'Donovan will deliver his very first speech in his new capacity as a member of our Association.

Mr. Chairman, you have the floor.

**Mr. Dennis O'Donovan**  
**President of the Senate of Ireland (Seanad Éireann)**

At the outset, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for an excellent meeting so far. I have been most impressed with your organisation and facilities and I would like to thank you in particular for last night's very enjoyable dinner.

But may I also at this juncture thank all my European colleagues for your unanimous support in accepting Ireland as part of the European Senates' family. I am very honoured and proud to become a member of this Association and I am confident that Ireland, from a Senate point of view, will play a significant and important role in the future.

And I ultimately thank you, Mr. President, for the efficiency and professionalism and the way you handled this item this morning; it made my life very pleasant and easy.

I will now turn to the theme of today's debate: *Current challenges to the economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe: what role for Senates?*.

Europe is in many ways a small place, perhaps better connected than it has ever been before. In just three hours yesterday I travelled from the most westerly country in Europe, from Dublin, to one of the most Eastern extremities of the European Union, in Bucharest. However, in that short journey I

crossed a continent which is marked by distinct regional disparities. It is marked by significant differences in, for example, levels of unemployment, youth unemployment in particular, social progress, poverty and public investment.

We face many challenges, from globalisation to the impact of new technologies on society and jobs, to security concerns and the rise of populism. Within the global economy, Europe needs to be more innovative and competitive. We need to invest in skills and rethink our approaches to education and lifelong learning systems. We must continue to address the legacy of the economic crisis of the last decade, and pay particular attention to the needs of our younger generations. We have to face the challenges of an ageing population and recognise the emergence of new family structures, greater organisation, more diverse working lives, and we have to achieve real gender equality. Increased levels of migration are clearly a feature of today's social and political scene, but this phenomenon requires appropriate responses. Ireland now - which is a huge change in 20 years - has 17% of our population born abroad and we understand the situation well. We have to manage this by assisting and integrating new communities.

Within the EU, cohesion policy has led to significant progress, but in terms of reducing regional disparities and economic growth, the EU economy is now back on a more stable footing and unemployment has fallen to its lowest level since the recent recession. However, the recovery is still unevenly distributed across society and regions. Continued support for all regions is still required. Few things illustrate better the challenge to cohesion in Europe, and in the European Union in particular, than the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. This is a particularly significant issue for Ireland. Ireland and the United Kingdom have for a long time been bound together by the ties of history, by trade and by strong cultural connections. The process which led to the ending of violence and a peaceful and agreed settlement of the political situation in Northern Ireland, known as the Good Friday Agreement, has been put at risk by the decision of the United Kingdom. The future of the free movement of goods and people across the border between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, which has been such an important factor in the success of the peace process, is now somewhat in question. Ireland is very grateful for the support of our colleagues in Europe and in negotiations and we view this as a tangible demonstration of the ongoing strength and unity of EU-27. We believe that it is very important that EU use all tools available, including cohesion policy, to demonstrate practical solidarity and support for all regions that are especially affected by externally imposed challenges, including Brexit. Strengthened nationalism and an antipathy to immigration are placed in this stream of cohesion right across Europe. As politicians it is our job to find solutions to these issues. We can be successful if we work together in a constructive way and avoid the temptation to resort to negative rhetoric. Economic and other forms of inequality, unemployment, debt and uncertain futures are all very understandable drivers of discontent, but they will only be resolved through political cooperation and mutual support.

Senates have a vital role to play in helping to make a positive contribution to addressing the challenges facing the economic, social and territorial cohesion of Europe. In the Irish Parliament, we have greatly improved in recent years the way we scrutinise EU regulations through our committees and we have resolved this function well. However, we need all to be able to stand back from detail and spend more time examining and bringing to public attention the bigger themes relating to EU and to Europe, in general.

Senates are often better placed than directly elected houses to do this as we do not need to be as responsive to day to day political issues in our constituencies. It is also part of the Senates' business to build and maintain strong links with European institutions and create opportunities for dialogue with senior European and EU officials. We too often view the EU as a place apart rather than as partners in politics. As part of a reform process in the Irish Senate, we are currently considering how we can improve the way we interact with other MEPs and the EU institutions. We can only reform the way we approach this work with Europe and remain open to new ideas.

The Association of European Senates offers us all an opportunity to share ideas and to learn from the particular characteristics that distinguish each of our institutions. As the Chairman of the Senate, which has only today joined the Association, I wish to give this final message that a united and cohesive Europe is far better than a divided and disjointed Europe and I think this is the road forward.

Go raibh maith agat go leor. Many thanks to you!

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for your presentation which brought to our attention some particular aspects of the cohesion policies, from the perspective of the current parliamentary debates on Brexit

As for the sensitive aspects of negotiations on the future border between the United Kingdom and the EU, I am convinced that there is room for cooperation solutions facilitating the creation of “intelligent frontiers”, able to respond to the expectations and needs of citizens, while avoiding the occurrence of new political and social division lines on the continent.

I now have the pleasure to invite Mr. Stanislaw Karczewski, Marshal of the Senate of Poland, to take the floor.

Let me mention firstly that our colleague will take the floor in the Senate of Romania for the second time in only two months. In April this year we had the pleasure to co-initiate the first B9 Parliamentary Summit that brought together countries of NATO’s Eastern flank. We have underlined then the importance of parliaments, as the most representative democratic fora in our societies, in adopting the legislative framework that is needed to ensure increased security in Europe and, through this, a strengthened Euro-Atlantic community, as a whole.

Mr. President, you have the floor.

**Mr. Stanislaw Karczewski**  
**Marshall of the Senate of Poland**

Distinguished Speakers of the Senates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for a magnificent organisation, for hospitality and I would like to thank you also for this highly interesting and very much needed discussion. Our Senates are different. Yes, we do vary, but we are keen on developing Europe. We would like Europe to develop as a coherent Europe.

And I would like to thank to one of us, the Speaker of the Senate of Ireland, for his last sentence. The last sentence pointedly indicates the direction in which Europe should go. The Senate in Poland is described as the Chamber of reflection and thoughts and I would like, Mr. Speaker and all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, to ask you to listen to my reflections as they are the result of certain thoughts about Europe and the future of Europe in the context of cultural, territorial and economic cohesion.

But first and foremost I would like to speak in the context of the social challenges and threats.

Europe has created a model of society and state that is the envy of the whole world. Human rights, democracy, the welfare state were all born in Europe. Industrialisation was also born in Europe, changing people's lives, which had earlier been short, base and poor. Industrialisation has created the

material foundations of freedom and unprecedented social mobility, initially for Europeans. Today, globalisation brings more nations out of poverty. Europe has given nation states to the world. A glance at the world map convinces us of the popularity of the nation state concept on every latitude. Europe has given the world hope for freedom, prosperity and peace.

Europe's global success is a product of the European civilisation. This civilisation is rooted in Christianity, with the central role of an individual equipped by the Creator with inalienable rights, but also called to love one's neighbour and feel solidarity with them. The Greek philosophy gave Europe reason, as an instrument of cognition and improvement of humans and the world. Rome gave Europe a legal tradition.

These days, Europe seems to be losing faith in the values that are the source of its success. Its identity and cultural coherence are blurred. The European middle class, which is the mainstay of this identity, is particularly threatened.

Some threats to the cultural, social and developmental cohesion of Europe are of a structural nature, while others are created by ourselves.

The first structural threat is due to the technological progress. The globalisation of economic processes has transformed the character of the European economy from manufacturing to service-oriented. Today, over 70% of jobs in Europe are in the service sector. This deepens income inequalities, undermining the position of the middle class, which is the foundation of democracy and the keystone of society. These processes may deepen with the progress in robotics and work automation.

The second structural threat is the demographic ageing of Europe. It undermines the solidarity of generations, on which the European welfare state is based. It also attracts immigration from non-European countries, diversifying Europe culturally. Meanwhile, the welfare state requires a certain level of cultural uniformity to function and develop properly.

The third structural threat to European cohesion is the continuing division of Europe in terms of development. At the same time, it is deepening on the North-South axis, and is gradually diminishing on the East-West axis. The socio-economic cohesion of regions and states of the European Union, as well as the convergence of living standards and social security of its citizens, are prerequisites for the success of the European integration project.

These threats and challenges should not overwhelm us, but rather inspire us to seek bold solutions. In the context of Europe's demographic crisis, as well as robotisation and work automation, it will be necessary to rethink the family and immigration policy. Without a strong family, tied to traditional values, there will be no Europe as we know it. The family policy should boldly support European families in their fatherly and motherly aspirations. Research indicates that Europeans want to have more children than they have now. The family policy should be addressed to the middle class, so that educated people who do not want to lose their high material status are more eager to decide to become mothers and fathers.

The technological progress may also contribute to weakening the demand for immigration. It is necessary to reject the alleged economic evidence that immigrants are needed by Europe because they take up jobs unwanted by Europeans. This logic works only on the assumption that these jobs must be low-paid. But it does not have to be the case. This is a logic that does not take into account the costs of integrating the people performing such low-paid jobs and their numerous families. They tend to be people with low qualifications, coming from poor regions of the world that are far behind Europe in terms of civilisation. Finally, it is a logic that overlooks the social and political costs of the failure of integration. Needless to say, the radicalisation of Europeans, racial tensions and the rise of anti-Semitism are certainly not serving social cohesion.

A fortress Europe would not be a good response to the threats posed by mass immigration from poor and underdeveloped areas. It is obvious that Europe cannot be home to all people of the world. It will stop being Europe then. There is a need for a credible policy of protecting European borders against the inflow of mass immigration, generous humanitarian aid for those at risk in their places of residence, and openness to those immigrants whose qualifications are needed in Europe and who can integrate in Europe. There are Western countries that pursue such a policy. Let us make use of their experience. At the same time, the cohesion of European societies and European integration are not served well by the imposition of mandatory migratory quotas. Those are not solutions. Those are shortcuts. We listen to the evaluations made by those eminent European leaders who say that the policy of multiculturalism has not worked in their countries and, understandably, we draw conclusions from it.

Shortcut temptations also appear in relation to the third threat to European cohesion, namely the persistent development gap. The functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union, which was to deepen the European unity, perpetuates and deepens the division between the competitive and prosperous North and the falling behind South. This division was particularly dramatic during the financial and economic crisis of 2007–2011. This discourages countries outside the euro area from joining it. But more importantly, it raises a longing to recreate the “Carolingian Europe”, which is actually to reverse political and social consequences of the expansion of the European Union to the East in 2004.

An additional pretext is Brexit and the related loss of the British contribution to the European budget. Eastward enlargement was a great success of the European Union, confirming the attractiveness of European values. Thanks to the expansion, Europe has strengthened its international position as one of the centres of power, determining the shape of international order. In just 14 years, the “new” Member States have managed to essentially bridge the backwardness that is the heritage of communism. This was possible not only because the “new” Member States were determined to implement the necessary reforms. They have also benefited from the access to the single market and from the socio-economic cohesion policy. Today, when we are negotiating a new, long-term budget of the European Union, we should remember these achievements in the construction of European cohesion and not lose them by taking political shortcuts.

Let us build on European values that are the source of Europe's success. Let us protect the European middle class, which is the mainstay of democracy and the keystone of social cohesion. Let us not cease in levelling development gaps that separate us. Let us look for bold solutions. Let us not take shortcuts. This is our role, the role of European politicians, members of the Senates - the legislative chambers co-shaping the policies of our countries.

Mr. Speaker,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I don't know whether there is time and space for that but, Mr. Speaker, I would like to also propose the organisation of the meeting of the Association of the European Senates in Poland, in 2021. So, if you accept this proposal that will be a great honour for us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker!  
Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen!

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, dear colleague, for your contribution to the debate. And now, dear colleagues, with your permission I would like to take the floor on behalf of the Romanian Senate.

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overarching theme of this year's meeting takes into consideration the concept of cohesion and its multifaceted connotations in a Europe confronted with the risk of deepening existing cleavages and with the emergence of new cleavages in the economic order, the social fabric and territorial organization.

In the early 1990s, the Romanian society was unconditionally opened with the view to joining the EU and NATO. Membership in these organizations was almost unanimously perceived as a viable solution to completely eliminate a host of historical vulnerabilities. At the same time, we were all convinced that a country geared towards European values and part of a system of alliances between free nations was able to add dynamism and value to the European Union.

This is how we were thinking fifteen years ago, or twenty years ago. Our assessment and actions from back then have consistently proven to be valid ever since. Nowadays, all available surveys indicate that the Romanian society continues to enjoy the highest degree of trust in the European project compared to all other member states.

Against this backdrop we note with concern that increased social diversity and diminished solidarity in facing recent financial challenges nurtured divergent forces in our region.

These trends seem to overlay pre-existing disparities between states and within societies. They create obstacles in the way of reaching a shared democratic conscience and a pluralist but coherent European identity. Implicitly, we cannot help but notice that the prerequisites are met for the decline of a united, competitive and internationally powerful Europe.

After the completion of the EU enlargement wave of 2004-2007 we have faced a historical challenge in Europe: we have been called as equal partners to properly understand and rightfully assess the realities that define our societies in the West and in the East, in the North and in the South of the continent. I believe that the Senates should play a more prominent role and encourage the European institutions to take the necessary steps to maintain social cohesion among our societies characterized by different levels of development and ambition. Due to its macroeconomic and macro-social implications, the EU cohesion policy could be considered the most important tool in correcting regional imbalances and increasing citizens' welfare.

This is why the future of Europe and, implicitly, the future of Romania depend on a firm anchoring to a pole of democratic stability and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The recent publication of the Reflection paper on the future of EU finances for 2021-2027, which includes the indicative structure for the European policies' funding, repositions the reform of the EU cohesion policy at the top of the European agenda.

This upcoming reform matters to us. Taking into consideration the perspectives of a slowdown in the rhythm of convergence throughout Europe, our two matters of concern are to maintain unchanged the financial allocations sustaining the Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy, and to assess the intention announced by some to introduce new convergence criteria for the management of the next financial framework.

I shall elaborate on this latter aspect.

We cannot talk about the credibility and solidarity of the European project while asking of the Central and Eastern European EU member states to have their legitimacy revalidated after almost two decades of far-reaching integration. Isn't this the very meaning of conditioning the cohesion funds?

Why instead of using unbiased quantitative data issued by the European Statistical System that we created for this purpose, one would wish to adjust the criteria of the decision making process to debatable qualitative assumptions that fuel political disunity and perceptions that invite adverse interpretation eventually leading to the erosion, from the inside, of the European construction?

For a better understanding of the challenges we face, I would like to tell you more about Romania's journey for the past 10 years. We have witnessed worrying slippages and the failure to protect citizens' individual rights and freedoms and the guarantees thereof provided in the Constitution, all in the name of the fight against corruption.

The strain created during the past years as a result of these slippages was a liability settled in full by the citizens. The most striking effect of this liability was the falling, to the lowest level ever measured in the EU Member States, of the trust afforded by Romanians to the judicial system.

A lawyer and professor from Cluj-Napoca, a major university city in Transylvania, applied to all courts in Romania to obtain the statistical data regarding the requests for eavesdropping warrants logged from 2010 to 2015. He received replies from all the Courts including the High Court of Cassation and Justice of Romania. It turned out that during the five years researched, the courts received a total of 109,900 eavesdropping warrant requests out of which 102,700 were granted, meaning a 93.4% rate of approval. Since each request targeted a minimum of 3 people, it is estimated that 300,000 citizens had their phones tapped by the state.

These numbers are not only worrying, they are telling. They prove that some levers of the power state institutions have been inadequately and unconstitutionally employed. The continuation of this trend would have confronted Romania with the risk of becoming a police state and a controlled democracy à la Putin, rather than being a liberal democracy - all this happening despite of the European Commission's Cooperation and Verification Mechanism.

From the total of 102,700 eavesdropping requests approved by the Courts in Romania, the High Court of Cassation and Justice alone approved 4,000 of them. The jurisdiction of the High Court includes parliamentarians, ministers, its own judges, judges of the Constitutional Court and prosecutors from the General Prosecutor's Office. Consequently, 4,000 warrants were issued in a five year period for the eavesdropping on at least 4,000 dignitaries and senior officials of the state.

These revelations are compounded by the unearthing of an unconstitutional system of secret agreements materialized through secret protocols starting with 2009, concluded between the Romanian Intelligence Service and the institutions of the judiciary. Out of the 65 secret protocols we know of, only two were declassified thus far: the one between the Romanian Intelligence Service and the General Prosecutor's Office and the one between the Romanian Intelligence Service and the Superior Council of Magistracy. These secret protocols contributed to the creation of a deep and meta-legal system that allowed intelligence officers to have an input to selecting and building criminal cases that were to be developed by the anticorruption prosecutors based on the secret information they provided.

In addition, the protocols provided that anticorruption prosecutors should report back to the Romanian Intelligence Service within 60 days on the way in which the information received were developed.

At the moment, we are still waiting for the protocols concluded between the Romanian Intelligence Service and the courts, including the High Court of Cassation and Justice, to be declassified.

The impressive and unjustified number of eavesdropping warrants and the unconstitutional protocols promoted by the Romanian Intelligence Service with institutions of the judicial system hijacked the anticorruption fight in Romania and put a strain on our relations with the European Commission. During the last years, the Commission issued reports that assessed Romania's progress under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. Unfortunately, the reports relied almost exclusively on the distorted image provided by the repressive state institutions and on the perceptions underpinning the media discourse promoted by several interest groups.

Currently, we are still waiting for the European Commission to take action regarding these bitter truths that recently surfaced in Bucharest, and to explain their systematic disregard of the warning signals sent to Brussels concerning the severe abuses committed by some individuals and institutions of the judiciary. Owing to the biased policies and sometimes even partisan proclivities of the Commission on these matters, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism was held captive by an occult and meta-legal system coordinated by the Romanian Intelligence Service and the National Anticorruption Directorate. It is disappointing, of course, for me and for many Romanians that the CVM thus became another domestic instrument of pressure against those that oppose this parallel system.

As you can see, after Romania's accession to the European Union, a repressive system similar to the 1950s Securitate was created. Evidence regarding the existence of a system with Stalinist roots is shown in the form of abusive arrests, live media spectacles exposing suspects in handcuffs, and media leaks of confidential details of the criminal cases. In practice, the presumption of innocence has been abolished and judges have been constantly pressured, through direct and public threats to issue the convictions requested by the National Anticorruption Directorate, at the order of the Romanian Intelligence Service. When such methods failed, magistrates who judged in good faith were prosecuted and eliminated. Using practices that do not belong to a long-lasting liberal democracy and with no respect to individual rights and freedoms, even preeminent judges of the High Court and the Constitutional Court were eliminated in key moments and acquitted later. Encouraged by the European Commission, this corrupt system proved to be invincible until recently.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I had deliberately presented the reality we face here in Bucharest in order to emphasize that justice and equity are important aspects of national cohesion, and that fundamental standards must be protected from any dangerous influences piloted by the partisans of a so-called deep state.

The very existence of such a parallel management of the anticorruption fight in Romania, and the support it received from our close European partners left us with two challenges very difficult to overcome.

Firstly, Romania was portrayed as a country where the incidence of corruption is measured by the high number of arrests and indictments orchestrated by institutions that let themselves to become corrupted by the exercise of unlimited power, twisting the checks and balances enshrined in the Constitution.

Indictments led to high-level resignations, and in many situations, the case files submitted by prosecution did not contain incriminating evidence. The increasing number of sound acquittals confirmed the political vein of many criminal investigations and proved the unjustified manner in which justice has been administered.

Secondly, a generalized and profoundly irrational perception was induced, of Romania as a country whose destiny lies in the hands of corrupt and criminal government officials. Thus, on the one hand, the prospects for our country to significantly contribute to the European project were notably

affected by the unfair evaluations drafted under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism and by the *sine die* postponement of Romania's accession to the Schengen Agreement.

On the other hand, European institutions have publicly criticized one and all parliamentary attempts of the governing coalition to revise the laws of the administration of justice with the purpose to correct the slippages of the judiciary and the *modus operandi* of some power state institutions.

Dear guests,

Our resolution is to reinstate the Parliament as the sovereign legislative body and representative of the nation together with its full ethical and political authority. Only in this way we can rebuild national social cohesion and ensure a democratic governance able to protect individual rights and freedoms by preventing any unconstitutional interference in politics of the power institutions.

Without any intention to create artificial lines between the pursuit of national objectives such as political equality, justice, solidarity and social cohesion, and the EU approach to "*unity in diversity*", I consider it absolutely necessary to convey, through everything we do, a clear political message: The European Union should focus on solving the problems of its citizens and on ensuring that all Member States are equal in dignity and have equal opportunities to contribute to the advancement of the European project. "Unity" should not consecrate a "Core Europe", it should not put in motion multi-speeds, and at the same time "diversity" should not be construed as division.

To conclude, I would like to share with you a very suggestive Romanian saying on how to approach common problems and keep a united front. We say: "*Union brings Power*".

This year, the celebration of the Romanian Centenary since the 1918 Great Union brought back to the national consciousness this essential lesson of national history expressed in an adage.

After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, the Romanian nation united its forces in an exemplary cohesiveness for the democratic reconstruction of the society. It was national social cohesion based on consensus that determined citizen's engagement in a national project. Therefore, even after a century, our national project remains making democracy work for all!

Thank you!

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Dear colleagues,

With your permission, I propose to conclude our second session of the day. We will proceed together towards the main entrance of the Senate, with a stop for the family photo immediately after exiting the Plenary Hall. Immediately afterwards, the buses will transfer us to the Triumphal Arch for the wreath laying ceremony and for the lunch.

We will return here for the third session, starting at 3:30 PM.

**GENERAL DEBATE ON THE MEETING THEME  
*CURRENT CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL  
COHESION IN EUROPE: WHAT ROLE FOR THE SENATES?***

**THIRD SESSION**

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Dear colleagues,

I want to thank you all for your participation to the wreath laying ceremony at the Triumphal Arch and to say that I greatly appreciated the opportunity to continue our discussions during the lunch, in a less formal framework.

Now, I have the pleasure to give the floor to the first speaker of our last session, Mr. Alojz Kovšca, the President of the National Council of Slovenia.

On the occasion of my recent participation at the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments in Tallinn, I noted with appreciation your firm commitment to a Europe of equality and common values. These are - and I fully share your view - prerequisites for establishing solid bridges among our nations, as prerequisites for both the sustainable development of every country and the creation of the united and stable Europe that we wish for.

Now, Mr. President, you have the floor.

**Mr. Alojz KOVŠCA**  
**President of the National Council of Slovenia**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Colleagues,

First of all let me thank to the president of the Romanian Senate for this great hospitality and the excellent organization of this meeting. This year's discussion, focusing primarily on the role of Upper Chambers in ensuring cohesion in Europe, is important not only on the national level, but also as regards the adoption of the next financial perspective of the European Union after the year of 2020.

The past years have brought numerous challenges not only to Europe, but worldwide, which require a unified and solidary approach, as only partial solutions fail to produce adequate results. Cohesion is necessary for the reduction of economic, social and territorial discrepancies both from the European and the national perspectives. Due to the decreasing birth rate, aging population, growing urbanization and the migration of the population from rural areas, as well as due to the migration pressures the National Council of Slovenia acknowledges the importance of a balanced and sustainable territorial development. We are aware that that the development of such a policy and its implementation demand a complex connectivity among the social, economic and territorial dimensions of cohesion. In its work, the National Council continually strives to respect these principles. Its specific Constitution enables an easier exchange of different perspectives in the search for better solutions to ensure a sustainable and balanced development.

The work of the National Council is focused on taking into consideration opinions and views of different interest groups, which after the careful examination and evaluation of various professional arguments does enter the legislative process in an institutionalized manner. At this point, I would

like to present one of the most successful projects of the National Council, which in my opinion not only contributes daily to solving problems related to the elimination of inequality among individuals, regions and local communities in Slovenia, but also strives to provide a harmonious development throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Slovenia. The National Council, as a stimulator of activities for the strengthening of social integration of citizens from different regions or local communities, has for many years cooperated successfully with the civil society in co-organizing consultations on various current themes. In its 25-year activity, it has organized over 750 consultations, lectures, round table discussions and exhibitions, with the participation of more than 150 associations, experts in various fields, representatives of the government and ministries, state institutions and non-governmental organizations. At these events, which generally offer an opportunity for the representatives of civil society, experts in different fields and representatives of local communities to exchange their views, the National Council discussed topics related to the local self-governance, social work, health, economy, public administration, the European Union, and other subjects which stimulated a search for mutual answers to current questions. Many solutions and proposals, made of such consultations or round table discussions, were later forwarded as conclusions to related ministries, while some of them served as a basis for the preparation of legislative changes referring to specific problems identified by the civil society or representatives of a particular civil initiative.

Since some of the member states of the Association are also members of the European Union, I would like to say a few words about the next financial framework of the European Union after the year 2020 and warn of some dilemmas concerning the reduction of financial means for the cohesion policy. On June 24<sup>th</sup>, this policy will celebrate its 30-year anniversary. So far it has remained one of the most successful European policies. It has contributed to the reduction of inequalities among the developed and undeveloped regions within the European Union, encouraged employment and greater mobility of students, innovation and research, and even much more. Since its foundation, it has noted a lot of success and has undoubtedly offered numerous possibilities for the future as discrepancies among the developed and undeveloped regions in the European Union have not been fully eliminated. The proposal by the European Commission on the reduction in financing the cohesion policy is questionable as many member states would be forced to tackle the problems of regional inequality on their own and many will consequently lack the necessary resources. The National Council has recently organized a consultation on this topic, primarily leading to a suggestion that the next European cohesion policy must enable the countries to deal with their socio-economic challenges and direct the majority of funding to the most vulnerable regions. According to the importance of the question on adopting the next financial perspective and especially the cohesion policy, the National Council will organize multiple presentations, consultations and round table discussions on this topic in the future months. Furthermore, the view of the government on the proposal of the European Commission will be discussed both by the competent Commission and the plenum of the National Council.

Therefore, referring to the question on the role of Upper Chambers in addressing the challenges in the field of economy, social and territorial cohesion in Europe, I would like to emphasize that, in my opinion, the role of Upper Chambers especially in countries where the constitution of Upper Chamber differs from the constitution of Lower Chamber, is especially important and it is precisely the different constitution of Chambers that enables an exchange of views and professional arguments based on concrete examples of the local communities. The National Council strengthens its role in this area primarily through consultations, at which it hosts various experts and representatives of interest associations as well as representatives of the civil society. By enabling the exchange of opinions and views it supports the search of constructive compromised solutions which strive to secure a sustainable social development in all parts of Slovenia.

Nowadays it is even more important that our institutions assume the initiative and responsibility of ensuring cohesion among citizens, regions and states. I believe that a stable and strong economy is a driving force for the elimination of inequalities among regions and states and represents the basic

pre-condition for ensuring social cohesion. It is my conviction that representatives of Upper Chambers must assume a more active role in this field. As we are still facing many challenges, despite the general economic growth, we must find opportunities for mutual cooperation and deepening relations not only on the economic, but also on other levels.

Thank you for your attention.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr President, for your intervention and for your honest and collegial invitation to reflect on the responsibility we have to encourage citizens' participation in the democratic decision-making processes.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Pedro Sanz, the First Vice-President of the Senate of Spain.

**Mr. Pedro Sanz**  
**First Vice-President of the Senate of Spain**

Dear Presidents,  
Dear colleagues,

It is an honour for me to be able to participate in the Meeting of the Association of European Senates. Firstly, I want to thank Mr. Popescu, President of the Romanian Senate for his warm welcome and the excellent organization of this meeting.

The topic chosen for the debate refers to the role played by the European Senates concerning the challenges that are arising in the areas of economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe. I would like to stress that I think this is an extremely relevant issue in view of the growth of political movements and of the attitudes that are spreading throughout Europe, calling into question the obvious achievements of the European construction since the end of the Second World War.

And when these types of problems harass us, we would do well to remember what history has taught us: that division and social and territorial fractures have only brought conflict and pain.

Against this backdrop, it is necessary to remember the role that democratic institutions must play, and in particular to highlight the fact that parliament, and more specifically the Senate, tend to make use of its constitutional position specially designed to act and react towards those who cause social and territorial division.

In the case of Spain, this is especially true. The Senate is constitutionally defined as a Chamber of territorial representation and, therefore, together with its role as a Chamber of second reading of the legislative projects and control of the Government, assumes fundamental competences for the guarantee of territorial cohesion, and therefore also of economic and social cohesion.

Thus, Article 155 of our Constitution confers exclusively to the Senate the authority to approve those extraordinary measures that are necessary if any part of the national territory seriously breaches its constitutional obligations.

This article had to be applied for the first time in recent date, specifically when on October 27<sup>th</sup> of the last year, the Senate agreed, by a very large majority, to authorize the measures required by the Government of the Nation so that the Government of Catalonia would cease its activities, seriously contrary to the general interest and the constitutional order.

During the last years a situation resulting from a peculiar confluence between radical nationalism - sociologically bourgeois - and ultra-left populism had been developing in Catalonia, which through a succession of facts frontally directed against the unity of Spain, against the national sovereignty and the equality of all Spanish citizens, had resulted in a rupture of the essential foundations of the Constitution and the Rule of Law.

These events, led by the same authorities who had as their first obligation to ensure compliance with the laws and the Constitution, caused an economic fracture reflected in the "flight" of thousands of companies and a deeply and worryingly divided society against which the democratic State under the Rule of Law had to react, after numerous warnings, using the constitutional instruments provided for it, i.e. with the application of the provisions of Article 155 after the corresponding authorization of the Senate: it proceeded to the dismissal of the President and the Government of Catalonia and new elections were held on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

As a result of these elections, a new Government has been formed in Catalonia which finally, after various attempts to challenge the legality impeded by the actions of the judges and courts, has taken office on June 2. In accordance with the provisions that had been approved by the Senate, the application of Article 155 of the Constitution ended on the same date.

Note also the role played by the Senate during all this time in which it has been necessary to apply extraordinary measures in Catalonia. As befits a parliamentary system, the Government's action in Catalonia has been submitted to the control of the Senate through the creation of a parliamentary committee that brought together members of two committees: the Constitutional Committee and the General Committee on Autonomous Communities.

Within this special committee, the Government has been submitted to the control of the Senators and the Parliamentary Groups with regard to its action under the authorization granted by the Senate to adopt the necessary measures to restore constitutional normality in Catalonia in accordance with Article 155 of the Constitution. This control has been reflected both in appearances before the committee and in the answer to the questions posed by the Senators.

I thank all European countries for their understanding and solidarity with Spain. And I warn you of the danger of contagion. We must be aware that Europe will only have a future if it is capable to strengthen its internal unity by firmly defending the European values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and mutual loyalty among European states. And with the functioning of institutions such as the Senate, which, as the Spanish case shows, can be especially adequate to maintain the validity of those values.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr. First Vice-President.

« *The Catalonia experience* », if I may name it that way, represented, and I have no doubt, a major challenge for the state institutions and the Spanish democracy, but also a strong warning for all of us.

In the current context, a Europe which would fail to fulfil its aim of enhancing cohesion having at its core a system of shared values and common projects, would most probably not be capable to deliver neither a long term social peace, nor stability and security with sustainable development and prosperity for its citizens.

I now have the pleasure to invite to the rostrum Mrs. Géraldine Savary, Vice-President of the Council of States of Switzerland.

**Mrs. Géraldine Savary**  
**Vice-President of the Council of States of Switzerland**

Thank you, Mr. President of the Romanian Parliament!

Dear Presidents of the Senates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A week ago, the world's leaders met, just as we do today, to discuss the future of relations between their peoples and countries.

For we were one billion men and women at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and now we are more than six billion, a hundred times more trade and forty times more wealth. States can no longer decide in isolation how they wish to live within their borders. This is a fact, this is a reality, and this is an obligation to act together. But despite the urgent need to respond collectively to the problems facing us, the leaders of the seven largest powers in the world were unable to come to an agreement. Maybe, you will say, if they had enjoyed such a welcome as the one we had here, in Romania, if they had tasted this extraordinary Romanian wine, as we have done today, maybe Mrs. Merkel and Mr. Trump would have successfully reached an agreement, presumably as in our case today.

Because today, Ladies and Gentlemen, the relationship we have with our people and with others has completely changed. And so has the relationship of trust. We have decided to create a world where free trade, regulated by international organisations, served as contract between nations and economies. We decided to create a world in which security was assumed collectively and in solidarity with each other. We have also decided to create spaces of peace and balance of power, thus making sure that the rule of the strongest would not prevail.

In short, the order which once ruled the political and economic organisation of our nations is now changing, or at least faltering, weakening under crisis. And in the middle of these crises, as reminded a few moments ago by our colleague from Spain, the question we face is how can we protect, strengthen and open our borders, all at the same time. "A nation's border is a bit like human skin, it is fragile, it is part of the identity, it is indispensable", said Régis Debray, a philosopher, a French thinker.

And today, the United States of America, confusing patriotism with protectionism, is building up new borders, which sometimes become barriers. Today, in the Middle East, in the Near East, in West Africa, in Ukraine and in South East Asia, the question of borders, sometimes the result of a tragic past, is setting peoples and nations against each other. The border between Israel and Palestine is turning into a cemetery. And in Europe too, borders are debated upon again, sometimes violently, and certain political groups are thriving precisely because they call them into question.

In this world, dear colleagues, where bearings are lost, where a border becomes a barrier or, worst, a source of conflict, the Senates are playing a fundamental role, we are playing a fundamental role.

Firstly, the Senates play an appeasing, tempering, reassuring role. Whatever the institutional function assigned to us in our countries, the Senates embody stability, wisdom, reflection and moderation.

Secondly, the Senates recognise intra-national collectivities and give them power over territories. One of the missions of our Senates, actually the most important, in my opinion, is to guarantee the regions' autonomy and decision-making authority. And what is more fundamental, Ladies and Gentlemen, than being able to say to our people in our regions: yes, you have power; yes, you have authority; yes, you have an identity, you have a culture which contributes to our living together; yes, your identity and your culture are and will be respected?

Dear colleagues,

In my opinion, many conflicts within countries could be defused if power was distributed more equitably and regions were allowed to coexist. Surely tensions could be avoided if states with troubled borders brought in more federalism and enhanced their political representation. In fact, you know it as well as I do, one day or another all states have to think about decentralisation, as a means to increase their legitimacy and prosperity.

You know, we, the Swiss, are always extremely likable, we look calm, we look peaceful. But make no mistake; these still waters hide passions, and some 200 years ago, the old Swiss Confederation came close to a civil war. Federalists and centralists, conservatives and liberals, Catholics and Protestants were prepared to confront each other. In fact, Switzerland is born not from a lasting peace, but from the arbitrage of these confrontations and the strong desire of these small states to form together an independent state at the heart of Europe.

In 2018, there is still tension between the cantons and the Confederation; it is not always the Peace of the Braves, sometimes there are truly certain tensions between us, federalism and decentralisation are not for granted.

And I would like to give you an example which is relevant, I hope, because it deals with a topical issue: taxation. It will be no surprise for you that I speak about taxation in Switzerland or for Switzerland, given that cohesion in Switzerland is based on the extensive fiscal powers of our cantons and communes. Article 3 of the Federal Constitution stipulates that the cantons are sovereign to the extent that their sovereignty is not limited by the Federal Constitution and they exercise all the rights that are not delegated to the Confederation. This means in reality that the cantons establish their own tax regulations, and the communes tax the income and assets of natural persons.

As a result, of course, the cantons are in competition with your countries, you know it as well as I do, but they are also in competition with each other in order to attract businesses and the wealth of the world and of the country. Each one defends its own turf and its taxation. On the other hand, the Confederation is required by the OECD to abolish the special tax status granted to foreign companies by some cantons. Hence, we have in fact three players and, as in the case of lawyers, four positions, and each one absolutely sure of its authority. And faced with these discordant voices, the people did the right thing: when asked to vote on a tax reform they refused the proposal precisely because considered it disrespectful of the regions and the population.

And this is where the Council of States, the Senate of Switzerland, plays a crucial role, it plays the role of an incubator. It works with the Confederation to ensure that the disparities between cantons do not have a negative effect on the federal state, and at the same time it works with and for the cantons so that they can benefit from the federal system. Therefore, last week, in a tremendous exercise of parliamentary tightrope walk, we linked an extensive reform of the corporate tax system, rejected by the people two years ago, with a wide-reaching reform of the pension system, previously rejected by the people, as well. In fact, we took two failures and then tried to turn them into a success. The project is so bold that the Council of States, the Swiss Senate, has been portrayed in the media as a kind of shadow cabinet. The media wrote to my colleagues and said: But do you all want to go to the Government? Because there are a lot of ambitions at the Council of States to serve in the Government. What do you want from the Government, since you have all the competencies at the Council of States?

Thus, the Council of States will have succeeded to reconcile the properly understood interests of the cantons and the multilateral convention which aims, under the auspices of the OECD, to prevent the erosion of tax on corporate profits, while injecting two billion Swiss francs into the pensions' fund. The role of the Council of States, dear colleagues, is therefore considerable, and the

parliamentary mechanism puts itself at the service of much broader issues affecting our system of values. Tax competition between cantons, yes, but with the respect of balances and solidarity between these cantons, equalisation, cohesion, respect for minorities, and all these down to the last detail!

And, with your permission, I will give another example, a very recent one, regarding our work at the Council of States in Switzerland. We had to debate the law on hunting, which affects 3% of the population, but which corresponds to about 80% of the passions that often animate our citizens. So, the law on hunting, a very concrete issue. Who authorises the shooting of wolves, lynx, cormorants and marmots? The cantons or the Confederation? And how many of these creatures may be shot, and during which period? We have dedicated more than two days to this topic and my colleagues from all the Swiss cantons had their say, and confirmed something that George Clémenceau had said: “We never lie so much as before elections, during war and after the hunt...”.

Mr. President of the Senate,

Before concluding, allow me to thank you for the warm welcome extended to us, and to pass on friendly greetings from the Federal Assembly and the Swiss authorities. Romanian is a language that sings to our hearts, a sister language to French, a really beautiful language. I encourage you to resist to English and firmly defend this beautiful language. And, in any case, Switzerland will be on your side when it comes to defending French and its sister languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The globalisation of goods and cultures, as well as the major humanitarian challenges, such as migration flows and climate change, require a joint action at supra-regional and supra-national level. Our presence here proves that we are concerned, that we are sensitive about these issues, and that we want to make our contribution to the European and global edifice. But this action will only be legitimate and democratic if it takes account of the interests of regions and local communities.

Thank you for your attention.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Madam Vice-President, for the information and opinions you shared with us.

As I have pointed out, the strong interconnection between the political, economic and social dimensions of our globalised world generates cohesion-related challenges of similar complexity for all the European Senates.

There is no doubt that institutional modernisation is no longer an option, but a must for all our countries.

It is highly relevant in this context that one of the answers of the Council of States to the question „*Will Switzerland still be federal in 50 years?*”, the theme of the 2017 edition of the National Conference in Federalism, was „4.0 Federalism”. In the spirit of our debate, allow me to add here that regardless of the type of our state systems, the “4.0 institutional modernisation” should be imperatively doubled by “5G measures of enhancing cohesion”.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the Right Honourable the Lord Fowler, Lord Speaker of the United Kingdom.

**The Right Honourable the Lord Fowler**  
**Lord Speaker of the United Kingdom**

Mr. President,  
Dear Colleagues,

It is first a pleasure and a privilege to speak today and to briefly conclude the proceedings of this debate. It is also an honour to speak at my first Association of European Senates Meeting in such modest surroundings! Many of you will know my predecessor, Frances D'Souza and her predecessor, Helene Hayman. I am only the third Lord Speaker since the post was created in 2006, and the first man to hold the Office, so I claim at any rate to having broken through the glass ceiling of female domination on that post.

Before I turn to my remarks, I would like to pay special tribute to you, Mr. President. The welcome we have received and the kindness you have shown us is a great testament to your country and we are deeply appreciative of that. As you may know, in Britain we have a large number of Romanians who live and work in the UK. Estimates vary but it could be as many as 400,000, which would mean that Romanians rank as the second largest non-British group in our country and they have made a big contribution to our life, which will most certainly continue.

Much has been said about the challenges to cohesion in Europe and, of course, much has been said about the role of the Senates, so let me briefly set out my thoughts from a British perspective.

There is one word which has been mentioned to me most frequently at this conference and that is Brexit. As you know, I am independent and although I was a Cabinet Minister for ten years in Margaret Thatcher's Government, gone are the days where I could speak with quite as much freedom as I could then.

But allow me a few observations: the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union but we are not leaving Europe. That is a very important and crucial point and I cannot emphasize it enough. Most of us in this room today share a common heritage, face common challenges and look forward to a common future. The British people took a political decision in June 2016 - a referendum with a clear majority from the British public. We are a democracy and obviously we respect that decision and that conclusion and so the UK Government are now taking the necessary steps to leave the institutions and legal structures of the EU, but they are not remotely 'pulling up the drawbridge'. As the President of the French Senate wisely said, we must continue to work and co-operate together. And if I may say this just in response briefly to what our colleague from Ireland said, I hope we can find sensible solutions to the issues concerned with the border. Britain is working very hard to do that and anything we can do in the House of Lords to help in that process we will certainly do. I am sure that we can reach agreement as the result of a constructive dialogue.

Mr. President, far from there being disagreement about the principle of Brexit, there is some disagreement obviously about what kind of Brexit, whether it will be soft or hard or somewhere in the middle, but something everyone is agreed on is that international relations, bilateral and multilateral, will assume a greater importance as we end our membership of the EU. We have just had the honour of hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London and there are opportunities obviously in that arena, but there is also fundamental important work to be done with you, our European friends and allies. The British are, after all, European and we forget that at our peril!

As part of my role as Lord Speaker, I welcome many visitors to our Parliament and explain our constitutional role and the work we carry out. Some of the most interesting meetings are with other Speakers and members of other chambers who come and speak about the challenges we share, regardless of our nationality. Just before I left, for example, I met the speaker of the Ukrainian

parliament. I am sure that you would recognize some of those problems: security and cyber security threats, the challenge of communicating our work on social media and things of that kind and not to mention the steady creep of Executive power! Sharing our experiences and our insights and building relationships at a parliamentary level can only be a good thing.

One of my most enjoyable moments as Lord Speaker was last July when I had the honour of welcoming the King and Queen of Spain to Westminster during their state visit to the United Kingdom. And it was an important visit. As part of their visit to parliament the King addressed both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and it was symbolic in one important way. We met in the Royal Gallery, which is a beautiful room at the heart of the Palace of Westminster. It is decorated with scenes from the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo. One battle scene depicted a time when Spain and the United Kingdom were allies, the other battle scene depicted a time when we were not, and I can think of other examples around Europe. But times have changed. The wreaths we laid earlier today are a reminder of the difficult times in our shared history, but Europe has changed, we have changed. Yes, we still have disagreements, but we Europeans have many, many more things in common than things that divide us. It is that commonality which we should focus on.

Something many of you have asked me about is the process of Brexit and the role of the House of Lords in that process. Following the referendum, the EU Notification of Withdrawal Bill was passed in March last year and consequently our Prime Minister, Theresa May, triggered the two-year process of negotiations. We are now in the process of passing the EU Withdrawal Bill which will repeal the European Communities Act 1972 and transfer the corpus of EU law into UK law before we leave. It sounds perhaps simple. Not quite so. As with all Bills, the Commons and the Lords must agree before this Bill becomes law. The Commons considered the Bill earlier this year and sent it up to the Lords. In passing the Bill, the Lords amended the Bill no less than fifteen times on matters as wide ranging as environmental standards, the date of exit, the Northern Irish Good Friday Agreement and the Customs Union.

This is our constitutional role - to amend the Bill and in doing so, to ask the Commons to think again. The Lords can have its say, but the Commons, the elected Chamber, must prevail in the end. We know that, the Commons know that, and the Government knows that, but it didn't stop some politicians and some in the media incorrectly stating the position. Last week the Commons considered these amendments - some were accepted, some, probably most, were rejected - but there is only, I think, one major outstanding amendment which will be considered by the House of Lords on Monday. Our power is to ask the Commons to consider again. But it would be odd, as some of our critics apparently suggest, if this Bill - one of profound importance - was the only Bill which escaped such scrutiny. We are a strong enough parliamentary democracy to permit differences of view, honestly held - particularly with the safeguard that the final decision rests with elected members of Parliament. Regardless of one's political beliefs, parliamentary scrutiny makes for better law-making and ultimately for better laws. It is the great justification of the bicameral system.

If I can give one specific high-profile case, far away from Brexit, from the House of Lords when this was seen in action: Alf Dubs, a former MP and now a member of the Lords, tabled an amendment to the Immigration Bill in 2016, which required the UK Government to accept 3,000 child refugees who were displaced as a result of the refugee crisis. When the Bill was sent back to the Commons, the matter received a great deal of media attention and so the Commons debated it and they also accepted the amendment. The result of us asking the Commons to think again therefore was that we managed to change for the better thousands of young lives and it is an achievement that I and many of my colleagues are incredibly proud of.

Lastly, Mr. President, let me just say this: we live in challenging times, not only in our own countries, but across the whole of Europe. It makes absolutely no sense for common challenges to be faced alone and it is my hope that the relationships we establish here and the experiences that we share

will make for a more united response and above all will make for a Europe which enjoys peace and prosperity for years to come.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you for your intervention. Undoubtedly, until the conclusion of negotiations on the future framework of cooperation with the EU, the Brexit theme will top the agenda of both British and European officials.

Everywhere in the world, periods of institutional and legal rearrangements such as the one that the United Kingdom is currently undergoing could be used by different groups of interests as a tool to discredit the democratic institutions, which are essential to a well-functioning state based on the rule of law. This is yet another reason to welcome your recent example of defending the members and the activities of the House of Lords.

Dear colleagues, before discussing the last item on the agenda, do you have any questions, or comments, or remarks to do? No.

Thank you all.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu President of the Senate of Romania**

I would like to inform you that we have received under the item *Any other business* a request from Slovenia. Are there at this time other requests? Thank you.

I will invite now Mr. Alojz Kovšca, the President of the National Council of Slovenia, to take the floor. Our Slovenian colleague wishes to bring to our attention his initiative concerning a possible collaboration with the Association of the Senates, Shoora and the Equivalent Councils from Africa and the Arab World (ASSECAA).

### **Mr. Alojz Kovšca President of the National Council of Slovenia**

First of all, let me express my deep gratitude to the President of the Romanian Senate for the opportunity to present the initiative for collaboration between our Association and the Association of Senates, Shoora and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World at this meeting.

In October 2017, my predecessor had the opportunity to visit the Upper House of the Parliament of Morocco (House of Councillors), whose composition and competences are similar to the ones of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia. The President of the House of Councillors Mr. Abdelhakim Benchamach, has informed me that the Upper House of the Parliament of Morocco currently presides over the Association of Senates, Shoora and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World. In this regard, he has expressed his willingness for cooperation between European and African Associations.

Living in a globalised world, we are facing more and more global challenges that should, in my opinion, be addressed globally, and not just regionally. Therefore, I strongly believe that we should expand our collaboration also to other non-member Second Chambers in order to successfully deal with common challenges.

As we all know, migration, climate change, lack of water resources, terrorism, wars and even regional inequalities still persist in developed and undeveloped countries and represent a serious global threat which cannot be managed only at the national or even at the European Union level alone. Today, more than ever, we acknowledge the importance of solving problems at their source by means that are acceptable, not by intervention of countries, but by local communities. For these reasons, we have to establish a good dialogue with representatives of these countries, which will lead to permanent solutions.

We are all aware that the population in Europe is aging, that we do not have unlimited facilities and programmes for illegal migrants and that we have to develop and promote high added value technology in order to provide our citizens with the quality of life that they demand, to guarantee the high standard of human rights to those in need and to develop a strong and competitive economy in a globalised world.

In this regard, I appeal to all of you to take your share of responsibility and encourage the debate on stronger cooperation with other Second Chambers from Africa and Arab World regarding the common challenges that we are facing today.

Thank you for your attention.

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Thank you, Mr. President. Your initiative for a bi-regional opening towards exchanges with a similar association with Arab and African backgrounds aims at strengthening the profile of our Association on the scene of multilateral diplomacy.

I invite the delegations to take note and to feel free to react and make known their points of view. If there are there observations or comments, please, let me know. Thank you all.

Otherwise, I would like to remark that these aspects need a reflection upon and a plan ahead, and I will ask the secretariat to make available the text of the intervention for appropriate consideration. I'm forwarding this reflection theme to the next AES President, Mr. Gerard Larcher, while pointing out the support of the outgoing President for exploring ways to best accomplish our goals through this initiative presented by Slovenia.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Mr. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**  
**President of the Senate of Romania**

Distinguished guests,  
Dear participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our proceedings are coming to an end.

With your permission, I will try to summarize the particular experience of the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Association of the European Senates, which we had the honor to host.

First of all, I am delighted because for the first time in the last 14 years of the history of the Association, a new full-fledged member joined us. Let me welcome once again the Senate of Ireland to our family!

Likewise, on behalf of the AES members, I would like to thank Mr. Gérard Larcher, Speaker of the Senate of France, for the initiative to host next year the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Association of European Senates.

Dear colleagues,

I was mentioning at the opening of the meeting that none of our states could continue to live with the illusion of a glass bell that makes visible, but at the same time totally separates national issues from regional and international ones. Nor was it possible to believe any longer that solutions to national problems could still be found by means of watertight policies devised exclusively at national level.

In my opinion, as long as we share the common values of democracy and the rule of law and as long as we act in full compliance with international law, we can build with confidence our country strategies, based on the precept that „common problems need common solutions”.

I would like to acknowledge your meaningful contributions to today’s thematic debate on the role of parliaments in a Europe faced with challenges to the economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Clearly, the mere membership of the European Union or any other institutionalized cooperation body does not solve by itself any of the problems confronting our nations, be they economic, social, environmental problems, security problems and so on.

Nevertheless, the actions that can make a difference in my opinion, and very soon even, are the following:

- Making more instrumental and increasing transparency of the legal framework regulating the cooperation of Senates with other state institutions, the civil society and all social stakeholders, in full observance of constitutional provisions;
- Improving the modalities in which Senates are making use of their institutional functions regarding public policies and strategies of national interest, with a particular emphasis on ensuring inclusiveness and full observance of citizens’ interests, monitoring the implementation, making progress assessments and the necessary adjustments, and performing a rigorous final assessment, from the perspective of the economic and social impact;

- And last but not least, better engaging Senators in substantiating and promoting, at the different levels of the European debate and decision making, the interests of the citizens whom they represent.

And starting from this point, I would like to submit to your attention the following topic of reflection: how can we continue and deepen the dialogue and cooperation among Senates across Europe, including at the level of general secretariats and parliamentary administrations, beyond the annual sessions of the Association?

Which should be the features of a mechanism enabling us to have a more consistent exchange of views and coordination with a view to supporting harmonized positions, so as to make sure, for instance, that the contributions of national parliaments are taken into consideration by the European institutions proportionate with the legitimacy weight they carry?

What about the Senates' contribution to civic education in the spirit of participative and responsible democracy at European level, which is a prerequisite for a real and sound partnership with the different components of civil society?

I am convinced that by extending the scope of cooperation under the aegis of the Association of European Senates and by making it more diverse along the above mentioned lines, the Senate institution will become more relevant and more representative in each of our countries.

Dear colleagues,

I hope that today's events have succeeded to meet your expectations. Let me thank you once again for your participation.

With this, I declare the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the European Senates of Europe closed!