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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: “THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – A CENTRAL ACTOR OF THE EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION (1952 - 2022)”

Petia Gueorguieva*

On the occasion of European celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the European Parliament a two days intense international conference was held on 22-23 of November 2022 at Sciences Po Strasbourg, University of Strasbourg and at the Palais du Rhin on the topic: *Le Parlement européen – un acteur central de la construction européenne (1952-2022)* (The European Parliament – a central actor of the European construction). The conference reunited diplomats, representatives of public authorities, representatives of different services of the EP, MEPs, and researchers and experts from eleven universities from seven European countries : Sciences Po Strasbourg; University Paris-Nanterre; University Paris 8, the Institut d'études européennes, University Paris 1, Lund University in Sweden, Université libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, CY Cergy Paris University; University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, University Paris-Saclay, Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica; Slovakia; New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria, the Foundation Europanova; Sciences Po Paris and College of Europe in Bruges.

It is interesting to note that on 12th of March 2008 there was a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, considering the Constituent Session of the European Parliamentary Assembly, acting as a parliamentary institution for the European Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, and held on 19th of March 1958, as the very beginning of the institution¹.

The international conference held in Strasbourg as well as the European

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¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/presse/pr_dossier/2008/EN/03A-DV-PRESSE_BKG\(2008\)02-26\(22350\)_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/presse/pr_dossier/2008/EN/03A-DV-PRESSE_BKG(2008)02-26(22350)_EN.pdf) ; “Building a Parliament: 50 Years of European History”, European Parliament 50th Birthday series, Brussels, 2008.

Parliament celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the European Parliament in 2022 place the very beginning of the European Parliament on 10th of September 1952 with the opening of the first session of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, under the presidency of Paul-Henry Spaak².

The international conference was organized by Sciences Po Strasbourg, University of Strasbourg in cooperation with the journal *Hermès*, published by the French National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris, and which has published in October 2022 its 90th issue, dedicated to *L'Europe, entre incommunicatons et guerres (Europe, between uncommunications and wars)*. The event received the support of several institutions and authorities. It was supported by the Municipality of Strasbourg, the Prefect of the Region Grand Est, etc. The opening speeches were delivered by the director of Sciences Po, Strasbourg Prof. **Jean-Philippe Heurtin**, by the Mayor of Strasbourg Mrs, **Jeanne Barseghian**; the chargé of European affaires to the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Paris Mr **Tomáš Chrobák**; the Director of the MEPs Research Service, Directorate General for Parliamentary Research Services (DG EPRS) Mr **Etienne Bassot**, and by Mr **Franç Debíé**, Director of Directorate of the Library & Knowledge Services, DG EPRS.

The conference was structured in several multidisciplinary thematic panels and roundtables covering topics on the history, the powers, the actors, the culture, the personalities, and the importance of the European Parliament.

The first panel: *The EP – the invention of a new democratic form?*, chaired by **Sylvain Schirmann**, Sciences Po, Strasbourg, was focused on the history of the European parliament. **Antonin Cohen** (University Paris-Nanterre) presented a paper on the “silent revolution” of the birth of a transnational parliament and its role in the European construction. **Birte Wassenberg** (Sciences Po Strasbourg) analysed the political culture and dynamics in the European Parliament from 1979 to 1989. The contribution of **Wolfram Kaiser** (head of the EP History Service, DG EPRS) studied the European Parliament and the institutional Reform of the European Communities in the 1980s. **Michel Manganot** (University Paris 8, Institut d'études européennes) focused on the history and the memory of the EP in comparison with the Commission and the Council. **Alexandra Ongono Pomme** (University of Strasbourg) presented a paper on the evolution of relationship between the EP and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of

² https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/fr/package/70th-anniversary-of-european-parliament_24703

Europe.

The second panel, moderated by **Maria Diaz Crego**, Citizens' Policies Unit, DG EPRS, was focused on the *Political actors of the EP*, and encompassed five interesting contributions on different actors and aspects. **Valentina Vardabasso** (University Paris 1) analysed the EP presidency of the first directly elected parliament and the first woman in this office – Mrs **Simone Veil**. **Sébastien Michon** (CNRS, UMR SAGE, Strasbourg) analysed the governance of the EP. **Francisco Roa Bastos** (University Paris 1) focused on political parties at EU level questioning their functions and the strategic institutionalization as European political formations. **Laura Landorff** (Lund University, Sweden) presented a study of the Intergroups in the European Parliament as Exclusive Arenas for Civil Society Deliberation. **Nathalie Brack** (Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium) analysed the evolution and the impact of the Euroscepticism in the EP. The presentations were followed by interesting discussion on Euroscepticism, on the possible success or failure of the EU election reform and the creation of an EU-wide constituency, promoted by MEPs.

The third panel of the conference: *The Old and New frontiers in Europe*, was chaired by the MEP **Marie Arena** and reunited analyses on very important issues such as the issue of migrants and the EP (**Étienne Deschamps**, DG EPRS); the resettlement of refugees and the EP (**Léa Lemaire**, Université libre de Bruxelles); the asylum policy and the EP as a critical actor (**Martin Deleixhe**, Université libre de Bruxelles) ; the of EP and the CFSP (**Alexis Vahlas**, Sciences Po Strasbourg) and a paper discussing the relationship between the West and the East (**Joanna Nowicki**, CY Cergy Paris University).

The fourth panel, chaired by **Gilles Rouet**, (Paris Saclay University and member of the Bureau of the review Hermès), treated the responses of “The EP to the challenge of the society of knowledge”. **Markus J. Prutsch** (Secretariat of the Committee on culture/DG for internal policies of the Union, EP) analysed the European Parliament and the challenges of a collective European memory. **Céleste Bonnamy** (ULB & University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) studied the EP in relation to the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market. **Thierry Côme** (University Paris-Saclay) shared his research on the EP in the construction of the European space of higher education. **Mária Huraj Rošteková** (Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia) presented a research on the role of the education and media coverage of Europe. **Élise Bernard** (Europanova foundation, Paris) analysed the European integration and the civil society.

A first round table *The Parliament seized by the social and economic*

challenges, held in the Palais du Rhin, was organized by **Hélène Michel** (Sciences Po, Strasbourg, the Interdisciplinary Institute MAKerS) to discuss the influence and the role of the European Parliament in the overlapping crises and challenges for all Europe and the world.

The purpose of the second roundtable, chaired by **Olivier Costa** (CNRS / Sciences Po and College of Europe, Bruges), was to reveal the challenges of the seat of the EP in the city of Strasbourg. The roundtable brought together Mrs **Josiane Chevalier**, Prefect of Bas-Rhin and the region of Grand Est; Mrs **Anne Sander**, MEP and representative of the EP President **Roberta Metsola**; Mrs **Jeanne Barseghian**, Mayor of Strasbourg and first Vice-president of Eumétropole and other officials.

The conference did not pay sufficient attention to the war in Ukraine neither to the issue of the EP ethic code, or issues of corruption and the role of the lobbies in EP. A couple of weeks later one of the biggest corruption scandals in the EP exploded – the so called Catargate implicating one vice-president of the EP and several MEPs, former MEPs and foundations linked to them. The president of the EP **Roberta Metsola** declared that with this scandal the EP, the European democracy and the open, free societies are under attack.³ However, the international conference and the scandal reveal the importance of the European Parliament. **Olivier Costa** has noted that the EP “almost devoid of powers at its origins” has gradually become “one of the most influential legislatures”, able to control the executive, to amend the bills and the budget, and to debate all issues of interest for MEPs (Costa 2014: 77). The role of the EP revealed its significance during the crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, in its positions and resolutions in favour of democracy, the founding values of the EU and of the rule of law. This role was validated with the resolution voted by MEPs to declare Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism (23 of November 2022⁴), and for the creation of a special tribunal on Russia’s crime of aggression against Russia (19 of January 2023)⁵.

³ EP President Roberta Metsola on the ongoing investigations by Belgium authorities”, 12/12/2022, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221212IPR64532/ep-president-metsola-on-the-ongoing-investigations-by-belgian-authorities>

⁴ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221118IPR55707/european-parliament-declares-russia-to-be-a-state-sponsor-of-terrorism>

⁵ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230113IPR66653/ukraine-war-meps-push-for-special-tribunal-to-punish-russian-crimes>

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