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**"THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTS IN AN ENLARGED EUROPE:
INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS"**

**REPORT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES
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1. The importance of inter-parliamentary co-operation and the role of the Conference of EU Speakers

The reunification of the European Union is placing a huge burden of responsibility on our Parliaments. Precisely because the Union does not merge states but unites peoples, as Jean Monnet famously stated, it is primarily the crucial task of representative assemblies to involve the public in every member state in this great undertaking. Furthermore, it is also their task - also to be performed through effective links between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament - to fashion a European public opinion that is aware of the common identity of our continent and of the great project which we are implementing.

Reunification is not only bringing about internal changes to the Union, making reform absolutely indispensable, but it is also changing its external positioning. It is moving not only its physical borders, but above all its geopolitical borders. This is making it even more necessary to create a Union that is capable of acting as a unitary player on the world stage, particularly in the areas that adjoin it.

Inside and outside the Union, co-operation between Parliaments has an essential part to play in this phase.

In general terms, co-operation can strengthen the role of Parliaments by offering them independent tools for fact-finding and appraisal in addition to those provided by their own governments. This can help enable representative assemblies, and through them the public opinion, to become more familiar with and better understand each other's positions and to develop shared policies.

If co-operation is to achieve these results effectively, it must be properly co-ordinated, carefully prepared and targeted at specific objectives.

Co-operation directly involves the Conference of the European Union Speakers, which is charged with acting as a forum for "the exchange of experiences, as well as for the promotion of common action *on topics related to the role of Parliaments and the organisation of parliamentary functions, also with respect to the forms and tools of inter-parliamentary co-operation.*"

The Conference could therefore be responsible for defining a framework for the co-ordination of inter-parliamentary co-operation within the European Union and in limited areas of co-operation outside the Union, solely for those aspects of common interest to the EU Parliaments. The Conference would thereby perform a great service to our Parliaments, helping to enhance the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary meetings and contacts between parliamentary administrations and to

rationalise the use of the invaluable parliamentary time devoted to this activity.

At the European Union level, the Presiding Officers of national Parliaments and of the European Parliament could also promote other types of joint initiatives by co-ordinating certain events on their parliamentary calendars. I am thinking in particular of the possibility of organising simultaneous debates in all our national parliamentary assemblies and in the European Parliament on the Union's action programmes and on the major issues on the European agenda. This would enhance the role of each and every Parliament, giving particular force to their ideas and contributing greatly to bring public opinion closer to European Union in every country. Every year, or every six months if deemed appropriate, the Conference could identify issues and establish a timetable for these debates.

To this end it would be useful to take up the proposal made by the European Parliament on various occasions to produce an "inter-parliamentary agreement", which could be the most appropriate instrument to create a framework for co-ordinating forms of co-operation and the *fora* for them.

The Conference of the European Union Speakers could in this way operate more effectively as the organising centre of the network of Parliaments and their joint activities within the Union. This inalienable and, in my view, essential role should also be explicitly recognised in the draft Constitutional Treaty, which rightly refers to the promotion of co-operation between the European Parliament and the national Parliaments.

Against this background, the ideas that I would like to address in this paper for the Athens Conference of EU Speakers refer to the action that the Parliaments of the reunified Europe might perform in relation to the external areas of the Union and the role that the EU Speakers Conference can play to ensure its effectiveness. The reasoning behind what I shall be saying is based on a number of things that, I believe, may be agreed by my colleagues:

- *the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the tasks of the Conference of EU Speakers, in the direction I have just mentioned;*
- *the fact that every Parliament acts and will continue to act in this field, exercising their full autonomy;*
- *the need for the Presiding Officers of the members of the Union, and those that will be acceding to it in a few months' time, to carefully examine any possible form of coordination and any possible joint initiatives we might undertake in our external parliamentary relations.*

In this report I shall try to reconstruct a framework of the external relations of the European Union's Parliaments, in general terms and without attempting to

be exhaustive, finally offering a few general remarks to my colleagues.

2. The main dimensions of the external relations of the European Union Parliaments

The development of European integration, which is now culminating on the constitutional plane, has never been based on the blind defence of positions but rather on dialogue and co-operation. The Parliaments of the European Union are the most immediate and incisive interpreters of this approach, to which they contribute the democratic legitimacy of direct representation of their peoples. Parliamentary diplomacy is emerging as the most flexible instrument for fostering political dialogue between political leaders and civil societies in an international context characterised by the end of the division of the world into two opposing blocs, the explosion of globalisation and pervasive migratory flows that are altering the demographic balance of the planet.

European reunification is forcing our countries to make an even greater commitment to external relations, for two reasons. First, a larger Europe will have to perform fully its role on the world stage; second, it is important to not erect new barriers in place of the Iron Curtain and to forge deeper relations with the Union's new neighbours to both the East and the South.

This sensibility is perhaps most acute in Parliaments, and can therefore best foster reciprocal understanding and the identification of solutions to our shared problems. The parliamentary approach makes it possible to integrate the three main components that have traditionally marked the Union's external relations: the political dimension, development aid and trade policy.

The framework of inter-parliamentary relations is highly varied and complex in terms of the institutional fora in which co-operation unfolds, often in tandem with similar inter-governmental initiatives. An initial examination enables us to identify a number of main types:

- a) the activities in which all the Parliaments of the Union participate, as such (for example Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary cooperation);
- b) the activities in which all the Parliaments of the Union participate individually (for example the International Parliamentary Assemblies);
- c) the activities in which some of the Union's Parliaments participate because of their membership of a particular regional area (such as the Nordic Council or the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the Black Sea Cooperation, etc.);

- d) bilateral activities in which individual Parliaments of the Union pursue relations with one or more third Parliaments.

From the point of view of the contents of these activities and of the goals, five main areas can be detected:

- partnership, or strategic rapprochement;
- promoting international security, conflict prevention, and supporting peace-making;
- strengthening democracy and raising the threshold of human rights protection;
- assisting the parliamentary institutions and civil society;
- combating poverty and underdevelopment, in terms of what is now known as "ownership".

But even these brief references to the issues show that inter-parliamentary cooperation by the Parliaments of the Union has already been extremely profitable and active for a long time, and it would be absolutely pointless to try to bureaucratically standardise it to some form of unity; it is precisely from the independence of each Assembly that it acquires the necessary flexibility for dealing and dialoguing with extremely widely differing situations.

However, there is the scope for an exchange of experience and for linkages, as it can be seen from the following short reconstruction of the external relations of the Parliaments of the European Union, to have some indication at least of the many collective fora in which these relations are conducted. The section provides an overview in terms of geographic area, and is offered *purely by way of example*, without any pretence at being exhaustive. It is obviously just a first approach, *work in progress*, open to all contributions to flesh it out or correct it where necessary. But I felt it would be appropriate to contextualise the issue and the possible future prospects.

The "Greater Europe" of human rights

With reference to the issue of human rights, the work of the Parliaments of every European Union country, acting individually, is very significant, within the context of the deliberations of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.¹ This

¹ The present 44 member States of the Council of Europe are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. The Parliamentary Assembly is the consultative body of the Council of Europe,

organisation, which was instituted as long ago as 1949, now comprises all the countries of the European continent following the recent accessions of Bosnia and Serbia and Montenegro, with the only major exception of Belarus. The Assembly plays an important part in the work of the Council of Europe, particularly by electing the judges to the Court of Human Rights and the members of the Committee for the Abolition of Torture, providing prior opinions on all international Conventions, and closely monitoring all commitments and obligations in relation to the defence of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, with which all member countries undertake to comply upon accession. One particularly important aspect of its work has been to secure the abolition of the death penalty throughout the continent of Europe. The parliamentarians play an important part in this work both as national delegations and through their membership of various political groupings (along the lines of the main European political groups, also in the European Parliament).

For the ten European Union countries which are already part of the Western European Union, the same parliamentarians who are members of the Council of Europe Assembly are also members of the WEU Assembly, an organisation concerned with defence and security issues, which is currently going through a period of transition in order to transfer its activities to the European Union itself.

Lastly, but not in terms of its importance, is the fact that the Council of Europe regularly convenes Conferences of the Speakers of the European Assemblies, alternating between Strasbourg and one of the Council of Europe member countries. The most recent of these Conference was in Zagreb on 10 and 11 May 2002, and its agenda included the question of parliamentary cooperation on specific Council of Europe issues. There is no doubt that the reunification of the Union will help to make the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe more effective by strengthening links between the member States.

The Euro-Mediterranean dimension

The Euro-Mediterranean Dimension is perhaps the geopolitical framework for the Union's external relations where parliamentary cooperation has become the most

whose statute was signed in London on 5 May 1949. (The current 44 member States of the Council of Europe are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. The Parliamentary Assembly is the consultative body of the Council of Europe, whose statute was signed in London on 5 May 1949.

The European Parliament dialogues directly with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

highly structured in recent years, starting with the Barcelona Declaration of 1995.² Parliamentary dialogue is the most appropriate place for expressing the novelty of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership whose purpose was to reach out to civil society and work towards establishing a common approach to joint development.

Parliamentary cooperation between both shores of the Mediterranean takes place in three different fora:

- a) the Conference of Speakers of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliaments, which was envisaged in 1996 and became institutionalised at Palma de Majorca in 1999, representing the highest level of political authority;
- b) the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum, which met for the first time in 1998 and has just held its 5th session, representing the national delegations of the 27 Partnership member countries, plus the European Parliament;
- c) the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Women Parliamentarians, which was established in Naples in 2000 and meets annually alternating between an EU country and a partner country.

The mature stage that this cooperation has already reached is evidenced from the fact that the Forum has now been transformed into a fully-fledged Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, which will have its Parliamentary Committees and become a fully-fledged institution of the Partnership, whose progress can be monitored in terms of the implementation of the association agreements. Decisions still have to be taken, however, on the criterion for its composition, because notwithstanding the fact that there is equality between both sides of the Mediterranean, the European component has to decide the proportion of European Parliamentary representation and the representation of the national Parliaments, which will soon rise from 15 to 25. Furthermore, reunification offers the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership a new perspective, because it also relates the countries of Central Eastern Europe to the southern shore of the Mediterranean, which have so far been less involved but which could provide great opportunities for debate. The accession of Cyprus and Malta to the Union, and also the fact that Turkey has been given the status of a candidate, even though the date for commencing negotiations has not yet been set, significantly exemplify the ongoing evolutionary process.

In the Euro-Mediterranean context, particular attention has also been paid to the Middle East, in order to foster the emergence of a parliamentary dimension to the peace process. The Conference of Speakers Liaison Group has held two meetings on this issue: the first in Rome in November 1999, and the second in Cairo in April 2002.

² The members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are the 15 Member States of the European Union, plus the 12 Mediterranean Basin countries (Algeria, Palestinian National Authority, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey).

But there have also been other opportunities for dialogue between the Israeli *Knesset* and the Palestinian Legislative Council, fostered by European mediation. Unfortunately, the results have not come up to expectations, and it is to be hoped that the initiative will be revived in the new international context, also to sustain the role of the European Union within the so-called "Quartet".

Lastly, another initiative deserving of mention, although limited, forms part of the cultural cooperation typifying the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: the Parliamentary Dialogue on ancient civilisations which two Union Parliaments (Greece and Italy) have been holding with two Parliaments of Islamic countries (Egypt and Iran), in search of their common historical roots, to form the basis for the endorsement of democratic values, tolerance and respect for diversity. The first phase of the initiative was completed last year in Athens after a series of seminars in which the parliamentarians of the countries involved brought up in open debate both the points of agreement and the divergences.

South-eastern Europe

The broadest cooperation in this area has been in relation to the implementation of the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe,³ at the initiative of the so-called parliamentary *Troika*, made up of the European Parliament, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Assembly. The *Troika* is chaired on a six-monthly rotating basis by each participating Assembly, which takes responsibility for organising a conference to which all interested Parliaments are invited (which therefore includes all the Parliaments of the Union on an individual basis). The initiative is nevertheless linked to the Conference of Speakers, and the Institutions who are parties to the Stability Pact, which was convened in September 1999 by the Croatian *Sabor*.

In the region there are also other important parliamentary cooperation fora, which refer to similar governmental initiatives, particularly those initiated by Italy and Greece, the two member States of the Union most directly involved. Regular meetings

³ The Stability Pact, which was a European Union initiative, was approved at Cologne in 1999 with the ultimate aim of fostering the integration of the countries in the region into Europe. The partner countries under the Pact are the countries in the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro); the 15 member States of the European Union and the European Commission, the non-EU members of the G8 (USA, Canada, Japan and Russia); several other countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Turkey); international organisations (the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, UNHCR, NATO and the OECD); the IFIs (World Bank, IMF, EBRD, EIB, and the Council of Europe Development Bank). In addition to these are a number of regional initiatives, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Central European Initiative (CEI), the South-eastern European Cooperation Initiative, and the South-eastern Europe Cooperation Process.

are therefore held on specific issues by the Parliaments of South-eastern Europe, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation,⁴ the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative,⁵ the two Quadrilateral Initiatives⁶ in which particular emphasis is placed on implementing the Pan-European Corridors 5 and 8 projects. The Central European Initiative Assembly is also interested in part of this. Members include both Italy and Austria, and the main commitment has been to fostering the reunification of the Union to the CEECs, but which is certainly going to develop further today, particularly in relation to the demand for Europe which is emerging in this region, exploiting its nature as a multi-lateral forum.⁷

As far as bilateral cooperation is concerned, I shall merely mention the assistance provided to the Kosovo Assembly, to whose management an official of the French National Assembly has been seconded. Many other Parliaments of the Union are also committed individually to supporting a particular branch of activity of that Assembly.

The Russian Federation and the Newly Independent States

The broadest framework within which parliamentary relations are being developed between the EU countries and the former USSR countries is certainly the

⁴ The member countries of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. The parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC, of which the representatives of national Parliaments are members, has a consultative role.

⁵ 7 countries belong to the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative: Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovenia. The following also attend the meeting of the IAI Presiding Officers as observers/special guests: the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, and the President of the Conference of the BSEC.

⁶ The "High" Quadrilateral Initiative comprises Italy, Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary and refers to Pan-European Corridor 5, Trieste-Ljubljana-Budapest-Kiev. The Parliamentary Dimension of the "High" Quadrilateral joins the Governmental Dimension and is based on the Joint Declaration of Intent concluded at Ljubljana (7 April 1999) and Rome (28 June 2000).

The "Low" Quadrilateral Initiative comprises Italy, Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia, and refers to Pan-European Corridor 8, an intermodal transport corridor which should link the Italian Adriatic Coast to Albania, and subsequently run through Macedonia and Bulgaria as far as the Black Sea. The Parliamentary Dimension of the "Low" Quadrilateral originated in the Joint Declaration of Intent signed on 2 May 1999 at Skopje by the Speakers of the Chamber of Deputies, the People's Assembly of Albania, the Bulgarian National Assembly, and the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia.

⁷ The Central European Initiative (CEI) comprises 17 countries: Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Serbia e Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Hungary.

As an integral part of the process of European integration, the CEI cooperates with the main European organisations and institutions, including the European Union in particular.

OSCE Assembly (which all the Parliaments of the Union attend *on an individual basis*),⁸ because this Organisation specialises in providing assistance for the transition towards democracy. The parliamentarians are therefore involved in such useful initiatives as electoral monitoring, visiting field missions, enhancing their sensitivities to the issue of human rights, but in particular with relation to such issues as the freedom of the mass media, the protection of national minorities and equal opportunities.

The main area in this geographic initiative is bilateral relations with the Russian Federal Assembly, in which all the Parliaments of the Union are individually involved. France and Italy have institutionalised their relations by initialling a protocol and setting up a Grand Commission which meets yearly and deals with foreign policy issues and domestic legislation, also in reference to economic cooperation and foreign investment in Russia.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning Russia's wish to step up cooperation with all the countries of the Union as the parliamentary side of the strategic partnership. There is no need for me to emphasise the significance of promoting such a relationship in the light of the new common borders that the Union now shares following reunification and the strategy of more integrated relations with neighbouring States.

The Northern European Dimension

The Nordic member States of the Union are strongly committed to promoting forms of regional parliamentary cooperation in their area in order to dialogue both with countries that are traditionally linked, but have opted to remain outside the Union (Iceland and Norway), as well as the United States and Russia. The Nordic Council has existed for 50 years, and comprises the five Nordic countries and three autonomous territories (Greenland, the Faeroes and Aland),⁹ but it was also recently linked to the Parliamentary Conference of the Baltic Sea which held its 11th session in 2002.¹⁰

⁸ The 55 member countries of the OSCE are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Republic Slovakia, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom, United States, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

⁹ The Nordic Council represents the Parliamentary Dimension of Nordic regional cooperation which, at the intergovernmental level, is run by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic Council is composed of 87 parliamentarians, representing Parliaments of the 5 member countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway e Sweden) e the 3 autonomous territories (the Faeroes Islands, Aland e Greenland). The Council works closely, inter alia, with the Baltic Assembly, the Arctic Council and the European Parliament.

¹⁰ The Parliamentary Assemblies invited to the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, under the 1999

Baltic cooperation is particularly important because it involves the Russian Federation together with the three Baltic States, over which, as we all know, there exists a post-Soviet dispute. Because of the participation of the German Regional Assemblies, there is another interesting possibility for cooperation that could usefully be further explored, between these parliamentary authorities at different levels.

The Conference of Parliaments from the Arctic Region is quite recent. It met for the first time at Reykjavik in 1993. The EU countries belong to it (Finland, Sweden and Denmark) with the other two Nordic countries (Iceland and Norway), as well as the United States and the Russian Federation. However it is significant that the European Parliament also takes part as a full member, and five other EU countries are observers (France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, and United Kingdom).

From the point of view of the European Union, quite apart from matters of specific interest to them (environmental protection, social development, clearly linked to the geographical considerations) it is particularly important that integration should be developed with countries such as Iceland and Norway that have so far decided not to join any Community institutions, even though they take part regularly in the life of the Union, in the European Economic Area, in the Schengen Agreement and also take up the common stances adopted in terms of European foreign and security policies.

The Trans-Atlantic Dimension

The broadest framework for parliamentary relations with the other side of the Atlantic is certainly the NATO Assembly, to which all the Parliaments of the Union belong (the non-member countries of the Union have associate *status*) including the

regulations were the Parliaments of: Denmark, Estonia, Faeroes, Finland, Germany, Greenland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia e Sweden; the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council, the Council of Europe and OSCE Assemblies, the Parliament of Aland, the city of Bremen, the city of Hamburg, the region of Kaliningrad, the Republic of Karelia, the region of Leningrad, Meklenburg-Western Pomerania, the Federal City of St Petersburg, and Schleswig-Holstein.

European Parliament.¹¹ This is the natural place to seek a political agreement on NATO-ESDP relations, and also a deepening of trans-Atlantic relations, not only on the political and military plane, but also in economic and social terms. During the past two years, the Assembly has been organising a Trans-Atlantic Parliamentary Forum in Washington, precisely to bring out this aspect of its work.

The 1990 Trans-Atlantic Declaration reiterated that as far as institutional relations were concerned, the United States was the Union's main partner and that it had a privileged relationship with Canada. Never before, however, has the need been so strongly felt for close political dialogue to be pursued through the parliamentary channel. This is particularly indispensable in the wake of reunification, namely, the reunification of a continent sharing the same historical and cultural background.

Obviously there are intense bilateral relations between the EU Parliaments and the US Congress. For example, the European Parliament has structured a regular and interesting methodology for consultation through its *Trans-Atlantic Legislators' Dialogue*, which was created in 1999 within the framework of the commitments entered into by the European Union and the United States under the 1995 *New Trans-Atlantic Agenda*. The German Bundestag has long been engaged in fruitful exchanges. The Italian Chamber of Deputies signed a cooperation protocol last December. Obviously, cooperation with the British Parliament is firmly rooted. But there are certainly many areas in which these relations can be enhanced, perhaps seeking a Euro-US approach in overall terms by promoting bilateral relations between the Parliaments of the European Union and the United States Congress.

Latin America

¹¹ The 19 member States of the Atlantic Alliance are: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States.

Since 1989 the representatives of 20 European countries have been taking part, with associate member status: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, (Belarus formerly had associate status, but it was suspended in 1997). Invitees to the Assembly meetings include: the European Parliament, 7 countries with parliamentary observer status - Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Japan, Israel, Morocco, Sweden and Tunisia - and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the WEU.

Even though in 1999 the European Union held the very first Summit of Heads of State and Government with all the countries of Latin America, the closest relations exist with Mercosur,¹² also by virtue of the fact that the organisation is modelled on the blueprint of the European Community (one only has to recall that it has its own parliamentary Commission, which corresponds to the European Parliament, but it is still a second tier institution).

The Conference of the European Union Speakers has therefore invited the Presiding Officers of the Parliaments of the MERCOSUR countries to attend meetings on several occasions. They came for the first time to the Rome Conference in September 2000 and submitted a common declaration of intent to put this cooperation on a permanent basis.

EU-Mercosur parliamentary cooperation can do a great deal to address the main problem, which is to create a free trade area, and hence commercial relations on which tariff barriers still weigh heavily. The development not only of the Mercosur countries, but the whole of Latin America (there is also Colombia, which is trying to find credible economic alternatives to cultivating drugs) largely depends on opening up the markets. This can be done by a general political assessment which obviously has to be carried out by each Parliament.

Some countries of the Union, for historical reasons, set great store by their relations with Latin America, and this also has effects in terms of parliamentary cooperation. Spain and Portugal, for example, promoted the Conference of the Spanish-American Democratic Speakers, in which parliamentary democracy has proven to be a useful instrument for improving parliamentary work, bringing politics closer to the citizens, and heightening transparency and democratic participation.

Lastly, in 2000 Italy set up a network of Parliamentarians of Italian origin abroad, of which the Latin American component is certainly the largest.

Africa

The broadest form of parliamentary cooperation between Europe and Africa is the ACP-EU Joint Assembly, to which a delegation of the European Parliament and national delegations of the countries signatories to the Cotonou Agreements (2000) belong, and which also includes the countries of the Caribbean and the Pacific.¹³ The

¹² The South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) was instituted on 26 March 1991 with the signing of the Treaty of Asunción, by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Bolivia and Chile subsequently signed association agreements.

¹³ The ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) members of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly are: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Cameroon, The Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius,

Assembly meets twice a year, alternating between a European country and a non-European country. This procedure is certainly valuable, because it makes it possible to address all the issues relating to those Agreements. Perhaps, today, innovations could be introduced, with the participation of the national Parliaments of the member States of the Union in light of the integrated and cooperative approach which today characterises the development of the European parliamentary system.

Euro-African parliamentary dialogue is more than ever before the key to consolidating the democratic institutions in the ongoing process of defining State identities in Africa, training capable and honest leaders, and establishing a virtuous circle between political democracy and free market economy, and the definition by African peoples of their own development model.

There is therefore a great deal of space for cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels to strengthen the role of the African Parliaments in their societies within the framework of relations between the European Union and the nascent African Union (which has since replaced the OAU). It is crucial here to guarantee assistance for the structuring of the parliamentary services, including training the administrative staff, circulating sources of documentation and applying new technologies, with a view to promoting the participation of their citizens in public life.

Some European Parliaments, including the British and French, have long been working in this direction through the large parliamentary cooperation networks of the Commonwealth and Francophonie communities. More recently, the Bundestag embarked on an intense training programme for African parliamentarians and administrative staff. The Italian Chamber of Deputies organised the first Italy-Africa Parliamentary Day for Presiding Officers in May 2002, which was also attended by the President of the European Parliament. This was followed by the drafting of a cooperation plan for the benefit of certain pilot countries, particularly in relation to parliamentary computerisation and budgetary procedures for scrutinising the Executive.

Asia

The multilateral framework within which all the Union Parliaments participate as such is the parliamentary dimension of ASEM, in which the Union and its member States have relations with 10 Asian countries (Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, South

Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Dominican Republic, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Kitts and Nevis, Santa Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tomé, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Tanzania, Chad, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad e Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zambia e Zimbabwe.

The assembly is attended by 77 representatives of the ACP Parliaments and 77 members of the European Parliament.

Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam). ASEP, the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership, is its parliamentary dimension. Their biennial meetings are attended by parliamentarians from the partner countries representing their respective Parliaments, and the European Parliament. The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) also works in this sphere, specialising above all in fostering opportunities for young parliamentarians to meet and debate. The most recent meeting was in Venice in October 2002, on international migration.

Important bilateral parliamentary relations obviously exist with the main Asian countries, such as China, Japan and India. The most recent opportunity for dialogue was provided by the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Indian Parliament, for which an Inter-parliamentary Conference on Globalisation and Combating Terrorism was convened in New Delhi in January 2003.

Assistance to Afghanistan and Iraq - for the restoration of democracy there - should at all events be viewed as a priority objective not only of individual Parliaments, but also of a collective effort which will be all the more productive if it is carried forward on a joint and agreed basis.

The international organisations with a global vocation

The need to deal with globalisation issues has led to the establishment of a parliamentary dimension in the leading international organisations, to provide representatives of countries, who directly express the sovereignty of the people, with a possibility to interact by participating in the multilateral decision-making bodies.

The development of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) as the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations is an example of this: the idea was first broached at the Conference of Speakers in New York in August-September 2000, which adopted a declaration to this effect. All the Parliaments of the Union are obviously members of the IPU and take part in all its activities, coming together as members of the regional group known as "12+". The European Parliament is also a member of the IPU, with a special status. It is therefore perfectly natural and consistent with its objectives, for the IPU to be committed to linking the parliamentary presence both with the United Nations General Assembly and the various international conferences that are held under the aegis of the United Nations (on climate change, sustainable development, the protection of children, etc.). Perhaps it might be appropriate in this regard to promote a European-level linkage as a preliminary step, and possibly make provision for joint representation, and even specialisation by certain Parliaments on specific issues.

The Parliaments of the Union have also been focusing recently on promoting a parliamentary dimension for the World Trade Organisation (WTO), on the understanding that this is a key institution for the governance of globalisation. This is a telling example in which individual national Parliaments have joined with the

European Parliament (remembering the Community competence over trade) and have also been lobbying the Inter-parliamentary Union.¹⁴

The Parliamentary Network of the World Bank (PNoWB) is another particularly interesting initiative. It was created as a priority by a number of European Union Parliaments for the World Bank. Based in Paris, this network is becoming one of the most active fora for discussing North-South divide-related issues, combating poverty and overcoming economic and social imbalances worldwide. The parliamentary network organises an annual conference¹⁵ and a series of thematic seminars. In conjunction with the World Bank it organises missions to various countries to monitor Bank-financed projects.

There are other important cooperation networks involving Europe's parliamentarians, for example to activate the International Criminal Court (ICC) or for combating corruption, organised crime and drug trafficking.

In 2002, there were two important parliamentary events relating to the institution of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which came into force on 1 July 2002: the first one was organised by the Spanish Senate in June 2002, and the second by the PGA (Parliamentarians for Global Action) in Ottawa in November that year. The Ottawa Conference adopted a Plan of Action to promote initiatives requesting the institution of a parliamentary dimension of the ICC, and a second session of the Conference has been convened for 2003.

The Global Organisation of Parliaments Against Corruption (GOPAC) aims to build up a parliamentarians' network, structured by areas or on a national basis, with a global outreach, to coordinate the work of Parliaments and to help fight corruption. Its main purpose is to lay the foundations for a fruitful exchange of technical and legislative information, and to coordinate the work of GOPAC with initiatives by other international organisations pursuing the same aims. The Conference instituting GOPAC was held in Ottawa on 13-16 October 2002. In the final Declaration the participants undertook to set up local networks to foster debate on issues relating to combating corruption in their respective Parliaments.

¹⁴ The IPU and the European Parliament recently organised the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Geneva on 17-18 February 2003. Its final Declaration reiterated the need for a stable parliamentary dimension to be created within the organisation at its annual meeting and Ministerial Conferences, beginning with the one that is scheduled to be convened at Cancún (Mexico) in September 2003.

¹⁵ The PNoWB 4th Annual Conference was held in Athens on 8-10 March 2003.

3. Conclusions

The overview of the fora and forms of the external relations of the Union's Parliaments - albeit not complete - clearly shows the breadth and complexity of these links and their development. The new needs of the very process of European integration are driving in this direction, as is the new reality of reunification and repositioning that this involves at the international level.

The Conference of EU Speakers - exercising its own specific functions - could ***embark on a joint debate to identify possible means of rationalising and coordinating the International cooperation from the point of view of the Parliaments of the European Union, and the areas in which it would be appropriate to improve the linkage of their external activities and the ways of doing so.***

The considerations which I believe should be our starting point, and which I wish to draw to the attention of the Conference of EU Speakers may be summarised briefly as follows:

- I. It is precisely because of the weight and role of a reunified Europe in the world that our Parliaments' relations outside the Union, in all of their varied forms, must multiply and deepen; *they will be able to do so only if there is effective co-ordination of the fora and manner in which they are conducted.* The very expansion of co-operation increases the risk of duplication and irrational use of parliamentary resources.
- II. It is therefore important for relations between Parliaments to be conducted as a rule through their Presiding Officers, facilitating coordination. Generally speaking, where the conditions exist, the most useful method that could be used as a benchmark for developing forms of systematic parliamentary cooperation could be to begin by defining *programmes of meetings and discussions on specific issues between the parliamentary organs having competence by subject-matter, from time to time*, by agreement with the external authorities involved, on a case-by-case basis. Such programmes might integrate or even replace some existing relations.
- III. *We must make a joint response to the growing demand for Europe on the international stage, and that includes in the inter-parliamentary sphere.* A common foreign action of the reunified Europe is what the people of Europe consider to be most necessary with respect to the reform of the Union, a

priority that has not been changed by the recent difficulties linked to the conflict in Iraq. The Convention is taking major, realistic steps in this direction, above all with regard to the Union's single external representation. Parliaments will have to take account of this as well: a unitary, or at least co-ordinated, approach to external relations on the part of the Union's Parliaments adds political legitimacy, especially in broader inter-parliamentary organisations (for example, the Inter-parliamentary Union or the possible parliamentary dimension of the World Trade Organisation, which could grow into an even more important role).

- IV. This is the only approach that can also create the will between Parliaments to cooperate, fostering regional integration and staving off any nationalism or isolationism.
- V. The fields and the methods for establishing linkage between the Parliaments of the Union in their international relations could, in my opinion, be identified in terms of *general indications set out by the Conference of EU Speakers*, to be applied with the greatest flexibility depending on the fora it is deemed appropriate to involve. These indications could be set out in the "*Inter-parliamentary agreement*" that has been proposed by the European Parliament, which would appear to be the most appropriate instrument for laying down common criteria for this and for other areas of common interest in the organisation of parliamentary functions.
- VI. The external relations of the Union's Parliaments must certainly continue to cover all geographical and political areas, but at the same time they must take account of priorities determined by this stage of European history. It could be useful for the EU Speakers Conference to systematically identify common areas of priority interest on the basis of the positions of their parliamentary assemblies, without prejudice to their attention to other regions and, obviously, the full independence of each Parliament in its own initiatives.
- VII. In this phase, two dimensions appear to call for priority attention on the part of our Parliaments:
 - i. *neighbouring areas*, namely *the Balkans*, with a view to accession to the Union, *the Mediterranean*, so crucial to the Union's present and future, and our new neighbours *Russia and the Independent States*. It is important that the recent Commission proposal and the draft Constitutional Treaty should frame relations with these areas in terms of a new strategy, with the aim of achieving a new level of integration. It is a further example of the Union's ability to identify new and flexible

forms of interaction and government of globalisation. These objectives, and the gradual approximation of legislation that they entail, underscore the major contribution that inter-parliamentary co-operation can make. An essential component of this framework is the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly;

- ii. *transatlantic relations*. Today, in my view, a specific commitment is needed to promote systematic bilateral *inter-parliamentary cooperation between the EU (that is to say, the European Parliament and the national Parliaments) and the USA, in all the many areas of common interest*. That could make a powerful contribution to strengthening the Euro-Atlantic linkage. Never before has there been such a need for greater understanding between our political classes and for deeper political dialogue, which the parliamentary channel itself could help lead to a shared vision of international issues and a renewed awareness that we all belong to a single community of shared values.