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Words of welcome for the Conference of Finance Committee Chairpersons

29 / 30 April in Berlin

Welcome to Berlin! I am delighted to be able to welcome you to this conference, which aims to intensify the cooperation between parliaments in Europe a step further and lend a parliamentary dimension to the German EU Council Presidency.

The expectations placed on this Presidency are high – so high, in fact, that I have taken to pointing out that it lasts only six months, not six years. It is obvious that, no matter how ambitious the agenda, it is impossible to deal with all European issues during this time. I do hope, however, that the many initiatives developed during these months will have an impact and that we will be able to place the EU – to use the phrase from the Berlin Declaration – on “a renewed common basis” by 2009.

I know that all of us here agree that this basis includes strengthening the position of parliaments at European level. As national competences have been transferred to the Community, powers have shifted from the parliaments to the governments of the Member States. Necessary though this is, we must remain on our guard that it does not result in a creeping erosion of parliaments’ constitutional significance – and ensure that, on the contrary, parliaments carry out their tasks confidently. Efficient procedures must therefore be established within and between parliaments to enable them to become more visible at European level and, in addition to safeguarding their responsibilities, also play an active and influential role. The specialised committees, in particular, have a crucial part to play in this context. And thus your conference is both a contribution and an expression of commitment to greater parliamentary cooperation in Europe. With this in mind, I wish you every success for your discussions, and an enjoyable time in Berlin.