



## CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF EU PARLIAMENTS

### PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

#### Preliminary remarks

The National Council of the Slovak Republic hosted the annual Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments on 24 - 27 May 2007. The Speakers or their appointed designates from 44 parliamentary chambers from 27 member states of the European Union, as well as the Speakers from Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine, and the Vice-President of the European Parliament participated in the Conference. The Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Pavol Paška, chaired the proceedings.

The Future of Europe, Interparliamentary Cooperation, Raising National European Awareness and Assistance to Parliaments of New Emerging Democracies were the key topics on the Conference agenda.

The discussion on the Future of Europe was opened by the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Pavol Paška. The main rapporteur on this topic was the Speaker of the parliament of the Member State holding the EU presidency, Mr. Norbert Lammert, President of the German Bundestag.

The EU Commissioner for Taxation and Customs Union, Mr. László Kovács, presented a report on the topic of Raising National European Awareness.

The President of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, Mr. Oleksandr Moroz, presented a report on Ukraine, the Eastern Neighbour of the European Union.

## Conclusions of the Presidency

The Speakers welcome among themselves Bulgaria and Romania as full-fledged Member States and express their support for their endeavour to actively participate in the activities of the European Union as well as in this Conference. At the same time they reassure candidate countries of the European Union's common approach to the enlargement process on the basis of a renewed institutional framework.

### *Concerning the future of Europe*

The Speakers acknowledge the initiative of the German Council's Presidency, particularly the Berlin Declaration adopted on 25 March 2007 for revival of the process of institutional reform and its vital contribution to the solution to the questions concerning the future of Europe, including the firm stance taken by the Presidency in favour of reaching a new institutional settlement before the European elections in 2009.

The Speakers request that the incoming Portuguese Presidency summarises the views and proposals of national parliaments on the future development of the European Union and communicates them to the Presidency of the Council in office, the European Parliament and the European Commission to be duly taken into account in the future processes of institutional reform. The Speakers at the same time call on the European Institutions to take into account the importance of the role of the national parliaments in the European integration and policy formulation and insist on their role staying at least equal in strength to the one foreseen in the Constitutional Treaty.

The Speakers express their common interest that in June 2007 the European Council will find a consensus on a renewed common basis for the European Union.

### *Concerning interparliamentary cooperation*

The Speakers welcomed the Report of the Working Group on Interparliamentary Cooperation and acknowledged its eminent contribution to the improvement of interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union. The Speakers call on all concerned parties to take forward the practical suggestions and proposals of the Report in order to reach better coordination of interparliamentary work in the EU as well as better planning and cohesion in work and agendas and avoiding duplication of effort.

The Speakers welcomed the new scheme of appointing the Speakers' Conference presidency as most of the parliaments see it as a necessary step towards better coordination between the Speakers' Conference and the

parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council. According to the new scheme the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of a calendar year would normally hold the presidency of the Speakers' Conference and organise the actual meeting in the following calendar year.

The Speakers gave also their support to the proposal on arrangements concerning the new scheme of Presidency appointment:

- the Conference shall decide about two years in advance, which parliaments will assume the EUSC Presidency;
- the Secretaries General shall come with necessary proposals in such situations where, for example, because of elections held in the Chamber concerned, the Presidency cannot be assured according to the agreed new scheme.

The Speakers welcomed the willingness of the Portuguese parliament to implement the new scheme already for the next Conference and take over the Presidency for the Conference in 2008 and France as the next parliament hosting the Conference in 2009.

The Speakers welcomed the proposal of the Working Group to reduce the costs of the parliament hosting the Speakers Conference by each parliament covering all accommodation costs concerning its participation at the Secretaries General meeting and the EU Speakers' Conference itself. The Speakers call on the incoming Presidency to make necessary arrangements in order to implement the decision.

The Speakers called on the incoming Presidency to promote the work of the Working Group on Interparliamentary Cooperation in order to conclude its work so as to strengthen the Hague Guidelines reflecting the recent development of interparliamentary cooperation and to present the result before the next meeting of the Secretaries General.

The Speakers welcomed the Working Group's idea of a yearly timeframe of interparliamentary cooperation and called for the continuation of the discussion on this issue.

### *Concerning IPEX*

The Speakers welcomed the successful launch of the IPEX website, and noted that a majority of the national parliaments are actively contributing information concerning their parliaments' EU scrutiny. In order to improve the exchange of information even further, the Speakers encourage national parliaments to include English or French summaries of important decisions on IPEX.

The Speakers invite COSAC and IPEX to enhance their cooperation as a means to eliminate duplication of work, and as a means to ensure that the information provided by IPEX, is relevant for the end-users of EU information in the national parliaments. The Speakers also invite COSAC and IPEX to take whatever action they may deem appropriate in order to minimise duplication of work with regards to the calendars on the two websites.

The Speakers call on IPEX to create a common portal for the various interparliamentary websites, as a means to facilitate the exchange of parliamentary EU information.

The Speakers call on the European Commission and the Office of Official Publications to cooperate with IPEX with a view to improve the transmission of Commission documents to IPEX.

### *Concerning cooperation between the various forums/parties of interparliamentary cooperation*

The Speakers noted that even after the new rotation scheme of appointing the Presidency, the presidencies of the Speakers' Conference and COSAC will not fully coincide. For these reasons and in order to reach better coordination between the two conferences, the Speakers called on the presiding parliaments of both conferences to find ways of better coordination, mainly in terms of agendas, communication of conclusions of each conference to the presidency of the other and timing of meetings in order to strengthen parliamentary participation in EU policy formation.

### *Concerning the cooperation between the national parliaments and the European Commission*

The Speakers welcomed the implementation of the European Commission's commitment to transmit directly all new legislative proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments, as a mean of increasing parliamentary scrutiny in particular with regard to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles and contributing to the transparency of EU decision-making and thus improving the process of policy formulation within EU.

The Speakers call on the European Commission to facilitate the publication of the Commission's responses to the opinions of the national parliaments on EU legislative and non-legislative documents on the IPEX Website.

### *Concerning the cooperation between the national parliaments and the European Parliament*

The Speakers support the evolving cooperation of national parliaments and the European Parliament, which is exercised within the different levels of interparliamentary cooperation, such as the Joint Parliamentary Meetings,

Joint Committee Meetings and the cooperation on IPEX, and welcome the steps taken by the European Parliament together with the parliaments of the countries holding the EU Council Presidency in order to make this cooperation more efficient.

The Speakers thank the European Parliament for its invaluable contribution to IPEX through its contribution to the development of the IPEX website. The Speakers call on the European Parliament to monitor and improve the performance of the website in order to secure a high level of service for the users of IPEX.

### *Concerning Raising national European awareness*

With regards to and in spite of the different EU scrutiny models exercised by national parliaments, the Speakers welcomed the fact that national parliaments have succeeded to reach in certain domains, such as subsidiarity and proportionality checks examination conducted under the co-ordination of COSAC, more active and efficient participation and at the same time enhanced the role of national parliaments in the EU processes. In this context the Speakers encouraged national parliaments to further intensify the co-operation, and invited COSAC to continue to play its coordinating role, including fully using the facilities of IPEX.

The Speakers took note of the Information on parliamentary discussions related to the European Commission Annual Policy Strategy and Legislative and Work Programme that was elaborated by the Slovak Presidency. The aforementioned Information presents a useful source on the EU national parliaments' scrutiny and provides a comprehensive review of national parliaments' debates on the European Commission Annual Policy Strategy and Legislative and Work Programme. Moreover, the aforementioned Information provides an overview of particular actions taken by different parliament/parliamentary chamber in 2006 in order to bring the EU closer to its citizens.

In this light, the Speakers encouraged parliaments to discuss, in the form they find most appropriate, the Legislative and Work Programme and to make the best possible use of the aforementioned Information in order to further develop and improve the quality and content of their debates.

The Speakers expressed their appreciation of the activity of COSAC in order to promote an exchange of information regarding the different debates in national parliaments on the Annual Policy Strategy of the Commission and the presentation of the document made by the Commission followed by a debate at the latest meeting in Berlin on 14 – 15 May 2007.

## *Concerning assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies*

The EU Speakers applaud the efforts done and results achieved by the Slovak Presidency in implementing the objective set out by the Speakers Conference in Copenhagen concerning the improvement of the cooperation of EU Parliaments with Parliaments of the New and Emerging Democracies (NEDs).

The EU Speakers welcome the commitment expressed by the European Commission for a better cooperation among the EU Parliaments and the Commission on NEDs and underline the need to strengthen the programmes of cooperation between Parliaments in the framework of the initiatives managed by the European Commission for providing assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies.

The EU Speakers agree with the actions proposed by the Slovak Presidency for ensuring the follow-up of the initiatives and projects undertaken up to now and mandate the Task Force to keep on its activities under the authority of the incoming Presidency Parliament.

The Speakers note that the parliaments of Central Europe have much to offer in the area of assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies as a result of the 15 years of transformation processes, during which they effectively implemented the achievements of the 50 years of European integration in their political, social and economic systems.

The EU Speakers recommend the incoming Presidency with the support of the Task Force to:

- continue its cooperation with the European Commission focusing on the development of following issues:
  - a procedure for consultation with the representatives of the parliamentary administrations when drafting programmes, projects and strategies for technical assistance that involve parliamentary assistance;
  - the exchange of information with EU parliaments about programmes, calls for tender, requests for parliamentary assistance submitted directly to the national parliaments;
  - possibilities of access to European Community funding for Member States' Parliaments in the framework of EU external assistance schemes.
- follow-up the work on the implementation of a database on assistance to NEDs within the IPEX Website – including information from EU parliaments and the European Commission;

- take the appropriate initiatives for extending the coordination and the exchange of information on NEDs beyond the EU. To this end the incoming Presidency could:
  - ask the Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the Council of Europe to assess the possibility of using the ECPRD (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) for setting up a project – in cooperation with the IPEX - with the purpose of ensuring the exchange of information on NEDs Europe-wide;
  - ask the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) to assess the feasibility of a global information network on assistance to NEDs, preferably in cooperation with IPEX and ECPRD. The cooperation with ECPRD and IPU would be useful in collecting information on the beneficiaries' needs as well.

### *Concerning Ukraine the Eastern Neighbour of the European Union*

The Speakers confirmed that in order to support the momentum of the European project, it is of vital importance to encourage the contacts and ongoing communication with the EU neighbour countries so as to promote the continuing process of reforms, which may one day lead to the Ukraine's EU membership. The Speakers, following the country's overall progress and recognizing the development of the civil society and democracy, expressed support to the integration ambitions of Ukraine, appreciating that the Ukrainian integration ambitions go beyond the framework of cooperation laid down in the European Neighbourhood Policy and that the European Union has extended to Ukraine the most important offer – the European prospect.

The Speakers called on the Ukrainian political leaders to resolve the current political situation in a manner consistent with standard democratic principles and thereby avoid potential radicalization in the society.

### *Transmission of the Conclusions*

The Speakers called on the Slovak Presidency to publish the Presidency conclusions on the Speakers' website and to transmit them to the President of the European Commission, the President in office of the Council and to the COSAC Troika.