

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary remarks

The annual Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments was held in the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, in Lisbon, on 19-21 June 2008. The Speakers or their appointed designates, from 37 parliamentary chambers of the 27 Member States of the European Union, and the European Parliament, as well as the President of the European Commission, the Prime-Minister of Portugal and a Vice-President of the European Parliament participated in the Conference. The Speakers of two of the candidate countries were also present. The Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, Mr. Jaime Gama, chaired the proceedings.

For the first time, the Speakers' Conference was divided into two parts. The first part was explicitly reserved to the Speakers from the Parliaments of the EU Member States and the European Parliament, in order to allow the Speakers a direct exchange of views in an informal environment. The second part followed the traditional arrangements of the Conference, in which the Speakers debated the presentations made on the different items on the agenda: The process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon; The Strengthening of the European Construction: new responsibilities of national parliaments and partnership with the European Parliament; Women's participation in political life; New functionalities of IPEX; Conclusions of the Working Groups (Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and Assistance to new emerging democracies); Challenges and priorities of the European Agenda; and Conclusions and closing of the Conference.

The informal debate on the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon was opened by the Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic, Mr. Jaime Gama, who allowed the Speakers to debate the theme.

The topic on the "The Strengthening of the European Construction: new responsibilities of national parliaments and partnership with the European Parliament" was addressed by the following Keynote Speakers: the President of the Assembly of the Republic, Jaime Gama; the President of the National Assembly of Slovenia, France Cukjati and the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Manuel dos Santos.

The subject on "Women's participation in political life" was introduced by the President of the Nationalrat of Austria, Barbara Prammer, and followed by the Co-Keynote Speakers: the President of the Estonian Parliament, Ene Ergma; the President of the Hungarian National Assembly, Katalin Szili; and the President of the Dutch House of Representatives, Gerdi Verbeet.

The President of the Parliament of Denmark, Thor Pedersen, presented the new functionalities of IPEX.

The subject related to the Conclusions of the Working Groups – Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and Assistance to new emerging democracies – was addressed by the Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic, Jaime Gama. Following this presentation, the new Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union were adopted by consensus.

The last item on the agenda, “Challenges and priorities of the European Agenda”, was presented by the Prime Minister of Portugal, José Sócrates; the President of the National Assembly of France, Bernard Accoyer; and the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso.

The conclusions and closing of the Conference were lead by the Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic, Jaime Gama.

Conclusions of the Presidency

Regarding the first part of the Conference – informal meeting¹ – the Speakers had the opportunity to hold a lively debate on **the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon**.

The first informal meeting between the Speakers from the Parliaments of the EU Member States and the European Parliament allowed the Speakers to exchange views on the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The Speakers exchanged their views, showing due respect for the outcome of the Irish referendum, on the current situation regarding the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, underlining the need for a common approach to the definition of the future of the European Union, as well as emphasizing the role of national parliaments on the development of the relationship with the European Union and the citizens.

The Speakers recalled that the purpose of the Treaty of Lisbon is to help an enlarged Union to act more effectively and more democratically. They noted that the parliaments in 19 Member States have ratified the Treaty and that the ratification process continues in other countries.

¹ This part of the meeting was reserved to the EU Speakers, following a 1+1 format, i.e., only one Speaker and one staff member (Secretary-General or an advisor).

The Speakers considered that the results of this exercise – informal meeting – were quite substantive, providing them with the opportunity to express and directly exchange views on the main topics of the current EU and global agendas.

The Strengthening of the European Construction: new responsibilities of National Parliaments and partnership with the European Parliament

The Speakers welcome a strengthened role of national parliaments in EU affairs, both at the EU and national level, which enables a reinforced involvement in the EU decision-making process, noting, however, that it is up to national parliaments, alone and collectively, to assure the full use of their rights, in order to meet the best interest of citizens.

Considering the Treaty of Lisbon, «*National Parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union*» (Art. 12 TEU), it «*encourage[s] greater involvement of National Parliaments in the activities of the European Union*» (PRNP) and «*enhance[s] their ability to express their views*» (PRNP).

The new responsibilities of national parliaments in the context of the Treaty were presented as follows:

1. Broader access to information;
2. Participation in EU Information/Communication/Notification procedures;
3. Participation in evaluation and control mechanisms (e.g. Europol and Eurojust);
4. Monitoring the principle of subsidiarity (the 8 weeks early warning mechanism);
5. Inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The recent developments concerning national parliaments, namely the European Commission's transmission mechanism of its proposals to national parliaments, not only strengthen their role towards the European institutional culture, but also provide an opportunity to develop their own domestic scrutiny systems on European – legislative and non-legislative – proposals and, subsequently, to improve the effectiveness of the collaboration amongst national parliaments – mostly through IPEX, COSAC and the Permanent Representatives of national parliaments in Brussels – in order to reach common goals.

The Speakers encourage the European Commission to carry on with the process of transmission of the proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments and welcome the efforts of the Commission to respond to the reactions submitted by national parliaments (as a result of their scrutiny efforts) and to take them into account in further policy formulation.

The Speakers would welcome a more direct involvement of European citizens in the EU decision-making process, namely through their direct representatives in the national parliaments and believe that the enhanced role of the European Parliament as a co-legislator, as foreseen by the Treaty of Lisbon, can also contribute to a greater transparency and democratic legitimacy of the decisions taken at the EU level.

The Speakers discussed the proposal of the Speakers from the Slovenian and Italian Parliaments aimed at creating a working group on the implementation of the provisions on the role of national parliaments laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon. Since COSAC has already created a WG on a similar issue, the Conference of Speakers should reflect on the outcome of the COSAC WG within the framework of the revised Hague Guidelines.

The Speakers, taking into account the work of the COSAC WG, consider it appropriate to start a joint reflection regarding the criteria and procedures for the implementation of the new powers vested in the national parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon, so that they can be implemented as soon as the progress with the process of ratification allows it. Thus, they hope that it will be possible to establish a fruitful dialogue with the European institutions on these matters.

The Speakers took note of the proposal of the Speaker of the French National Assembly to promote, for the countries that so wish, the anticipated implementation of the provisions laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon, which attributes new responsibilities to national parliaments, and invited the French Presidency to present a proposal on that subject during the next EU Speakers' Conference, in Paris.

The Speakers call upon the trio of presidencies – French, Czech and Swedish – to work closely together in order to contribute to better working methods to develop the cooperation between the parliaments in the European Union.

The Speakers also took note of the proposal of the Speaker from the Portuguese Parliament on the idea of changing the periodicity of the Conference to a semester basis, in order to follow the rhythm of the EU Presidency.

Women's participation in political life

When preparing the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments, the Assembly of the Republic carried out a questionnaire devoted to "Women's participation in political life", in order to assess the quantitative and the qualitative level of the participation of women in political life in the EU Member States, in the European Parliament and in the candidate

countries, during the last two legislatures. All parliaments have answered the questionnaire.

The Speakers conclude that, although Europe is internationally in the vanguard in terms of women's participation in political decision-making, there is still plenty to be done. The representation of women in leading political positions needs to be reinforced. Gender equality should be pursued in accordance with the policies outlined in the EU road map, backed by awareness-raising and a legal framework. Raising awareness for gender mainstreaming could contribute to a greater participation of women in political life. The exchange of information initiated in this Conference can serve as a useful evaluation platform.

IPEX

The Speakers acknowledge and welcome the development of the IPEX website, during its second year of implementation. The new features enabling advanced search and subscription, as well as the new IPEX brochures, containing information about the database, in all the official languages of the EU, are especially welcome.

The Speakers observe that a majority of the national parliaments regularly update their national pages concerning the EU scrutiny carried out by their Parliaments.

In order to ensure that IPEX enhances its role as a tool for exchanging scrutiny information even further, especially within the framework of the Treaty of Lisbon - and within the scope of the subsidiarity check and the application of the early warning mechanism, the Speakers:

- Encourage national parliaments to update their scrutiny information in real time, mutually informing each other about their relevant scrutiny activities during the eight-week period. In addition, the Speakers encourage national parliaments to include summaries in English or French and other languages of important decisions, and in relation with the relevant internal scrutiny procedures which were followed;
- Ask the IPEX Board and the permanent representatives of national parliaments in Brussels, together with the COSAC Secretariat, to develop their cooperation and dialogue in order to organize best practices of ensuring the flow of information especially with regards to the subsidiarity mechanism laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon;

- Invite the European Commission to promptly make available, for publication on IPEX: documents with the relevant metadata, the date on which the period of eight weeks will expire, as well as reasoned opinions from national parliaments and the Commission's responses to them;
- Welcome the German Bundestag as a member of the IPEX Board as of September 2008;

The Speakers thank the Parliaments of Denmark, Italy, Finland and Sweden for financing the IPEX Information Officer until the end of 2008 and welcome the support of the European Parliament in providing all the necessary facilities for hosting this officer.

The Speakers welcome the letters of intent already received from thirty six Parliamentary Chambers² expressing their commitment to participate in the co-financing of the IPEX Information Officer and invite all national parliaments to participate in the co-financing scheme of the Information Officer. The Speakers acknowledge that the scheme should enter into force in January 2009.

Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation

The Conference of Speakers welcomes the work of the Working Group on Inter-parliamentary Cooperation, which has concluded its works on the new version of the Guidelines for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union, adopting them, by consensus. The new Guidelines are a more flexible, concise and permanent instrument and reflect the recent developments of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The new Guidelines also represent a strengthening of the role of national parliaments as well as an added value for the inter-parliamentary cooperation effort in the EU, especially taking into consideration that national parliaments are the ultimate source of democratic legitimacy. The Conference of Speakers considers that national parliaments should reinforce their coordination while maintaining their autonomy when discussing subjects

² Austria (Lower and Upper House), Belgium (Lower and Upper House), Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic (Lower and Upper House), Denmark, Finland, France (Lower and Upper House), Germany (Lower House), Greece, Hungary, Ireland (Lower and Upper House), Italy (Lower and Upper House), Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands (Lower House), Poland (Lower and Upper House), Portugal, Romania (Lower and Upper House), Slovenia (Lower House), Slovakia, Spain (Lower and Upper House) Sweden and the UK (Lower and Upper House).

of common concern, and that established cooperation schemes must be further developed.

Assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies

The Speakers appreciate the efforts made and results achieved by the Portuguese Presidency in pursuing the objective set out by the Conference of Speakers in Bratislava concerning the improvement of cooperation of EU Parliaments and the Parliaments of the New and Emerging Democracies (NEDs).

The Speakers underline the need for better cooperation between the EU Parliaments and the Commission on NEDs, particularly within the framework of the initiatives managed by the European Commission for providing assistance to Parliaments of new and emerging democracies.

The Speakers welcome the support from IPEX concerning the work on the NEDs assistance project, especially the publication of the survey containing national parliaments' data collection files on NEDs Assistance Programmes and Projects.

The Speakers support the alteration of the name of the NEDs Project to "Parliament to Parliament Cooperation".

The Portuguese Presidency will inform the European Commission of the current state of progress on this matter and also request collaboration on the reciprocal collection and provision of information, particularly concerning the exchange of information with EU parliaments on programmes, calls for tender and requests for parliamentary assistance submitted directly to the national parliaments.

The Speakers recommend that the incoming Presidency, with the support of the Task Force:

- Continues to explore with the European Commission the possibility to improve the management and the involvement of national parliaments in the current procedures and projects of assistance funded by the EU Budget;
- Continues updating the information of the national parliaments on their «Parliament to Parliament» assistance activities;
- Takes appropriate measures for maintaining and extending the exchange of information on this subject.

Challenges and priorities of the European Agenda

In the light of the discussions, the Presidency identified the following challenges and priorities of the European Union:

- stressing the fact that the EU constitutes an important pillar of the international system and encourage all the European leaders to act jointly in order to strengthen the role of the EU in the world-wide community of States;
- calling upon the defence of peace, fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law, including the respect for international law, stability and prosperity in the world and appeals to the EU to contribute to the effective realization of those ideals;
- underlining the need to reinforce Europe's security for its citizens and for the European continent, by fighting against terrorism, ensuring EU solidarity in energy security, strengthening the European Security and Defence Policy, regional cooperation, the EU Eastern partnership, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and developing the Process of Barcelona: a Union for the Mediterranean;
- underlining that the process of negotiation as regards the enlargement should proceed;
- acknowledging the importance of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, together with the challenges and opportunities presented by the EU approach to migration, the Schengen area, as well as the stability of the euro area, the improvement of growth and competitiveness (facilitating the creation of more and better jobs), implementing the Lisbon Strategy and enhancing the internal market;
- encouraging the EU to take the lead in terms of the defence of sustainable development and social cohesion, as well as of the fight against poverty, alternative energy sources, halting climate change and, moreover, the free movement of knowledge within our societies;

Conclusions and closing of the Conference

The Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament closed the Conference by presenting the conclusions of the Presidency.

The next Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments will be held in Paris, in February 2009, followed by the Swedish Presidency, in 2010.

Transmission of the Conclusions

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