

PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL CSDP/CFSP

Mr. Danny PIETERS, Speaker of the Belgian Senate

Dear colleagues,

It is my privilege to introduce the first topic of the Speakers' Conference. And we immediately start with the most promising and animated debate of the day on the parliamentary control of the common foreign and security policy and the common security and defence policy. I would like to insist on the open character of this discussion. Positions of the different parliaments are sometimes very different. Only a true debate can have the ambition of overcoming these differences and perhaps can lead to a compromise acceptable to all.

Let me start by briefly describing when and how it all started. On 31 March 2010, ten Member States of the Western European Union agreed to initiate procedures to terminate the modified Treaty of Brussels. Citing the mutual assistance clause enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, these Member States considered that a next phase in CFSP and CSDP had begun, ending the historic role of the WEU.

However, the termination of the modified Treaty of Brussels also meant the end of the activities of the Assembly of WEU, traditionally considered to be one of the interparliamentary bodies dealing with security and defence policy in Europe. The Assembly will cease its activities at the end of June 2011. The dissolution of the Assembly of WEU will leave the issue of parliamentary control in the field of European defence and security unsolved.

Article 9 of Protocol 1 of the Lisbon Treaty on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union states that the European Parliament and national Parliaments should together determine the organisation and promotion of effective and regular interparliamentary co-operation within the Union.

In that context, the implementation of Article 10 of Protocol 1 on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union also represents an opportunity for national Parliaments to get more involved in the CFSP and CSDP.

Following certain early initiatives taken by some national parliaments to set up a procedure for parliamentary control of the CFSP and CSDP, both the Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU and COSAC recognised the fundamental role of national Parliaments in this respect.

The Conference of Speakers asked in Stockholm in May 2010 the incoming Belgian Presidency to take the discussion forward, with a view to reaching an agreement at the next meeting of Speakers.

A first reflection was organised during the 44th COSAC meeting on 25-26 October 2010 in Brussels. Reference was made to Article 10 of Protocol 1 which gives COSAC a clear role in this matter. The discussion lead to the following conclusions:

- Parliamentary oversight of CFSP and CSDP should involve both national Parliaments and the European Parliament;
- The mechanism of parliamentary oversight of CFSP and CSDP should represent value for money and should add value to the work that Parliaments already do in this area;
- There should be no new institutions or bodies established;
- Parliamentary oversight should involve Members specialising in foreign affairs, defence and European Union affairs.

The Belgian presidency started working on the basis of all the information that became available and produced a first proposal for the organisation of the

parliamentary oversight of the CFSP and CSDP at the end of February this year. All national parliaments and the European Parliament were invited to give their comments concerning this proposal. The vast majority of the assemblies sent their remarks.

An oversight of all these reactions was sent to you last week. I will not go into detail, as I am confident that you studied the different positions in your home assembly. I would just like to point out that concerning the composition of the delegations, the venue for the meetings, the chairmanship of the conference and the conference secretariat, it was not possible to determine a common point of view.

However, this does not mean that consensus was non-existent. Concerning the relationship with COFACC, CODAC and COSAC, the scope of the conference, the background of the delegation members, the observer status for certain countries, the frequency of meetings and the language regime, the majority positions were much clearer and more generally supported.

On the basis of all this information, the Belgian presidency decided to draft a compromise proposal that was sent to you last week. This compromise is attempting both to determine the highest common denominator and to overcome possible breaking points. It is seeking a balanced solution for four interrelated points of disagreement, namely:

- The ratio between the number of representatives of the national parliaments and that of the European Parliament ;
- The presidency of the parliamentary structure;
- The meetings' venue;
- The secretariat.

The most important breaking point between the various points of view expressed by parliaments is the tension between the Community dimension and the intergovernmental dimension of the CFSP and the CSDP.

Since these two dimensions are essential components of this policy, they must be represented to a significant degree in the new parliamentary structure.

In addition, in drafting this compromise, we started from the principle that the new interparliamentary forum must be workable. Both in order to ensure optimal functioning of the forum and to enable a maximum number of Parliaments to host the meeting, it is proposed that the parliamentary structure should not exceed the number of 150 members, including observers.

This is why the Belgian presidency proposes the delegation of the European Parliament to be larger than those of the individual national parliaments, but that the number of its representatives be reduced from 54 members, as indicated in the original proposal, to 27.

The national parliament delegations would also be reduced from 6 members, as was proposed by a large number of Parliaments, to 4. The European Parliament delegation would thus represent a quarter of the number of national parliament members.

Concerning the chairmanship of the Conference, we would like to propose a presidency for the national parliament of the Member State holding the rotating Council Presidency, in close co-operation with the troika and the European Parliament.

The presidency is to be supported by the COSAC secretariat, in which as you all know, the parliaments of the troika countries and the European Parliament are represented.

Concerning the location of the meetings, the Belgian presidency proposes to hold them in the country holding the rotating Council Presidency or in the European Parliament in Brussels, leaving it up to the presidency to decide the matter.

Dear colleagues,

Given the function of the new parliamentary forum, we have kept a reasonable ambition. The objective is to ensure the monitoring of the CFSP and CSDP from a parliamentary point of view rather than to exercise true control over it, which would involve a power of sanction. The Parliamentary Conference fulfils above all an informative function, which, on the one hand, must enable the national parliaments to exert better control over their own governments with regard to the intergovernmental dimension of the CFSP and, on the other, must enable the European Parliament to exert its powers of oversight in the European institutional framework.

Before giving you the floor, I would like to touch upon a basic but very important aspect of the Conference's proceedings, namely the financing of it. Although all parliaments were unanimous in demanding that the financing be kept as low as possible and that no additional financing be envisaged, it remains unclear how this financing will look like. I therefore hope that you will also touch upon this aspect during the discussions.

Mister Chairman,

I am looking forward to this debate. I hope it will be open and franc. And I am confident that at the end of the day we will be able to draw clear and fundamental

conclusions concerning the organisation of the parliamentary control over CFSP and CSDP.

I thank you.