

The Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments Bratislava, 26 May 2007

RAISING NATIONAL EUROPEAN AWARENESS

Speech by Mr. Pavol Paška, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic

*Honoured Colleagues, Speakers, Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests,*

It is my honour to stand here today in front of you and to make a contribution on how to raise national European awareness or rather how we have managed to raise national European awareness. It is my firm hope that my contribution shall be an asset; an asset at least as valuable as the contribution by Madam Commissioner Margot Wallström, which will be presented by the EU Commissioner, Mr. László Kovács who has joined us this morning.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me at this point turn for a while to the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (that shall certainly be in coming days facing some major challenges on the part of all of us) and make the best of a motto enshrined in "our" EU Constitution. The motto or rather one of the EU symbols I wish to refer to for particular reasons now is „United in Diversity“.

To be united in diversity can definitely be accommodated also for parliamentary input in the EU business. In spite of the fact that there is not one model of parliamentary EU scrutiny generally applicable for all national parliaments, still there is a common goal for all of us participating in this process and that is: by means of an effective EU scrutiny exercised in each national parliament to make a substantive parliamentary contribution in the process of reducing the so-called democratic deficit and to raise concurrently national European awareness.

In the light of being so close to the citizens, national parliaments have a unique opportunity and at the same time a responsibility to make best use of their capacity so as to involve the public more actively into the EU processes. In case we care to apply the bottom-up approach, we shall (even though in the long run) be rewarded by having the EU processes more democratic, more transparent and more accountable.

Nevertheless, I am proud to see that we have managed to more actively and more efficiently participate in enhancing the role of national parliaments in the process of formulation of the EU policies leaving thus our unforgettable imprint on the EU business.

Let me in this connection (though I don't fancy doing this) be "a kind of cherry-picking", since I desire to particularly focus on an increasingly active engagement of national parliaments in monitoring the compliance of the EU legislation with the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Bearing in mind the co-ordination role taken by the COSAC, subsidiarity and proportionality checks tested recently in our parliaments on a collective and concurrent basis do indicate that they might be a useful and an effective way how the national parliaments may in an early stage intervene in the EU legislative processes and make their own input. This way (though this is only one of many other ways!) we may manage to make the national parliaments be more seen and more heard as regards the EU agenda. And that is the point (!) – to actively intervene on our side and at the same time to listen carefully to our citizens so that we can intervene on their behalf! And that is not definitely all we have got to say.

Let me also point to another added value stemming from the subsidiarity and proportionality checks examination. By conducting these (under the auspices of European committees) it is inevitable, to a certain extent, to seek for a professional expertise from other specialized committees; along this line we strengthen internal parliamentary co-operation which is desirable as well.

Last but not least, allow me in this respect to highlight the aspect of the interparliamentary co-operation as well, which - considering not only successful subsidiarity and proportionality checks but also other domains of a joint parliamentary handling of the EU matters - forms the nucleus of a functioning and in a harmony living family of EU parliaments!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was not my ambition to cover all the domains that would give us an evidence of raising national European awareness. There was no need to do so. Evidence is provided by an existing exchange of opinions and professional experience and best practices among the EU parliaments on a number of topics, such as discussions on the European Commission Legislative and Work Programme or the Commission Annual Policy Strategy. Above all of them stands of course the co-operation with the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament.

Distinguished Guests,

In order to conclude let me get back to where I have started!

To be united in diversity can be interpreted also as by having different opinions, different procedures, and different practices in one united "house" ... which does us no harm! On the contrary, it is to our avail! It enriches us to communicate on different experience from our parliamentary practice; it enriches us to keep on bringing new impetuses for "united" co-operation among us and paves thus the way to search for common consensus on perhaps challenging issues of our common interest. An added value of this lies in the fact that we get two in one: we carry on being partners and friends working for our common goals of the Europe united in diversity.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.