

**The Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments**

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**Address by Maciej Plążyński, Deputy Speaker of the Senate of the Republic of Poland**

***Assistance to Parliaments of New and Emerging Democracies***

Mister Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's discussion on the assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies is a continuation of the debate that was initiated at the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments in Budapest in May 2005 by the address of the then President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Ferdinando Casini [*currently President of the Interparliamentary Union*] on the required activities of EU parliaments to strengthen the global role of the EU.

In this context, it could be reminded that an important determinant of the present global role of the EU is its contribution to the development policy. The European Union – together with its member states – delivers more than a half of the total development funds, and the Union itself since the mid-1990s has been among the top five global donors. It should be remarked that the Treaty on European Union adopted after the termination of the cold war [ 1992 ], on the one hand, stipulated that one of the EU objectives should be "*to assert its identity on the international scene*" [art. 2 ] and on the other hand, it recognised the development policy as one of the Community policies and determined its objectives [art. 177]. The Treaty admitted, especially, that the Community policy in the area of cooperation for development "*contributes to the attainment of the general objective of development and to strengthening of democracy and the principle of lawful state, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*". After 1989, besides the development policy – global and targeted at developing countries – the EU has implemented many programmes to support stability and regional integration in neighbouring regions.

Assistance to parliaments of new and emerging [*or perhaps re-built*] democracies is an integral element of the general EU policy for development and regional policies for stabilisation or integration, implemented in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

I am referring to this issue to show that President Casini's appeal for coordination of the assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies will, on the one hand, require some fact-based, strategic agreements, and on the other hand it relates to administrative and technical issues, such as making data bases, procedures for information exchange between national parliaments and the European Commission or tender procedures for specific tranches of assistance programmes.

The initiative of President Casini resulted in important reports on the coordination of assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies written by the Working Group [*the report was prepared for the last year's Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments in Copenhagen*], the Task Group [*the report was prepared for the March 2007 meeting of the General Secretaries of the EU Parliaments*] and the Slovak Presidency (the report prepared for today's meeting). On behalf of the delegation of the Polish Sejm and Senate I would like to express a positive opinion on the work performed and to support the legitimate demands for coordination of the assistance to parliaments of new democracies and especially the appeals to the European Commission. It seems necessary however to establish a forum for information exchange and arrangements between EU parliaments. We

would suggest to accept the reasonable British proposal made at the March meeting of the General Secretaries concerning the establishment of a cooperation tool that would be used instead of just comparing the lists of offers and expectations. We share the view that to help effectively means to work with those in need and not for those in need.

The before mentioned report of the Task Group includes an appeal for greater involvement of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) in the coordination for assistance to parliaments of new democracies. I should only remind you that at the pre-accession and accession stage the ECPRD played a very important role in the coordination and implementation of the technical and training assistance to the Polish Sejm and Senate. Today, also the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe might become more involved in the coordination of assistance to parliaments of EU's neighbouring countries.

To conclude, I would like to remark that the Polish parliament has a lot to offer in the area of assistance to parliaments of new democracies. It results from the fact that the 50 years of European integration have been cumulated in 15 years of the institutional memory of the transformation period [contacts of our parliamentary delegation with the European Parliament, structural dialogue, the *stand still* principle, satisfaction of the Copenhagen criteria, acceptance of *acquis communautaire*, accession negotiations and implementation of the Hague guidelines]. We can act as experts to the New Neighbourhood countries not because we are their immediate neighbours but because we also experienced (for a shorter time and to a smaller degree) the trauma of communism. We can seem convincing and credible to our neighbours since we have managed to overcome the trauma during less than one generation and to a degree that does not provoke any reservations on the part of the European Union and NATO.

In this context, in July a group of officials from the parliament of Albania will come to us for a one-week training [*and shortly probably also a group from Azerbaijan will come*].

Thank you for your attention.