

## ***Cooperation with the European Commission***

It is becoming increasingly evident that an important key to increasing the involvement of national parliaments in EU matters would be the establishment of a closer relationship between the national parliaments and the European Commission. There appear to be two principal areas, where it would be advantageous to enhance their existing relationship:

- 1) through the transmission of EU legislative proposals, reports and consultation documents to national parliaments,
- 2) Through an intensified dialogue between the Commission and national parliaments.

### **Transmission of EU documents**

The European Commission's proposal from May 2006, which calls upon the national parliaments to be involved to a greater extent in the development and performance of EU's policies, could be a significant turning point in the relations between the Commission and national parliaments.

The commitment of the President of the Commission to transmit directly all new proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments constitutes an important recognition by the Commission of national parliaments as players in EU policy. This is a step forward in comparison with existing rules set out in the Amsterdam Treaty, which solely oblige the Commission to submit consultation documents directly to the national parliament proposals for EU legislation to the governments of Member States. It is then the responsibility of the governments to pass on the documents to parliaments as each government "finds appropriate".

At its meeting from 15 – 16 June, the European Council expressed its support of the Commission's commitment to make all new proposals and consultation documents directly available to national parliaments.

The Commission and national parliaments, however, have still not agreed on the final technical solution on the way in which documents can be transmitted to national parliaments. The Commission is presently preparing an e-mail distribution list and a network of contacts in the national parliaments, so that it will be possible to begin sending the documents in September. However, in addition, the Commission will also transmit documents directly<sup>1</sup> to national parliaments via the IPEX-system. IPEX currently provides access to all Commission proposals and consultation documents through the European Parliament's document management system (greffe). But the European Commission has also stated that, at the beginning of 2007, it will send documents to IPEX together with relevant bibliographical information (legal base, title,

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<sup>1</sup> The documents must be sent to [centralsupport@ipex.eu](mailto:centralsupport@ipex.eu)

reference numbers, etc.). This will enable the automatic entry of IPEX documents in the IPEX database.

The Commission also promised in its report of 10 May 2006 to investigate how to ensure that the national parliaments are properly informed of the Commission's plans for new legislative initiatives, which could help involve the national parliaments at an earlier stage of the decision-making process.

This concerns:

- The Commission's *Annual Policy Strategy* (APS), which is the first stage in the establishment of the coming year's political priorities in the EU, and is presented each year in March
- The Commission's *Legislative and work programme*, which contains the coming year's proposals for EU legislation and consultation documents. The legislative and work programme is usually published in November.

For national parliaments it is essential in this connection that these documents are made available in all official Community languages in order to allow parliaments to examine them in their own languages. This is not fully the case today. For example the annexes of the Legislative and Work Programme, which contain lists of proposed initiatives, are not translated. In addition, there is a substantial delay in the translation of many Commission documents into certain languages, which prohibits their timely examination in the national parliaments. According to their internal rules, some parliaments can only examine documents that are available in their national languages. In addition, the quality in the presentation of these documents should be improved so as to make them more understandable for the parliaments (and the public).

## **Intensified dialogue between parliaments and the Commission**

Another area in which cooperation between national parliaments and the European Commission could be increased for their mutual advantage is through direct contact between the political groups.

The Commission takes a positive view of an enhancement of political dialogue, and therefore the Commission invites national parliaments in its Communication from 10 May 2006 to react so as to improve the process of policy formulation in connection with new proposals and consultation documents (Green Papers, White Papers, and Communications).

It must be expected on the basis of this, that the Commission is suitably prepared to reply to any statements from national parliaments regarding such documents from the Commission. This approach is firmly supported by the European Council on 15-16 June

2006, where it calls on the Commission to duly consider comments by national parliaments – in particular with regard to the subsidiarity and proportionality principle.

More participation on the part of the Commissions in debates on EU issues in the parliaments would also strengthen the dialogue between the parliaments and the Commission. This could be done, for instance, in connection with debates in national parliaments on the Commission's annual political strategy or the annual legislative and work programme.

The Commission could also present these documents to national parliaments collectively. The Annual Policy Strategy, for instance, could be presented at the annual Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments at a spring meeting, at one of the spring meetings of COSAC, or at a "joint parliamentary meeting" in the European Parliament. The annual policy programme could similarly be presented by the Commission at an interparliamentary meeting in the autumn.

Such steps on the part of the Commission would be in compliance with the Commission's declarations in connection with launching plan D in October 2005, where it declared its will to participate "in COSAC and the Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments at a high level"<sup>2</sup>.

**Cooperation between national parliaments and the Commission can be increased by:**

The Commission transmitting:

- all proposals for EU legislation direct to national parliaments and IPEX simultaneously with sending them to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.
- the Annual Policy Strategy and the Annual Legislative and Work Programme in all Community languages as soon as they become available
- all consultation documents such as Green Papers, White Papers, and Communications.

The Commission:

- takes part in meetings of the national parliaments in connection with debates regarding such areas as the Annual Policy Strategy or Legislative Programme.
- presents the Annual Policy Strategy and the Legislative Programme in the central interparliamentary forums. This could be at the Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments, in COSAC, or at the "joint parliamentary meetings" in the European Parliament,
- commits itself to duly consider comments by national parliaments on new proposals and consultation documents – in particular with regard to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles.

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<sup>2</sup> Report from the Commission: The Commission's Communication on the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue, and Debate. Com(2005) 494 of 13 October 2005.