



Report
prepared by the Danish Presidency
for the Conference of EU Speakers
concerning
“Raising National European Awareness”

Summary

The Danish Folketing was called upon by the 2005 Speakers Conference in Budapest to commence a coinciding debate on the Commission's Annual Legislative and Work Program and to prepare a subsequent report concerning its implementation.

Debates took place in 29 parliaments and a majority of parliaments reported that the debate was a success and should be repeated. An exchange of information concerning the debate took place at the February 2006 meeting of Secretaries General in Copenhagen. Following the exchange, the Secretaries General summarized that parliamentary debates on the Commission's Work Program (published in the autumn) should be repeated, however that it could be improved through beginning the scrutiny process in conjunction with the publication of the Commission's Annual Policy Strategy (published in March).

This report recommends that the next coinciding debate should begin in March 2007 with the publication of the Annual Policy Strategy and should conclude with coinciding debates in the national parliaments on the Commission's Work Program. The following specific recommendations are articulated in this report:

- I. Following the publication of the Annual Policy Strategy in March 2007, the Commission should be asked to present the paper to the national parliaments in one of the following parliamentary forums: (1) the spring COSAC Chairpersons meeting (2) a joint parliamentary meeting hosted by the European Parliament and the Parliament holding the EU Presidency (3) the EU Speakers Conference.*
- II. Following the presentation of the Policy Strategy, national parliaments should be encouraged to hold national consultations with the Commission on the specific policy areas covered by the paper. Following national consultation, national parliaments should transmit their opinions directly to the Commission.*
- III. Following the publication of the Commission's Annual Legislative and Work Program, the Commission should be asked to present it to the autumn meeting of COSAC.*
- IV. During the month following the presentation of the Work Program to COSAC, national parliaments should be encouraged to hold "coinciding" parliamentary debates with the objective of finalizing the scrutiny of the Commissions annual policy cycle and in order to "Raise National European Awareness".*

- V. Parliaments should be encouraged to use IPEX in order to exchange information concerning the consultation of the Policy Strategy and the debates on the Work Program. The Commission should be encouraged to consult IPEX.*

Introduction

According to the Conclusions of The Conference of the Speakers of European Union parliaments meeting in Budapest, The Danish Folketing was called upon to implement the declaration “Raise national European awareness”, and to subsequently prepare a report on the declarations implementation to the Conference in Copenhagen.

This final report is based on the interim report prepared by the Danish Parliament prior to the meeting of Secretaries General in Copenhagen in February 2006, as well as the conclusions of the deliberations of that meeting. The report includes a concrete proposal for conducting parliamentary debates on the Commission’s Annual Policy Strategy as well as a coinciding debate on the Commissions Legislative and Work Program.

Background – results from the first coinciding debate on the Commission’s Annual Legislative and Work Program

At the meeting of the Conference of Speakers in Budapest it was decided to welcome the “declaration on the role of national parliaments in the European debate: Raise national European awareness” adopted by the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of parliaments of the European Union (COSAC).

According to the COSAC declaration, a coinciding debate should take place in all the national parliaments on the Annual Legislative and Work Program of the European Commission. The objective of such a debate is to encourage parliaments to place European issues on their agenda and thus bring citizens and civil society closer to Europe.

Following a meeting of the parliaments comprising the troika of the Conference of EU Speakers, the Danish, Hungarian and Slovakian parliaments concluded that in order to ensure a timely and relevant debate, the declaration should be imple-

mented in conjunction with the European Commission's adoption of the Work Program.

As the European Parliament had already scheduled its debate for 15 November 2005, national parliaments were therefore encouraged to conclude their debates on the Work Program by 16 December 2005. Therefore the intent of the original declaration to initiate "coinciding debates" was maintained – albeit within a one month timeframe.

Following the debate, all EU parliaments were encouraged to send a brief summary of the debate (along with any formal resolutions etc.) to the Danish Parliament which was then published on the Conferences website – www.eu-speakers.org.

The results of the first debate, including the findings of the questionnaire sent out by the Danish Parliament to the national parliaments, are included in the annex of this report.

Deliberations at the meeting of Secretaries General

The results of the annual debate were discussed under the heading "Exchange of information on the results of the national debates on the Commission's Annual Legislative and Work Program".

The Secretary General of the Danish Parliament, Mr. Henrik Tvarnø concluded the debate by stating that the Danish Parliament will prepare an updated report on the question of raising national European awareness that would include additional responses from parliaments.

During the debate several Secretaries General voiced the opinion that the timing and quality of the debate could be improved through focusing attention on the pre-legislative cycle through scrutiny of the Commission's Annual Policy Strategy. It was stressed that by beginning a scrutiny of the Work Program at the time of the publication of the Annual Policy Strategy national parliaments would be able to begin a process of dialog with the Commission concerning future priorities before the actual formulation of the Work Program.

It was stated at the meeting, that the European Parliament conducts an annual debate of the Annual Policy Strategy following its publication in March. Following

the debate, the text is then transmitted to appropriate parliamentary committees which then take a closer look at their respective policy areas. Each Committee then holds a meeting with their respective Commissioner prior to the publication of the Work Program. This period of consultation between the European Parliament and the European Commission maximizes the Parliaments influence on the final preparation of the Work Program.

Summary of the debate at Secretaries General in Copenhagen

- National Parliaments should be encouraged to hold an annual debate on the Commission's Legislative and Work Program.
- The Speakers should encourage the Commission to translate the Work Program and its annexes into all official languages.
- The Commission should be encouraged to improve the quality of the Work Program by providing more detailed information on the individual proposals – including preliminary information from impact assessments. Priority as well as non-priority proposals should be included in the annexes of the Work Program – as the distinction between the two can at times seem arbitrary.
- It should be explored how national parliaments can be involved at an even earlier stage in the pre-legislative cycle of the Commission
- The IPEX website should be used to promote the debate on the Annual Work Program and to improve the exchange of information during the debate by the national parliaments

How to improve the debate: A closer look at the Commission's policy cycle.

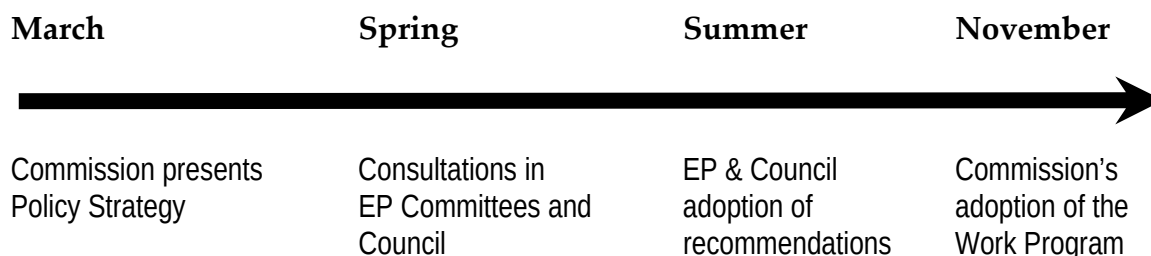
The European Commission produces its Annual Policy Strategy in March of the preceding calendar year – and it is then presented to the European Parliament and Council.

The Policy Strategy is the first stage of the European Union's annual policy cycle and provides a guide to the Commission's policy priorities for that year. It also adopts a budgetary framework which ensures that the human and financial resources needed to achieve the priorities are available. The Policy Strategy forms

the basis for the dialogue with the Council and the European Parliament. This dialogue will culminate in the presentation of the Commission's Legislative and Work Program in November.

The Commission's rules of procedure provide that the Commission defines annual priorities and adopts a Work Program for each year. The Commission's Work Program translates the Policy Strategy into policy objectives and an operational program of decisions to be adopted by the Commission. It sets out major political priorities and identifies legislative initiatives, executive and other acts that the Commission intends to adopt for the realization of these priorities. The President presents the Commission Work Program to Parliament and the Council. The Work Program contains a list of priority legislative and policy initiatives the Commission commits itself to adopt by the end of the year. Each initiative will be supported by a comprehensive assessment of its likely impacts.

Following the presentation of the Policy Strategy the European Parliament and the Council scrutinize the document and report back to Commission on their views. The policy cycle can be illustrated in the following manner:



In order to maximize the influence of the national parliaments with regards to holding an annual debate on the Work Program it would be advisable to begin the process at the same time as the European Parliament – following the presentation of the Policy Strategy.

Proposal for future parliamentary debates

The Commission could be called upon to present the Policy Strategy to the national parliaments. In order to maintain the spirit of the original "Raising National European Awareness Initiative", this presentation and subsequent debate should be given collectively to the national parliaments. The following three options have been identified:

- The Commission presents the Policy Strategy at the spring COSAC Chairpersons meeting.
- The European Parliament and the Parliament holding the EU Presidency during the first half year hold a Joint Parliamentary Meeting in March following the Commissions presentation of the Policy Strategy to the European Parliament's plenary.
- The Parliament hosting the forthcoming Conference of EU Speakers host a special meeting where the Commission can present the Policy Strategy and the national parliaments could hold a preliminary debate.

Following the collective presentation of the Policy Strategy by the Commission the national parliaments could hold consultative meetings with a member of the Commission, preferably following the national scrutiny of the document in the relevant committees of the national parliaments. National consultation would give individual parliaments the ability to transmit directly to the Commission any comments, reservations or suggestions that they might have on the Policy Strategy prior to the presentation of the Work Program.

In addition to involving the national parliaments in the consultation process of the Policy Strategy, the subsequent debate of the Work Program – as envisioned in “Raising National European Awareness” could be conducted along similar lines of the debate conducted in 2005/06.

While the scrutiny of the Policy Strategy will give the national parliaments the opportunity to make their views known to the Commission prior to the adoption of the Work Program, a simultaneous debate by the national parliaments on the Work Program will give the national parliaments the ability to review the results of the consultations of the Policy Strategy by the national parliaments and European Institutions. In addition, such a debate will also have the affect of drawing public attention to the work of the national parliaments in the pre-legislative stage of European policy making.

The launching of a coinciding debate on the Work Program would be greatly enhanced if the Commission would present the document to the national parliaments. It is therefore suggested, that the Commission be asked to present the document to the COSAC at its autumn meeting. This will give the national par-

liaments the ability to hear the Commission's views on the final formulation of the Work Program. In addition it would offer the opportunity for the national parliaments to review the results of the consultation process between the European Commission and the national parliaments on the Policy Strategy.

Coinciding debate on the Annual Legislative and Work Program

The results of the questionnaire sent out by the Danish Parliament suggest that an overwhelming majority of EU parliaments would like to participate in a debate on the Work Program. Indeed a majority of parliaments have already claimed that the results of the initial debate were a success.

Although holding a debate in all national parliaments on the same day might help contribute to raising national awareness in European Affairs, due to scheduling problems in the national parliaments, a large majority of parliaments believe that the debate should take during the first month following the Commissions presentation of the Work Program.

Parliaments that are unable to participate during the first month following the adoption of the Work Program should nevertheless be encouraged to participate at their convenience.

According to the findings from the Danish questionnaire there does not appear to be a clear tendency for the type of debate (plenary, committee, public) used by the EU parliaments. It might therefore be concluded, that the way in which the national debates are executed should not be fixed by the Speakers. A flexible approach will allow different parliamentary systems and traditions, while maintaining the common objective – a coinciding debate in the EU parliaments.

Finally it should be noted that a majority of Parliamentary chambers are unable to base parliamentary debates on documents in English and French. Therefore the Commission should be encouraged to transmit directly to the national parliaments the Policy Strategy and subsequent Work Program together with all annexes and related documents in all languages – including indicative lists of non-priority proposals.

Following the successful launch of the IPEX website on June 30, 2006 the national parliaments now have a platform for the electronic exchange of EU information. IPEX should therefore be used to exchange information between the national par-

liaments during the consultative discussions of the Policy Strategy and during the coinciding debate on the Work Program. Furthermore the information provided by the national parliaments concerning the Policy Strategy and Work Program on the IPEX website should be made available to the Commission.

Timeline for the debates on the Policy Strategy and Work Program in the national parliaments in 2007:

- I. March 2007 – The Commission presents the Policy Strategy to the European Parliament and the Council.
- II. Late March 2007 – The national parliaments hold an interparliamentary meeting inviting the Commission to present the Policy Strategy.
- III. April – June 2007 – The national parliaments are encouraged to individually scrutinize the Policy Strategy – possibly in relevant committees. The national parliaments are encouraged to transmit their opinions on the Policy Strategy either directly to the Commission or by inviting a member of the Commission to their Parliament.
- IV. The national parliaments should publish their opinions on the Policy Strategy on IPEX. Opinions from the European Parliament’s committees concerning the Policy Strategy should also be made available through IPEX. The Commission should be encouraged to consult the IPEX website.
- V. November – December 2007 – During the month following the Commissions presentation of the Work Program in the European Parliament, the national parliaments should conduct a coinciding debate on the Work Program.
- VI. The outcome of the national debates should be published on IPEX.

Annex 1

The results of the implementation of “Raising European Awareness”.

The analysis of the implementation of the declaration is based on two sources: (1) the information and results of the national debates sent directly to the Danish Presidency and subsequently published on the Conference website and (2) the final results of a questionnaire sent to the EU parliaments by the Danish Presidency.

Participation

29 national parliaments and the European Parliament were asked to participate in the implementation of the declaration: 25 EU Member States, 2 Acceding Countries (Romania and Bulgaria) and 2 Candidate Countries (Turkey and Croatia).

Due to the fact that some parliaments are composed of bi-cameral parliamentary systems, a total of 42 national chambers – and the European Parliament were eligible to participate.

26 parliamentary chambers representing 21 parliaments submitted information to the Danish Presidency concerning their national debates which was published on the Conferences website.

36 parliamentary chambers responded to the Danish questionnaire representing 19 countries.

The website

The website of the EU Speakers Conference (www.eu-speakers.org) was used as a platform for the electronic exchange of information concerning the exercise.

The objective of the website was twofold: to publicly announce the dates of the debates in the EU parliaments and to publish brief summaries/results from participating parliaments.

19 chambers sent information to the website concerning their national debates, while 17 chambers sent information to the website prior to the actual debate 2 chambers did so after their debate had taken place.

The pages on the website concerning the implementation of the declaration were accessed approximately 250 times per month since November 2005 by the general public and staff of the national parliaments.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed on 23 January, 2006. Parliaments were asked to complete the questionnaire by 27 January, 2006, however information from parliaments which replied after that date has also been included in this report.

What type of debate?

According to respondents 14 Chambers held their debates in their European Affairs Committee while 13 Chambers held their debate in the plenary. One chamber held a public debate, while the remaining 8 debates were either conducted by sector Committees or in Joint Committees.

Outside participation in the debates was also varied. While 5 chambers invited their Foreign Minister to participate in the debate 8 others asked Ministers from other Ministries (ex. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of European Integration, Minister of Economy). In addition 7 other chambers asked high ranking civil servants to represent the views of their Government.

In addition to Governmental Ministers 8 chambers requested the participation of the European Parliament – through national MEP's, while 7 chambers had the opportunity to debate the Work Program with a Member of the European Commission.

Of the chambers which reported that they did not hold a debate the majority claimed it was due to scheduling constraints, while only one chamber responded that a political decision was taken not to hold a debate.

Should the Work Program be debated on an annual basis?

25 chambers responded positively to hold annual coinciding debates on the Work Program while 6 chambers reported negatively. On the question of whether or not there should be a correlation between the annual debates of the Work Program and the Subsidiarity and Proportionality Check as envisioned by COSAC 21 chambers favored such a correlation, while 7 would rather not see a correlation.

Concerning the key question of the timing of future debates, a majority of chambers 18 would like to hold the debate in the month following the Commissions presentation of the Work Program, while 2 parliaments would prefer to hold the debate in a timeframe of two weeks following the Commissions presentation of the Work Program.

Was the debate a success?

On the question of whether the debate was a success or not, 13 chambers responded positively while 4 parliaments responded negatively. Parliaments claiming a success stated that the debate had a valuable political affect, while on the negative side, it was stated that the proposed goal of “raising public awareness” of the EU through coinciding debates in the EU parliaments was not achieved – and indeed public and journalistic interest in the debate was very low.

How can the procedure be improved?

There are several themes which can be identified with regards to improving the quality of the debate. The first deals directly with the Work Program itself. A large number of chambers found it difficult to work with the Work Program and annexes, as they were not translated in their entirety into all official languages. It has been suggested, that the Work Program be translated in a timely fashion before the commencement of the debate.

It was also stated that the Work Program lacks detailed information concerning the individual proposals – and thus, it is difficult to have a political exchange on the basis of a collection of titles and internal reference numbers. Furthermore, the separation of the priority and non-priority proposals seems arbitrary, and therefore the indicative lists of non-priority proposals should be transmitted directly to the national parliaments as part of the Work Program package.

Finally it was suggested by numerous chambers that better communication between the EU parliaments is of the utmost importance. Better information about the scheduling and outcomes of the debates might improve the individual debates, and would certainly contribute to the public awareness of the exercise. To this end, the numerous networks already existing between the national parliaments was mentioned (COSAC, IPEX, ECPRD, Speakers Conference and the Parliamentary Representatives in Brussels), and it was suggested, that a rationalization of interparliamentary cooperation might actually help in parliamentary coordination.