

THE CONFERENCE OF THE SPEAKERS OF EUROPEAN UNION PARLIAMENTS

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ON THE DANISH FOLKETING REPORT ON
RATIONALISING INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The point of departure for this debate is the Report drawn up by our host Parliament on the subject of rationalization of interparliamentary cooperation in Europe. In my remarks, I will focus on the structure and contents of this document and on the perspective of further work on the subject under discussion.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

In its three constituent parts, the Report discusses three areas of interparliamentary cooperation in Europe. The first part of the Report discusses the attempts to describe and rationalize interparliamentary cooperation on a pan-European scale, triggered off by Wolfgang Thierse's Report during last year's Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments in Budapest. In its second part, the Folketing Report describes The Hague Guidelines on interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union from July 2004 and evaluates their implementation. Finally in the third part, the authors of the Report undertake to evaluate the potential¹ of the EU parliaments and selected parliaments outside the EU² in terms of their readiness to engage in interparliamentary cooperation.

Given that each of the parts of the Folketing Report is an entity in itself and does not relate to the other two, it would be worth while to consider their consolidation in the future so that can complement one another.

2. THE CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

2.1. RATIONALIZING INTERPARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE

In his last year's report, W. Thierse strived to rationalize interparliamentary cooperation on a pan-European scale. Accordingly, this was also the mandate that was given to the working group set up to prepare main points for the Folketing Report under discussion today. In the Folketing Report, in its first part, next to the conclusion from Thierse's Report, one can also find conclusions from the poll conducted by the Folketing at the end of the previous and the beginning of this year³, as well as conclusions from a seminar on the subject of supranational parliamentary and interparliamentary assemblies in contemporary Europe. The latter was or-

¹ Such potential is measured by the number of members of each parliament. Moreover, data were provided about workload related to commission work and plenary sessions (measured in hours). According to the authors of the Report, the lesser the workload, the greater the readiness of a given parliament to involve itself in interparliamentary cooperation.

² Not only of parliaments from EU candidate states.

³ The poll measured the workload (the time spent) among parliamentarians who attend works of interparliamentary assemblies in Europe.

ganized mid-May this year by the Polish Senate in Warsaw under ECPRD auspices. This Seminar was the last stage in the preparation of Folketing Report on the subject prompted by W. Thierse's Report. In view of the fact that I had opened the seminar and participated in it, let me for a moment dwell on this thread of the Folketing Report.

The Warsaw seminar on the subject of supranational parliamentary and inter-parliamentary assemblies in contemporary Europe was meant to be the first step leading to preparation of a review under ECPRD auspices which would reflect the existing forms of permanent interparliamentary cooperation between parliaments of European states⁴ (or to be more precise, of the Council of Europe member states).

The initial feedback⁵ provided to the poll which was sent out in September last year to all ECPRD member parliaments helps to describe how European national parliaments (or their Houses) participate in interparliamentary cooperation in this moment of time and shows their readiness to engage in such cooperation in the future.

The feedback to the poll coming from ECPRD correspondents shows that Europe's parliaments are nowadays engaged in a. **76** more or less formalized forms of interparliamentary relations in the political dimension and in a. **8** forms in the area of parliamentary administration.

The poll confirmed the aspirations of the Balkan respondents to accede to NATO and the European Union in the future and also to join their respective forums of interparliamentary cooperation. It also pointed to the willingness of some EU states: France, Cyprus, Portugal, to accede to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean PAM (under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union), whereas Germany showed their readiness to change its status from the observer to the member in Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly EMPA. The Polish Senate and the Lithuanian Seimas would like to be more involved in the Eastern dimension of inter-parliamentary cooperation starting closer contacts with the Supreme Council of Ukraine.

As regards the question concerning interparliamentary cooperation involving individual national parliaments of European states, the answers were fed into on a two-dimensional classification based on two criteria: the legal and organisational one, and the geopolitical one. Adoption of such a classification makes it much easier to find one's way in a thick net of various forums of interparliamentary cooperation whose development gathered momentum especially after 1989. Such a classification will contribute to the cohesion of a future study on the subject of rationalisation of interparliamentary cooperation in Europe.

The findings contained in the introductory part of the Folketing Report point to the need of creating a factual data base which will be used to assess the rationale of interparliamentary cooperation in Europe. Highlighted is also the need to have all materials there sorted according to the right type of classification. These findings are fully in line with the conclusions of the Warsaw ECPRD seminar. During its proceedings, it was pointed out that the very presentation on the Internet of possibly fullest and well sorted-out information on the subject of interparliamentary cooperation in Europe will create conditions for its rationalization while also making it more transparent. At present, it does happen that parliamentarians attend meetings of interparliamentary forums which are completely unknown to them. A narrow circle of initiates know

⁴ The best procedure would be to upload the above study on the ECPRD website and to have it regularly updated.

⁵ Out of **60** houses of national parliaments in the Council of Europe states, **36** provided their responses (more than **60%**) and only **24** houses failed to give their feed back.

what is the difference between the previously mentioned Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

The Warsaw ECPRD seminar has also revisited the subjects flagged up in W. Thierse's Report as areas where possibly reform is needed:

- cooperation between Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE);
- parliamentary dimension of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, either based on the European Parliament or on the interparliamentary model resembling the Assembly of the Western European Union, or possibly resembling the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of the EU Parliaments (COSAC) and
- interparliamentary cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The discussion encouraged further insight in such controversial topics but did not end in any decisive results. This state of play has been also reflected in the findings in the introductory part of the Folketing Report.

Towards the end of the Warsaw seminar, it was decided that further work concerning supranational and interparliamentary assemblies in contemporary Europe should be piloted by the Chancellery of the Polish Senate in cooperation with the EU and the Council of Europe parliaments. In this connection, I wish to pledge the readiness of the Polish Senate to continue with the work we undertook.

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HAGUE GUIDELINES - COOPERATION BETWEEN THE PARLIAMENTS OF THE EU MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

I fully agree with the conclusion contained in this part of the Folketing Report which points to the need to have a working group in charge of developing coordination mechanisms for interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union, appointed by the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments.

Let me note at this point that the Hague Guidelines of July 2004 provide that "the Conference [of Speakers of the EU Parliaments] has a responsibility for overseeing the coordination of interparliamentary EU activities". Hence, there is still no entity in charge of day-to-day coordination of interparliamentary activities. Moreover, "overseeing the coordination of interparliamentary EU activities" only applies to such forums which are involved in the scrutiny of decision making process in the EU. A pending question is whether such oversight is also going to apply to numerous forums of interparliamentary cooperation inside the EU, e.g. regional forums as in the case of Benelux, the Nordic states or Visegrad states. Such forums are sometimes indirectly involved in the scrutiny of decision-making processes in the EU. It is not clear, either, whether such an oversight covers interparliamentary cooperation within the EU foreign policy or within neighbourhood policy.

Speaking about further oversight of the coordination of interparliamentary EU activities, the idea to harmonise the presidencies of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments with those of the European Union seems to be very appropriate. Such a harmonisation was accomplished within COSAC and this gave the Conference greater opportunities to be kept abreast of the current work in the Council of the EU. National parliaments of the countries presiding over the EU organize meetings of corresponding permanent commissions of the EU parliaments. Such meetings also take place in the European Parliament. This way, at present there are three centres in the EU dealing with coordination of interparliamentary cooperation: the presidency

of COSAC (identical with the EU presidency), the European Parliament and the presidency of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments.

Therefore, I would like to come up with a concrete proposal: every year in its first half the meetings of secretaries general of the EU parliaments should be hosted in the parliament of the country which presides over the EU whereas, Conferences of Speakers of the EU Parliaments should take place in the country which assumes the EU presidency in the second half of the year.

2.3. MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND THEIR SITTING DAYS

In relation to this part of the Folketing Report I would only like to point to the need to complement the quantitative analysis presented therein with some qualitative studies. Quantitative studies fail to cover such issues as: education of MPs, the level of expertise available to them, the latter being conditioned to the budgetary resources of a given parliament. At this point, I would like to highlight the advantage that the parliamentarians from richer countries gain over those from poorer countries. Parliaments from poorer states have to face greater budgetary restrictions in proportion to a lower national income, and atop of that they need to earmark substantial sums of money for translation of documents, and sometimes of the speeches of their members, either from English or French into Polish, or the other way round. In the comparative analysis presented in the conclusive part of the Folketing Report, the above qualitative nuances have rather been made more opaque than more clear.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Coming to the close, I would like to note that the problem of *supranational parliamentary and interparliamentary assemblies in Europe* has been revisited in recent years equally by Conferences of Speakers of the EU Parliaments and by the European Conference of Speakers of Parliaments. From the perspective of the actual area of competence, this problem is rather eligible for discussion in the latter Conference, whereas the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments should rather focus on the rationalising of interparliamentary relations within the EU itself. This should also take into account interparliamentary relations that EU states maintain within the CFSP and neighbourhood policy framework with the countries which do not belong to this fold. On the other hand, given that the following European Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, after the most recent one in Tallinn a month ago, is scheduled to take place in two years' time, I would suggest to place the subject of rationalising interparliamentary cooperation in Europe on the agenda of the forthcoming Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments in Bratislava next year.

Thank you for your attention.