



CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS AND PRESIDENTS
OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES

STRASBOURG, 5 - 6 MAY / MAI 2000

CONFÉRENCE DES PRÉSIDENTS
DES ASSEMBLÉES PARLEMENTAIRES EUROPÉENNES



**CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE
BY LORD RUSSELL-JOHNSTON,
PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

I. In my opinion, the debate about **the relationship between national parliaments and European Parliamentary Assemblies**, introduced by Zurab Zhvania, produced from the Conference the following main ideas which should be followed up:

1. One of the great advantages of our Assembly is that we replace bilateral agreements with conventions, which member states sign, ratify and hopefully implement. But there seems to be no mechanism for making sure that this is followed through. We have a shared responsibility here between national parliaments and the Parliamentary Assembly.
2. Information is sometimes inadequate and we do not have within individual parliaments and, for that matter here in this Assembly, adequate review procedures. Annual debates in member states on the Council of Europe are a method of review, which one should encourage. The use of electronic communication might be helpful. We should also consider structural differences. Speakers and Presidents of Parliaments have very different powers. Some are quite regal people who can lay down the agenda. Others are more constitutional monarchs who control the day-to-day business but cannot actually plan things ahead or lay down the law too strongly. Is there a case for any harmonisation?
3. We should try and avoid clashes of dates. Those of the Assembly are known more than a year ahead. Therefore it should be possible for national parliaments to take account of this, to avoid having European debates during our Assembly sessions, and avoid having votes, thus enabling people to attend committees, to recognise that the place is important and of value to them and to all of us. Equally, we have to respond to the observation that many countries feel that there are too many committee meetings spread over too much time, sometimes spread out over too many countries, costing too much, taking up too much time. We should seek to reduce costs and to reduce time as well. The Parliamentary Assembly will seek to do this.
4. Parliaments should give more support to their national delegations. There are some countries where national delegations are looked upon as political tourists! This is a silly, superficial attitude. It is so important that delegations get the fullest support at home.
5. Regional co-operation between national parliaments can take place through the Assembly. It has demonstrated a capacity to make constructive contributions to the reduction of conflict in certain areas such as the Caucasus or the Balkans where we have helped internally.
6. The Assembly is about values and about human beings and their concerns which we should never forget. So we must ask ourselves why there is a trend to absenteeism in democratic elections and some trends towards extremism.

II. On **crime and corruption**, many thought that this was an inappropriate subject as Speakers were not experts. But, in fact, the debate was a great success, largely due to the inspired introduction by Luciano Violante. It was agreed that an informal group would be established to consider ideas for the involvement of parliaments in this exceptionally important matter.

We will meet again in Zagreb two years' from now.