

Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments and of the European Parliament

Lisbon, 21 and 22 May 1999

Presidency conclusions

On 21 and 22 May 1999, the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments and of the European Parliament met to discuss the Consequences of Globalisation on the future of the European Union.

The problem of globalisation and the challenge it poses for parliamentary institutions was introduced by President Trillo Figueroa (Congreso de los Diputados, Spain). Various Speakers said that parliaments should be able to adapt to the information society and to new technologies, reinforcing parliamentary legislative and budgetary control.

The new technologies represent a challenge to representative democracy. For this reason, parliaments should be prepared to grasp the opportunities offered by the technological resources available to them and intensify the exchange of information, especially on the Internet.

The subject of “Quality of legislation and normative simplification” was addressed by President Violante (Camera dei Deputati, Italy) as a result of the working group established in Helsinki. The Conference registered the importance of the role of parliaments in dealing with this subject as main legislative bodies. All other institutions at national and European levels must co-operate to achieve better laws and make them more accessible to citizens.

By consensus, the Conference proposes that the document prepared by the working group should be submitted to the Speakers who may decide whether to bring it to the attention of the competent Parliamentary bodies or to individual members of Parliament; the issue of legislation should become an agenda item of the next Conference of Speakers in Rome and it should be taken forward by an ad hoc working group following the method that has been adopted so far.

The subject of “Parliaments, freedom of information and data protection” was presented by First Deputy Speaker Haselhurst (House of Commons, United Kingdom). Granting everyone rights of access to information held by a public authority in connection with its public function is a desirable objective. However, the application of this rule to parliaments should be carefully evaluated since the public release of some documents would prevent parliaments from performing their unique constitutional functions.

Two reports addressed the issue of inter-parliamentary co-operation after the Amsterdam Treaty. President Fischer (Nationalrat, Austria) adopted a general perspective evaluating the various *fora* for co-operation. The report by President Dahl (Riksdagen, Sweden) focused on the more specific topic of the model to be adopted by the Conference of Speakers.

The Conference mentioned the need to articulate all levels of inter-parliamentary co-operation, namely various meetings, round-tables and Conferences where the National Parliaments and the European Parliament get together. The relationship between different contact levels needs to be more clearly defined, so as to rationalise and improve the existing ones.

The Conference agreed to take forward further discussions on the scope, objectives and rules of procedure of the Conference by entrusting the current and next two Chairs and the President of the European Parliament with submitting further proposals to the next Conference. This work will take into consideration the following general principles, which were reached by consensus:

- The Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments agreed that it comprises the Speakers/Presidents of the national parliaments of member states of the Union and of the European Parliament. They all participate on an equal basis. The participants have different mandates according to the constitutions of their own countries or – for the President of the European Parliament – the consolidated treaties. These variations are to be respected.
- At an appropriate time, Speakers of Parliaments of candidate countries may be invited to participate as observers.
- Meetings of the Conference shall operate by consensus. The Conference respects the autonomy and constitutional positions of individual parliaments and their speakers.
- The presidency of the Conference shall be held by the Speaker of the host parliament, who shall be responsible for organising the meeting.
- The Presidency shall issue a summary of the discussions of the Conference to participants, on its own authority. Both the Presidency and individual speakers may publicise the views and opinions expressed at meetings without binding the Conference as a whole.
- Working groups may be established with the agreement of the Conference, on the proposal of one of its members.
- The Secretaries General of member parliaments may accompany their Speakers to meetings of the Conference. They or their designated representatives may meet together separately from the Speakers, either to prepare the agenda of the Conference or for any other mutual consultation. Arrangements for such meetings shall be made by the Presidency and shall follow those for the Conference as set out above.
- The Conference shall meet annually at the invitation of one of its members.

The next Conference shall be held in Rome in 2000, and the following one in Stockholm, in 2001.

The Conference took note of the remarks by certain colleagues concerning the prolongation of the crisis in Kosovo for which it expressed its deep concern.

The Conference took note of the appeal by the President of the European Parliament asking the heads of State and of Governments at their meeting on 3 and 4 June to ensure that the national Parliaments and the European Parliament are involved in preparing the future Intergovernmental Conference that will draw up the institutional reform of the Union.

Finally, on behalf of the Speakers attending the Lisbon Conference, President Almeida Santos (Assembleia da República, Portugal) appealed to all European citizens to play an active part in the upcoming elections for the European Parliament.