

Mr Pat Breen TD,
Chairman, Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs
Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

27 November 2012

Dear Pat

We are writing to you to follow up the first of the new format of inter-parliamentary meetings on common European foreign, security and defence policy following the meeting in Paphos in September.

As attendees at the September meeting we thought we should take the opportunity to write to you, as the incoming presidency chair of the Conference, with some thoughts on how the new conference can be developed in light of our experiences.

The most obvious consequence of the change from separate COFACC and CODACC meetings to the new format is one of size. Having so many parliamentarians assembled means that exclusively using set piece plenary debates can tend to be unwieldy and limit the opportunities for parliamentarians to ask questions and receive proper responses. The full plenary format also imposes a formality on proceedings which can hinder genuine exchanges of views and encourage the reading of short set piece speeches rather than focussed debate.

We think there are two areas where the adverse impact of increased size could be mitigated:

- One change which we would suggest is the use of concurrent "break-out" sessions, in addition to the plenary sessions, where interested groups could assemble in smaller numbers to address specific issues of a more strategic nature. We know from our informal discussions with you and your colleagues in Paphos that this is something you were already considering and we would certainly like to encourage it.
- Another improvement would be to shift the balance from lengthy presentations by the speakers to more time for questions and answers, which is the fundamental purpose of the meetings. It is also important to ensure that each chamber present is able to contribute during each debate should they wish.

We hope that it is useful to have this sort of informal feedback from delegations on the development of the new conference and we wish you and your colleagues in the Oireachtas every success both with the next CFSP and CSDP conference and more generally with what looks to be a

busy Presidency in the first six months of 2013. Of course, should you wish to discuss any of these issues with us we would be very happy to do so.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Teverson,
Chairman, EU Sub-
Committee for External
Affairs, House of Lords

Sir Malcolm Bruce MP,
Chairman,
International
Development
Committee, House of
Commons

Mike Gapes MP,
Member, Foreign
Affairs Committee,
House of Commons