

Focus paper

Future of the parliamentary scrutiny of the European Union affairs

Plenary meeting of COSAC
2 June 2015, Riga

A vigorous debate on the need to strengthen the role and involvement of national parliaments in the EU policymaking has been going on for years. It can be said that there is a constant constructive exchange of initiatives and new ideas; however, when it comes to reaching an agreement on new procedures or the improvements to the existing ones, we often find it difficult to reach consensus. In order to facilitate our discussions during the second day of the COSAC Plenary meeting and eventually find common solutions to our most pressing concerns, we would like to propose to focus the debates in the way described below.

The Treaty of Lisbon represented a significant step forward in ensuring that national parliaments can become an effective part of the European decision-making process. Today, more than five years on, we have accumulated much practical experience in the conduct of subsidiarity checks, political dialogue, the scrutiny of the respective governments and inter-parliamentary cooperation.

What conclusions can we draw at this point and what are our ambitions for the future? Have national parliaments taken full advantage of all the available opportunities and instruments? Have we outgrown the role of guardians of the subsidiarity principle and are we now ready for a more proactive involvement?

Recently, fellow national Parliaments/Chambers undertook a number of excellent initiatives aimed at improving the existing mechanisms of national parliaments' involvement in the EU decision-making. They shared their visions of the future role of the national parliaments in the European architecture. Discussion papers and cluster meetings generated by these initiatives have enriched the ongoing debates and have contributed to our attempts to find a unified approach.

The debates on the second day of the COSAC Plenary meeting will focus on three main topics. In order to have a more structured discussion and a constructive exchange of views and ideas, we would like to propose that the participants express **their positions on specific questions highlighted below**. This will help us identify the areas where consensus can be said to exist, as well as those where national parliaments could be seen to be, at this time, further apart.

1) First Session

“The National parliaments’ involvement in EU decision-making: state of play and overview of existing instruments” will aim at appraising the key experiences accumulated by national parliaments to-date, and will invite the participants to discuss issues and areas where most urgent improvements are needed.

The questions that we invite the participants to consider are as follows:

- **What, in your view, has been the most successful aspect of the parliamentary engagement in EU affairs so far? And, *vice versa*, which aspects have proved to be the most disappointing or challenging?**
- **What areas, in your opinion, call for most urgent improvements? Which of these improvements require mid-term / long-term action?**

2) Second Session

“Green card: Towards an enhanced political dialogue” will aim to constructively contribute to the ongoing debate on the national parliaments’ proactive approach to EU policymaking. There seems to be a considerable support for the “green card” procedure as an excellent opportunity for the willing parliaments to play a proactive rather than a merely reactive role, and thus genuinely contribute to better functioning of the EU. However, some of us take a more cautious attitude. Moreover, the procedural framework and practical details of the possible “green card” procedure remain unclear.

Hence, the questions that we would like to suggest to all of you are as follows:

Are we really willing and are we ready to play a proactive role in the EU agenda setting process? If so, should COSAC endorse the “green card” mechanism as a new form of political dialogue?

Can we commonly define this possible “green card” mechanism?

3) Third Session

“The European Commission’s multi-annual work programme and the role of parliaments”: the proposal to closely examine the Commission’s annual work programmes by national parliaments has recently been extensively discussed, and the summary of national parliaments’ priorities compiled on the basis of the Commission’s work programme for 2015 has been presented. While we regard this as an excellent example of successful cooperation among parliaments and their participation in the process of shaping EU legislation and policy, we would like the discussion to take one step further and encompass a new perspective. Namely, we would like to initiate an *early* involvement of parliaments, possibly in the context of the Commission’s multi-annual work planning foreseen in Article 17 TEU. Until now, this issue has been underexplored; therefore, our questions to you are as follows:

- **What, in your view, is the best way forward with the scrutiny of the Commission’s annual work programmes?**
- **Do you see any potential for the national parliaments to eventually become involved in shaping the Commission’s multi-annual work programme?**

- **What steps could be taken in this direction?**

We very much look forward to welcoming you in Riga in a few days' time and hope that the COSAC Plenary meeting will be a forum for constructive debates, mutual understanding and concrete solutions!

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