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Twenty-first Bi-annual Report:
Developments in European Union
Procedures and Practices
Relevant to Parliamentary Scrutiny

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Background

This is the Twenty-first Bi-annual Report from the COSAC Secretariat.

COSAC Bi-annual Reports

The XXX COSAC decided that the COSAC Secretariat should produce factual Bi-annual Reports, to be published ahead of each ordinary meeting of the Conference. The purpose of the Reports is to give an overview of the developments in procedures and practices in the European Union that are relevant to parliamentary scrutiny.

All the Bi-annual Reports are available on the COSAC website at:

<http://www.cosac.eu/documents/bi-annual-reports-of-cosac/>

The four chapters of this Bi-annual Report are based on information provided by the national Parliaments of the European Union Member States and the European Parliament. The deadline for submitting replies to the questionnaire for the 21st Bi-annual Report was 28 March 2014.

The outline of this Report was adopted by the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, held on 27 January 2014 in Athens.

As a general rule, the Report does not specify all Parliaments or Chambers of which the case is relevant for each point. Instead, illustrative examples are used.

Complete replies, received from all national Parliaments/Chambers of 28 Member States and the European Parliament, can be found in the Annex on the COSAC website.

Note on Numbers

Of the 28 Member States of the European Union, 15 have a unicameral Parliament and 13 have a bicameral Parliament. Due to this combination of unicameral and bicameral systems, there are 41 national parliamentary Chambers in the 28 Member States of the European Union.

Although they have bicameral systems, the national Parliaments of Austria, Ireland and Spain each submitted a single set of replies to the questionnaire.

ABSTRACT

CHAPTER 1 - FUTURE OF COSAC

The first chapter of this report seeks Parliaments'/Chambers' views on the effectiveness of COSAC to date as a forum for interparliamentary dialogue and exchange of information and best practice. It reviews where COSAC has been successful in the past and highlights repeatable best practice. In this context, it provides an evaluation of a number of tools currently used by COSAC to stimulate exchange between national Parliaments and with the European Parliament.

This chapter looks further into the future of COSAC and collects the views of Parliaments/Chambers on how COSAC should evolve to adapt to the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation within which it exists. In this respect, it outlines Parliaments' ideas on how COSAC can contribute to enhancing the role of Parliaments in the EU and how its role can potentially be strengthened in any matter related to EU affairs.

Networking of members of Parliaments/Chambers was considered by the responding Parliaments/Chambers the most successful aspect of COSAC meetings followed by exchange of best practices through the Bi-annual Reports, the recent trend of organising informal sessions, the agenda, the exchanges with significant figures and the side meetings with officials from the capitals. The quality of debates was considered the least successful aspect.

Regarding the evaluation of certain tools used by COSAC, Parliaments/Chambers provided various ideas and suggestions. When asked how the quality of the debates could be improved, the majority expressed different ideas. Background notes, the Bi-annual Report, informal sessions at the side of COSAC meetings and informal meetings of officials from the capitals were the tools mostly highlighted as useful tools by the responding Parliaments/Chambers.

In relation to COSAC's future role, Parliaments/Chambers were asked to provide an evaluation of and further ideas on its debates, its role after the issuing of two "yellow cards", the creation of different smaller formal and informal meetings of members of Parliaments submitting contributions to COSAC and the role of the COSAC Secretariat. The majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers presented their views as to what specific European policies and issues COSAC could discuss in the context of the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation. In general, there seemed to be a desire that COSAC discussed both policy and institutional issues.

Most responding Parliaments/Chambers supported that, after the issuing of two "yellow cards", national Parliaments should engage in better exchanging information and best practices on the subsidiarity principle checks in the framework of COSAC. As to how this could be achieved, the most favoured option was holding a discussion in COSAC meetings on the European Commission's response to a "yellow card".

The majority Parliaments/Chambers welcomed different smaller formal and informal meetings of members of Parliaments submitting contributions to COSAC referring mostly to the importance of discussions on topics of common interest to national Parliaments. Several Parliaments/Chambers expressed their concerns as to the abovementioned meetings, citing the very busy programme of COSAC and the risk of proliferation of meetings, and the undermining of inclusiveness.

The majority Parliaments/Chambers did not think that the role and functioning of the COSAC Secretariat should be improved or reformed within the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation.

CHAPTER 2 - COOPERATION BETWEEN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The second chapter of the report focuses on the evaluation of current formal and informal mechanisms of interparliamentary cooperation exploring on how interparliamentary cooperation could be improved and further deepened. In this respect, it seeks Parliaments'/Chambers' ideas on how the relationship between national Parliaments and the European Parliament could be further strengthened and on how information could be better exchanged, especially in the context of recent *ad hoc* initiatives taken by the European Parliament and other suggested mechanisms. It further outlines Parliaments/Chambers' views on whether there is a need to update the Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation and on how COSAC may provide a useful input to future EU Speakers' Conference.

The majority of Parliaments/Chambers responding replied that they regularly attended interparliamentary meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament, while 12 respondents informed they were attending them sometimes. The large majority responded that they regularly attended meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In both cases, the vast majority of those Parliaments/Chambers which responded, considered networking of members of Parliaments the most successful aspect of these meetings, whereas the quality of the debate, in the case of meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament, was considered the least successful. The agenda and the exchanges with leading figures in meetings both held at the premises of the European Parliament and organised by the Presidency Parliaments in the Member States, as well as the quality of debates in the case of meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States, were considered positively by the majority of Parliaments/Chambers.

The large majority of Parliaments/Chambers responded that there was a need for improvement of meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament and of meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, especially in terms of duration of interventions.

In relation to both types of meetings, the majority replied that the organisation and outcome of such meetings were sometimes or regularly evaluated.

The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers considered recent *ad hoc* initiatives taken by the European Parliament useful tools in promoting interparliamentary cooperation. The most favoured option was inviting rapporteurs or specialised members of national Parliaments on specific topics/ draft proposals for discussion in committee meetings of the European Parliament. The second most favoured option was inviting members of national Parliaments to hearings in the European Parliament, while the third was inviting national Parliaments to committee enquiries in the European Parliament. The vast majority of the respondents thought that these initiatives could be further improved.

Bilateral visits between members of national Parliaments and members of the European Parliament and video-conferencing were considered by the overwhelming majority useful tools in promoting interparliamentary cooperation.

When asked whether the Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation of June 2008 should be updated, the majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers responded positively, in several cases referring to new recent interparliamentary fora and the need for an update to reflect these.

A vast majority of the respondents supported the idea of COSAC providing some useful input to future EU Speakers Conferences in relation to a possible reflection on the guidelines. The most favoured means through which this could be achieved was by submitting a working document, based on the replies to the COSAC questionnaire on the Lisbon guidelines, in preparation of the EU Speakers Conference, followed by submitting the COSAC Bi-annual Report currently under preparation to the EU Speakers Conference.

CHAPTER 3 - DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EMU: THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS

The third chapter of this report focuses on scrutiny by Parliaments/Chambers of the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on "Strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union", COM (2013) 690 final, on monitoring by Parliaments/Chambers of the European Social Fund and on the discussion in Parliaments/Chambers of the Youth Employment Initiative proposed by the European Council on 7-8 February 2013. This chapter highlights best practices and procedures regarding how social and employment problems and related policies at a European and national level can be better monitored and coordinated at the level of Parliaments/Chambers in such a way as to strengthen and improve parliamentary surveillance over employment and social issues. It further outlines best practices amongst Parliaments as to how social dialogue and active participation of social partners could be achieved in the formulation of more effective and targeted policies.

Almost unanimously responding Parliaments/Chambers pointed out that the social dimension should be better or more integrated into EU policies. Several

Parliaments/Chambers deemed that the social dimension should be considered as a "horizontal" issue.

A majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (22) scrutinised the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on "Strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union", while a small number (4) expressed the intention to do so.

Concerning the content of the abovementioned Communication, a narrow majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers was of the view that it addressed adequately the crucial issues related to the social dimension. However, some Parliaments/Chambers indicated that the social indicators should be better designed and adapted to the national circumstances. Nine out of 10 responding Parliaments/Chambers deemed there was room for improvement in terms of content of social indicators. A majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers deemed that negative trends detected after using the employment and social indicators should trigger the adoption of specific measures.

The results of the questionnaire showed that the majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers monitored the allocation of funds in the context of the European Social Fund operations in their own country, while a wide majority of the respondents intended to play a role in taking responsibility for EU money spent in the context of the structural funds by supervising their own Government or agencies which manage EU funds.

However, there was no consistent position among responding Parliaments/Chambers on strengthening the role of national Parliaments to ensure better accountability of the allocation of EU funds in this area.

As regards the Youth Employment Initiative proposed by the European Council, this was discussed by the vast majority of the respondents. A large number of them (27) responded that their respective countries had submitted a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, while 1/3 had contributed to the designation of the Plan.

Parliaments/Chambers often cited having been engaged in interparliamentary dialogue mostly with other national Parliaments for exchanging best practices on social protection and social welfare matters, then with the European Parliament and then with the European Commission.

Parliaments/Chambers, when asked to share best practices on social protection and social welfare matters, expressed general support to existing forms of interparliamentary cooperation. Best practices cited varied from organising workshops and debates involving interested parliamentarians and experts to organising "cluster-meetings".

A positive reply was quasi-unanimous (34 out of 35) to the question whether Parliaments/Chambers supported social dialogue and active participation of competent social partners in the formulation of more effective and targeted policies. As to how social dialogue and active participation of competent social partners could be achieved,

Parliaments/Chambers presented a number of procedures used in their own systems. Consultation with, invitation to relevant Committees and participation of social partners in hearings were frequently cited.

CHAPTER 4 - DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE BUDGET PROCESS

The fourth chapter of the report focuses on the European Semester process implementation and the practical lessons learnt by Parliaments from their experience with this new procedure. It refers to existing practices on scrutinising national budgetary, fiscal and economic policies in the framework of the European Semester procedure, and outlines Parliaments/Chambers views on how to enhance the European Parliament's and national Parliaments' potential role for ensuring greater democratic legitimacy in the process. It further examines the accountability of participating institutions, namely of the Commission, the ECOFIN and the Eurogroup and also seeks Parliaments'/Chambers' views on parliamentary scrutiny over the "Troika's" (European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund) working methods, in cases of countries under macroeconomic adjustment programmes.

Over half of the responding Parliaments/Chambers have adopted or introduced special procedures, since the first European Semester was put into practice in 2011. Although in some Parliaments/Chambers no new legal procedure has been introduced, several new practices, aimed at greater involvement of Parliaments, were established and, in some cases, existing parliamentary practices regarding the European Semester were subject to improvement.

In order to ensure better parliamentary scrutiny in relation to the European Semester process, several Parliaments/Chambers adopted new scrutiny procedures by amending the relevant legislation or their Rules of Procedure, revised the procedure for the adoption of the annual budget, or comprehensively reformed the national economic and financial planning cycle.

The element most often highlighted was the importance of focusing on the European Semester during its most important phases: the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), the Stability (SP) or Convergence Programme (CP) and the National Reform Programme (NRP), as well as the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSR).

The scrutiny procedures mentioned included plenary debates/votes on European Semester documents before they are submitted to the European institutions and scrutiny undertaken predominantly in meetings of the sectoral committees and/or the Committee on European Affairs via debates/resolutions/reports on the European Semester, as well as documents/written questions/correspondence to the Government. In some cases, members of the Government take part in the debates, and in some cases representatives of the European institutions are also invited.

Other tools for monitoring the activities of the European Semester cited were the participation in interparliamentary meetings or the Interparliamentary Conference on

Economic Governance of the European Union based on Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG), the appointment of a rapporteur to coordinate the work of relevant committees and to collect information or the creation of an entity with reporting, scrutiny and monitoring functions.

There was consensus among those Parliaments/Chambers which answered positively that closer economic coordination and integration needed to be accompanied by tighter democratic control both at national and European level. Most respondents raised the issue of time constraints and deadlines that prevented thorough scrutiny.

A large majority stated that the SP or the CP and NRP were presented /submitted by the Government for discussion/ consideration/approval by relevant sectoral committees and the European Affairs Committee and/or by the plenary.

As regards participation in drafting national Draft Budgetary Plans (DBPs) submitted by Member States to the European Commission, for the first time on 15th October 2013, in line with the "Two-Pack" Regulations, the vast majority of responding Parliaments/ Chambers did not participate in such drafting. A narrow majority of Parliaments/Chambers examined the European Commission's CSRs at either committee or plenary level.

Regarding the role of the Eurogroup in the DBPs' assessment, most Parliaments did not express any view.

Most of the respondents believed that national Parliaments must ensure the democratic legitimacy of the process of the European Semester at both EU and national level. Political dialogue between national Parliaments and relevant stakeholders was identified as one of the most effective tool for providing a more democratic dimension to the European Semester and enhancing participation of national Parliaments in the process.

As to whether the European Parliament should play a more active role during the European Semester process, almost half of the respondents replied positively. There was however no agreement as to the phase of the European Semester cycle when greater involvement of the European Parliament should be ensured.

As regards debates on the economic and social consequences of the austerity measures provided for in economic adjustment programmes, nearly two thirds of the respondent Parliaments/ Chambers answered that they had held such debates, often at a committee level as well as at the plenary level.

When asked which institution should decide whether a country should enter an economic adjustment programme, a number of Parliaments/Chambers replied it should be the relevant Government with the approval of its national Parliament. A number of Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that the European Commission should design the specific measures and reforms to be applied, after a Member State had entered a macroeconomic adjustment programme, either in cooperation with the government of the State and the national Parliament or the Council.

The majority of Parliaments/Chambers did not comment on the possible role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Several respondent Parliaments/Chambers expressed the view that the IMF should participate in the "Troika", whereas opinions on whether the IMF should be replaced by a European mechanism were equally divided.

Concerning the role that national Parliaments of Member States under macroeconomic adjustment programmes should play with regard to monitoring the negotiation and implementation process of such programmes, several Parliaments/Chambers referred to an oversight – scrutiny function falling within their constitutional competences, in order to legitimise the procedures. Some Parliaments/Chambers called for a greater and more decisive role for national Parliaments.

When asked what role the European Parliament should play with regard to the negotiations and implementation process, several Parliaments/Chambers referred to a possible monitoring role over the work and the decisions taken by the European institutions.

The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers responding expressed the view that macroeconomic adjustment programmes were not characterised by sufficient democratic legitimacy and accountability. Some Parliaments/Chambers noted that these programmes had been negotiated and implemented without sufficient involvement of the national Parliaments in question, especially in scrutinising the process of "Troika" decision-making. Some of the responding Parliaments/Chambers mentioned the underestimation of the social dimension, highlighted the element of the emergency risk and called for more transparency and political ownership.

CHAPTER 1: FUTURE OF COSAC

The importance of democratic legitimacy in the EU and interparliamentary cooperation has been growing in recent years. Whilst interparliamentary cooperation has been blossoming in importance and a number of significant fora have been created in recent years, it can be argued that COSAC has not evolved significantly. For this reason, following the recent celebration of the 50th meeting of COSAC in Vilnius in October 2013, the moment seemed ripe to review COSAC's recent past and look into its future.

This chapter of the Bi-annual Report seeks Parliaments'/Chambers' views on the effectiveness of COSAC to date as a forum for interparliamentary dialogue and exchange of information and best practice. It reviews where COSAC has been successful in the past and highlights repeatable best practice. In this context, it provides an evaluation of a number of tools currently used by COSAC to stimulate exchange between national Parliaments and with the European Parliament.

This chapter looks further into the future of COSAC and collects the views of Parliaments/Chambers on how COSAC should evolve to adapt to the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation within which it exists. In this respect, it outlines Parliaments'

ideas on how COSAC can contribute to enhancing the role of Parliaments in the EU and how its role can potentially be strengthened in any matter related to EU affairs. In this respect, this chapter examines recent trends in the developing landscape of interparliamentary cooperation and explores whether the role of the COSAC Secretariat should be improved or reformed.

1.1 Past and current success - evaluation

The responding Parliaments/Chambers almost unanimously (35 out of 37) considered networking of members of Parliaments/Chambers to have been the most successful aspect of COSAC meetings. The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* assessed the COSAC meetings as the most significant fora for networking of parliamentarians involved in European affairs.

Most Parliaments/Chambers (29 out of 34) emphasised that the exchange of best practice through Bi-annual Reports had also been a successful aspect of COSAC meetings. The UK *House of Lords*, calling COSAC meetings "the heart of interparliamentary cooperation", noted that networking and the exchange of best practice should be paramount, and this principle should guide COSAC agendas.

The recent trend of organising informal sessions, exchanges with significant figures and agenda were seen by the majority of Parliaments/Chambers (more than 2/3) as being among the most successful attributes of COSAC. The UK *House of Lords* suggested that more space in future agendas should be set aside for informal or "workshop" type meetings. However, the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* commented that informal sessions were sometimes used by some parliamentarians to promote their own agendas.

Almost half of the Parliaments/Chambers responding (15 of 29) considered that the quality of debates had been the least successful aspect of the COSAC meetings. Eight Parliaments/Chambers stated that recent trends had shown that the quality of debates had often been affected by too broad and over-ambitious agendas, limited speaking opportunities and formulaic debates, based on prepared speeches rather than on a true debate.

The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* assessed the discussions on the COSAC Contributions in the recent years as ineffective. The Dutch *Eerste Kamer* believed that the COSAC Conclusions and Contributions often stretched beyond their aim of summarising debates and increasingly contained political statements about various issues that either were not part of deliberations, or were not shared by all delegations. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* claimed that the efforts of putting into practice the Contribution and Conclusions of the meetings were the least successful exercise.

Twelve out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers replied that the recent trend of organising side meetings with officials from the capitals was the least successful initiative. In that respect, the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* noted that representatives from capitals have regularly the opportunity to meet in Brussels.

1.2 Tools currently used by COSAC - evaluation

Debates

When asked how the quality of the debates could be improved, 34 Parliaments/Chambers expressed different ideas.

The Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, the Estonian *Riigikogu* and the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* suggested holding fewer sessions or inviting fewer speakers per session. The Lithuanian *Seimas* was of the opinion that it was essential to strike the right balance in selecting the speakers for the items of the agenda of the meeting (for example, at least one speaker per item of the agenda should be a representative of a national Parliament) and in scheduling proportional time for speeches in relation to the discussions.

Five Parliaments/Chambers suggested giving time in the debate to one member of each delegation followed by a second round of interventions by other members of the delegations.

The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* believed that consideration should be given to "break-out" sessions which would facilitate better discussion among smaller groups. The UK *House of Lords* suggested that exchange of best practice could be heightened via a "standing group" or panel of members of EU Affairs Committees being established, drawing members from a range of Parliaments/Chambers and scrutiny systems. The European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO Committee) believed that better involvement and advanced consultation of Troika Parliaments should allow avoidance of duplications, reduction of costs and improvement of the effectiveness of meetings and interparliamentary conferences; meetings between European political groups and European political parties should be developed as well. The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* suggested that COSAC could allow interruptions or a catch-the-eye-procedure during its plenary meetings in order to establish a vivid debate between members; moreover, plenary meetings should be combined with informal and side sessions in order to increase exchange and interaction between delegations. The Belgian *Sénat* mentioned that more time could be allowed to develop individual contacts between parliamentarians (for example, more time for lunch). The Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* suggested extending the second day with continuation of discussions later in the afternoon (without additional dinner increasing the cost).

Eight Parliaments/Chambers emphasised that significant improvement could be achieved by reducing the number of topics to have more time for debates and to encourage in-depth debate on each of them.

With regard to the subjects discussed, Parliaments/Chambers expressed the following ideas¹:

- the agenda should focus on politically important issues (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Belgian *Sénat*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*), on the priorities of the European Union and of the rotating Council Presidency and, if necessary, include current political, economic and social developments (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Polish *Senat*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, French *Assemblée nationale*);
- the topics selected should be of a broad interest which would reflect the concerns and interests of as many national Parliaments as possible (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*) and the debates should focus on key legislative proposals or other topical policy matters of importance to national Parliaments at the time of the meeting (Danish *Folketing*);
- COSAC should concentrate on specific policies, while proposals should be considered in interparliamentary Conferences involving sectoral committees (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*);
- topics should be more focused on particular issues rather than on "big questions" (Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*);
- topics should be focused on important European issues such as ensuring an effective, transparent, participatory EU decision-making process, youth employment, wider inclusion of women in politics and in leading roles in EU institutions, the social dimension of the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) and environmental protection policies (Romanian *Senat*);
- the inclusion of topics discussed in other conferences should not be considered a repetition (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Polish *Senat*).

The UK *House of Lords* suggested that interest groups of parliamentarians might also wish to cooperate – perhaps working remotely – in order to prepare discussion papers that could help to focus debates, alternatively, such groups could take forward agreed conclusions with a view to reporting back to COSAC at a later meeting.

The Swedish *Riksdag* suggested reducing the agenda by shortening the time for introductory speeches, or by keeping down the number of keynote speakers. The UK *House of Lords* also said that greater time restrictions should be placed on podium speakers, who could circulate beforehand extensive background documents, if necessary.

The Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor* and the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* emphasised that sufficient time should be ensured (at least 2-3 minutes) for individual interventions.

The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* suggested that in best practices debates members of Parliaments/Chambers of different or complementary philosophies might deliver coordinated presentations. The French *Sénat* stated that the debate could be introduced by

¹ See also point 1.3 of Chapter 1 on the "Future of COSAC" under heading "Discussions at COSAC meetings and the future role of COSAC".

a speaker from a national Parliament while the presence of a number of interlocutors was essential (Commissioners, representatives of the Presidency of the Council of the Union); in some occasions, the presence of representatives of European agencies would be useful. The UK *House of Lords* said that in the future some space on the agenda could be dedicated to a topical debate with the European Commission or with the President of the European Council, perhaps once per year, who would address COSAC and hear Parliaments' views on a salient topic.

When asked which keynote speakers Parliaments/Chambers considered more useful, a large majority of Parliaments/Chambers (37 out of 39) answered Commissioners, while 23 out of 39 Parliaments/Chambers replied members of national Parliaments. Less than half of Parliaments/Chambers believed that experts (19 out of 39 Parliaments/Chambers), members of the European Parliament (15 of 39 Parliaments/Chambers) and other speakers (11 of 39 Parliaments/Chambers) were useful keynote speakers, whereas 8 out of 39 Parliaments/Chambers responded Members of the Government of the country holding the EU Presidency. The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* and the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* considered the President of the European Council a useful keynote speaker, while the European Parliament suggested representatives of other EU institutions, where necessary. Four out of 39 Parliaments/Chambers considered experts and officials from the European Commission as useful keynote speakers. The Romanian *Senat* and the Latvian *Saeima* believed that the choice of keynote speakers should continuously focus on, among others, members of the European civil society, representatives of non-governmental organisations and the business sector.

Background notes

Parliaments/Chambers quasi-unanimously (37 out of 39) replied that they considered background notes a useful tool for the preparation of delegations.

Bi-annual Report

Parliaments/Chambers quasi-unanimously (36 out of 38) answered that they considered the Bi-annual Report as a useful tool in exchanging best practices amongst Parliaments/Chambers. The Spanish *Cortes Generales* and the UK *House of Commons* emphasised that the questions included in the questionnaires of the Bi-annual Report should be more focused on procedures and recent practices in national Parliaments and suggested that policy-specific issues be better addressed in COSAC plenary debates.

When asked who was involved in responding to the questionnaire which provided the basis for the Bi-annual Report, all of 35 Parliaments/Chambers responding answered that officials from the Committees on European Affairs were and 10 out of 35 Parliaments/Chambers replied that officials from sectoral Committees were also involved. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* named officials from the Parliamentary Studies and EU Policies Department, the Latvian *Saeima* reported about representatives of the *Saeima* in Brussels and the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* reported about officials of the EU Affairs Department being tasked with responding to the questionnaire.

Eighteen out of 35 Parliaments/Chambers said members of the Committees on European Affairs were engaged. Four out of 35 Parliaments/Chambers answered that members from sectoral Committees also took part in the exercise. Twelve out of 34 Parliaments/Chambers responded by saying that the draft of the answers to the questionnaire was prepared by the staff of the committees or other officials and then Committee Chairs or/and members were engaged in the final approval of its draft replies.

The European Parliament replied that, since 2013, the COSAC questionnaire has been forwarded by the Vice-President responsible for relations with national Parliaments and COSAC to the President of the Conference of Committee Chairs and the competent committee for the preparation of answers; the answers, which represented the position of the committee that had prepared them, were forwarded to the relevant Vice-President.

Nearly half of the Parliaments/Chambers responding (19 of 39) answered that the final draft of replies to the questionnaire was politically discussed and approved by a Committee of the Parliament/Chamber. The Czech *Senát* stated that answers to all "political" questions in the Report were strictly based on existing resolutions adopted by the *Senát*, therefore, there was no formal procedure for answering the questionnaire.

The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* and the UK *House of Commons* noted that the length of questionnaires and the Bi-annual Report itself seemed to be increasing and it was important that the Report was not overly ambitious in the issues it sought to address, because this could place a burden on parliamentary staff tasked with completing the questionnaire and the COSAC Secretariat in compiling the Bi-annual Report.

Two out of 37 Parliaments/Chambers replied that the Bi-annual Report was discussed at a Committee meeting. The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* responded that the Bi-annual Report was included in the agenda of a Committee on European Affairs meeting (usually as a side-topic) and distributed to all members of the Committee both by e-mail as well as by regular post. The European Parliament's AFCE Committee reported that it organised, at least once a year, an exchange of views on the developments within COSAC and in such circumstances the Bi-annual Report was distributed and eventually discussed. The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* stated that the Report was discussed by the EU Affairs Committee in the framework of the mandate of the delegation to the plenary of COSAC. The Finnish *Eduskunta* responded that the Report was distributed to members, but that it had never led to a discussion. The Estonian *Riigikogu* answered that the Bi-annual Report was sent only to the members that participated in the COSAC plenary meeting. The Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* said that the new Chair of the Committee on European Affairs intended to discuss the Bi-annual Report at a Committee meeting in the future.

The majority of Parliaments/Chambers (28 of 39) replied that the Bi-annual Report was communicated to members of the Parliament/Chamber's Committee on European Affairs and to the officials of the Parliament/Chamber. In the large majority of Parliaments/Chambers (32 of 39) the Report was not communicated to members of sectoral Committees. Almost the same number of Parliaments/Chambers (30 of 39) answered that it

was not published on the Parliament/Chamber's website. The UK *House of Commons* and the Latvian *Saeima* reported that the Bi-annual Report was distributed on an ad hoc basis, depending on the subjects involved (e.g. if relevant to an inquiry).

More than half of the Parliaments/Chambers responding (21 of 37) believed that the Bi-annual Report should not be further communicated. The Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* stated that, instead of further external communication, more attention could be given to Bi-annual Reports in COSAC's own meetings; Bi-annual Reports tended to be highly informative and rich in data about working methods and best practices of other Parliaments and this could help structure discussions aimed at exchanging best practices among Parliaments. The French *Sénat* also believed that Bi-annual Reports could enhance the debate in COSAC and the role of national Parliaments in the EU. The UK *House of Commons* agreed that a session dedicated to a discussion on issues related to the Report, without a long opening keynote speech, would be a positive innovation and could ensure greater linkage between the content of the Report and the scheduled debates in the plenary.

Sixteen out of 37 Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that the Bi-annual Report was a useful document which deserved greater visibility and wider circulation. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, and the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* stated that the Bi-annual Report should be easily accessible by members and officials of Parliaments and should also be disseminated among academics and experts. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* also suggested that Bi-annual Reports should be available on IPEX. The Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* agreed with this proposal and added that the Report should also be circulated to the Presidency of the EU Speakers Conference. The UK *House of Commons* and the Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* said the Report should be further communicated to the members of the relevant sectoral Committees. The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* and the Estonian *Riigikogu* stated that Bi-annual Reports should be further communicated to interested groups with regard to topics discussed in these reports.

The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* suggested that should the Bi-annual Report discuss matters which were relevant for interaction between Parliaments and other stakeholders, it could be relevant to send it to the members of the Council or the European Parliament.

The European Parliament's AFCD Committee highlighted that the Bi-annual Report was a unique tool that gave a synthetic overview on the developments of procedures and practices in relation to the parliamentary control on European affairs exerted by national Parliaments; it was therefore necessary to increase its "usability" through its diffusion at national and European parliamentary level by providing its translation in all EU languages.

The Czech *Senát* believed that the Bi-annual Report could not be viewed as a joint declaration or contribution of COSAC and it would rather be useful if the Conclusions and Contributions of COSAC were further communicated.

The majority of Parliaments/Chambers (19 out of 35) considered that the COSAC Secretariat should have a role in further communicating the Bi-annual Report. The Irish *Houses of the*

Oireachtas suggested that the Bi-annual Report should have increased visibility and prominence on the COSAC website, with an index of issues addressed (with links) in the reports. The UK *House of Commons* said that the COSAC Secretariat could disseminate the Bi-annual Report to a Brussels audience/academia, and more proactively offer to provide presentations on it to interested parties. The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* stated that the COSAC Secretariat should formulate a communication strategy with regard to its work and to interparliamentary cooperation in cooperation with the representatives of national Parliaments. The Estonian *Riigikogu*, the Belgian *Sénat* and the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* responded that it would be up to the COSAC Chairpersons or COSAC plenary and the Latvian *Saeima* suggested that it would be up to the Presidency or the Presidential Troika of COSAC to decide to whom the Bi-annual Report should be further communicated.

Informal sessions

Most Parliaments/Chambers (30 out of 36) responding considered informal sessions at the side of COSAC meetings a very useful or useful tool. The Danish *Folketing* reported that small informal sessions provided members of Parliaments with a better opportunity to exchange views in greater depth with members of Parliaments from other Member States than large scale formal sessions. The UK *House of Lords* underlined that informal sessions could offer a smaller group of delegates the opportunity for genuine debate and exchange of best practice, as well as further networking opportunities, and suggested that simultaneous "workshops" on separate issues could be run for parliamentarians in lieu of one of the plenary debates, rather than informal sessions being squeezed into lunch or other breaks. The Swedish *Riksdag* stated that informal sessions might be useful, but they also entailed the risk of distracting the focus from the actual plenary meeting; thus, the number of such informal sessions needed to be limited. Six out of 35 Parliaments/Chambers replied informal sessions at the side of the COSAC meetings were not so useful or not really useful, distracting the focus from the actual meeting. The Spanish *Cortes Generales* responded that additional sessions imposed an extra burden on the COSAC agenda, which was sufficiently dense thus not needing to be complemented by extra meetings. This would allow the focus to stay in the interparliamentary debate held in the plenary of COSAC.

Informal meetings of officials from the capitals

Most Parliaments/Chambers (29 out of 36) considered informal meetings of officials from the capitals at the side of the COSAC meetings a very useful or useful tool. The UK *House of Commons* recommended these meetings became standard practice during plenary meetings, as they were very useful events, noting that sufficient time needed to be allotted in order for informal/side events to be successful. The UK *House of Lords* emphasised that informal staff meetings allowed secretariats to share practical experience and information about their procedures, helping them to support effective European scrutiny work by their Committees and therefore suggested that informal sessions for both groups - parliamentarians and officials - should be one of the focuses of COSAC meetings in future. The Finnish *Eduskunta* replied that informal sessions and meetings of officials could be helpful, when they had a clear agenda, but that it would be hesitant to "institutionalise" them.

Seven out of 36 Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that informal meetings of officials from the capitals at the side of the COSAC meetings were not so useful or not really useful. The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* replied that the network of representatives of national Parliaments was a more valid and immediate point of reference and communication for issues of interparliamentary cooperation due to regular meetings and update of its synthesis.

1.3 Future of COSAC

Discussions at COSAC meetings and the future role of COSAC

Thirty one Parliaments/Chambers presented their views as to what specific European policies and issues COSAC could discuss in the context of the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation. Parliaments/Chambers' views varied. In general, there seemed to be a desire that COSAC discussed both policy and institutional issues.

According to the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, COSAC could be a forum to debate not merely a specific draft act, but policy options at the origin of the European Commission's initiatives expressed in working papers or in its Communications. What is more, according to the UK *House of Lords*, "COSAC's remit needn't be constrained..." and "...COSAC should be free to address any salient European policy or issue." On a similar note, according to the Danish *Folketing*, COSAC should exchange views and information on all policy issues that the European Affairs Committees deal with in their Parliaments/Chambers, including all kind of issues of a legislative nature, but also of institutional nature.

However, according to the Czech *Senát*, "COSAC should concentrate primarily on institutional questions rather than specific EU policies", while, regarding specific policies, it should "concentrate on the most salient ones for national Parliaments". According to the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, "COSAC should focus more on the EU legislative process" and always have legislative business as an item on its agenda. According to the Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, COSAC's contributions cannot go beyond the exchange of best practices within the established framework of COSAC.

The European Parliament, noting the establishment of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union, suggested that COSAC could also perform a detailed examination of the problems that national Parliaments encountered in exercising the prerogatives conferred to them by the Lisbon Treaty. COSAC should rather focus on horizontal/institutional issues, while leaving specific policy areas to other existing interparliamentary fora, e. g. the European Parliamentary Week.

Three national Parliaments underlined the need for consultation with the Troika (Spanish *Cortes Generales*, UK *House of Lords*, Finnish *Eduskunta*) and the delegations (Spanish *Cortes Generales*, UK *House of Lords*) regarding the choice of topics on the agenda of the COSAC meetings, while the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* highlighted that it would be best not to be too prescriptive about the agenda.

Four Parliaments/Chambers (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, UK *House of Lords*, Polish *Sejm*, Estonian *Riigikogu*) warned against the risk of replicating debates taking place in other interparliamentary fora, while a number of others underlined the importance of addressing issues highly on the agenda of the EU at the time of the meetings (Belgian *Sénat*, French *Assemblée Nationale*) and current political, economic and social developments (Polish *Sejm*).

More specifically, COSAC, according to the proposals submitted, could have discussions and exchange of information on, amongst others, the following:

- institutional issues which may deepen interparliamentary cooperation and help strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the EU (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*) and practices of interparliamentary cooperation, exchange of information and networking between delegations (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- the issue of democratic accountability and legitimacy (Lithuanian *Seimas*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and *Tweede Kamer*, governing coalition parties SPÖ (S&D) and ÖVP (EPP) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*), the role of Parliaments in improving democratic legitimacy in the EU (Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and *Tweede Kamer*) and the role of national Parliaments (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Danish *Folketing*);
- best practices on parliamentary scrutiny of the activity of national governments on EU matters (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*);
- how to reinforce the European dimension of national Parliaments' activities to strengthen the consciousness of national parliamentarians and to promote a "European reflex" in sectoral committees (Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*);
- the European Commission's Work Programme (CWP) (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*) in order to draw a list, at an early stage, of proposals that Parliaments feel might be in breach of the subsidiarity principle (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*) and the European Commission's annual political strategy (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*);
- those legislative proposals that attracted most attention at national Parliaments' level in the context of the subsidiarity check procedure (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Polish *Senat*) not reaching, however, the threshold for the issuing of a "yellow card" (Polish *Senat*), the role of the "yellow" and "orange card" and its limits (Slovenian *Državni zbor*).

Parliaments/Chambers, which responded to the question, proposed a number of specific issues that COSAC could discuss. Amongst those, some notable and recurring ones were the following:

- parliamentary control of Europol and Eurojust (French *Sénat*);
- national Parliaments' participation in consultations of the European Commission (French *Sénat*);
- future priorities and issues of European policy of Justice and Home Affairs (French *Sénat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Romanian *Senat*);
- Multiannual Financial Framework (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- promoting mobility and the Labour Mobility Package (Romanian *Senat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*);
- addressing unemployment and youth unemployment (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Romanian *Senat*);
- enlargement (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- strengthening the role of COSAC (Romanian *Senat*) and its future (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*);
- Treaty changes (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Danish *Folketing*);
- environment and energy policies (French *Sénat*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Romanian *Senat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*) and green growth (Green party, opposition, of the Austrian *Nationalrat and Bundesrat*);
- taxation (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*) and tax harmonisation (Green party, opposition, of the Austrian *Nationalrat and Bundesrat*);
- Eastern Partnership (Lithuanian *Seimas*, Latvian *Saeima*);
- assessment of the functioning of the EU after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty - intergovernmental versus community approach (Polish *Sejm*);
- state of play of the Union (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*).

A number of Parliaments/Chambers expressed additional views regarding the future substantive role of COSAC. The view was expressed that COSAC should give "a sort of green card" to European initiatives (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*) and that it could give consideration to whether its ability to submit any contribution it chooses to the European Parliament, Council and European Commission could be used in order for a group of Parliaments to suggest a legislative proposal that they believe the Commission ought to bring forward (UK *House of Commons*). It was also suggested that COSAC might also benefit from appointing a longer-term chair of COSAC (UK *House of Commons*).

Better exchange of information and best practices on the subsidiarity principle checks in the framework of COSAC

Most (30 out of 39) Parliaments/Chambers replied that, after the issuing of two "yellow cards", national Parliaments should engage in better exchanging information and best practices on the subsidiarity principle checks in the framework of COSAC.

The replies regarding how this could be achieved can be seen on the table below.

Proposal	Percentage of Parliaments/Chambers in favour of a proposal	Number of Parliaments/Chambers in favour of a proposal
Through a discussion in COSAC meetings on the European Commission's response to a "yellow card"	93%	28
Through a discussion in COSAC meetings on proposals which have triggered a "yellow card"	63%	19
Through pre-selecting specific proposals from the Commission Work Programme for discussion in COSAC meetings	60%	18
Through forming a group of members within COSAC aimed at discussing a "yellow card"	27%	8
Total respondents		30

When asked further to provide other ways/means for better exchange of information and best practices, Parliaments/Chambers provided the views below:

- through a discussion in COSAC on draft legislative acts scrutinised by national Parliaments raising doubts as to compliance with the principle of subsidiarity (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*);
- sharing, via the network of Representatives in Brussels, those specific proposals from the CWP which they had selected for detailed scrutiny (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*);
- in the framework of informal sessions (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*);
- COSAC could consider whether the COSAC Presidency should have a role in issuing a factual statement should a "yellow card" threshold be reached. This would avoid the sort of circumstance that arose with EPPO², where national Parliaments had to wait several days for the Commission to inform them that a "yellow card" had been triggered (UK *House of Lords*);
- through issuing Guidelines for assessing the compliance with the subsidiarity principle, in cooperation with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the EU Court of Justice and the Committee of the Regions (Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*).

When asked to provide reasons why they would not favour such an exchange of information and best practices, eleven Parliaments/Chambers submitted their views.

² Proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, COM(2013) 534 final.

Two Parliaments/Chambers expressly rejected a collective approach of national Parliaments regarding Protocol 2 of the Lisbon Treaty. The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* stated that COSAC had decided that the application of the subsidiarity procedure was a prerogative of national Parliaments and that a collective approach had been rejected. Similarly, the European Parliament's AFCO Committee, referring to Protocol 2 of the Lisbon Treaty, according to which COSAC promotes the exchange of information and best practices between national Parliaments and the European Parliament, stated that the control of subsidiarity was not a collective exercise, but an individual one of every Parliament/Chamber. The European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI) supported further that it could be useful to involve the competent European Parliament Committee in the discussions of the follow-up to "yellow cards" and the Commission's reply to these. Along the same line, the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* stated that COSAC should not be conferred any power to 'coordinate' the monitoring of subsidiarity by national Parliaments. According to the latter, conferring such power would be in contradiction to the conferral of relevant responsibilities to individual parliaments, which are exercised in accordance with Parliaments' own procedures and powers.

The Finnish *Eduskunta* underlined that neither the subsidiarity mechanism had any impact on legislative outcomes, nor national Parliaments' contributions had been given the attention they warranted, suggesting that the procedure needed to be rethought. The Polish *Senat* referred to a risk that the COSAC meeting could focus on a single draft legislative proposal and not on the subsidiarity principle check, whereas the Spanish *Cortes Generales* supported such exchange only on an *ad hoc* basis. According to the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, substantial discussion should take place among sectoral committees, while COSAC should discuss substantial proposals if the subsidiarity procedure was compromised, i.e. when the European Commission's response was contrary to expectation.

Four Parliaments/Chambers mentioned IPEX (Lithuanian *Seimas*, Polish *Sejm*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*) and national Parliaments' permanent representatives in Brussels (Polish *Senat*, Polish *Sejm*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*) as sufficient existing mechanisms for exchange of information and best practices. The Lithuanian *Seimas* suggested additionally sharing best practices in the framework of clusters of interested groups of national Parliaments or conferences or seminars.

Formal and informal meetings of members of Parliaments/Chambers

The majority (25 out of 36) Parliaments/Chambers welcomed different smaller formal and informal meetings of members of Parliaments submitting contributions to COSAC.

When asked to explain why they supported these meetings, Parliaments/Chambers gave different justifications. The most prevalent justification was related to commonality identified and established amongst Parliaments/Chambers. Thus, "discussion of issues related to specific situations common to members of national Parliaments" (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*) and "groupings of members of Parliaments with similar interests" (Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*), finding "common positions" on subjects on the agenda of the

EU (Slovak *Národná rada*, Polish *Senat*, Belgian *Sénat*), "providing information of common interest" to national Parliaments (Slovenian *Državni zbor*), representing "certain common interests and will of those who approved [contributions]" (Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*), facilitating "coordination of positions of various delegations" (Czech *Senát*), "networking amongst members with a shared interest" (UK *House of Lords*), giving the "opportunity to the Chairmen of Committees on European Affairs...to gather, discuss and submit collectively their views on matters of specific interest and importance to COSAC" (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*), enhancing "closer cooperation among national Parliaments and parliamentarians on a broad spectrum of common issues of concern" (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*), "addressing issues of common interest" (Latvian *Saeima*) were cited as justifications for Parliaments/Chambers' positive reply.

In addition, Parliaments/Chambers stressed, amongst others, the possibility for deeper, better-focused, result-driven and more thorough discussion and analysis where more concrete proposals could be formulated (Lithuanian *Seimas*), the exchange of information with a view to reinforcing parliamentary control, influence and scrutiny (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*), the opportunity to take into consideration certain priorities of Southern Europe (French *Sénat*) and the reinforcement of transparency in forming positions at COSAC meetings (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*).

Twelve Parliaments/Chambers expressed their concerns as to the abovementioned meetings.

Though both the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* stood in favour of these meetings, they expressed some concern. The former "would be hesitant to support institutionalisation of these meetings", while the latter stated that "these meetings should not constitute, in any case, a mechanism serving interests other than the Union's common benefit."

The Finnish *Eduskunta* stated that, while the contributions per se were welcome, time constraints, also underlined by the Swedish *Riksdag* and the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, did not allow consideration of these. It also underlined that COSAC and the Presidency should retain control over the agenda of the meetings and that there should not be an assumption that all *ad hoc* contributions would automatically be debated. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, stating that it was not in favour of such meetings, underlined the already very busy programme of COSAC. Both the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* and the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* supported the view that such meetings were distracting the focus from the actual meeting, while the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* and the French *Assemblée Nationale* referred to the danger of fragmentation of debates. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* stated that "the criteria employed to create the groups should avoid gender, age, nationality or geography...". The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* warned of the risk of proliferation of meetings, while the UK *House of Commons* warned against the introduction of unnecessary costs and the undermining of the inclusiveness of COSAC. "In the light of developments that can be detected in the wake of the economic and financial crisis, COSAC should not encourage the emergence of such interest groups" (German *Bundesrat*). The Spanish *Cortes Generales*, citing the European Parliament resolution of 16

April 2014 on relations between the European Parliament and the national Parliaments³, shared the view of the European Parliament that "interparliamentary cooperation must be open and inclusive". Both the Spanish *Cortes Generales* and the European Parliament expressed their concern regarding the unilateral organisation of restricted interparliamentary meetings, which excluded certain parliamentarians and aimed at the aggregation of positions on EU affairs which were not consensus-based.

Concerning the frequency of meetings of the already established Women's Forum, mixed replies were provided.

Four Parliaments/Chambers expressly said it should meet twice a year (French *Sénat*, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, Romanian *Senat*), while four others specified that the meetings should be held in consideration of the timing of the COSAC plenary (Belgian *Sénat*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*). Three Parliaments/Chambers and the Green party (opposition) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* replied that it should meet once a year (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*) without specifying exact timing or "once a year, within the framework of the plenary session of COSAC" (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*). The Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* suggested meeting once or twice a year, while the governing coalition parties SPÖ (S&D) and ÖVP (EPP) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* according to the necessity and the on-going political agenda.

The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* stated that the frequency should be set in liaison with the chair of COSAC, whenever there should be matters for discussion. On a similar note, the Slovak *Národná rada* and the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* suggested meetings when there was a real need or when it was deemed to be useful. The Czech *Senát* said the issue should be decided by the trio Presidencies and the COSAC Secretariat. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* suggested it should meet as often as it chooses separately from the plenary meetings of COSAC, in the format of cluster of interest meetings. The European Parliament recalled the "need of calling such a forum at the side of COSAC, when specific reasons, related to the role of COSAC, justify its call, and, if needed, once per year".

Replying it had no official view on this issue, the Finnish *Eduskunta* nevertheless warned against the proliferation of semi-permanent parliamentary conferences.

The role and functioning of the COSAC Secretariat

In reply to the question whether Parliaments/Chambers considered that the role and functioning of the COSAC Secretariat should be improved or reformed within the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation, 22 out of 37 respondents replied negatively.

From those Parliaments/Chambers, which responded positively and which chose to provide comments on the abovementioned issue, 6 (French *Sénat*, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, UK *House of Commons*, Italian *Senato della*

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0430

Repubblica and Danish *Folketing*) supported an expanded role for the COSAC Secretariat in supporting other interparliamentary meetings, namely the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (French *Sénat*, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, UK *House of Commons*, Danish *Folketing*), the Conference on Economic Governance (French *Sénat*, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Danish *Folketing*), the future mixed parliamentary committee in the area of Europol and of the evaluation of Eurojust (French *Sénat*), the EU Speakers Conference (Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*) and all interparliamentary meetings organised in national Parliaments and the European Parliament (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*).

More specifically, the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* referred to "a certain experience of the Secretariat in the field of interparliamentary cooperation" stating that it "could offer its competences to the benefit of respective Presidencies, being reinforced, where appropriate, with a second or third or fourth permanent member for co-financing amongst Parliaments". The UK *House of Commons* referred to an expanded role of the Secretariat for cost and efficiency reasons.

In addition, the following notable views were expressed:

- the COSAC Secretariat should give priority to the improvement of a structural coalition-formation in the context of the "yellow card" procedure by facilitating discussion on the CWP, exchange of priorities amongst its members and identification of potential coalitions on specific topics (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- more online tools could be used, such as a Facebook web page or email lists (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- potential increase of the resources available to COSAC and the small Secretariat should COSAC modify its working practices to include simultaneous workshops, topic debates, or *ad hoc* working groups of members preparing discussion papers (UK *House of Lords*);
- subject to guidelines set down by COSAC, there could be a role for the COSAC Secretariat in providing logistical or other support and advice in order to facilitate *ad hoc* "cluster" meetings of parliamentarians, given the increasing frequency of these (UK *House of Lords*);
- the COSAC Secretariat should be up to date with any exchange of information between national Parliaments and the European Parliament (Romanian *Senat*);
- there may be a role for the COSAC Secretariat to more actively facilitate interparliamentary activities between COSAC meetings, both at official and political level, for example on occasions when a "yellow card" is reached (UK *House of Commons*);
- there is scope to foresee a role in terms of content (i.e. preparation of notes for reflection) rather than a purely formal role (Belgian *Chambre des représentants*);
- the COSAC Secretariat may work to further encourage and trigger cooperation and awareness, i.e. by maintaining a database of requests/questionnaires on parliamentary procedures, accessible through the COSAC webpage (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*);

- the COSAC Secretariat may also produce a more elaborate working paper based on the replies to the COSAC questionnaire on the Lisbon guidelines, in preparation of the EU Speakers Conference (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*);
- the COSAC Secretariat could, under the political responsibility of the COSAC Presidency and the Presidential Troika, have greater role both in diffusing the COSAC Bi-annual Report and in preparing information notes (European Parliament's AFCO Committee);
- the COSAC Secretariat could, in cooperation with the Presidency, contribute in exploring ways to improve the functioning of COSAC, strengthen its role and increase the role of national Parliaments in the legislative process of the EU (Latvian *Saeima*).

The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* noted that the Secretariat should implement its duties within the existing financial arrangements.

On a different note, according to the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, there was no need to change the role, the composition and the functioning of the COSAC Secretariat, which should continue to concentrate on the preparation of Bi-annual Reports and to assist the Presidency Secretariat in all its tasks.

CHAPTER 2: COOPERATION BETWEEN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Since the coming into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament and national Parliaments have had a significantly larger role to play within the European Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall together determine the organisation and promotion of effective and regular interparliamentary cooperation within the Union. A number of new mechanisms, both formal and informal, have been introduced to increase the level of cooperation and improvements have been made to working methods. However, it can be argued that there is still space for further enhancement and that more could be done to strengthen interparliamentary cooperation at the level of informal dialogue.

This chapter of the Bi-annual Report focuses on the evaluation of current formal and informal mechanisms of interparliamentary cooperation exploring how interparliamentary cooperation could be improved and further deepened. In this respect, it seeks Parliaments'/Chambers' ideas on how the relationship between national Parliaments and the European Parliament could be further strengthened and on how information could be better exchanged, especially in the context of recent *ad hoc* initiatives taken by the European Parliament and other suggested mechanisms. It further outlines Parliaments'/Chambers' views on whether there is a need to update the Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation and on how COSAC may provide a useful input to future EU Speakers Conference.

2.1 Evaluation of formal and informal mechanisms of interparliamentary cooperation

Evaluation of interparliamentary meetings and Parliaments' views on how to improve them

The majority of Chambers/Parliaments (24 out of 38) responding replied that they regularly attended interparliamentary meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament. The Danish *Folketing* and the Slovenian *Državni zbor* responded that they rarely attended these meetings.

Most responding Parliaments/Chambers (30 out of 38) replied that they regularly attended meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In relation to the meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament, the vast majority of those Parliaments/Chambers which responded (27 out of 31) considered networking of members of Parliaments the most successful aspect of these meetings. The quality of debate was considered by 18 Parliaments/Chambers out of 31 the least successful. The agenda was considered positively by 24 out of 33 Parliaments/Chambers and the exchanges with leading figures were considered positively by 20 Parliaments/Chambers out of 34.

Similar replies were provided with regard to meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. All but one of those Parliaments/Chambers which responded (31 out of 32) ranked networking of members of Parliaments the most successful aspect of these meetings. Then the agenda was considered most successful by 23 out of 29 Parliaments/Chambers. The quality of debates and the exchanges with leading figures were ranked last by responding Parliaments/Chambers (18 out of 30).

When Parliaments/Chambers were asked to provide other most/least successful aspects, the Estonian *Riigikogu* pointed out the importance of written contributions provided before such meetings, while the UK *House of Lords* stressed that meetings organised in the European Parliament gave the opportunity to share their Committee's work with a wider audience and to discuss with other parliamentarians possible subsidiarity issues on new proposals.

With regard to the meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament, the vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers (32 out of 37) identified a need for improvement.

Parliaments/Chambers thought that improvement should take into account the duration of interventions (26 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), the content (14 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), the duration of meetings (13 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), the timing of meetings (13 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), and the choice of keynote speakers (11 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers).

In relation to the meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, the large majority of those Parliaments/Chambers which responded (27 out of 37), identified that there was also a need for improvement.

The proposed improvement should take into account the duration of interventions (20 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), the content (13 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), the choice of keynote speakers (10 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers), the timing of meetings (8 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers) and the duration of meetings (8 out of 31 Parliaments/Chambers).

When asked to explain their proposals, Parliaments/Chambers proposed a number of ideas.

More specifically, in relation to the content, Parliaments/Chambers proposed, among others, the following ideas:

- the Conference agenda should be both focused (specific pieces of legislation/topics) and flexible (Polish *Senát*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, UK *House of Lords*, Romanian *Senat*, French *Assemblée nationale*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor*, Latvian *Saeima*, Green party, opposition, of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*);
- topics of the interparliamentary meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament should be equally relevant both for the European Parliament and national Parliaments (Lithuanian *Seimas*, UK *House of Lords*, Romanian *Senat*, European Parliament's AFCE Committee);
- the answers to questions from the European Commission representatives participating in interparliamentary meetings should be less vague (Slovenian *Drzavni zbor*);
- interparliamentary meetings should end with the adoption of conclusions (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*) - by majority vote, if necessary, taking into account the minority positions (French *Assemblée nationale*) - and issues raised at the conclusions should be reflected in the agenda of future meetings (Lithuanian *Seimas*);
- interparliamentary meetings should "allow national Parliaments to take into account the European perspective in national debates, and the European Parliament to take account of the national perspective in European debates. A better cooperation between rapporteurs on specific legislative initiatives should be ensured" (European Parliament's AFCE Committee).

In relation to the choice of keynote speakers, Parliaments/Chambers proposed, among others, the following:

- the keynote speakers should be chosen among those who are involved in the decision-making process (Polish *Senát*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, UK *House of Lords*, Romanian *Senat*);
- the number of keynote speakers should not exceed the number of 2 or 3 (French *Assemblée nationale*).
- more academics should be invited as keynote speakers (Estonian *Riigikogu*);

- the keynote speakers should always be present throughout the whole event in order to enable a real dialogue and exchange of views (Polish *Sejm*, Belgian *Sénat*, Czech *Poslanecka snemovna*, Czech *Senat*, Latvian *Saeima*).

In relation to the duration of meetings, the following was, among others, proposed:

- meetings organised by the European Parliament should not start before 10 am and should not end after 4 pm because of travel arrangements. One-day events could start in the afternoon with the first session; the second session could continue in the morning of the following day (Czech *Senat*);
- the European Parliament should not organise meetings in Brussels which last two hours (Polish *Sejm*, Czech *Senat*).

Regarding the duration of interventions, the comments and the proposals included, among others, the following:

- duration of interventions is considered insufficient for national Parliaments (13 Parliaments/Chambers));
- more meetings in parallel should be organised in order to allow for more individual speaking time (European Parliament's BUDG Committee);
- time allocated for interventions should be short (German *Bundesrat*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*), discussions should remain 'on topic' and delegates should avoid make long pre-prepared speeches (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, UK *House of Lords*, German *Bundesrat*, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor*);
- sufficient time for discussion should be allocated (9 Parliaments/Chambers).

Regarding the timing of meetings, the proposals included, among others, the following:

- the organisers should confirm a date and time and circulate the agenda well in advance, so that parliamentarians can discuss their attendance and have time to prepare (Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, UK *House of Lords*);
- better coordination and planning of the interparliamentary meetings should be ensured in order to avoid duplication in the agenda (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*) and overlapping (Belgian *Sénat*, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, German *Bundestag*);
- interparliamentary meetings should be organised shortly after the publication of the proposals that national Parliaments deem to be priorities (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- interparliamentary meetings at the European Parliament should be organised during the pre-legislative phase and the legislative phase, preferably shortly before the relevant Council meetings and before the deadline for amendments in the relevant Committee of the European Parliament, while the timing of meetings organised by the Presidency should be fixed before the relevant Council meetings (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*);
- more general policy debates should be organised at an early stage (UK *House of Lords*);
- interparliamentary cooperation should be more focused on already established Conferences and COSAC in order to avoid proliferation of other fora (French *Assemblée nationale*) and there should be coordination of calendars of national

Parliaments, Presidency Parliament, the European Parliament etc. to avoid duplication of topics on the agenda (Belgian *Sénat*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*).

Other notable ideas included, among others, the following:

- detailed background notes (Czech *Senat*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, UK *House of Lords*), contributions of participating parliaments and questionnaires (Italian *Camera dei deputati*) should be provided before the meetings;
- speakers' names and political group information should be displayed on the screen (Estonian *Riigikogu*);
- participation of national parliamentarians through video-conferencing (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, UK *House of Lords*);
- an official report should be provided at the end of the meetings (Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*).

Evaluation of organisation and outcome of interparliamentary meetings by Parliaments

In relation to both types of meetings, the majority of Parliaments/Chambers (21 out of 38) replied that they sometimes evaluated the outcome of such meetings.

Almost equal number of 30 Parliaments/Chambers replied that such evaluation took place at the level of members of Parliaments (23) and at the level of officials (24).

Fourteen Parliaments/Chambers replied that delegates reported back to their Committee; the main topics on the agenda and outcome were often discussed at Committee meetings. Some 7 Parliaments/Chambers stated that officials prepared written reports summarising the meetings. According to the Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, the Chairperson of its competent Committee submitted a report to the Speaker.

The Belgian *Sénat* responded that the evaluation referred mainly to organisational matters; other Parliaments/Chambers replied that they focused on the outcome of the meetings rather than on their organisation (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*).

The UK *House of Lords* responded that the evaluation of logistical/organisational aspects takes place mainly at official level. The House of Lords' EU Committee secretariat discussed the benefits of such conferences, including the ways in which to capitalise on the opportunities they offered, and any difficulties or constraints at logistical/organisational level.

Seven Parliaments/Chambers stated that they never evaluated the outcome of interparliamentary meetings.

As to the results of the evaluation, the following views were, amongst others, expressed:

- the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* responded that the overall assessment was positive although the latter specified that, as to specific interparliamentary meetings, there had been debates over the relation between the content and duration of the meeting and the travel costs involved;
- the Czech *Senat* responded that they could not evaluate the real outcome of the meetings since no formal outcomes had been distributed to the participants;
- the UK *House of Commons* responded that "attendees at recent interparliamentary meeting in the European Parliament recently questioned the added value and concrete purpose/outcome of such meetings. They felt that a series of unconnected pre-prepared speeches did not assist in their work scrutinising EU policy/legislation, in contrast to the bilateral visits our select committees often conduct to Brussels".

The European Parliament responded that, according to its Rules of Procedure, in relation to the COSAC meetings, its delegation submits a report to the Conference of Presidents after each meeting. The European Parliament's AFCD Committee organises, at least once per year, an exchange of views on the developments within COSAC with the Vice-President responsible for relations with national Parliaments.

With regard to the meetings organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* pointed out that Presidency Parliaments failed to improve the quality of debates, in particular they sometimes avoided to put "difficult" issues on the agenda; participants usually went over their allotted speaking time; Chairpersons were not capable of channelling debates into concrete and/or innovative ideas and managing debates on amendments to adopt meetings documents.

The European Parliament's BUDG Committee, focusing on the European Parliamentary Week, stressed that continuity in the composition of national Parliaments' delegations should be ensured to allow debates to be more fruitful, and that it would be desirable if national Parliaments could be regularly represented at the level of (Vice) Presidents, Committee Chairs, Rapporteurs or Group Presidents, to ensure that the opinions expressed represent those of the Parliaments and not only individual opinions. It also underlined that it was necessary to better differentiate between the Interparliamentary meeting on Economic Governance of the European Union and European Semester meetings.

Commenting on the same meeting, the UK *House of Lords* noted that in 2013 and 2014 the format of after-dinner speeches had not worked well and that, although these had been very good, the environment was not conducive for them.

Recent ad hoc initiatives taken up by the European Parliament

The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers considered these initiatives useful tools.

Parliaments'/Chambers' replies can be seen on the table below.

Initiative	Percentage of Parliaments/Chambers responding in favour of a proposal	Number of Parliaments/Chambers responding in favour of a proposal
Inviting rapporteurs or specialised members of national Parliaments on specific topics/draft proposals for discussion in Committee meetings in the European Parliament	94%	33
Inviting members of national Parliaments to hearings in the European Parliament	86%	30
Inviting members of national Parliaments to committee enquiries in the European Parliament	74%	26
Total respondents		35

Thirty-one out of 34 Parliaments/Chambers responded that these initiatives could be further improved.

When asked to add other useful initiatives, the UK *House of Lords* mentioned invitations to members of European Parliament and other national Parliaments to national Parliaments and Committee meetings in the capitals and the Belgian *Chamber des Représentants* invitations to European Parliament rapporteurs by national Parliaments to discuss main dossiers.

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of Parliaments/Chambers considered bilateral visits between members of national Parliaments and members of the European Parliament (36 out of 38) and video-conferencing (31 out of 35) useful tools in promoting interparliamentary cooperation.

When asked to provide additional information, Parliaments/Chambers expressed the following ideas:

- the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* considered the organisation of more informal meetings (such as the *ad hoc* meetings promoted by the Danish *Folketinget* on social security systems and the French *Assemblée nationale* on the funding of European cinema) a useful tool;

- the Finnish *Eduskunta* pointed out that "inter-parliamentary cooperation was often helpful for networking and general information-gathering, but it did not affect legislative outcomes and thus contributed little to the influence of Parliaments. Inter-parliamentary cooperation should thus be understood as a complementary activity rather than a priority";
- the Czech *Senat* responded that it was interested in strengthening political dialogue with the European Parliament shortly after the eight-week deadline. With regard to hearings/enquires, it was of the opinion that the European Parliament should organise them around topics where there is a genuine interest in conducting a concrete dialogue with members of a national Parliament;
- the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, noting that the current format of interparliamentary meetings, particularly in the European Parliament, was not working, stated that "consideration should be given to 'break-out' sessions at larger gatherings which would facilitate better discussion among smaller groups";
- the UK *House of Lords*, the Romanian *Senat* and the Latvian *Saeima* stressed that the use of video-conferencing should be increased.

2.2 Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation

When asked whether the Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation of June 2008 should be updated, the majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (21 out of 35) responded positively.

Twenty Parliaments/Chambers explained what would be the main points they would have liked to see reflected in a possible update.

Several Parliaments/Chambers underlined that the interparliamentary landscape had changed since the conception of the guidelines in 2008, referring to new recent interparliamentary fora and the need for an update to reflect these. A number of Parliaments/Chambers made express reference to the establishment of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Conference on Economic Governance and the need that these be included or taken into consideration in the guidelines (French *Sénat*, Belgian *Sénat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Estonian *Riigikogu*), while others referred generally to new interparliamentary fora (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, UK *House of Commons*), a new institutional environment and current needs for enhanced cooperation amongst Parliaments in economic governance and new formats of interparliamentary cooperation (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*).

The Lithuanian *Seimas* agreed that "we should start discussing the redefinition and re-approval of the main aims and forms of interparliamentary cooperation" adding that the objectives of interparliamentary cooperation "should no longer be limited to the monitoring of the principle of subsidiarity". The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* stated that, although its Joint Committee had not discussed the Lisbon guidelines, it was of the opinion that "a review would be timely". What is more, according to the UK *House of Commons*, the guidelines could also reflect recent discussions within COSAC in relation to the fundamental

role of national Parliaments in ensuring democratic legitimacy; it could further be explored whether Article 352 TFEU should trigger an enhanced form of interparliamentary cooperation. In addition, more focus should be given to interparliamentary cooperation in the framework of EU legislative process, particularly subsidiarity checks (Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*). The Romanian *Camera Deputaților* suggested specific amendments to the objectives, the framework and the fields of cooperation in the text of the guidelines. The Latvian *Saeima* stressed the need that these reflected that the European Parliament and national Parliaments functioned on an equal footing, while further suggesting setting uniform and clear principles for subsidiarity and proportionality checks.

Despite support to a possible update of the guidelines, three Parliaments/Chambers (Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, Swedish *Riksdag*) did not consider there was a need for an update or a major overhaul. The first, while supporting this view, acknowledged, nevertheless, the need for an adaptation to the post-Lisbon situation, while the second urged for implementation rather than discussion of the guidelines. The Italian *Camera dei Deputati* pointed out that the Guidelines could be updated only in order to include the new permanent Conferences established by the EU Speakers' Conference.

The European Parliament cited the proposal of its AFCD Committee to develop an arrangement between national Parliaments and the European Parliament to govern efficient cooperation, in accordance to Article 10 of Protocol 1 of the Lisbon Treaty and its Rules of Procedures. Citing Article 12 of TEU and Protocol 1, it added that the principles of the Lisbon guidelines should be adapted following the idea of "a European parliamentary system". The Italian *Camera dei Deputati* suggested compliance with Article 9 of Protocol 1 and expressed its opposition to any attempt to confer the competence to express national Parliaments' "collective positions" upon new or existing interparliamentary fora or bodies.

When Parliaments/Chambers were asked whether COSAC could provide some useful input to future EU Speakers Conferences in relation to a possible reflection on the guidelines, a large majority of those replying (28 out of 35) responded positively.

The most favoured means through which this could be achieved was "by submitting a working document, based on the replies to the COSAC questionnaire on the Lisbon guidelines, in preparation of the EU Speakers Conference" (21), followed "by submitting the COSAC Bi-annual Report currently under preparation to the EU Speakers Conference" (14).

The Finnish *Eduskunta* noted, however, that it was not convinced any formal guidelines were necessary, questioning whether the Lisbon guidelines had had any effect. It added that "a submission to the Speakers' Conference would only add to the volume of papers that the Speakers do not read, but officials acting in the Speakers' name might use to promote their own agendas". The UK *House of Commons* supported discussing the working document to be submitted by a future COSAC plenary, while the Danish *Folketing* highlighted that such a contribution to the EU Speakers Conference should primarily focus on COSAC's own role in interparliamentary cooperation.

Other possible means suggested included forwarding the summary of the answers given in relation to the future role of COSAC, or COSAC looking at the issue through a future Bi-annual Report, or a plenary session with resulting Conclusions, or COSAC asking for follow-up from the European Parliament to the COSAC issues/proposals.

CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EMU: THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS

The deep economic recession in the euro area and the on-going European sovereign debt crisis have placed the debate on the social dimension of Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) high on the European political agenda. Even though this issue is by no means a new one, it has recently been put into a more focused and targeted context and has been associated with key issues relating to EU's overall legitimacy and EMU's structural reforms, such as the European project's questioning by its citizens, the concept of a deep and genuine EMU and the tackling of employment and social challenges resulting from the crisis.

This chapter of the Bi-annual Report focuses on scrutiny by Parliaments/Chambers of the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on "Strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union", COM (2013) 690 final, on monitoring by Parliaments/Chambers of the European Social Fund and on the discussion in Parliaments/Chambers of the Youth Employment Initiative proposed by the European Council on 7-8 February 2013. This chapter highlights best practices and procedures regarding how social and employment problems and related policies at a European and national level can be better monitored and coordinated at the level of Parliaments/Chambers in such a way as to strengthen and improve parliamentary surveillance over employment and social issues. It further outlines best practices amongst Parliaments as to how social dialogue and active participation of social partners could be achieved in the formulation of more effective and targeted policies.

3.1 Scrutiny of the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on "Strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union", COM(2013) 690 final

The respondents almost unanimously (29 out of 31) agreed that the social dimension should be better or more integrated into EU policies within the framework of the European Semester.

Several Parliaments/Chambers (German *Bundestrat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Polish *Sejm* and *Senat*, Estonian *Riigikogu*, European Parliament) deemed that the social dimension should be considered as a "horizontal" issue.

The French *Sénat* and the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* pointed out that social and employment issues should be taken into account in assessing member States economic policy reforms and also in the framework of the excessive deficit and macroeconomic

imbalances procedures. The Latvian *Saeima* underlined the need to improve the existing procedures of the European Semester and to focus on raising employment and improving welfare. The Czech *Senát* highlighted the opportunity to integrate into EU policy measures that could increase labour mobility or eliminate barriers in the European labour market. In a recent resolution, the Spanish *Cortes Generales* called on the Government to promote the development of the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union with a view to contributing to the construction of a future political union.

The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* specified that some parties were of the opinion that the social dimension should be given a more prominent and integrated role, while others were of the opinion that there was not or there should not be any ground for this. The Swedish *Riksdag* emphasised the social dimension in EU policies, but, at the same time, underlined the importance of respecting national competences.

A majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (22 out of 38) scrutinised the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on "Strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union", all of them at committee level. In 9 Parliaments/Chambers the Communication was scrutinised by the Committee on European Affairs, in 10 Parliaments/Chambers by the Committees responsible for subject matter (sometimes jointly with the Committee on European Affairs). Four out of 38 Parliaments/Chambers expressed the intention to scrutinise the Communication.

Concerning the content of the Communication, a narrow majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (11 out of 21) was of the view that it addressed adequately the crucial issues related to the social dimension. According to the rest (10 out of 21), the social indicators should be better designed and adapted to national circumstances.

The Slovenian *Državni zbor* pointed out that the Communication issues were too generic, while the Finnish *Eduskunta* deemed that it was just a starting point for future, more concrete, measures. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* highlighted the need to better define some of the contents of the proposal and, with regard to social dialogue, considered the definition of "social partner" too narrow, compared to that used in a number of Member States.

The French *Sénat* called for the organisation of meetings of the Eurogroup ministers with ministers for social affairs, to take greater account of social and employment issues in the debate on EU governance. In addition, it called for the introduction, within a budget of the Eurozone, of unemployment insurance.

The UK *House of Lords* asked the Government for clarification on the following points: 1) the gradual evolution of Instrument of Convergence and Competitiveness (ICC) into a EU autonomous fiscal capacity; 2) the critical position on the Communication taken by the EU Trade Unions (EUTC) and by the President of the European Parliament; 3) the lack of any reference to a European system of unemployment insurance.

Most of the responding Parliaments/Chambers had not assessed the quality and the added value of the employment and social indicators put forward by the Communication. Nonetheless, some of them were critical about those indicators, since they concerned those matters of national competence (Finnish *Eduskunta*) or they did not take into account the specifics of a particular country and the countries of diverse structures (Estonian *Riigikogu*) or they were difficult to compare and, at best, they could signal a need for a more detailed analysis (Latvia *Saeima*). The Romanian Chamber of Deputies pointed out that some of them may sometimes be difficult to monitor especially for the new Member States, where the administrative capacity is in the process of consolidation and historical trends are not particularly relevant and therefore performance monitoring on this basis can be misleading.

Nine out of 11 responding Parliaments/Chambers deemed there was room for improvement in terms of content; 5 out of 10 in terms of updating of data; just 1 out of 10 in terms of sources of replies.

A few Parliaments/Chambers (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Romanian *Senat* and Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*) underlined that indicators should be as concrete as possible.

The Lithuanian *Seimas*, the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the German *Bundesrat* suggested taking into account gender indicators, while Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* deemed it appropriate to include also child and elderly poverty, as well as indicators related to the participation of women and youth in the labour market. The European Parliament called for concrete benchmarks for the employment and social indicators to be defined in the form of an EU social protection floor; it further called for additional employment and social indicators, such as child poverty levels, access to healthcare, homelessness, and a decent work index.

A majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (10 out of 16) deemed that negative trends detected after using the employment and social indicators should trigger the adoption of specific measures. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* suggested introducing threshold values of indicators; in cases of thresholds infringements the possible consequences - such as sanctions - should be considered. Some Parliaments/Chambers (Lithuanian *Seimas*, Romanian *Senat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*) underlined that, in such a case, national Parliaments should be involved in setting up those measures in the framework of the European Semester and mainly in the preparation of the National Reform Programme.

3.2 European Social Fund (ESF)

The majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (21 out of 36) monitors the allocation of funds in the context of the European Social Fund operations in their own country.

Regarding the procedure followed, monitoring is based on reports from the Government (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Slovak *Národná rada*, Latvian *Saeima*), the annual or special report from the National and/or the EU Court of Auditors (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*), hearings of or evidence from

the competent ministers (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, Latvian *Saeima*), agencies, regions, etc. The Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the Lithuanian *Seimas* discusses each year the report on EU Structural Funds (including the European Social Fund) expenditure in the previous year and the budget for the following financial year. In addition, the European Affairs Committee monitors the allocation of EU funds on a regular basis.

A wide majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers intended to play a role in taking responsibility for EU money spent in the context of the structural funds by supervising their own Government or agencies which manage EU funds. In order to provide the necessary oversight, the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* intends to hold regular hearings of the competent ministers and to receive information from the National Institute for the management of the ESF. The Spanish *Cortes Generales* aims at assessing the reports from the national Court of Auditors. The Italian *Senato della Repubblica* envisages to take advantage of the parliamentary opinion on the Agreement related to the 2014-2020 programmed period for enhancing its function of monitoring and controlling the activities of the Government and of the Regions in spending money relating to structural funds.

There was no consistent position among responding Parliaments/Chambers on strengthening the role of national Parliaments to ensure better accountability of the allocation of EU funds in this area. A few Parliaments/Chambers (Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*) suggested improving the exchange of information and best practices. The Greens, opposition, of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* answered that a subcommittee of the social committee could be established, while the Latvian *Saeima* pointed out that it was essential to have close cooperation with responsible Directorates-General of the European Commission (visits, meetings and political dialogue).

3.3 Youth Employment Initiative proposed by the European Council on 7-8 February 2013

Twenty-nine of the 38 responding Parliaments/ Chambers had discussed the Youth Employment Initiative proposed by the European Council, while one answered that it was intending to do so. Although a large number of them (27 out of 37) responded that their respective countries had submitted a Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, only 10 out of 30 Parliaments/ Chambers had contributed to the designation of the Plan. Most of the Chambers/Parliaments that further elaborated on the issue stated that the Youth Guarantee Plan had been discussed at a committee level (European Affairs Committee, Labour and Employment Committee, Social Affairs Committee), in some cases, in association with recommendations of related ministries. The Finnish *Eduskunta* stressed that the European Council proposal was a repackaged version of a scheme originally created in Finland, while the Lithuanian *Seimas* highlighted the importance of promoting youth internal mobility, as well as of the inter-institutional cooperation between line ministries and engagement of local government authorities and came to the decision to scrutinise the implementation of the Plan on a regular basis.

When asked to provide additional information, a number of Parliaments/Chambers referred to resolutions issued by competent committees. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* called on the European institutions to pay special attention to the conditions for carrying out the initiatives in Member States which are under the Economic and Financial Assistance Programme (EFAP), especially as regards the instruments used for financial support and highlighted the importance of monitoring the implementation and evaluation measures related to the Youth Employment Package. The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* stated that the implementation of the Plan fell primarily in regional responsibility. The French *Sénat*, in a political view adopted in July, emphasised, among others, the need to make a priority of the Youth Guarantee funding mechanism the detection of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and their reintegration into the system and encouraged the Commission to propose setting the amount dedicated to youth employment within the European Social Fund. It supported, moreover, that the expenditure co-financed by the Member States in favour of youth employment should not provisionally be included in the calculation of Member States' fiscal balances of the Member States and invited the Commission to act in favour of the development of joint courses of alternate training for different professions in order to put in place a genuine European apprentice status and to develop a quality charter for internships in Europe.

3.4 Exchange of best practices amongst Parliaments

Sixteen out of 37 responding Parliaments/Chambers engaged in interparliamentary dialogue with other national Parliaments for exchanging best practices on social protection and social welfare matters, whereas 11 out of 38 engaged in such a dialogue with the European Parliament and 10 out of 36 with the European Commission.

Parliaments/Chambers, when asked to share best practices on social protection and social welfare matters, expressed general support to existing forms of interparliamentary cooperation. The French *Sénat* noted the participation of its Committee on European Affairs in the meeting of the EMPL Committee of the European Parliament in the framework of the European Parliamentary Week, while the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* cited both the EU Presidency Conferences and conferences organised by the European Parliament as opportunities for engagement in the issues concerned. The Polish *Senat* suggested inviting the Chairmen of the Committees on Social Affairs to meetings concerning economy and finance, while the Polish *Sejm* suggested the organisation of workshops and debates involving interested parliamentarians and experts. The Danish *Folketing* referred to the "cluster-meeting" organised by its European Affairs Committee on free movement and national welfare systems with national Parliaments' members and representatives of the European Commission in October 2013.

In response to the question whether Parliaments/Chambers supported social dialogue and active participation of competent social partners towards the formulation of more effective and targeted policies, all but one respondents 34 out of 35 reacted positively.

When asked how social dialogue and active participation of competent social partners could be achieved, Parliaments/Chambers presented a number of procedures used in their own

systems. Consultation with, invitation to relevant Committees and participation of social partners in hearings were frequently cited. Social partners, according to a number of the replies, were invited to present their views orally or submit them in writing in Committees.

Some notable procedures presented included the following:

- inclusion of external members – representatives of civil society and social partners that have all the rights of committee members, except the right to vote and enact decisions - in most Committees (Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*);
- dialogue with the trade unions, representatives of Small and Medium Enterprises and cooperatives (Slovak *Národná rada*);
- attributing a more ample place to European and national social partners in the framework of the European Semester (French *Sénat*);
- formation of a tri-partied Council with the participation of the Government, Trade Unions and employers, as well as through the parliamentary dialogue within the Councils for Public consultations to the permanent standing committees (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*);
- approval, often without discussion, by the Committee on Social Affairs and Labour of the social partners' (Tripartite Council) decisions. Consultation of the Committee on Social Affairs and Labour with social partners (umbrella NGOs, employers' organisations, labour unions, etc.), while drafting or debating draft laws, exercising parliamentary control and invitation to participate in and contribute to open hearings, meetings and other events convened by the Committee. Participation of the Committee in meetings and other events organised by social partners (Lithuanian *Seimas*);
- closer cooperation with European Economic and Social Committee might also prove to be valuable (Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*);
- frequent meetings of parliamentary groups and political parties with the most relevant social partners (Spanish *Cortes Generales*);
- introduction of three-way talks (joint discussions between trade unions, employers and the Government) established in 2011 of which the purpose is agreement and reform that bring improvements to the labour market for, among others, young people. Three-way talks are conducted within three areas: vocational introduction agreements, redeployment issues and short-term work. The abovementioned vocational introduction agreements are targeted at young people, where employment that has been agreed between the parties and that combines work and education can be subject to some degree of subsidies and supervisory support from central government. The three-way talks and vocational introduction agreements have received the support of all the parties in the Swedish Parliament. As the system is relatively new, it has not yet been evaluated (Swedish *Riksdag*).

The European Parliament referred to its resolution of 21 November 2013 on the social dimension of EMU⁴, where it recalled that the "Troika" had confirmed that high-quality participation by the social partners and strong social dialogue, including at national level,

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0515

may contribute to the success of any reforms. It invited the European Commission and the Member States to allow the European Parliament and the social partners to be involved in defining the employment and social indicators; welcomed the proposed involvement of the social partners in the European Semester process, inter alia in the framework of the Social Dialogue Committee prior to the adoption of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) each year; recalled that good governance of the EMU and its impact can be effective only if all stakeholders, including social partners, were involved; invited the Commission and the Member States to ensure that all stakeholders, including the social partners, were involved in economic governance, and in particular in the European Semester process.

Responding to the question as to how social partners were invited to contribute to parliamentary procedures in their Parliament/Chamber, respondents, adding to the information given above, presented elements of their internal procedures. Invitation to sectoral committee meetings in Parliaments/Chambers, participation in hearings, conferences and seminars were mostly cited in this respect.

Some notable procedures presented included the following:

- social partners can be invited to submit a written contribution or can send a submission on their own initiative (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*);
- social partners participate in public hearings and engage in lobbying activity. They are informed via the website of the Chamber, which features tabs dedicated to public hearings and lobbying (Polish *Sejm*);
- a register kept by the Parliament on the national interest groups and social organisations which request to be included in it (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*);
- invitation to the EU Internal Market Sub-Committee to give evidence as part of the Sub-Committee's inquiry into youth unemployment in the EU. Welcoming submissions in writing, as well as holding hearings in person with their representatives in the EU Committee (UK *House of Lords*);
- social partners are involved in parliamentary procedures through: the work of sectoral committees which hold public meetings and use social media to gather views (such as twitter, youtube and vine); they may also be involved through the public petitions process, the work of the Backbench Business Committee and in influencing legislation (for example if a bill has a public reading stage) (UK *House of Commons*);
- social partners play an institutionalised role in most decision-making processes on political reforms and are represented in numerous tripartite working groups on labour market integration matters (policies and laws). They are systematically consulted in the law-making process. All draft bills are sent to social partners by the Government for public consultation prior to their examination and adoption by the Parliament. Their opinions are accessible to all members of the Parliament in the course of the law-making process (Danish *Folketing*);
- exchange of experience at the level of rapporteurs and formal and informal meetings at the level of all parliamentary groups (German *Bundestag*);
- social partners send their position papers to members of the European Parliament and are regularly invited to public hearings organised by the EMPL Committee.

Members also meet with social partners during delegations organised in the Member States (European Parliament's EMPL Committee).

Chapter 4: DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE BUDGET PROCESS

The persistent and acute economic crisis and the austerity measures adopted to address the situation in the periphery of the Eurozone have triggered an intense debate on the legitimacy and democratic transparency of the processes relating to fiscal and budgetary consolidation. Acknowledging the need for strong mechanisms for legitimate and accountable joint decision-making, this chapter of the Bi-annual Report examines the means to enhance democratic legitimacy and accountability in national budgetary, fiscal and economic policy.

This chapter focuses on the European Semester process implementation and the practical lessons learnt by Parliaments from their experience in this new procedure. It provides an overview of the existing practices on scrutinising national budgetary, fiscal and economic policies in the framework of the European Semester procedure, and outlines Parliaments/Chambers views on how to enhance the European Parliament's and national Parliaments' potential role for ensuring greater democratic legitimacy in the process. It further examines the accountability of participating institutions, namely of the Commission, the ECOFIN and the Eurogroup and also seeks Parliaments'/Chambers' views on parliamentary scrutiny over the "Troika's" (European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund) working methods, in cases of countries under a macroeconomic adjustment programme.

4.1 Implementation of the European Semester process

Procedures in Parliaments

When asked whether they had adopted or introduced special procedures, since the first European Semester was put into practice in 2011, 20 out of the 37 Parliaments/Chambers, which responded, gave a positive reply.

In order to ensure better parliamentary scrutiny in relation with the European Semester process several Parliaments/Chambers adopted new scrutiny procedures by amending the relevant legislation (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*), or their Rules of Procedure (Lithuanian *Seimas*), revised the procedure for the adoption of the annual budget, or comprehensively reformed the national economic and financial planning cycle (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*).

The element most often highlighted in the replies was the importance of focusing on the European Semester during its most important phases: the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), the Stability (SP) or Convergence Programme (CP) and the National Reform Programme (NRP), the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSR).

The scrutiny procedures mentioned included plenary debates/votes on European Semester documents before they are submitted to the European institutions and scrutiny undertaken predominantly in meetings of the sectoral committees and/or the Committee on European Affairs via debates/resolutions/reports on European Semester documents/written questions/correspondence to the Government.

In some cases, members of the Government (Polish *Sejm*, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Romanian *Senat*, Danish *Folketing*) take part in the debates, and in some cases representatives of the European institutions are also invited (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Polish *Sejm*). In the case of the Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Prime Minister Rajoy appeared in front of the plenary of the *Congreso de los Diputados* in 2013, for the first time, at his own request, to inform the Chamber in question about the SP and the NRP, after the Council of Ministers had approved both documents and after these had been sent to the European Commission.

Other tools for monitoring the activities of the European Semester include the participation in interparliamentary meetings or the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union, the appointment of a rapporteur to coordinate the work of relevant committees and to collect information (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*) or the creation of an entity with reporting, scrutiny and monitoring functions (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*).

Three Parliaments/Chambers argued that the European Semester was fully integrated in the works of the relevant committees, as its main stages were linked to the documents on financial programming and execution.

A number of Parliaments/Chambers highlighted other features of their scrutiny system:

- the Lithuanian *Seimas* made mandatory the debate on AGS, while other European Semester documents and the draft national budget are debated by the sectoral committees and the European Affairs Committee without obligation on a regular basis;
- the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* answered that the amended law provides for prior consultation of Parliament in the drafting of the NRP and SP as well as on the definition of the Italian position on European Semester decisions of the European Council and Ecofin Council;
- the French *Sénat* replied that the French Parliament is consulted on the SP before it is sent to the European Commission since 2011 and the procedure may involve: a debate followed by a vote, the adoption of an information report by the relevant committee and the adoption by both Chambers of a European resolution on the European Commission's recommendation on the NRP and on the draft SP.

In most Parliaments/Chambers, no new legal procedures were introduced; greater involvement of Parliaments was ensured by establishing new parliamentary practices regarding the European Semester or by improving existing ones. The Danish *Folketing*, implemented in December 2013 a "National Semester", allowing the European Affairs

Committee and the Finance Committee to hold three annual joint consultations (on the Commission's AGS, the means of reflecting the broad economic policy orientations set by the Spring European Council in the NRP and the CP, and on the Commission's draft CSRs) with the relevant minister to whom members of Parliaments can address questions.

The Croatian *Hrvatski sabor* established a Special Fiscal Policy Commission in late 2013, competent for European Semester matters; the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* established a Budget Office with monitoring, reporting and scrutiny competences and promoted the enhancement of the Parliament's relations with the Greek Court of Audit.

The Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*'s competent committee discusses every Spring with representatives of the Government the actualisations of the NRP and the CP before they are sent to the European Commission; the Latvian *Saeima*'s European Affairs Committee approves the NRP and the SCP before they are submitted to the European Commission; the Polish *Sejm*'s European Union Affairs Committee discusses the AGS and the CSRs jointly with the relevant committees; it also examines Government reports on the European Council meetings focused on the European Semester.

In the case of the Czech *Senát*, an informal system of debating the European and national documents of the European Semester and cooperation with the Government was established. The Romanian *Senat*'s European Affairs Committee analysed in 2013 the way the provisions of the European Semester were debated and the AGS in March 2014; the UK *House of Lords* has an annual debate on the UK Convergence Programme; at every crucial stage of the process, the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* organises a debate.

Proposals related to the time frame and the procedures of the European Semester cycle

The following suggestions were made to improve the time frame and the procedures of the European Semester cycle:

- organising the European Parliamentary Week of the European Semester at the end of March or the beginning of April in order to synchronise it with the European Semester calendar (French *Sénat*) and bringing the calendar of the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union closer to the main stages of the European Semester (French *Assemblée nationale*);
- holding joint meetings of the sectoral committees of the European Parliament and the national Parliaments on the AGS and the CSRs (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*);
- participation of national Parliaments in the European Semester process at an early stage and involvement in the discussion of the national programmes both before their submission to the Commission and in subsequent stages when specific recommendations are submitted by the European Commission and the European Council (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*);
- earlier submission of NRPs and SCPs; presentation of the detailed assessment as part of the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure before policy recommendations are issued, so that it is partly integrated to the NRPs and SCPs (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*);

- extending the time limit for the national Parliaments to examine the CSRs in order to ensure appropriate parliamentary scrutiny (Polish *Sejm*, Finnish *Eduskunta*, UK *House of Commons*, Latvian *Saeima*);
- providing national Parliaments the necessary information and opportunity to evaluate whether CSRs have been taken into account during the drafting of the national budget (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*);
- dialogue between the Commission and the Member States to increase effectiveness of CSRs; better monitoring of CSRs implementation; presentation of the CSRs for discussion by the European Commission in the European Parliament and by national Governments in national Parliaments (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*);
- drafting a manual of best practices that would be useful to exchange information within the COSAC frame (Romanian *Senat*);
- inter-institutional agreement in order to involve the European Parliament in the drafting and approval of the AGS and the Economic Policy and Employment Guidelines; presentation by the Commission before the competent committees of the European Parliament of the AGS each year, early November so as to allow sufficient time for Parliament to present its views in subsequent European Semesters.

Other Parliaments/Chambers presented relevant initiatives/actions taken at national level: the Lithuanian *Seimas* aims to ensure that a two-week period is foreseen for drafts of the European Semester documents to be debated and, if necessary, amended by relevant committees before the final document is approved by the Government; the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* indicated that due to constraints introduced by the European Semester reducing the time to debate the central Government budget, while both Houses have reduced the time spent discussing the 2014 budget and the Senate has only debated priority 'chapters' of the budget; the UK *House of Lords*'s EU Committee has called for the production of the CP and NRP to be synchronised, allowing both to be debated together in the House. The governing coalition parties SPÖ (S&D) and ÖVP (EPP) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* underlined that a timely involvement of national Parliaments is a key for stronger participation and mentioned that the new government programme for 2013-2018 contains an assessment to improve national parliamentary procedures with regard to the European Semester. The Greens (opposition) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* answered that the national reform programme should be discussed and decided in the Parliament before being sent to Brussels.

Debates in Parliaments on the Stability or Convergence Programme and National Reform Programme

The questions to Parliaments/Chambers about whether Parliaments/Chambers debated the Stability or Convergence Programme and National Reform Programme in sectoral Committees or in Plenary triggered many positive responses. 29 out of the 38 respondents, stated that the programmes are presented /submitted by the Government for discussion/ consideration/approval by relevant sectoral committees and the European Affairs Committee and/or by the plenary.

In 9 Parliaments/Chambers, the SP or CP and the NRP are presented/submitted by the Government for discussion and/or vote, before they are sent to the European institutions. A debate was held by the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* competent committee on Ireland's Stability Programme on the day it was submitted.

In most cases, information on these documents or the draft documents were presented or submitted to the European Affairs Committee (6 Parliaments/Chambers), sectoral committees (7 Parliaments/Chambers), sectoral committees and the European Affairs Committee (8 Parliaments/Chambers), sometimes in joint sessions (2 Parliaments/Chambers) and to the Plenary (9 Parliaments/Chambers).

Five Parliaments/Chambers mentioned that discussions took place in the presence of competent Government representatives (Slovak *Národná rada*; Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Swedish *Riksdag*, Danish *Folketing*), while one said that these took place in the presence of EU representatives (Slovak *Národná rada*).

In the German *Bundestag* drafts of NRPs are debated at committee level prior to Cabinet decision; the German *Bundesrat* is informed on the NRPs drawn up by the Federal Government with the involvement of the federal states; in the Czech *Senát* Government's information on the preparation of those documents is usually debated at committee level in April, while the final versions are debated in these committees and in the plenary after their submission to the Commission; in the Swedish *Riksdag* no debate takes place, but the programmes are presented by the Government and discussed in the Committee on Finance.

For some Parliaments/Chambers, this practice is recent, but may become an established one or undergo further changes: the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor* debated these documents for the first time in April 2014 at committee level; the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*' Joint Committee on European Union Affairs held in 2013, for the first time, a debate on Ireland's draft NRP, before it was finalised; the UK *House of Lords*, which holds an annual debate on the UK Convergence Programme, has called for it to also cover the NRP.

The Slovenian *Državni zbor*'s responsible committees may adopt conclusions and send them to the Government for improving these documents; the French *Sénat* indicated that the SP was discussed and voted upon by the French Parliament and that the NRP is considered at the same time as the draft SP in the framework of the annual information report of the Committee on Finances; the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* makes no direct contribution to the NRP, but the Government submits for its consideration the SCP and sends it the final revision before delivery to the European institutions; the *Italian Senato della Repubblica*'s Budget Committee is responsible for consideration of the SCP and NRP (which are parts of the Document of Economy and Finance) and shall refer to the Senate within 20 days of referral, where resolutions can be voted; the UK *House of Commons* informed that the Government's assessment of the UK's medium-term economic and budgetary position (the basis of the CR), is approved by Parliament. The Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*'s Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs considered these matters and issued not binding views in the context of the on-going debate on "Europe 2020" Strategy. The governing coalition parties SPÖ (S&D) and ÖVP (EPP) of the Austrian

Nationalrat and *Bundesrat* informed that the Budget Committee of the National Council dealt with both programmes only after they were submitted to the European Commission.

Parliaments' participation in national Draft Budgetary Plans and Country-Specific Recommendations

In line with the "Two-Pack" Regulations, Member States submitted to the European Commission, for the first time on 15th October 2013, national Draft Budgetary Plans (DBPs). The majority (30 out of 36) of responding Parliaments/ Chambers did not participate in the drafting the DBPs.

When asked whether their Parliament/ Chamber examined the European Commission's CSRs during the preparation of the DBPs, 21 of the 37 respondents answered yes.

Most of the 23 Parliaments/ Chambers which provided additional details indicated that parliamentary involvement took the form of parliamentary debates at either committee or plenary level, or in some cases at both levels.

In several Parliaments/ Chambers, at committee level, the process is conducted either by the Committee on European Affairs or by sectoral committees with or without involvement of the EU Affairs Committee.

Parliamentary participation took the form of:

- hearings of the respective national authorities (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*); discussions of CSRs with representatives of the European Commission and of the Government (Slovenian *Državni zbor*) or as a part of the debate on the participation of the Minister of Finance in the ECOFIN meeting (Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*);
- parliamentary scrutiny of DBPs; debate with the Government after presentation of the CSR's (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*);
- budgetary debates on the implementation of the CSRs which is a specific topic in the various chapters of the draft budget submitted to Parliament (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*)
- parliamentary debates on DBPs and CSRs (Czech *Senát*) complemented by regular information reports from the Governments (German *Bundestag*);
- presentation by the Government of the adoption of CSRs and discussion of the Commission's opinion on Estonia's budgetary plan (Estonian *Riigikogu*);
- consideration of CSR by 7 sectoral committees followed by the adoption of opinion endorsed by the Chamber (Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*);
- scrutiny of CSRs in committee followed by a letter to the Government informing it on its views (UK *House of Lords*);
- consideration in and approval by the European Affairs Committee of the positions drafted by the Government on the CSRs, on the progress achieved in implementing the Council recommendations for 2013 and the AGS 201 (Latvian *Saeima*).
- discussion of CSRs in the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs and the Plenary of the Austrian *Nationalrat* in 2013.

In some cases parliamentary involvement is embedded in existing scrutiny/budgetary procedures (Finnish *Eduskunta*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*).

The Swedish *Riksdag*'s Committee on European Union Affairs underlined that, in principle, the Commission's CSRs were not binding, and that it was up to the *Riksdag* independently to decide how it used the documentation in its everyday activities. The Committee had explicitly refrained from adopting positions on recommendations that were targeted at other national Parliaments.

Hearings with the European Commission

The majority of responding Parliaments/ Chambers (27 out of 38) replied that no hearings with the European Commission were held regarding the abovementioned Programmes/ Plans.

Out of the 11 Parliaments/ Chambers, which gave a positive reply, several indicated public meetings were held with representatives at the European Commission at political or administrative level:

- the French *Assemblée nationale*, the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the European Parliament's ECON Committee referred to meetings with the Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Economic and Monetary Affairs or the President of the European Commission while the French *Assemblée nationale* referred additionally to an invitation to the President of the European Commission;
- the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* referred additionally to hearings with the Director-General of DG ECFIN;
- in the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* and the Latvian *Saeima* held meetings with the participation of the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission Representation in their countries;
- the Slovenian *Državni zbor*'s Committee on EU Affairs discussed the CSRs with Representatives of the European Commission.

Parliaments' views on the role of the Eurogroup in the Draft Budgetary Plans (DBPs)

Nine Parliaments/Chambers expressed the following ideas:

- the Eurogroup should actively participate in the assessment of the DBPs, together with representatives of all the non-euro area countries (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Romanian *Senat*);
- Member States in the Eurogroup exercise peer pressure when needed (Finnish *Eduskunta*);
- the Eurogroup draws up the evaluation criteria and the budgetary provisions (Belgian *Chambre des représentants*);

- the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, which has not adopted a formal position on this, answered that "the Eurogroup would appear to be the appropriate forum for discussion at ministerial level of draft national budgets of euro area member states and the Commission's opinions thereon, notwithstanding concerns over transparency with regard to the activities of the Eurogroup";
- consultative role, including proposals to ensure that Member States' budgets reflect the EU recommendations and preserve the stability of the Union (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*);
- the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, which has not adopted a formal position on this, in general, supports the role of Eurogroup as a specific Council formation that deals with economic affairs of the Eurozone countries, and took into account its statements in the deliberations on the draft budget.

The Estonian *Riigikogu* described the presentation by the European Commission of its first budget plans assessment as "a step in the right direction" and believed the European Commission's recommendations should be reflected in the Eurogroup statement. The Romanian *Senat* warned that a too strong role for Eurogroup "could be considered a dividing tool of EU, feeding competition between Member States" and that strong informal institutions can "endanger its unity and democratic functioning". The Greens (opposition) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* stressed that the Eurogroup should not receive a further role than given.

Parliaments' action to address non-compliance after the assessment of CSRs' implementation for every Member State

Twenty-six out of 36 of the respondents replied that no action was taken to address non-compliance after the assessment of CSRs' implementation for every Member State, published by the European Commission on 29 May 2013.

The Italian *Camera dei Deputati* informed that several legislative measures were adopted in order to ensure the compliance with the CSRs; important points of the assessment of CSRs' implementation have been addressed by the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*. The Czech *Senát* informed it has constantly debated at committees and plenary level the implementation of CSRs with the Government. The European Union Affairs Committee of the Polish *Senat* held a hearing with the representative of the Polish Government regarding Council's Decision establishing that no effective action has been taken by Poland in response to the Council Recommendation of 21 June 2013 and accepted the Government's explanations.

The UK *House of Lords'* procedure for holding the Government to account for progress in relation to CSRs, but not in the sense of non-compliance, involves "scrutinising of the relevant documents by the EU Committee and corresponding with the Government about their contents and the Government's progress in addressing issues raised".

In the Estonian *Riigikogu* the Government presents the EU Affairs Committee the means to achieve EU2020 Strategy and CSRs-related goals and an overview of past progress; legislative changes or adjustments in a development plan are resorted to if necessary. The

Italian *Senato della Repubblica* applied the parliamentary procedure foreseen for the approval of the update to the Document of Economy and Finance; the European Affairs Committee, has included in its opinions on draft bills submitted to the consideration of the Senate a reference to recommendations related to Italy; the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* takes into account the European Commission's recommendations throughout the budgetary process.

Parliaments' views as to enhancing participation of Parliaments in the process

Most of the 30 respondents believed that national Parliaments must ensure the democratic legitimacy of the process of the European Semester – at both EU and national level. Political dialogue between the national Parliaments and relevant stakeholders was identified as one of the most effective tools for providing a more democratic dimension to the European Semester and enhancing participation of national Parliaments in the process.

Several Parliaments/Chambers mentioned, amongst others, the following ideas:

- the creation of a parliamentary cooperation structure for the parliamentarians of the Eurozone, e.g. setting up a special committee of the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union (French *Sénat*);
- Joint Parliamentary Meetings organised by the European Parliament (Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*; Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*);
- exchange of information on the implementation of specific CSRs in the Member States, e.g. by integrating CSRs implementation in the agendas of interparliamentary committee meetings (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*);
- the inclusion of parliamentary experts in the working groups, elaborating the actualisations of the NRPs and CSPs (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*);
- constant monitoring and control of the activities of their respective Government's positions assumed in the Council and in the European Council (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*) and, more specifically, on the CSRs, NRPs, DBP and CSPs and other relevant documents (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Latvian *Saeima*);
- internal cooperation between committees in the Parliaments to ensure accountability of the Governments (Danish *Folketing*);
- direct participation of national Parliaments in the discussion and formulation of the national SCPs as well as the NRPs (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*);
- hearings and question time with Commissioners at national Parliaments between the publication of draft CSRs by the Commission and their deliberation and adoption by the Council (Czech *Senát*); invitation of representatives of the European Commission to national parliamentary debates; foster interparliamentary cooperation between European Parliament and national Parliaments to allow information exchange on Economic Debate (governing coalition parties SPÖ (S&D) and ÖVP (EPP) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*);
- dialogue with the European Commission and social partners following the publication of CSRs would allow holding Governments to account in advance of the formulation of DBPs (Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*);

- specific working groups, annual reports presented to the Parliament and presenting of the draft budget within the Parliament's Chambers) (Romanian *Senat*);
- cluster of interest meetings as those hosted by the Danish *Folketing* (Romanian *Camera Deputaților*).

The role of already established forms of interparliamentary cooperation, mainly of the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union and the European Parliamentary Week in strengthening the participation of national Parliaments in the European Semester was acknowledged by the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, the Polish *Sejm*, the Hungarian *Országgyűlés* and the Spanish *Cortes Generales*. Amongst others, the Polish *Sejm* supported strengthening and adopting the Rules of Procedure of the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic Governance in the EU and the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* holding more interactive debates, perhaps in smaller settings, during the European Parliamentary Week and giving a smaller role (in numbers and/or time) for members of the European Parliament during debates.

Several Parliaments/Chambers expressed satisfaction with involvement in the process and the functioning of existing mechanisms to ensure accountability of their respective governments (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Spanish *Cortes Generales*). The French *Sénat*, referring to the French scrutiny procedure of the national SP and NRP, suggested that its dissemination would be useful and that, to this end, the "various scrutiny/consideration procedures of these documents by national Parliaments should be considered in the framework of the European Semester (especially during meetings of Chairs of Committees on Finances)".

The UK *House of Lords* advocated a stronger role for national Parliaments in the oversight of the Eurozone integration. According to the Polish *Sejm*, the reform of the economic governance in the EU cannot lead to a division of the EU into two areas: the Eurozone and the other Member States.

When asked whether the European Parliament should play a more active role during the European Semester process, almost half of the respondents (12 of the 28) replied positively. Most respondents whose Parliament/Chamber(s) adopted a position on this issue agreed that a stronger role of European Parliament was necessary. Some argued this would enhance the accountability and transparency of the European Semester process. There was however no agreement as to the phase of the European Semester cycle when greater involvement of the European Parliament should be ensured. For some respondents the initial phases were crucial, others distinguished between the AGS phase and the subsequent ones (NRPs, SCPs, CSRs and DBPs) arguing that the latter were of national competence, while some campaigned for European Parliament involvement throughout the process.

The Italian *Camera dei Deputati*'s Committee on Budget took the official position that the European Parliament should be involved on an equal footing with the Council in the procedures for the coordination of *ex ante* economic reforms.

The Romanian *Senat* considered that the European Parliament should be involved since the beginning, starting with its position on AGS. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* believed an active role should be played by the European Parliament prior and following the publication of the AGS.

The Italian *Senato della Repubblica* believed the European Parliament should play an active role in the first part of the European Semester process before the Spring European Council, at a stage when different Council configurations are holding their preparatory meetings in finalising their conclusions to the European Council.

For the Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, the European Parliament should be more active at the stage of discussing the CSRs before they are adopted, with the Council and the national authorities of the Member States, while national Parliaments should initiate plenary debates at all stages of the Semester, given their key role in the adoption of national budgets. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* suggested assessing the Commission's proposal for CSRs in the framework of Joint Parliamentary Meetings. It further suggested that the ECON Committee meeting should be maintained and be the forum where to discuss with national Parliaments delegations CSRs adopted by Council and their implementation at the national level.

On the contrary, the Czech *Senát*, pointing out that "the European Parliament already plays an important role in debating the Annual Growth Survey and the general economic policy orientations in the EU..." and that "this should be the focus of the European Parliament", saw "no space for a role of the European Parliament with respect to NRPs, SCPs, CSRs and DBPs because these are instruments of coordination of fiscal and economic policies of individual Member States" for which Member States are competent.

The Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* advocated the need for proportionate involvement of the European Parliament in all stages of the European Semester process and an enhanced role in the assessment and surveillance process.

The German *Bundestag* stated the European Parliament and the national Parliaments were responsible within their respective competencies.

4.2 Parliamentary scrutiny of "Troika's" operations

Debates in Parliaments on the economic and social consequences of the austerity measures provided for in macroeconomic adjustment programmes

Almost two thirds of the respondent Parliaments/ Chambers (24 out of 39) answered that they had held a debate on the economic and social consequences of the austerity measures provided for in economic adjustment programmes, often at a committee level as well as the Plenary. In most cases, Parliaments/Chambers presented the general feeling of the debates held. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* expressed the view that the impact of austerity measures was not spread equitably across society, while the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* and the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* underlined that the strict austerity policies had led to a

deepening of the recession, an exacerbation of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion; fiscal consolidation should have been achieved gradually in order to avoid deep recession. The German *Bundesrat* noted that the austerity policies adopted had not proved to be an effective crisis management instrument and called for a European coordinated economic strategy with sustainable investments in order to foster economic growth, whereas the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* and the *Senato della Repubblica* both stressed the need to strengthen the social pillar of the economic reforms. At the debates held in the Finnish *Eduskunta* the general view was that the economic and social consequences were a regrettable result of individual Member States' failure to control their macroeconomics. In the report on the assessment of the "Troika" in Greece, issued by the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, criticism was expressed on the reflexes of Member States' Governments to the crisis, as well as the management of the problem by "lending institutions", while the intensification of the debate and regular exchanges between national Parliaments on budgetary economic and financial policies was encouraged.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the enquiry on the role and operations of the "Troika" (ECB, Commission and IMF) with regard to the euro area programme countries⁵ and on Employment and social aspects of the role and operations of the "Troika" (ECB, Commission and IMF) with regard to Euro area programme countries⁶. The latter called on the European Commission to carry out a detailed study of the social and economic consequences of the economic and financial crisis, and the adjustment programmes carried out in response to it in the four countries concerned, in order to provide a precise understanding of both the short-term and long-term effects on employment and social protection systems, and on the European social acquis.

Parliaments' views on which institution should decide whether a country should enter a macroeconomic adjustment programme

When asked which institution should decide whether a country should enter an economic adjustment programme, a number of Parliaments/Chambers referred to the relevant Government with the approval of its national Parliament (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Romanian *Senat*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*). According to the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, the national Parliament concerned should participate in the decision along with the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB). The view that the Council and the Eurogroup should take part in the decision, in order to guarantee its legitimacy, was expressed by several Parliaments/Chambers (Finnish *Eduskunta*, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, German *Bundestag*), while the Belgian *Sénat* also referred to the European Commission and the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* to the Commission and the European Parliament. The European Parliament stressed that only genuinely democratically accountable institutions should steer the political process of designing and implementing the adjustment programmes. Sixteen out of 33 of the responding Parliaments/Chambers had not expressed an official view on the issue.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0239

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0240

Following on the previous question, a number of Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that the European Commission should design the specific measures and reforms to be applied, after a Member State had entered an economic adjustment programme (Luxembourg *Chambre des Député*, the Greens (opposition) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*), either in cooperation with the government of the State (Belgian *Sénat*) and the national Parliament (Romanian *Senat*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*) or the Council (Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, European Parliament). The Bulgarian *Narodno sabrani*, the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, the Latvian *Saeima*, the German *Bundestag* and the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* underlined the role of national authorities and the Hungarian *Országgyűlés* highlighted especially the role of the relevant national Parliament. Three Parliaments/Chambers stated that the current arrangement was reasonable (Finnish *Eduskunta*, Dutch *Tweede Kamer* Estonian *Riigikogu*), whereas the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* called for an improvement of the current routine by adapting measures to the particular circumstances of each country and the involvement of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament deplored that it had been completely marginalised in all phases of the programmes and related measures, and that neither the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, nor the International Labour Organisation had been consulted despite the important social implications. It underlined the importance of coordinating with the Council of Europe, the Employment Committee, the Social Protection Committee, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) and the Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs.

Parliaments' views on the role of the International Monetary Fund

Only 12 Parliaments/Chambers commented on the possible role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Six out of 11 respondent Parliaments/Chambers expressed the view that the IMF should participate in the "Troika", whereas opinions on whether the IMF should be replaced by a European mechanism were equally divided. The European Parliament's report on the "Troika" stated that a European Monetary Fund, which would combine the financial means of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the human resources that the Commission had acquired over the last few years, would take over the Commission's role. The IMF, should its involvement be strictly necessary, would be a marginal lender and therefore could leave the programme, if in disagreement.

Parliaments' bilateral contacts

In response to the question whether Parliaments/Chambers had engaged in bilateral contacts with the Parliament of a Member State under a macroeconomic adjustment programme, 12 answered positively while 24 negatively. Several examples of meetings were cited by the responding Parliaments/Chambers. In some cases meetings at a Speakers' level (Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*), at a committee level in the framework of pre-presidency visits (UK *House of Commons*), or within the framework of regular interparliamentary cooperation were cited. The French *Sénat* had appointed a

member as a rapporteur for each Member State under macroeconomic adjustment programme.

Role of Parliaments in monitoring the negotiation and implementation process of macroeconomic adjustment programmes

Concerning the role that national Parliaments of the Member States under macroeconomic adjustment programmes should play with regard to monitoring the negotiation and implementation process of such programmes, several of the responding Parliaments/Chambers referred to an oversight – scrutiny function falling within their constitutional competences, in order to legitimise the procedures. Some Parliaments/Chambers called for a greater and more decisive role for national Parliaments (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Latvian *Saeima*, governing coalition parties SPÖ (S&D) and ÖVP (EPP) of the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*). The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* was of the opinion that national Parliaments should be regularly advised during the designation of the programmes. It added that these should participate in the forming their characteristics, as well as adopt an assessment procedure on the effectiveness of such programmes and their implementation, so that "ownership" of the programmes was achieved. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, citing the example of its procedures, referred to the establishment of the *Ad Hoc* Committee to Monitor the Measures of the Financial Aid Package for Portugal, which meets with the Heads of Mission of the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF and with members of the Government to present and discuss successive reviews and with the President of the Court of Auditors to present the "Audit Report - Monitoring of Mechanisms for Financial Assistance to Portugal".

When asked what role the European Parliament should play with regard to the negotiations and implementation process, several Parliaments/Chambers referred to a possible monitoring role over the work and the decisions taken by the European institutions (Belgian *Sénat*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*), while 5 Parliaments/Chambers answered that it should not play any role. The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* responded that the European Parliament could play a vital role by equalising pressures exerted by the "Troika" and assessing whether the programmes in question comply with EU legislation not putting in danger what has been acquired so far in Community level. The European Parliament recommended that, once the hardest moment of the financial crisis had passed, the programme countries should, together with the European Parliament and other EU institutions, put in place job recovery plans to restore their economies.

Citing its enquiry on the role and operations of the "Troika" with regard to the euro area programme countries, the European Parliament underlined specific monitoring procedures such as:

- the EU members of the "Troika" should be heard in the European Parliament on the basis of a clear mandate before taking up their duties and should be subject to regular reporting to and democratic scrutiny by Parliament;

- before financial assistance is granted, the President of the Eurogroup should be heard before the European Parliament and the EU finance ministers in their respective Parliament;
- the President of the Eurogroup and the finance ministers should both be required to regularly report to the European Parliament and national Parliaments;
- the negotiation mandates of the assistance programmes should be submitted to a vote in the European Parliament, which should also be consulted on the resulting Memoranda of Understanding.

Parliaments' views on legitimacy and accountability of macroeconomic adjustment programmes

The vast majority (14 out of 18) of the respondent Parliaments/Chambers answered that macroeconomic adjustment programmes were not characterised by sufficient democratic legitimacy and accountability. Further commenting on this issue, some Parliaments/Chambers noted that these programmes had been negotiated and implemented without sufficient involvement of the national Parliaments in question (Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Romanian *Senat*), especially in scrutinising the process of "Troika" decision-making (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*). The European Parliament and the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* called for transparency, legitimacy and political ownership. The Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* and the Belgian *Sénat* noted that the social dimension was underestimated, while the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* underlined that, once the emergency risk of EU dismantlement was averted, the process to make necessary changes in the Treaty may be launched in order to preserve the Union and its values and allow a swift and firm decision making system in case of high risks of any nature. The UK *House of Lords*, in its recent report on the role of the national Parliaments, stated that an asymmetry had developed between the growing powers of key institutions such as the European Commission, the ECB, the Eurogroup and the "Troika", and the ability of citizens to hold them to account for their actions and that means must be found to ensure that EU institutions are accountable not only to the European Parliament, but also to national Parliaments.