

Check against delivery

***Speech of the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, Mr Per WESTERBERG at the XLIII COSAC, Madrid 31 May 2010.***

Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency for its hospitality and for giving me the opportunity of presenting the outcome of the EU Speakers' Conference at the COSAC meeting here in Madrid.

This is also a valuable opportunity for direct contact between EU Speakers and COSAC. In the light of the Lisbon Treaty, I am even more convinced of the necessity of networking and regular contacts between different forum in national parliaments, as well as between national parliaments and the European Parliament.

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The annual EU Speakers' Conference 2010 was held in the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag, on 14 and 15 May. This time Speakers, or their representatives, from 24 member states and from the European Parliament, as well as the three candidate countries (Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) participated. In focus were of course the consequences of the Lisbon Treaty for parliaments.

To give a general review, I can say that the Conference 2010 was an efficient and successful Conference. Several interesting and essential debates took place among our colleagues. Valuable conclusions were endorsed. I will present some of them here today. Further more, new revised Guidelines – or “rules of procedures” - for the Speakers' Conference were adopted, the *Stockholm* Guidelines, I'm proud to say.

The other main item for the conference was new communication technologies. This part of the conference addressed such issues as the growing use of social media, the opportunities for parliaments offered by these forms of communication, but also the challenges and how our parliamentary systems are, or could be, affected by using these channels. A very interesting subject indeed, but maybe of less relevance for today's discussions, so I leave it at this.

Before I talk about our discussions on the Lisbon Treaty, let me also comment briefly upon the formula of the meeting, since I know that procedures also have been an issue for COSAC. In order to develop the formula of the meeting, the use of short remarks and immediate reactions was introduced and encouraged as a complement to prepared (short) interventions. It proved to be an appreciated format, contributing to more interesting and lively debates.

This also goes hand in hand with our ambition to make EU politics more accessible to the general public. Therefore the plenary deliberations were open to the public and the

press. It was also possible, for the first time, for the public to follow the open parts of the conference via the social network Twitter.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Speakers' responsibility within this framework of cooperation is to oversee the coordination of EU interparliamentary activities. As the Presidency of the EU Speakers' Conference, Sweden has taken this coordination task seriously, of course, starting with an extra Speakers' Conference last December, right after the Treaty of Lisbon came into force.

This informal Conference served as an opening point for our discussions regarding the consequences of the new Treaty, in particular for national parliaments. Between December and May, an exchange of ideas and identified issues that needed to be addressed before the main Conference took place. This was possible through an open process of deliberation carried out on a designated forum on IPEX.

The Treaty of Lisbon puts interparliamentary cooperation in focus. In broad terms, the Speakers considered it essential that national parliaments should be in a position to make full use of the possibilities the new Treaty grants. However, at the same time their respective constitutional rules and parliamentary traditions must be respected.

The debate concerning consequences for parliamentary cooperation was held mainly on the basis of three topics:

- the European Commission and national parliaments,
- fora for interparliamentary cooperation,
- challenges and expectations for future interparliamentary cooperation.

The topic concerning the European Commission and national parliaments was introduced by Mr Maroš Šefcovic, Vice President of the European Commission.

He explained the Commission's view on the political dialogue with national parliaments and discussed subsidiarity and information exchange, as well as future plans for evaluation and monitoring in the area of freedom, security and justice.

During this part of the conference, the Speakers underlined the earlier initiatives and efforts of the Commission to create and improve the political dialogue with national parliaments. We also noted that increased contacts and dialogue between the Commission and national parliaments remain vital for the general scrutiny of EU matters – not only for the subsidiarity check. We welcomed the willingness of the Commission to present its annual work programme within national parliaments.

When it comes to interparliamentary cooperation, the discussion in general terms is about making it as efficient as possible, identifying the most appropriate forum for a particular issue or task, avoid duplication of work and - waste of time.

The Speakers stressed the importance of developing established structures and that overlapping meetings or debates should be avoided.

The Speakers' Conference debated consequences of the Treaty of Lisbon and the new tasks of evaluation and monitoring in the area of freedom, security and

justice. In relation to this, the Speakers supported and agreed with the request of COSAC that the EU institutions should enter into dialogue with national parliaments when drafting and negotiating regulations dealing with parliamentary oversight of Eurojust and Europol. The Speakers concluded that a possibility to express views should be given to specialised committees within national parliaments, since effective scrutiny often requires the expert competence of these committees.

A concrete proposal was to arrange an interparliamentary meeting, preferably of the parliamentary committees or bodies responsible for issues concerning the area of freedom, security and justice, on the oversight mechanisms as part of the consultation process regarding the Europol and Eurojust regulations. The Conference therefore asked the incoming (the now current) Presidency of EU Speakers, Belgium, to prepare for such a meeting.

Concerning the future scrutiny of European security and defence policy, and given the special nature of these matters, the Speakers stressed the fundamental role of national parliaments, and for that reason also here asked the Presidency of Speakers to take the discussion forward, with a view to reaching an agreement at the next meeting of the Conference of Speakers.

Regarding the challenges and expectations of future interparliamentary cooperation, including the role of COSAC, the Conference also had a valuable exchange of views.

In the past few decades, cooperation within the EU has broadened and deepened immensely. Proposals for EU legislation concern national parliaments in their entirety and, as a consequence, EU matters are increasingly on the agenda of the parliamentary specialised committees.

Towards this background, the Speakers considered that political debates on specific issues or themes are best held in meetings or other contacts involving the relevant committees.

In this context, the Conference highlighted that contacts between specialised committees should be developed and strengthened.

COSAC has had a fruitful existence since its creation in 1989 as a regular meeting venue of the parliamentary committees specialised in European Affairs of the national parliaments, together with the European Parliament. The Speakers noted that the new Protocol annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon opens the possibility for a discussion concerning the future role and composition of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs. In this regard, the Speakers agreed that the Treaty of Lisbon's provisions imply a more general approach than before to interparliamentary cooperation.

I am convinced of regular contacts between committees specialising in EU matters as a natural and valuable aspect in interparliamentary cooperation. Political debates on specific issues or themes are best held in meetings or other contacts involving the relevant specialised committees. Committees specialising in EU matters already meet regularly, as so do other established constellations, such as meetings of Chairs of Foreign Affairs Committees (COFACC). Why not use these established fora for the new tasks and possibilities of influence given by the Lisbon Treaty?

A valuable contribution and role for COSAC could involve focusing on EU and government scrutiny and general trends in parliamentary work with EU matters, as well as the exchange of information and best practices.

However, it is vital that COSAC also continues its important exchange of information and best practices. COSAC would in that case not overlap other fora, and would have the possibility of a more comprehensive approach to EU matters (than the specialised committees).

A request was made to the Presidency of EU Speakers to further explore a proposal to schedule regular conferences for parliamentary committees dealing with European affairs, foreign affairs and defence as well as justice and home affairs in cooperation with the European Parliament.

We also asked the incoming Presidency to elaborate on how to strengthen links between the different Council constellations and national parliaments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finally, I want to point out that a Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs gives parliaments additional value in the framework of the increasing importance for the national parliaments, not only to follow the ongoing negotiations within the European institutions, but also to participate and contribute to the good functioning of EU.

I wish you fruitful discussions during your meeting and look forward to hear more about the outcome.

Thank you very much!