



XLII/XLIIème COSAC



Stockholm 4–6 October/octobre 2009

Welcoming Address

by The Speaker of the Riksdag,

Mr Per Westerberg

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The Speaker: Welcoming address, COSAC plenary session, Stockholm 5–6 October 2009

Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you from the whole of Europe to the forty-second COSAC meeting here in the Plenary Chamber of the Swedish Parliament. This full COSAC assembly is an impressive sight! Today COSAC comprises 40 chambers from the 27 parliaments of the Member States – plus the European Parliament. In addition we have observers from our 3 candidate countries.

As special guests here in Stockholm we also have the Icelandic Parliament, the Althingi, and the Norwegian Parliament, the Storting. A special welcome to you! And congratulations to Iceland, our most recent candidate country!

Our circle has indeed grown considerably since Sweden was last President of the EU in 2001. European cooperation is also becoming deeper, and covering more and more of the political agenda.

And this means that the central role of the national parliaments is growing stronger, because that is where proximity to the citizens can be found. This is where real, effective support of measures at EU level must be developed. It is here – and in the European Parliament – that we have a fundamental responsibility to take our citizens' interests into account.

But we are not a passive supervisory assembly. We are not blinkered pedants holding everything back. As national parliaments we are an active and constructive partner in helping to ensure that the measures taken by the EU are the best possible.

A lot has happened in recent years. We have taken part in the Convention and followed the ongoing discussions and negotiations regarding the EU's treaty reform. We have developed forms and channels for direct contact with the EU institutions. Here in the Swedish Parliament we now prepare statements on Green Books and White Books, and carry out subsidiarity controls.

The Lisbon Treaty should take us further along the road to a stronger formal role. And after the recent successful Irish referendum it finally appears likely that this will in fact materialise. The road to ratification is now open,

To fully play our part in the work of the EU we must have expertise covering a very wide range of different areas. For this reason European issues cannot just be left to narrow specialists.

Obviously we need experts and EU bodies – but nowadays European issues need the committed attention of every parliamentarian.

Here in Sweden at the Riksdag we have long been working to make European issues an everyday part of the work of our specialised committees. European issues must be regarded as part of Swedish domestic policy. The Committee on Justice must win support for the EU approach to intellectual property law. The deregulation of the European transport market must be discussed in the Committee on Transport and Communications.

We must all be able to deal with EU affairs. Therefore, it is natural and necessary that cooperation between national parliaments takes place at different levels.

The committees conduct discussions in their various constellations.

The European Parliament participates in and organises a number of joint committee meetings and joint parliamentary meetings. One such joint parliamentary meeting is included in the total of ten meetings organised by the Swedish Parliament during the Swedish Presidency.

In Stockholm today you have an agenda which I hope you will find stimulating.

"We accept the challenge" was the motto chosen by the Swedish Government for a Presidency that promised to be rich in complications. In a moment you will have an opportunity to discuss some of these directly with Prime Minister Reinfeldt – the economic and financial crisis, the climate challenge, the institutional labyrinth, and the others.

Later today you will get a special in-depth presentation of the state of climate negotiations in the run-up to Copenhagen from Minister for the Environment Andreas Carlgren.

Issues relating to asylum and migration are among those that deeply concern our citizens. The same goes for the fight against trafficking, other cross-border crime, and migration issues as a whole. This is at the core of the parliamentary sphere of responsibility. Parliamentary commitment and responsibility are indispensable. Tomorrow you will be able to consider the Stockholm Programme – the future of our common sphere of freedom, security and justice – with the Swedish ministers responsible for these areas.

It is imperative for our citizens to be able to follow what is happening both in Brussels and in their national parliaments if we are to gain popular acceptance and support in the issues we would like to see regulated at the European level.

Friends,

The Lisbon Treaty gives our national parliaments new formal powers. That is a good thing. But we must remember that powers of this kind are a supplement to and not a replacement for the fundamental role of the national parliaments. This role is firmly based on the fact that our parliaments are crucial to the democratic legitimacy of our decision-making.

And that is why our parliaments are a necessary part of the European project. This is what makes our cooperation so very valuable.

COSAC provides an arena to exchange views on the great European issues of the day and to discuss more concrete forms of cooperation and exchange of experience – in fact, quite simply, to learn from each other. I hope and trust that your meeting here in Stockholm will prove very useful.

Once again I extend a very warm welcome to you all, and I give the Chair and the floor to the Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, Anna Kinberg Batra.