

Conclusions of the Presidency - XXII. COSAC

Lisbon 29-30 May 2000

The twenty second COSAC meeting held in Lisbon on 29-30 May 2000, started by examining the question of the Portuguese presidency, presented by the Secretary of State for European Affairs, Francisco Seixas da Costa, on this point of the order of business, the meeting looked mainly at the enlargement of the Union, employment and the IGC.

The conference continued by considering three fundamental questions - the extension of qualified majority voting, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the relations between MEPs and national deputies.

In relation to the extension of qualified majority voting, the responses to the questionnaires sent to the parliaments and the speeches made during the conference showed that the majority of national parliaments have accompanied this IGC. Many of them have already issued reports, or passed resolutions on the subject, and others are preparing to pronounce on the matter (including some applicant countries), which is to be welcomed.

Most national parliaments are in favour of the extension of qualified majority voting, some make this depend on the re-weighting of votes or the introduction of a double majority. Others believe that the question can only be posed as part of an overall package for negotiations. There is no consensus as to which matters should be subject to qualified majority voting, but the tendency is for a distinction to be made between fundamental/constitutional questions and questions of lesser importance.

There is also no consensus on the widening of the powers of co-decision of the European Parliament. Most of the parliaments are in favour of increased co-operation only as a last resort, calling for greater flexibility in the use of this.

On the second question on the order of business - Charter of Fundamental Rights - most national parliaments have not yet expressed their opinion, but intend to do so. Most see the charter as a tool for minimising the distance between citizens and community institutions and to exercise greater control over these institutions. Only a small majority wants a Charter, which is binding on member States.

Questions of compatibility between the Charter and the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of Luxembourg and Strasbourg courts were raised, a number of solutions were suggested in order for the Charter to have added value over the Convention. Finally, there was unanimity with respect to the applicability of the Charter to the citizens of third countries who reside in the European Union, albeit with some restrictions.

With regard to relations between MEPs and national deputies, it was found that close contacts existed both within parties and institutional level. These contacts tend to be more intense when questions of national interest are at stake.

In the absence of a public European domain, MEPs are elected from national parties, although they represent all the interests of European citizens. MEPs and national deputies are therefore not competitors, but rather partners, acting only at different levels of representation.