

Seventh Conference of European Affairs Committees

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMEN OF THE CONFERENCE

The Seventh Conference of European Affairs Committees met in London on 10-11 November under the Chairmanship of Mr Jimmy Hood MP, Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation of the House of Commons, and Lord Boston of Faversham QC, Chairman of the Select Committee on the European Communities of the House of Lords.

The Conference was addressed by the Rt. Hon. Douglas Hurd MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and President-in-Office of the Council of Ministers who also answered questions put to him by participants in the Conference.

The Conference discussed three major issues:

- the role of national parliaments and the European Parliament in ensuring democratic accountability in the Community and the practical steps which could be taken to improve the present position;
- the application of Community law;
- the ratification process of the Treaty on European Union and the European Economic Area Treaty and the future development of the Community.

Following wide-ranging discussions at the Conference, the Chairmen, as the Presidency of the Conference, drew attention to the following points:

- (1) the view was widely and strongly expressed that the Treaty on European Union should be ratified as quickly as possible;
- (2) the recognition by the European Council at Birmingham of the important role which the Community's parliaments play in the democratic life of the Community is welcome;
- (3) both the European Parliament and national parliaments have roles in ensuring the accountability of the Council of Ministers and the Commission to parliamentary bodies;
- (4) the commitment of the Governments of the Member States to ensure that national parliaments receive Commission proposals to the Council of Ministers for legislation in good time for information or possible examination is a helpful development and the Council should normally not act on them until national parliaments have had a reasonable opportunity to consider them, according to each parliament's tradition, competences and procedures;



- (5) the Commission's willingness to consult more widely before making legislative proposals to the Council is welcome, and the Commission should, wherever appropriate, suitably involve the parliaments of the Community;
- (6) the proposal by the Commission to appoint a specific Commissioner to act as a channel of communication with each national parliament should be followed up with a view to its implementation as soon as possible;
- (7) national parliaments have a particular role in overseeing the implementation and enforcement of Community legislation in each Member State;
- (8) there is a need for greater openness in the proceedings of the Council of Ministers: the Council should make use of the provision already incorporated in its Rules of Procedure (which may be amended by a simple majority of the Council) to meet in public when it unanimously so agrees and the minutes of its proceedings should be made available to the Community's parliaments;
- (9) the annual legislative programme, the quarterly rolling legislative programme, and the indicative agendas for Council meetings, prepared at the start of each Presidency, should be made available to parliaments;
- (10) application of the principle of subsidiarity may place a greater responsibility on national parliaments and enhance the importance of inter-parliamentary co-operation as a means of facilitating co-ordination across the Community;
- (11) the willingness of the European Parliament to provide national parliaments with all information at its disposal, especially about the implementation of the annual legislative programme, with a view to strengthening co-operative efforts, confirmed at this Conference, is welcomed;
- (12) the Community's parliamentarians must be fully associated with any initiatives taken by the Governments of the Member States consequent on the Declaration on the Conference of the Parliaments attached to the Treaty on European Union, but without prejudice to initiatives which parliaments themselves may take in this area.