



FEDERAL PARLIAMENT OF BELGIUM

**Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU
Brussels, 4 – 5 April 2011**

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary Remarks

1. The Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union was held in Brussels, at the joint invitation of the Speakers of the Federal Parliament of Belgium, from 04 April to 05 April 2011. The Speakers or their representatives of thirty-seven Houses of the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union, as well as the Speaker of the European Parliament, took part in the Conference. The Speakers of the five EU candidate countries also took part in the Conference. The Conference was jointly presided over by Mr. André Flahaut, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Mr. Danny Pieters, Speaker of the Senate.
2. On Monday, 04 April 2011, the Conference discussed the following topics:
 - Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP):
 - The Role of the Parliaments in the oversight of the European area of Freedom, Security and Justice. This topic comprised the following two sub-topics: parliamentary oversight of the security and intelligence services (projected database for the exchange of information between the competent parliamentary committees), as well as the role of the Parliaments in the monitoring of Europol.

His Majesty the King of the Belgians, Albert II, received the Speakers of the Parliaments in Laeken Castle on Monday, 04 April 2011.

3. On Tuesday, 05 April 2011, the Conference addressed the question of the Financial Crisis in Europe and its Consequences for the National Budgets: Role of the Parliaments and Co-operation between the Parliaments in European Economic Governance and the European Semester. This part of the work proceeded in the form of an informal meeting according to the one-plus-one format, i.e. one Speaker or his representative and one Advisor per Chamber or Parliament.

Thereafter, the Conference resumed its proceedings with regard to the parliamentary scrutiny of CFSP and CSDP.

4. The topic on the “Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)” was introduced by Mr. Danny Pieters, Speaker of the Senate. He tabled a compromise proposal on the basis of the positions expressed by the national parliaments and the European Parliament and communicated to the Belgian Presidency of the Conference. In the course of the ensuing discussion, the Speakers paid tribute to the efforts made by the Belgian Presidency in order to reach a consensus on the parliamentary mechanism that ought to be put in place. They then exchanged their parliaments’ points of view as to the major principles according to which that mechanism ought to be formulated.

Further to this debate, the Belgian Presidency presented a revised compromise proposal.

5. The topic relating to the *“Role of the Parliaments in the Monitoring of the European area of Freedom, Security and Justice ”* was the subject of a double presentation. The Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Danny Pieters, presented a projected database for the exchange of information between the competent parliamentary committees in the context of the creation of a network of European expertise relating to parliamentary oversight of the security and intelligence services.

Mr. Per Westerberg, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, presented the role of the Parliaments in monitoring the activities of Europol. This presentation was situated in the context of the communication of the Commission [COM(2010)776] on the procedures for the scrutiny of Europol's activities by the European Parliament in association with the national parliaments.

In the course of the ensuing discussion, speakers considered it to be necessary to exercise a closer and deeper parliamentary oversight of Europol's activities. They also dealt with the implementation procedures of the aforementioned database.

6. During the informal part of the Conference, according to the one-plus-one format, the Speaker of the French Senate, Mr. Gérard Larcher, introduced the topic relating to the *“Financial Crisis in Europe and its Consequences for the National Budgets and the Stability of the Euro: Role of the Parliaments and Co-operation Between the Parliaments in European Economic Governance and the European Semester”*.

In the course of the discussion, speakers recalled the European citizens' strong expectations with regard to the measures to be taken in order to face the budgetary consequences of the financial and economic crisis.

They explained how the Member States and the National Parliaments have reacted to the crisis and prepared for the European Semester. Several working methods have been put in place in certain countries in order to meet the European commitments by collaboration between the parliamentary assemblies (majorities and oppositions) and the governments, while taking care to involve the members of the European Parliament therein.

Evoking the “European Semester”, the new tool set up by the European Council in order to strengthen the economic governance of the European Union and the euro zone, participants discussed the proposal of the Speaker of the French National Assembly that an annual interparliamentary meeting be arranged, according to procedures to be agreed, bringing together the chairs of the budget committees of the national parliaments and the chairs of the relevant committees of the European Parliament in order to discuss the co-ordination of the Member States’ budget policies.

7. Parliament Public Opinion and Media: the Belgian Presidency proposed to postpone this item to the following Speakers Conference.

Presidency Conclusions

Concerning the parliamentary scrutiny of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP):

1. The Speakers recognised the important work accomplished by the Belgian Presidency in order to set up an interparliamentary mechanism for the scrutiny of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).
2. The Speakers emphasised that it was essential that the diversity of opinions within the national parliaments and the European Parliament could be

sufficiently expressed and that the mechanism proposed should allow the different points of view to be heard.

3. The Speakers emphasised that the goal of this new structure is to ensure the monitoring of the CFSP/CSDP from a parliamentary point of view (*scrutiny*) rather than truly to control it (*control*), which would involve a competence of sanction. The Parliamentary Conference has above all an informative function which, on the one hand, should enable the national parliaments to better scrutinize their own governments with regard to the intergovernmental dimension of the CFSP/CSDP and which, on the other, should enable the European Parliament to exercise its functions within the European institutional framework.
4. The Speakers noted that the one difference between the various parliamentary points of view was between those who wished to focus on the intergovernmental dimension of the CFSP and the CSDP and those who wished the Community dimension also to be included.
5. In view of the aforementioned considerations and given the diverging views, the Speakers did not reach an agreement on all aspects of the establishment of an interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), consisting of delegations from the national parliaments of the Member States of the European Union and the European Parliament. However, the Conference agreed on the following:
 - a. An Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is set up. It is composed of delegations of the national Parliaments of the EU Member States and the European Parliament. This conference replaces the existing COFACC and CODAC meetings.

- b. Each national parliament of a candidate Member State and each European member country of NATO can participate as observers.
- c. The Conference shall meet twice a year in the country that is holding the six-monthly Council Presidency or in the European Parliament in Brussels. The Presidency shall decide the matter. Extraordinary meetings shall be held when deemed necessary or urgent.
- d. The meetings shall be presided over by the national Parliament of the Member State holding the rotating Council Presidency, in close co-operation with the European Parliament.
- e. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union shall be invited to the meetings of the Conference in order to set out the outlines and strategies of the common foreign and defence policy of the Union.
- f. The Conference may adopt non-binding conclusions by consensus.
- g. The Conference shall approve its rules of procedure and working methods on the basis of the aforementioned principles.

Concerning the Role of the Parliaments in the Monitoring of the European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

6. As a general principle, the speakers underlined the political responsibilities of the national parliaments and of the European Parliament in respecting and exercising their respective powers in the legislation process.

Parliamentary oversight of the security and intelligence services: projected database for the exchange of information between the competent parliamentary committees.

7. The Speakers discussed the implementation of the Declaration of Brussels, adopted on 1 October 2010 by the 6th Conference of the Parliamentary Committees for the Oversight of Intelligence and Security Services of the Member States of the European Union.
8. On this subject, they agreed that it is important for the national parliaments to be able to monitor the activities of the security and intelligence services with a view to the protection of basic freedoms and rights. They recognised the need for and the utility of a more intensive exchange of non-confidential information amongst the parliamentary control committees of the Member States of the European Union.
9. In this context, the Speakers supported the creation, by means of a website, of a network of European expertise relating to the monitoring of intelligence services (ENNIR – European Network of National Intelligence Reviewers). That network's primary objective is to improve democratic control of the functioning of the security and intelligence services. To that end, the Speakers agreed in principle to the proposed funding system, with the costs being shared by the participating member states.

On the Role of the Parliaments in the monitoring of Europol's activities.

10. The Speakers emphasised the importance of the role of the national parliaments and the European Parliament in the evaluation and scrutiny of the further development of the European area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

In this spirit, they welcome the communication of the European Commission [COM(2010)776] relating to the scrutiny of Europol's activities by the European Parliament and the national parliaments.

11. The Speakers considered that the political monitoring of the activities of the European Police Office (Europol) should be exerted by the national parliaments and the European Parliament in the spirit of Article 88 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

12. The Speakers were of the opinion that the current forms of scrutiny were insufficient. Consequently, that scrutiny should be exerted by an interparliamentary body within which representatives of the national parliaments and the European Parliament would meet on a regular basis. In order to limit costs, this scrutiny should be organized within the framework of existing interparliamentary structures. The LIBE Committee of the European Parliament could organise joint meetings on Europol with the corresponding committees of the national parliaments. The Chairpersons of Home Affairs Committees could also organise regular meetings on Europol. Such increased transparency would strengthen Europol's legitimacy.

13. The purpose of these meetings should be to discuss all questions relating to Europol's structure, functioning, planning and work. To that end, it should be possible to have hearings with the Chair of the Board of Directors as well as the Director of Europol on Europol's strategic documents and/or its evaluation reports.

Concerning the Financial Crisis in Europe and its Consequences for the National Budgets and the Stability of the Euro: Role of the Parliaments and Co-operation between the Parliaments in European Economic Governance and the European Semester.

14. The Speakers stressed the need to strengthen the economic governance of the European Union and to ensure the stability of the euro zone. They took note of the will expressed by the European Council meeting of the Heads of State and Government of 24 and 25 March 2011 fully to associate the national parliaments and the European Parliament with the implementation of the policies intended to confront the crisis, to preserve financial stability and to progress towards sustainable growth.
15. The Speakers welcomed the new procedure, known as the “European Semester”, put in place by the European Union in order appreciably to strengthen the co-ordination of the budgetary policies within the Union, parallel to the measures taken in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy. They insisted on transparency and the need to properly inform public opinion.
16. In this respect, they noted that many practical arrangements remained to be specified and, in particular, the exact role of the Parliaments in the context of the “European Semester”. They paid tribute to the initiatives taken by the Economic and Monetary Committee and the Budget Committee of the European Parliament in order to proceed with exchanges of views on the procedures for parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the “European Semester”.
17. The Speakers supported the proposal put forward by the Speaker of the French National Assembly to set up the necessary dialogue on the budgetary issue between the European Parliament and the national parliaments by arranging an annual interparliamentary meeting, a “Budget Conference”, bringing together

the chairs of the budget committees of the national parliaments and the chairs of the relevant committees of the European Parliament according to arrangements to be specified.

18. The Speakers stressed that this dialogue must have added value: there should be convergence on the quantity of the data and its quality. A balance needs to be struck between solidarity measures, austerity measures and measures that encourage research and development, sustainable development and employment, especially in order to prevent as far as possible crises that penalise the most destitute.

19. It was also suggested that a section should be added to the IPEX database (EU Interparliamentary Information Exchange) for the exchange of information on the European Semester and economic governance. That would strengthen the visibility of IPEX by enabling external users to have access to the relevant information.