

Presidency Conclusions

Rome, 22 - 24 September 2000

The Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments was held in Rome from 22nd to 24th September 2000. The three main subjects - under the general title "The role of Parliaments in the European Union" - were: the role of Parliaments in the reform process of the European Union and in the drafting of a EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; the quality of legislation; the definition of the tasks of the Conference and of the principles governing its working procedures. A special session was devoted to the meeting with the Speakers of the Parliaments of Mercosur member and associate countries.

The Conference held a debate on the role of Parliaments - the European Parliament and national Parliaments - in the reform process of the European Union and in the drafting of a EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, on the basis of the introductory report by the Speaker of the Italian Senate, Sen. Nicola Mancino. During the debate a significant degree of convergence emerged. Firstly, there was a general consensus on the need for an increasingly effective involvement of Parliaments in the EU decision-making processes so as to ensure their representative character and democratic legitimacy. As pointed out by many participants, networking and co-operation among Parliaments enable them, on the one hand, to participate more effectively in the preparatory stage of the Community law-making process and, on the other, to have a better perception of the common interests of the Union. Secondly, a general consensus also emerged on the prospect of building a Europe based on values, in which respect the importance of the Charter of Fundamental Rights is recognised, together with its possible and gradual integration among the Union's legal sources, in response to the need felt by the public opinion. Finally, many participants noted that the Convention charged with the drafting of the Charter of Fundamental Rights might represent a useful model to ensure the institutional involvement of Parliaments - albeit with the necessary adjustments, in a gradual way and respecting the specific role of Governments - in the definition of the Union's fundamental choices.

The Speaker of the Finnish Parliament, Ms Riitta Uosukainen, reported on the conclusions of the Working Group on the Quality of Legislation, set up in Helsinki, and presented the final Memorandum, which will be included in the Conference proceedings together with the comments made by some Parliaments. The Memorandum contains general guidelines that can be followed by Parliaments interested both in their own activities and, if they deem it appropriate, with a view to establishing forms of "enhanced co-operation", so as to improve the quality of legislation within the EU framework. In particular, reference is made to programmes aimed at: a) enabling a rapid exchange of information through their respective Web sites; b) facilitating contacts among the parliamentary bodies dealing with issues related to the quality of legislation; c) revitalising the network of research and documentation departments (ECPRD) and ensuring the best possible co-ordination with the activity of parliamentary bodies. Interested Parliaments will promote the initiatives required to implement these guidelines. During the Conference the Speaker of the Riksdag, Ms Birgitta Dahl, announced the first such initiative, namely the Conference on European Law, which will be organised by Sweden's Parliament and Government in June 2001. At the Conference the activity carried out by EU Parliaments in this field will be presented.

The Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, Mr Antonio de Almeida Santos, illustrated proposals for guidelines for the Conference procedures, based on the criteria established by the previous Conference in Lisbon. These guidelines define the tasks and objectives of the Conference, as well as the main aspects of its working procedures, without laying down inflexible and detailed rules. The Conference agreed to adopt these guidelines, underlining the need to retain a degree of flexibility in the Conference's working procedures and referred any possible amendments to the following meeting.

At the meeting with the Speakers of Mercosur Parliaments, the development of a parliamentary dimension in the relations between the European Union and Mercosur was agreed upon. In particular, great emphasis was laid on the shared interest in exchanging views on the role of Parliaments in the development and strengthening of representative democracy within the EU and Mercosur. Speakers agreed that it would be appropriate to hold regular meetings and asked the Speakers of the Swedish and Spanish Parliaments to

outline a co-operation programme between the Parliaments concerned, to be submitted to one of the next meetings.

As agreed in Lisbon, the next Conference will take place in Stockholm in 2001. Moreover, the Conference accepted the invitation by the Speakers of the Spanish Parliament for the year 2002.