

Bijlage 1: Brief Eurogroepvoorzitter Centeno aan de voorzitters van de commissies Europese Zaken in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal en in het Deense Parlement

Lisbon, 3 October 2018

Mr. Malik Azmani, Chairman of the Standing Committee on European Affairs, House of Representatives of the Netherlands

Mr. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, Chairman of the Standing Committee on European Affairs, Senate of the Netherlands

Mr. Erik Christensen, Chairman of the Standing Committee on European Affairs, Parliament of Denmark

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for your letter of 12 July and the attached documents containing the contribution and conclusions of the 59th COSAC meeting and the paper from the Dutch COSAC delegation on making the EU more transparent for its citizens, which I have carefully considered and which feed into the ongoing reflection on this matter.

You will appreciate that I am responding to your letter in my capacity of the President of the Eurogroup, and therefore am not in a position to comment on the proposals pertaining to the Council, the European Council or other EU institutions.

Regarding your suggestions on the application of transparency rules to informal bodies, let me describe some of the actions that have been undertaken in the Eurogroup in order to improve transparency and public access to documents submitted to it, as well as outline our intentions on this subject for the future.

Before doing so, allow me to recall the Eurogroup's status, as set out in the Treaties. The Eurogroup is an informal body in which the ministers of the euro area member states discuss matters concerning their shared responsibilities related to the euro. It is not an institution of the Union and does not have any tasks - legislative or other - assigned to it under the Treaties. This has as a consequence that the accountability for what is being discussed and agreed in the Eurogroup lies essentially at national level.

The Eurogroup has taken a number of initiatives which aim at improving citizens' understanding of what is being done at its meetings.

First, it was decided in March 2016 that documents submitted to the Eurogroup would, as a rule, be published, unless there were well-founded objections such as i) documents which are still work in progress and/or subject to further substantial changes; ii) documents containing confidential or market-sensitive information; and iii) documents for which the author institution objects to their publication.

Since the introduction of the Eurogroup's transparency regime, the Eurogroup has published on its website not only the annotated agendas and summing-up letters of all its meetings, but also other meeting documents.

In particular, in June 2017, the Eurogroup agreed that, from then on, documents presented in the Eurogroup, notably the Commission notes prepared for the thematic discussions on growth and jobs, would be made publicly available ahead of the Eurogroup meetings, unless the objections to publication on which the Eurogroup agreed on in March 2016 applied. This rule would also apply to documents such as the post-programme surveillance reports.

When a request is received for access to a particular document held by the General Secretariat of the Council and linked to the Eurogroup's activities, such a request is processed in line with the substantive and procedural framework set out in Regulation 1049/2001. This process requires that we seek the consent of the author of the document in question. A large share of the Eurogroup documents is prepared by the European Commission and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM).

Moreover, when it comes to documents held only by national delegations, requests for access to these have to be handled in accordance with the relevant national legislation on transparency. Requests for public access to such documents should be directed to the relevant national authorities.

Finally, allow me to reiterate the commitment of the Eurogroup to transparency, despite the fact that the Eurogroup is not an EU institution but an informal gathering of the ministers of finance of the member states of the euro area.

I am confident that the initiatives which we started to implement in 2016 go a long way towards addressing the information needs of national parliaments and European citizens alike and hence contribute to improved scrutiny and transparency of our work. This does not stop us from further improving, where needed, and that is precisely what has happened recently.

Only last June we started publishing the list of attendees of Eurogroup meetings, bringing that practice in line with the Council. It is not only an issue of publication, but also dissemination, which is why we are today more active on social media, as well to inform about Eurogroup meetings and its agenda items.

At our Eurogroup meeting in Vienna last September, I announced the decision to look into our transparency practices, namely the initiative taken a couple of years ago, to see if there was anything we should improve.

Once this work is completed, I would be happy to share the results with you.

In addition, earlier this year I have initiated the practice of opening the Eurogroup to the views of renowned experts from academia and civil society to lay the ground for discussing topics that are strategic to our policy making. Their presentations have also been made public.

Lastly, I remain committed to a good dialogue and information sharing with the European Parliament. At our Vienna gathering, upon my initiative, the Chair of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee of the European Parliament was invited - for the first time ever -

to attend a session of the Eurogroup. This is in addition to the President of the Eurogroup's regular hearings in the European Parliament, notably at the ECON Committee, for an 'economic dialogue' on the Eurogroup's work and policy priorities, and also in addition to the participation in a conference in the European Inter-parliamentary week at the European Parliament's premises.

Yours sincerely,

Mário CENTENO
President of the Eurogroup