



The Hague, July 3, 2004

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION PARLIAMENTS

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary remarks

1. The annual Conference of the Presidents of Parliaments of the European Union took place in the Hall of Knights in The Hague on July 2 and 3 2004. The Presidents of the Parliaments of the 25 member states, as well as those of the European Parliament and three candidate countries participated in the Conference. The Conference was alternatively presided over by the President of the Senate of the States-General, Mrs Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck and the President of the House of Representatives of the States-General, Mr Frans W. Weisglas. The Prime Minister of the Netherlands held an opening address in the Conference in which he stated the primary importance of further strengthening the role of national parliaments in European cooperation.
2. From the outset four specific topics were placed on the agenda: monitoring compliance with (the principle of) subsidiarity, the language regime at future Conferences, interparliamentary cooperation and the European and global agenda after the enlargement. In her introductory speech, the President of the Dutch Senate, Mrs Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, pointed out that this was the first interparliamentary conference after the intergovernmental conference was concluded. She stated that future challenges would not only be found in implementing the new constitutional treaty but also in developing a common European and global agenda.
3. Regarding the subject of the so-called early-warning-mechanism, the deputy speaker of the House of Commons of Great Britain, Sir Alan Haselhurst, gave an explanation of the various options considered in the House of Commons for implementing the mechanism and he raised important questions concerning future interparliamentary cooperation in this area. The President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Pavol Hrusovksy, stressed the importance of the subsidiarity principle being an instrument to ensure the efficiency and the legitimacy of European decision-making. He called on the participants to think about the future European Union we are creating especially by clarifying the constitutional Treaty.
4. A lively debate took place on the issue of the language regime to be used at future conferences. Several Presidents appreciated the logistic and financial problems posed by the retention of a full language regime, but at the same time they underlined the great importance attached to the right to speak in one's own language within the European Union. There was a certain consensus that the right to speak one's native language should be upheld, but that the responsibility for providing interpretation should not automatically be placed with the host country.

5. In his address in the Conference the President of the European Parliament, Mr Cox pleaded for rekindling the enthusiasm for Europe by focussing on the essential issues and delivery of the ambitions to the citizens. In the future dynamic relations between the national parliaments and the European parliament should be strengthened by increasing the direct co-operation in the form of joint parliamentary meetings on intergovernmental policy areas.
6. The Speaker of the Swedish Riksdagen, Dr. Björn von Sydow, presented guidelines for the interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union. These guidelines were drafted on the basis of the findings of a working group of Presidents of Parliaments, the Athens-group.
7. On the future European and global agenda, the President of the Senate of Poland, Professor Longin Pastusiak stressed the importance for parliaments to act locally, but to think globally in dealing with the challenges and threats of the contemporary world. On the same issue, the President of the Italian House of representatives, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini sent a report that was presented in his name by Mr Biondi, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies. He pleaded for more interparliamentary cooperation considering the complexity of the international situation.

Conclusions of the presidency

1. The protocols on the role of national parliaments and the principle of subsidiarity provide an opportunity for the national parliaments to not only strengthen their role in Europe, but also to raise the awareness of the European Union on the national level. Monitoring the compliance with the principle of subsidiarity will increase the legitimacy of decisions taken at the European level as well as the legitimacy of the integration process. The national parliaments of the European Union should take advantage of these possibilities both separately and as a whole. The reaction time of six weeks, as incorporated in the protocol on subsidiarity, will give national parliaments little time to thoroughly scrutinise European proposals for legislation and to co-ordinate their position with other national parliaments. Interparliamentary cooperation is a necessary instrument to get the maximum effect from the early-warning mechanism.
2. The host of the upcoming conference, the Hungarian National Assembly, was asked to form a working group which will follow up on the debate about the language regime. This working group shall be charged with the task of working out the technicalities of a regime by which delegations share the responsibility, both organisational and financial, for ensuring that the languages required are interpreted at conferences. It is clear that every person so desiring should be able to speak their mother tongue, and the solution to the logistic problems outlined in the debate at this conference should be a purely practical one. The new language regime should be operational at the next Conference of Speakers.
3. The Athens working group has made a commendable effort to explore further cooperation between parliaments during the last year. This goal was reached when the "Guidelines on interparliamentary cooperation between parliaments in the European Union" were presented. We note that these guidelines have been agreed upon by the conference and will be implemented. The guidelines (enclosed) are an instrument to improve the structure of, and to co-ordinate interparliamentary cooperation with practical and operational mechanisms. In this context IPEX will serve as important tool for the exchange of

information, for example by directly distributing legislative proposals from the European Commission to the IPEX database.

4. The challenges ahead on both the European and global level should be faced together. The parliaments of the member states should play an important role in structuring these future agenda's. Through more interparliamentary cooperation we can combine forces. Dealing with the global challenges ahead also means underlining time and again the necessity and the importance of a well-functioning multilateral system in which the United Nations play a crucial role. The parliaments of the European Union have to think and act on a local, European and global level in order to contribute to a successful European and global agenda.
5. A proposal has been presented by Mr. De Decker, President of the Senate of Belgium, to set up a working group to examine the efficiency of the European parliamentary cooperation in the field of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). We take note of this proposal and we presume that some Presidents will take it upon them to further examine the issue.
6. The President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Casini, represented at this conference by Mr. Biondi, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies, the President of the German Bundestag, Mr. Thierse and Mrs. Benaki, President of the Hellenic Parliament, suggested that a debate be started to further examine the development of interparliamentary structures, assemblies and institutions at the European level and to review their effectiveness. We think it appropriate for this debate to take place and ask the host of the next Conference to follow up on it.
7. The next Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments will take place in Budapest in May 2005. The Danish Folketinget has put forward an offer to host the Conference of Speakers in 2006.