

PM

2 March, 2010

## Progress report on the Lisbon forum debate

*The Swedish EUSC Presidency is submitting this progress report on the IPEX forum debate on interparliamentary cooperation in the era of the Lisbon Treaty for consideration at the meeting of the Secretaries-General in Stockholm on 7–8 March 2010. The report includes proposals for some conclusions regarding the debate on subsidiarity and information exchange. Moreover, the debate on coordination in the planning of interparliamentary meetings has led to adjustments to the Presidency's original draft and proposals for an alternative perspective based on the role of the EU trio presidency.*

### General remarks on the debate

Following the meetings in December 2009, the Swedish EUSC Presidency, with the technical assistance of the European Parliament's services, began to prepare for the IPEX forum-based debate between the EU parliaments.

The forum was launched on 28 January 2010 with a debate on the issue of coordination in the planning of interparliamentary meetings. On 10 February, a second debate on subsidiarity and the exchange of information was launched.

In both debates, Parliaments/Chambers were asked to submit comments by 18 February, either by posting comments on the forum or by sending them to the Presidency's mailbox for the forum debate.

In total, seventeen Parliaments/Chambers have responded to one or both of the background papers. No Parliament/Chamber has submitted a comment on any other Parliament's/Chamber's response. All contributions but one have been posted on the forum. In addition, the Brussels representatives made a joint contribution regarding the debate on subsidiarity and information exchange.

Several Parliaments/Chambers have experienced technical problems with the forum, i.e. short sessions, and have not been able to upload their contributions themselves. This problem has been brought to the attention of the European Parliament's services.

## Subsidiarity and exchange of information

On the basis of the comments to the background paper, the Swedish EUSC Presidency considers there are grounds for drawing some conclusions.

1. A number of Parliaments/Chambers (frass, fiedu, hours, iesea, bechb<sup>i</sup>) have warned against laying down *rigid procedures* for the exchange of information in detailed conclusions or guidelines. The Presidency shares this concern and agrees that it is neither appropriate nor necessary to have guidelines of this kind.
2. There appears to be a fair degrees of agreement about what *information parliaments expect to find on IPEX* regarding the subsidiarity compliancy check, even though several Parliaments/Chambers (eerii, nltwe, huors, sizbo, dkfol, itcam/itsen, uklor) have pointed to variations, due to differences in the organisation of the work of our Parliaments/Chambers. Many have stressed the need to improve both IPEX and routines for uploading information.

On the other hand, several Parliaments/Chambers (dkfol, nltwe, eerii, bechb) object to the description made in the background paper on the limited scope for the *Brussels representatives' complementary role* as a result of the information available on IPEX.

Any Parliament/Chamber wishing to exchange information through their Brussels representative will do so, regardless of form or if the information could be found elsewhere. The Presidency, however, considers that each Parliament/Chamber, while rightfully expecting others to provide requested information, has a responsibility to avoid unnecessary duplications when submitting inquiries, in order to keep the workload of the representatives at a manageable level.

3. There seems to be broad support for putting the *method of work outlined by the Brussels representatives* to a test. However, two Chambers (frass, bechb) oppose this, finding the method too rigid.

At the same time, some Parliaments/Chambers (eerii, czsen, hours, czpos) have indicated that it is necessary to assess the method and to let the representatives continue to develop their cooperation. The Presidency fully agrees that experiences of the working method need to be evaluated and finds this to be an appropriate issue to be taken up within the COSAC biannual report.

4. Regarding dissemination of *unofficial or preliminary information in writing*, a number of Parliaments/Chambers (dkfol, frass, huors, dkfol, bechb) have put forward similar alternative suggestions. These suggestions could possibly be combined by setting up a non-public forum on IPEX and providing a separate forum mailing list of special contacts designated by each Parliament/Chamber.

In the view of the Presidency, such a forum could also host a list

of envisaged priority proposals, an idea mentioned by a couple of Parliaments/Chambers (dkfol, iesea, nltwe) and also by the Brussels representatives.

5. Finally, the Danish Parliament has pointed to the *interconnection between the procedures of the subsidiarity compliancy check and the political dialogue* between the Commission and national parliaments. The Danish Parliament proposes that developments in this regard are closely monitored and evaluated.

The Swedish EUSC Presidency also considers the political dialogue to be of great importance, not least as a tool for parliamentary participation in the policy-shaping process. This has also been stressed by the Portuguese Parliament. The Presidency therefore wishes to bring the proposal of the Danish Parliament forward and suggests that the COSAC biannual report, as a feasible existing instrument, is used for the collection of evidence in this regard.

#### **Suggestions for the Secretaries-General meeting on 7-8 March**

On the basis of the debate, the EUSC Presidency proposes that the Secretaries-General meeting in Stockholm on 7-8 March should:

- encourage the representatives, while avoiding bureaucratisation and overly rigid procedures, to work along the lines they have agreed on, in order to contribute to a systematic exchange of information concerning dossiers currently under debate;
- commission the establishment of a forum on IPEX, where parliaments will be able to exchange preliminary unofficial information in writing. This forum will also host a mailing list of designated special contacts and a list of envisaged priority proposals. Each Parliament/Chamber is responsible for the accuracy of both lists on their behalf;
- propose that the Speakers' Conference should ask COSAC, by means of the biannual report, to provide the Speakers' Conference with basic findings on how parliaments use the subsidiarity compliancy procedure and the Barroso initiative political dialogue, as well as on experiences of the working methods of the national parliaments' Brussels representatives.

### **Coordination in the planning of interparliamentary meetings**

None of the responding Parliaments/Chambers have expressed any opposition to the idea of searching for a new consensus on the annexe to the EU IPC Guidelines. The EUSC Presidency therefore intends to push this project forward. Responding Parliaments/Chambers have, however, raised a number of important issues and proposals for amendments that need to be addressed.

1. First, the Presidency concurs with the fundamental point made by the Finnish Parliament that an important step in the right direction would be an agreement among parliaments on the need to *exercise restraint in meeting activities*. This point will be brought forward to the EUSC meeting in May.

At the same time, the Presidency would like to stress that fewer meetings does not mean fewer contacts. On the contrary, it could mean that resources are made available for a proliferation of alternative forms of interparliamentary contact. In this regard, the Swedish EUSC Presidency has requested information on parliaments' readiness for video conferencing. An inventory will be presented at the Secretaries-General meeting.

However, this is likely to be a long journey, and the Presidency believes that in any case better coordination in the planning of meetings is also needed to improve the present situation.

2. The main outstanding issue in relation to the draft annexe in the Presidency's background paper is the *definition of the coordinating constellation*. Where the Presidency suggested a constellation of the presiding and three forthcoming EU presidencies together with the European Parliament, the Danish and Irish Parliaments have suggested that the parliaments of the EU trio presidencies should be put at the centre of the planning coordination process. The Portuguese Parliament suggests, as a third alternative, that the EU troika is the most suitable constellation. A fourth alternative, ensuring permanent representation of the EUSC Presidency, has been proposed by the Italian Parliament.

Regarding the trio concept, the Danish Parliament is the most consistent advocate, proposing several amendments to the draft in this respect. The Swedish EUSC Presidency is inclined to agree that there are advantages in basing the planning process on the EU trio presidencies, where continuity between consecutive trios, as suggested, is put in the hands of the last and the first presidency parliaments of the trios concerned. The EUSC Presidency has drafted provisions taking into account the trio concept.

3. Regarding provisions on *exchange of information in the planning of meetings*, the French National Assembly has proposed an amendment to enable the parliaments concerned to decide themselves how to

exchange information. This proposal has been inserted into an amended draft.

4. Regarding provisions on the *calendar*, the Danish Parliament argues that the parliament of the country holding the EU Presidency should be responsible for submitting the meeting agenda to the IPEX calendar. The Swedish EUSC Presidency agrees that this may be more suitable, regardless of the choice of coordinating constellation, and is favourably disposed to including this in an amended draft. Still, and in line with the proposal of the Danish Parliament, notification of meetings to the IPEX calendar would follow consultations with the other parliaments.

It is proposed that consultation with other parliaments should still take place at a Secretary-General level. As underlined by the Italian Parliament, consultations could be made in a written procedure.

5. Regarding provisions on *documentation*, the French National Assembly has stressed that meeting documents on IPEX should be available both in English and French, and when necessary in other languages. The Presidency believes that existing guidelines and practices give proper guidance in this regard.

This reflection is also valid for the reference to the Central Support in the Presidency's original draft, which has therefore been deleted.

6. Finally, responding Parliaments/Chambers have raised various *other important issues* of a more general nature. For instance, the Irish and Portuguese Parliaments stress that interparliamentary activities ought to focus on justice and home affairs and on the common foreign and security policy, including defence. The EUSC Presidency would, in connection with this, like to add the idea of making use of existing permanent meeting constellations in this regard. Furthermore, the Danish Parliament suggests that a set of meeting formats should be predefined and applied as appropriate when meetings are planned at short notice. The Danish Parliament also suggests that Secretaries-General should meet biannually.

The Presidency would like to encourage continued debate on these issues, as well as other issues raised, with the objective of reaching some conclusions at the Speakers' meeting in May. At this point, however, it is not deemed appropriate to include them in the annexe.

### ***Suggestions for the Secretaries-General meeting on 7-8 March***

On the basis of comments and counterproposals put forward in response to the Presidency's background paper, the Presidency submits an amended draft for the Secretaries-General meeting in Stockholm on 7-8 March.

The left-hand column is based on the Presidency's original draft, with amendments underlined. The right-hand column represents the alternative where the parliaments of the EU presidency trio are placed at the centre of the meeting coordination process.

### Issues of common interest

<i>Original draft unchanged</i>	<i>Trio concept draft</i>
Taking into consideration the various working programmes and other strategic EU documents, the Secretaries-General (or other high-level official appointed by the Speaker) should identify and submit to the Conference of Speakers issues of common interest to focus on during the following years.	Taking into consideration the programmes and priorities of the EU presidency trios, the Secretaries-General (or other high-level official appointed by the Speaker) should identify and submit to the Conference of Speakers issues of common interest to focus on during the following years.

### Exchange of information in the planning of interparliamentary meetings

<i>Amended original draft</i>	<i>Trio concept draft</i>
Representatives of the parliaments of the presiding and the three forthcoming EU presidency countries and <u>responsible units</u> of the European Parliament shall <u>exchange information on a regular basis</u> on the planning of interparliamentary meetings, including choice of topics and timing.	Representatives of the parliaments of the incoming EU Council trio presidency and the responsible units of the European Parliament shall exchange information on a regular basis on the planning of interparliamentary meetings, including choice of topics and timing.

### Calendar

<i>Amended original draft: responsibility placed on the EU presidency parliament</i>
To facilitate the planning and work of the parliaments, an overview of activities should be provided. For this reason, a calendar of EU interparliamentary meetings is hosted on the IPEX website.
Information about regular meetings with sectoral committees, COSAC or other established forums and networks, as well as scheduled or intended ad hoc interparliamentary meetings, should be sent to the Secretary-General of <u>the parliament of the EU presidency country</u> . He/she will, <u>after having consulted the Secretaries-General of the other EU parliaments</u> , submit <u>information on meetings</u> to the IPEX calendar. The calendar is subject to the right of any parliament to propose new initiatives.

### Invitations

<i>Amended original draft</i>
-------------------------------

Formal invitations to meetings should be sent to the Speakers of every Chamber with a copy to the Secretaries-General.

A contact list for the EU Speakers' Conference, including Secretaries-General, should be provided on IPEX. The contact lists shall be continuously updated upon submission of information from the parliaments.

### **Documentation**

*Original draft unchanged*

All invitations, relevant information and documents regarding meetings should be made available through the IPEX calendar.

---

<sup>i</sup> Short references to Chambers are made according to the IPEX coding:

bechb - Belgian Chamber of Representatives

czpos - Czech Chamber of Deputies

czsen - Czech Senate

dkfol - Danish Parliament

eerii - Estonian Parliament

grvou - Hellenic Parliament

frass - French National Assembly

iesea - Irish Parliament (joint respons of Houses of Oireachtas)

itcam/itsen - Italian Chamber of Deputies/Italian Senate (joint respons)

hours - Hungarian National Assembly

nltwe - Dutch House of Representatives

ptass - Portuguese Assembly of Republic

sizbo - Slovenian National Assembly

fiedu - Finnish Parliament

uklor - British House of Lords