WORKING GROUP ON INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

FINAL REPORT

4 April 2008

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

The Working Group charged to examine how to improve inter-parliamentary cooperation was established by the Conference of Speakers of Copenhagen held in 2006 and presented its report at the Conference of Speakers of Bratislava in 2007.

The mandate of the Working Group included the following subjects:

- Can the Hague Guidelines be strengthened?

On this subject, the Working Group presented a proposal to amend the Hague Guidelines that was not approved at the Bratislava Conference. The Bratislava Conclusions establish: "The Speakers called on the incoming Presidency to promote the work of the Working Group on Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in order to conclude its work so as to strengthen the Hague Guidelines reflecting the recent development of inter-parliamentary cooperation and to present the result before the next meeting of the Secretaries-General."
Therefore, the Portuguese Presidency decided to present a new draft version of the Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation to the Working Group. This new draft aims to transform the Guidelines into a more flexible, concise and permanent instrument, not having to be amended if some other text is approved. The Guidelines were approved by consensus of the WG in its meeting on 1 February 2008, with the exception of the last article (Information, Research and Documentation).

- Can the coordination between the various forums for inter-parliamentary cooperation – including the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments, COSAC, meetings of parliamentary sectoral committees and Joint Parliamentary Meetings, hosted by the European Parliament and the national parliament of the member state holding the Presidency of the Council – be improved and, if so, how?

The role of IPEX in gathering information on all inter-parliamentary meetings and the role of each player in giving information to IPEX was much underlined. An annual and long-term calendar should be published on the IPEX website and continuously updated. All invitations, relevant information and documents regarding meetings should be made available through the IPEX website. The WG observed that this was already done and considered that an appeal should be made to all national parliaments to provide information to IPEX. Furthermore, establishing a fixed calendar for all EU inter-parliamentary meetings was considered a constraint for the parliaments holding the presidency.

- Can national Parliaments strengthen cooperation between national parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission?

The reinforcement of the role of national parliaments in the Lisbon Treaty represents an added value for the inter-parliamentary cooperation effort in the EU, especially taking into consideration that national parliaments are the ultimate source of democratic legitimacy. The WG considers that national parliaments should maintain their autonomy when discussing subjects of common concern. However, an increased coordination between national parliaments – and between national parliaments, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council – is necessary when discussing the monitoring of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The Commission, on its part, should develop its participation in the consultation process, in particular by publishing its responses to the input of national parliaments. The WG agrees to further develop the established cooperation scheme, avoiding the proliferation of meetings.

- Can the current scheme of appointing the Presidency of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments be improved?

After changing the scheme of appointing the Presidency of the Conference of Speakers according to the Bratislava Conclusions that followed the proposal of the Working Group report, the Portuguese Presidency decided to present a new formula to the Conference of Speakers to enter into force after 2010. The new formula is based on the idea that the Conference of Speakers should meet twice a year, once in each semester, under the presidency of the parliament of the country that holds the presidency of the Council of Ministers of the EU, and prior to the more significant meeting of the European Council in the same semester.

Annex
Draft proposal of the Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation.

GUIDELINES FOR INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Considering that:

a) National parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning and to increase the democratic legitimacy of the European Union;
b) Member states are represented in the Council of the European Union by their governments, themselves democratically accountable to their national parliaments;
c) Inter-parliamentary cooperation respects all the principles and rules established in the framework of the European Union;
d) Inter-parliamentary cooperation respects the autonomy of each parliament;
e) Inter-parliamentary cooperation respects the principle of national parliaments and the European Parliament being on a equal footing and having complementary roles in the EU structure;
f) The Lisbon Treaty gives national parliaments, together with the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament, a responsibility to scrutinize all legislative and non legislative initiatives.

I. Objectives

The main objectives of Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union are:

a) To promote exchange of information and best practices between the national parliaments of the European Union and the European Parliament with a view to reinforcing parliamentary control, influence and scrutiny at all levels.
b) To ensure effective exercise of parliamentary competences in EU matters in particular in the area of monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.
c) To promote cooperation with parliaments from third countries.

II. Framework:

Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union is performed within the following framework:

a) Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union

This Conference gathers Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU Member States and the President of the European Parliament. The Conference shall oversee the coordination of inter-parliamentary EU activities. The organisation of the Conference is conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for the Conference of Presiding Officers.

b) COSAC

COSAC (Conference of European Affairs Committees) enables a regular exchange of information, best practices and views on European Union matters between European Affairs Committees of national parliaments and the European Parliament.

c) Joint Meetings on Topics of Common Interest

The Parliament of the country holding the presidency and the European Parliament can organise joint meetings on topics of common interest, e.g. Joint Committee Meetings and Joint Parliamentary Meetings.

d) Meetings of Sectoral Committees

Meetings between sectoral committees are organised by national parliaments or the European Parliament with the purpose of discussing European Union topics within their fields of competence. In arranging meetings of sectoral committees, national parliaments of the countries holding the EU Presidency and the European Parliament should avoid the duplication of activity.

e) Secretaries-General

The Secretaries-General or other designated officials convene regularly in order to prepare the agenda and the debates of the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union and to settle any other business that is deemed necessary. Meetings of the Secretaries-General are prepared and chaired by the Secretary-General or other designated officials of the Parliament that holds the presidency of the Conference of Speakers after having consulted the preceding and the next presidencies.
Additional provisions on technical practices and procedures can be adopted by the Secretaries-General.

f) Representatives of National Parliaments to the EU

National Parliaments' Representatives contribute to reinforce inter-parliamentary cooperation by facilitating a regular exchange of information between national parliaments and national parliaments and the European institutions.

III. Fields of cooperation:

Inter-parliamentary cooperation is of particular value in the following fields:

a) Exchange of information and best practice

Exchange of information and best practice between national parliaments and with the European Parliament in all policy-fields covered by the Treaties of the European Union is a main field for inter-parliamentary cooperation, mainly in what regards procedures for parliamentary scrutiny of European Union matters.

b) Monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality

National parliaments have a key role to play in monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. In order to facilitate effective scrutiny, national parliaments are encouraged to exchange information on EU draft legislation and its compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

IV. Instruments of Cooperation

a) IPEX

The objective of IPEX is to support inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union by providing a platform for electronic exchange of information on all EU-related parliamentary activities. IPEX should inter alia facilitate an exchange of information between parliaments with regard to EU draft legislation including its compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.
A calendar of inter-parliamentary meetings of the European Union is also available on the IPEX website.

b) INFORMATION, RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION

Parliaments should promote the exchange of information, research and documentation by all the appropriate means, including COSAC and ECPRD.