

Meeting of Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments Bratislava, Slovak Republic 15 – 16 March 2007

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In his opening welcome note, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Pavol Paška, called on Secretaries General to find a functioning mechanism of the EU Speakers' Conference Presidency appointment.

Secretary General of the host parliament, Viktor Stromcek, introduced the Program and Agenda of the Meeting. Afterwards, the organization and practical information concerning of the Bratislava Conference, were presented.

I. Future of Europe

The Secretaries General welcomed their colleagues from the new European Union Member States – Bulgaria and Romania.

In further, Secretaries General welcomed and appreciated an address by Bo Manderup Jensen, Principal Advisor to the President of the European Commission on the Future of Europe.

It was underlined in the discussion that national parliaments should also be involved in debates on the future of the EU and participate at the exchange of opinions relating to the topic. At the same time, it is important to take into consideration the constitutional arrangements of individual member states, which form the basis for how to solve the EU questions.



II. Interparliamentary Cooperation

The Secretaries General welcomed the Report of the Working Group on Interparliamentary Cooperation and acknowledged its eminent contribution to the improvement of interparliamentary cooperation within the EU.

After studying different suggestions and conclusions of the Working Group, the Secretaries General called on the Working Group to continue its work on reviewing the Report in order to reach a higher accord on the text to be presented to the Speakers.

The Secretaries General agreed on passing their mandate to the members of the WG to implement the given suggestions and make the final changes in the Report. The Working group shall continue its work primarily by using electronic means and hold the meeting only in the case that these will no longer be sufficient for reaching an agreement on the final text. The Secretaries General agreed to follow the final work of the Working group in order to be able to give their formal endorsement at their morning meeting prior to the opening of the Bratislava Conference of the EU Speakers on 25 May 2007.

In order to strengthen the Hague Guidelines, the Secretaries General recommended to the EU Speakers to call on the incoming presidencies to promote actively the implementation of the Hague Guidelines by all participating parliaments.

After discussing the proposal made by the Working Group on the new scheme of appointing the EUSC Presidency, the Secretaries General were of the opinion that the proposed change of the current scheme of appointing the Presidency would extensively contribute to better coordination among the different forums of interparliamentary cooperation.

The Secretaries General gave their priority to the proposal, in which the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of a calendar year would hold the presidency of the Speakers' Conference and organise the actual meetings in the following calendar year.

The Secretaries General agreed also on the following arrangements concerning the new scheme of appointing the EUSC Presidency:

- the Secretaries General should formally take note about two years in advance, which parliaments will assume the EUSC Presidency;
- the Secretaries General should come with necessary proposals in such situations where, for example, the Presidency cannot be assured according to the agreed new scheme because of elections held in the Chamber concerned.

The Secretaries General welcomed the proposal of the Working Group to reduce the costs of the parliament hosting the Speakers Conference by implementing the same approach as decided for the language regime, i.e. each parliament covers all accommodation costs concerning its participation at the Secretaries General meeting and the EU Speakers' Conference itself. They suggested that the EU Speakers will approve the proposal and call on the incoming Presidency to make necessary arrangements in order to implement the decision.

Concerning the cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament, the Secretaries General agreed that the structure, timing and content of interparliamentary meetings should generally be improved. The Secretaries General expressed their belief that this problem could be resolved if the European Parliament adopted standardised procedures for such meetings. That is why the Secretaries General call on the European Parliament to come up with a proposal of such *vademecum* that shall be open to comments and amendments from national parliaments preceding its implementation.

III. First year of IPEX

Regarding the IPEX website, the Secretaries General took note of the oral report on IPEX by Peter Juul Larsen, Head of the EU Department of the Folketing, and the work of the IPEX Board. The Secretaries General acknowledged the importance of a reliable IPEX website and the need - at the present - to retain the webmaster by financial contributions from parliaments in the Board.

The Secretaries General re-appointed the members of the IPEX Board with a mandate extending to the forthcoming Meeting of Secretaries General in 2008. The Board consists of parliaments of Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, UK and the European Parliament. In addition, ECPRD and COSAC are associate Board members. The Secretary General of the Danish Parliament, Henrik Tvarnø was also appointed as chairman of the IPEX board for the duration of the current mandate of the IPEX Board.

The Secretaries General approved of the IPEX Board decision to encourage national parliaments to cooperate with their respective regional parliaments and to publish relevant regional documents on the existing pages. They asked the IPEX Board to provide for a viable solution for the publication of EU relevant information from regional parliaments.

The Secretaries General welcomed the initiative of the IPEX Board that is to be implemented by the EUSC Presidency to send a letter to the President of the European Commission concerning an improvement of the cooperation between IPEX and the Commission including a request to transfer appropriate meta-data to IPEX.

The Secretaries General welcome the Draft Presidency Conclusions concerning IPEX noting that the Draft Conclusions will be put on the agenda at the meeting of the IPEX Board in the beginning of May 2007.

IV. Report of Task Force on assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies

With respect to the technical assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies, the Secretaries General underlined the need to ensure the exchange of information between the National Parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission in view of their capacity as donors.

The Secretaries General mandated the Task Force in cooperation with the IPEX Board to continue with its work, which should contribute to a better coordination of the individual national parliaments' assistance.

The Secretaries General mandated the Slovak Parliament with the support of the Danish and Italian Parliaments to continue its talks with the European Commission on the following issues:

- a procedure on how to advance consultation with the representatives of the parliamentary administrations when drafting programmes, projects and strategies for technical assistance that involve parliamentary assistance;
- the exchange of information with EU parliaments about programmes, calls for tender, requests for parliamentary assistance submitted directly to the national parliaments etc.;
- the possibility of issuing invitations to tender concerning technical assistance to NEDs which would be restricted to parliamentary administrations and which could possibly be less burdensome in terms of procedures, administration etc. for the national parliaments.

The Secretaries General recommended that the Speakers' Conference take the appropriate initiatives to obtain a commitment by Mr Barroso to this respect.

V. Raising national European awareness

The Secretaries General welcomed the presented Information on discussions related to the European Commission's Annual Policy Strategy and Legislative and Work Programme and acknowledged a right of the EU parliaments to apply their own constitutional, parliamentary and traditional practices when discussing both documents.

The Secretaries General invited COSAC to play a coordination role when discussing the European Commission's Annual Policy Strategy and Legislative and Work Programme. Time framework to debate both documents should be 6 to 8 weeks following the publication of the documents in all language versions.

The Secretaries General recommended that a member of the European Commission, if possible the President himself, presents both documents at an interparliamentary meeting.

The Secretaries General expressed their hope that Mrs. Margot Wallström would be able to come and present the Annual Policy Strategy at the May Conference in Bratislava.