



## Future of the European Union and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation

Tomorrow we shall enter the second Finnish Presidency of the European Union. We welcome you all to cooperate and to help us to tackle the very demanding agenda of the coming six months. The Austrian Presidency achieved many results and took the debate on the future of Europe forward.

The Finnish Presidency will continue to examine the question of the constitutional treaty, but the European Council has instructed the German Presidency to actually start working out alternative solutions. Our contribution will be to ratify the treaty in the autumn. We are well aware that the treaty will not enter into force in its present form. However, ratification by the Finnish Parliament will be a political act, confirming our determination to defend the essential content of the treaty and reaffirming the acute need for a new decision-making structure in the EU. Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen said “it is a very good treaty”, and we agree, as, among other things, it would strengthen the role of national parliaments.

Equally, we must not let the constitutional debate paralyse the EU’s ability to do things. We have a full mandate to make Europe deliver results on the basis of the present treaties. We should even decide soon to implement the passerelle clause in the EU Treaty’s article 42, to transfer police cooperation and criminal justice to the Community sphere, a move that would enjoy strong public support, as in Denmark.

We need a new commitment to economic reform, an effective energy strategy and a pro-active approach in the WTO negotiations. We must work systematically and decisively on enlargement. The integration of the Western Balkans is essential for maintaining peace and stability in our continent. Having committed ourselves to negotiate with Turkey on membership, we must not flinch at the magnitude of the task. As prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen said, we will be wise not to try to set definite geographic limits to the EU, but should be careful with making new promises of membership beyond the present agenda.

A few remarks on inter-parliamentary cooperation and the excellent reports by our distinguished colleagues Christian Mejdahl and Hugo Haenel.

The primary task of national parliaments is national, or national-European: supervising governments and holding them to account, thereby wielding real influence at the European level, mainly in the Council. A model for such real influence, the Danish model, was well explained by Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen. Cooperation among national parliaments cannot be a substitute for the role of parliaments in the national decision-making system. In other words, even the new treaty would not create a new institution, national parliaments in concert. It is important to establish a clear doctrine on this before a new treaty enters into force.

As to the Speakers' cooperation, I strongly endorse amending the system of rotation of the Speakers' Conference presidency, by creating a troika consisting of the current and the two following presidencies. The same rotation should apply both to the Speakers' Conference and to COSAC.

According to the present and the proposed treaties, COSAC bears the responsibility for inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU.

I am pleased to confirm that the parliament of Finland will organise, with the European Parliament a conference on the future of the European Union in Brussels on 4 and 5 December. This conference comes immediately before the start of the German presidency, which was given a particular task by the European Council. I expect that at the conference in December, the debate will have moved forward, from analysis to constructive proposals. I would be grateful if this conference is given the endorsement of the Speakers' Conference.