



Parliamentary Assembly  
Assemblée parlementaire

22 February 1992  
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**CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES  
(Strasbourg, 20-22 February 1992)**

**CONFÉRENCE DES PRÉSIDENTS DES ASSEMBLÉES  
PARLEMENTAIRES EUROPÉENNES  
(Strasbourg, 20-22 février 1992)**

Report of the third sitting held on 22 February 1992 at 10.00 am

Compte-rendu de la troisième séance tenue le 22 février 1992 à 10h00

Delegations are requested to submit their amendments to the Secretariat by 15 March 1992 at the latest

Les délégations sont priées d'envoyer leurs amendements au Secrétariat pour  
le 15 mars 1992 au plus tard

The sitting was opened with Mr Wieslaw CHRZANOWSKI, Marshal of the Polish Sejm, in the chair.

Lord MACKAY OF CLASHFERN, Lord Chancellor of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom expressed his satisfaction at being able to participate at the largest gathering of European presiding officers that has ever been held and extended a very warm welcome to those colleagues who were attending this conference for the first time. Their presence was a testimony to the central theme of the debate: that parliamentary democracy was a prerequisite, though not a guarantee, of peace and co-operation among nations. As previous speakers had already mentioned, there was the need for a little time and a great deal of patience to permit the rebuilding of democratic institutions and the development of a market economy in Poland; for faith and optimism in the search for solutions to constitutional and institutional problems in Czechoslovakia; for the promotion of the proposed European Development Fund regarding educational systems and human rights supported by the European Parliament; for confidence in new state structures in Germany and finally for the establishment of sound and effective governmental structures to implement the decision reached by parliament.

Parliamentary democracy could not in itself ensure economic progress or the removal of deep-rooted political and ethnic difficulties. Parliamentarians should take stock of what they could realistically do together to help meet the challenges and opportunities thrown up by the largely peaceful revolution in Europe. Conferences such as this one could provide a useful forum to exchange views on current work and on current developments and trends in the respective parliaments. In the current debate the difficulties facing parliamentary democracy had been mentioned: the need for effective structures in the new democracies and the dangers of a democratic deficit in the European Community. Although an effective executive was needed, it had to be answerable to parliament. Each parliament had the responsibility to develop effective and timely ways of scrutinising government action, also with regard to the European Community.

Apart from the advantages of bilateral contacts between parliamentary assemblies there was of course value in multi-national interparliamentary co-operation, but further proliferation of international meetings had to be avoided except if they were aiming at a particular objective. The speaker endorsed Professor Süßmuth's statement when she spoke of the need for an effective network of organisations and not just a jungle growth.

With regard to the parliamentary dimension of European co-operation and integration, he recalled that the United Kingdom had at the conference of political union at Maastricht in December last year, readily agreed two declarations on the important role of national parliaments in the European Union and on a future conference of all the parliaments of the Community. He hoped that in due course most of the non-Community countries represented here would be able to join fully in these initiatives. Referring to Mr Nothomb's intervention, he agreed that European parliaments must also keep their eyes on the world scene although it was up to the United Nations to promote peace and security at world level. The role of economic problems had to be fully recognised and he hoped that the current GATT negotiations would come to a successful end in the interest of the whole world.

Mrs Josi MEIER, President of the Swiss Ständerat, referred to Winston Churchill's speech in Zurich when he had asked for the creation of a United States of Europe and had brought hope to a part of the world which had been rife with political turmoil. Earlier enemies had started friendly co-operation but it had become obvious that men needed bread first and foremost. The European Economic Community had been founded out of this necessity whilst the Council of Europe was concentrating, in particular on human rights and democracy, carrying the flame of hope for all those living under totalitarian regimes. Spain and Portugal had liberated themselves in the 70's; the countries of Central and Eastern Europe today.

To give them bread, market economy was needed together with democracy. The new democracies were now prepared to make their own experiences and patience was needed. However, they should formulate clear wishes on the type of support they wanted to receive from the West.

Switzerland had a particular know-how with regard to the protection of minorities and giving rights to minority groups was a guarantee for peace. Those who could determine their own language and a big part of their culture would be unlikely to ask for separation. She also supported those speakers who criticised the democratic deficit. Switzerland had a direct democracy which was characterised by great patience and close relations with the citizen.

However, European integration was difficult because the citizen was asked to give up a certain amount of its independence. A two chamber system in Europe in which in Strasbourg small and big states would be represented at equal level would be desirable and would help to promote the parliamentary concept in all states.

M. Martian DAN, Président de l'Assemblée des Députés de Roumanie, se réjouit de prendre part à cette conférence dans laquelle il voit le témoignage d'une coopération plus étroite entre la Roumanie et le Conseil de l'Europe. Les mutations profondes qu'a connues la Roumanie dans son passé récent recèlent à la fois des potentialités de renaissance et des dangers. Ces derniers sont liés à la profonde crise, d'ordre économique, social et moral que traverse la société roumaine, tout comme les sociétés d'autres pays de l'Europe centrale et orientale.

M. Dan répond à la question de savoir par quels moyens les parlements européens peuvent engendrer une dynamique positive. En premier lieu il est indispensable d'accroître la coopération entre les parlements européens. Dans ce contexte le rôle de l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe est irremplaçable. En deuxième lieu, les Etats occidentaux doivent accorder un appui économique aux pays de l'Europe centrale et de l'Est. Les parlements européens, tout comme l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe, peuvent contribuer au développement d'un courant d'opinion publique plus favorable à cet effort économique en faveur des nouvelles démocraties. De l'avis de M. Dan, il conviendrait également que les Etats de l'Est et de l'Ouest coopèrent afin d'empêcher que des liens se tissent entre les forces extrémistes qui s'organisent un peu partout en Europe. En outre, M. Dan prône une extension géographique de la collaboration interparlementaire. Cette extension constitue un prémisses de la stabilité de l'Europe centrale et de l'Est dans son ensemble.

Enfin, M. Dan rappelle que le parlement de la Roumanie a jeté les bases juridiques pour une nouvelle démocratie qui sauvegarde les droits de l'homme et les libertés fondamentales. En outre, le parlement roumain a défini le cadre institutionnel de la transition à l'économie de marché. La Constitution, qui a été approuvée par référendum populaire le 8 décembre 1991, est pleinement

démocratique et donc antitotalitaire. Les présidents de tous les parlements européens peuvent compter sur le parlement roumain, sur sa volonté de réaliser des réformes et de satisfaire pleinement les nobles aspirations qui ont animé la révolution de 1989.

**Mrs Kolle GRONDAHL, Member of the Presidium of the Nordic Council**, paid tribute to the colleagues representing the newly restored democracies. Eastern and Central Europe had undergone tremendous political changes during the past two years. All of us present had to give all of our support to these states in their pursuit of more stabilised economical and political conditions.

The Baltic republics had, for historical and cultural reasons, close ties with the Nordic region. Consequently, the Nordic Council gave high priority to co-operation with the Baltic Republics. The official opening of contact and co-operation was carried out in October 1990.

In November 1991 the Baltic Assembly was established, standing as a counterpart to the Nordic Council and other interparliamentarian organisations. The Nordic Council had adopted principles for co-operation and a working programme with the Baltic Republics.

The Baltic Sea region would experience considerable economic expansion within a few years. The Nordic Council wished to play a role in the development of this region. One of the most important challenges for the Nordic region was the fight against pollution of the Baltic Sea.

Besides economic revival, political co-operation would also increase in this region. For example the Nordic Council would host the second Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area and would invite representatives from all national parliaments from states and autonomous territories around the Baltic Sea. This conference would focus on future co-operation plans for the region and the emerging Baltic Sea identity and its challenges in a new European political atmosphere. In order to establish closer co-operation the communication infrastructure had to be developed.

Despite the small size of the Nordic countries they had a role to play in helping to shape the unified Europe. In a larger international context, the Nordic countries had previously, on several occasions, been represented by one common voice.

The Nordic Council's main concern for the moment was the future of Nordic co-operation after the year of 1992. The economic and political integration in Europe would no doubt have significant consequences for the Nordic region. A closer co-operation in handling international questions was a prerequisite for future co-operation with international organisations.

Continuous development of democratisation was a pre-condition for the peaceful development of Europe. It was the responsibility of all of those present to provide the newly re-established states in Central and Eastern Europe with know-how, not only in the building up of technical and financial systems, but also in the building up of solid political democracies.

**Sir Geoffrey FINSBERG, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, replaced Mr Chrzanowski, in the chair.

Mr Willem DEETMAN, Speaker of the Netherlands Second Chamber, said that it was a great privilege for him to make some concluding remarks. Before doing so he wanted to thank the Council of Europe's Assembly for its invitation.

Thirty-two countries had participated in this conference; each of which stood for a long tradition of national and cultural identity. Therefore one would have expected a huge diversity of views to be expressed at this conference. It was a happy surprise to see how much all the participants agreed on their analysis of the theme of this conference: parliamentary democracy as a prerequisite of peace and co-operation between countries.

Mr Deetman summed up some of the elements of this common analysis. Mrs Süssmuth, Mr Szabad and Mr Virshubsky had stressed that democracy was not a situation but a process, never perfect. Mr Emmanuelli had added that democracy was not a system but a degree of civilisation.

Although democracy was therefore never perfect, the choice between democracy and totalitarianism was nevertheless a very clear one. His Greek colleague had given the example of his own country and of Spain and Portugal, who had made a clear choice for democracy and who were now fully participating in European co-operation. Mr Deetman was sure that this could be the case for countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the future. It was time to use the instruments we had, as had been said by Mrs Süssmuth.

Some of these instruments had been discussed during this conference. The President of the Latvian Parliament had asked the richer countries of Western Europe to invest in the Baltic states, rather than in improving their own defence. Mr Klepsch had mentioned the creation of a special fund for European democracy. Mr Dubcek and Mr Khasboulatov had warned against the danger of throwing away everything that had been created in Eastern Europe in the period of totalitarian rule. Sir Geoffrey Finsberg had hinted at the role the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly could play in the future. All this required time and money and debate.

Mr Fischer and many others had said that democracy sometimes gave free access to the worst and the most destructive elements of the human mind ie excessive nationalism, racism and anti-semitism. All these phenomena could be seen occurring both in the old democracies and in the new, both in small countries and in big countries. One of the happiest conclusions of this conference was that everyone condemned such phenomena.

Mr Deetman said that the next meeting at this level was to take place in 1994 at The Hague. He invited all of the participants for that gathering and asked them to make proposals for subjects to be discussed.

This conference had shown that the value of our contacts lay not so much in the declarations adopted, but in the mutual inspiration they could provide. It was especially when democracy and the rule of law were threatened, that international parliamentary assemblies could show, much clearer than governments, their disapproval and help colleagues whose position or even whose lives were in danger. The Council of Europe had done this in the past but the presidents and speakers could have a similar influence.

Mr Deetman concluded by saying that democracy and the rule of law did not provide instant solutions and they did not even provide final solutions to any problem. But nevertheless all the participants could be convinced of the inherent moral value of these systems. This made it a particular honour to be president of a parliament in democratic, law-abiding countries. He hoped to see all the participants in 1994 in The Hague in good personal health and in good democratic health.

**Sir Geoffrey FINSBERG, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and President of the Conference,** said that after listening to the debate he felt the conference had been most useful.

He thanked Mr Deetman, host of the next conference, for his concluding remarks and all colleagues who had attended the meeting and contributed to its lively debate. Sir Geoffrey also thanked all those who had said some friendly words about the Council of Europe and who had come forward with interesting viewpoints and suggestions that would be carefully studied and followed up. One of them was that the Parliamentary Assembly should co-ordinate assistance to parliaments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The speeches made at the conference reflected the world-shattering changes Europe had been, and still was, experiencing and the awesome challenges parliaments were facing. He underlined the decisive role parliaments played in internal politics and encouraged them to enhance their role in international politics. Referring to the speech by Mrs Meier, Sir Geoffrey would welcome all requests to the Parliamentary Assembly for assistance to Central and Eastern European countries and the Assembly would do its best to meet all of them.

Regular meetings of presiding officers of European parliaments created a network that must be used for the strengthening of parliamentary rule in our continent which could be a model for other continents. Sir Geoffrey warned that the multitude of inter-parliamentary bodies active in Europe would lead to a certain confusion unless they tried to avoid overlapping and establish a coherent and rational division of tasks. Full use should be made of the potential of existing institutions like the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament.

The Parliamentary Assembly stood for common values on a pan-European scale whereas the CSCE Assembly would bring in a necessary transatlantic element. In the coming years, the Presidents of European parliaments would be called upon to figure out how these inter-parliamentary institutions, together with regional assemblies, such as the Benelux, Nordic and Baltic Assemblies, must co-operate in order to achieve the best results.

Sir Geoffrey thought that one of the lessons of his experience in parliament and in government was that, if governments were to listen to the views of their parliaments, parliamentary initiatives had to be envisaged as early and decisively as possible.

Sir Geoffrey wished all participants a happy and safe return to their countries.