



Parliamentary dimension Dutch EU Presidency

1 January - 1 July 2016



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Reflection

During the first six months of 2016, it was the Netherlands' turn to assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Throughout this period the Dutch government was responsible for efficiently guiding the Council negotiations. But the Dutch Presidency also had a 'parliamentary dimension' to it. This entailed that the Dutch House of Representatives and the Senate organised six conferences for fellow parliamentarians from EU member states.

The aim of these conferences was to encourage parliamentarians to work together towards a stronger parliamentary engagement in European decision-making. Particularly now that many important decisions are made at a European level, effective parliamentary scrutiny plays a major role. And that is why it is essential that national parliaments and the European Parliament join forces and work together. It was in this spirit that, during the six months of the Dutch Presidency, the House of Representatives and the Senate made it their goal to encourage cooperation between parliamentarians and so increase their joint effectiveness.

This e-zine reflects on the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch EU Presidency and shows the highlights of the six interparliamentary conferences organised by the Dutch parliament on such themes as security and defence, economic and budgetary policy, energy and human trafficking.

It also features the special focuses that the Dutch parliament placed on the content and organisation of the meetings. The conferences on the themes of energy and human trafficking were consciously chosen for their topical relevance, whereby the issue of migration was not eschewed. Use was also made of innovative means to stimulate the interaction and debate between the parliamentarians. And finally, this e-zine takes a look behind the scenes of the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union.





**Malik Azmani**

Chair of the European Affairs Committee in the Dutch House of Representatives and co-chair of the conference

"One of our most important tasks is to closely examine the legislative proposals of the EU. How can we best do this?"

**Ana Birchall**

Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies

"The themes of the conference touch the heart of what is happening in Europe and the world today."



On 7 and 8 February 2016 the Chairpersons of the European Affairs committees of the various national parliaments and a delegation from the European Parliament met together in the Hall of Knights in The Hague. This Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC formed the kick-off of the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch EU Presidency.

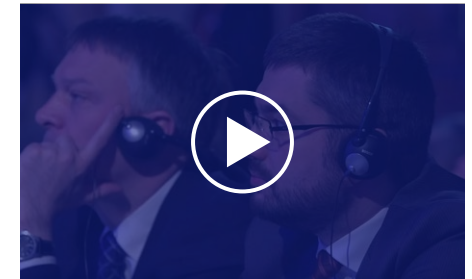
Among the topics for debate was the question of how national parliaments can best exert influence on EU proposals. Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders discussed the priorities of the Dutch government during the EU Presidency and EU commissioner Kristalina Georgieva discussed the work programme of the European Commission. The conference also addressed the Bi-Annual report: an overview of the working methods of national parliaments with regard to the EU. This conference set the agenda of the COSAC plenary conference in July 2016.

COSAC: The French acronym for *Conference des Organes Parlementaires spécialisé dans les Affaires Communautaires*

**Bert Koenders**

Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs

"The European Union is currently undergoing a number of stress tests. We are all faced with the question: What kind of EU do we want, and what legacy do we want to leave our children?"



Did you know...

...that the EU Presidency coincided in part with the 200th anniversary of the Dutch parliament. To celebrate this fact, a Special Joint Meeting was held in the Hall of Knights



**Joris Backer**

Member of the Finance Committee of the Dutch Senate and Deputy President of the Senate

"Today we discussed our experience in European budgetary agreements. We used several examples from practice, from both the national parliaments and the European Parliament. We need to learn from each other."

**Jean Arthuis**

Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Budgets

"The aim of this conference is for members of the national parliaments and the European Parliament to talk about democratic control of the governance in the Eurozone."

On 17 February 2016 an interparliamentary conference on stability, coordination and governance in the EU took place in the European Parliament in Brussels. The basis for this conference was the EU Fiscal Compact Treaty; a series of agreements ratified by the EU member states on stability, coordination and governance in the Economic and Monetary Union.

The conference was organised and chaired jointly by the Dutch parliament and the European Parliament. The aim of the conference was to exchange experiences on budgetary policy, investments and competitiveness within the EU. Speakers included Jeroen Dijsselbloem, chair of the Eurogroup and Dutch Minister of Finance, and Kees Vendrik, member of the Netherlands Court of Audit, who both spoke on current developments in the area of economic coordination and governance. This was followed by an exchange of experiences and best practices between the EU member states. The budgetary policies and the role of national parliaments in the EU member states were also discussed.

In the afternoon the focus of the conference switched to the long term. Future scenarios for a competitive European Union were outlined and the related opportunities were discussed, as well as the threats to achieving this objective. This took place in a 'catch the eye of the moderator' debate, a more dynamic way of engaging each other in discussion.

EMU - Fiscal Compact Treaty

The European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) was achieved in 1999. Its purpose was to introduce a monetary union with harmonised economic policies throughout the European Union. The Fiscal Compact Treaty is a series of agreements within the European Union prompted by the euro crisis and aimed at improving budgetary discipline within the individual member states.

**Pieter Duisenberg**

Chair of the Finance Committee of the Dutch House of Representatives

"The afternoon session focused on the competitiveness of Europe and stimulating the economy. The key question was: how can we increase investments in the EU member states?"



Did you know...

...that 843 participants from the 28 member states and the European Parliament attended the six conferences

Innovative & Inspiring

To enable parliaments to play as active a role as possible, it is important that the parliamentarians from the different member states can easily link up. Therefore, the conferences paid special attention to the mutual exchange of information and to helping participants expand their European network.

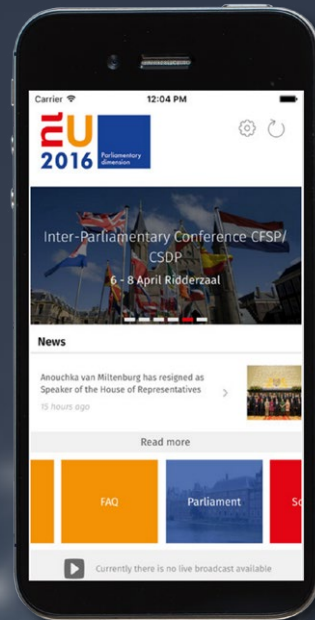
Working visits

Working visits were organised for some of the conferences to facilitate more in-depth, substantive discussions. For example, prior to the conference on energy, participants paid a visit to Westland and the Port of Rotterdam in order to get a better idea of how the energy transition in the Netherlands is taking shape. At an information market they could see how the Netherlands is working on clean and renewable energy.

Film and debate evening

Prior to the conference on human trafficking in the digital age there was a film and debate evening. Using short films on the theme of human trafficking, CNN journalist Leif Coorlim entered into discussion with the participants, giving them an impression of the human face behind this problem.

www.parleu2016.nl



App

All the information on the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch EU Presidency was made available via a dedicated app for iOS and Android. The app served two purposes: to provide interactive information for participants and to encourage mutual communication. The app offered participants a single platform where they could find all the relevant documents as well as practical information. Changes to the programme were also communicated directly via the app. In addition to this, the app could be used to find the contact details of fellow parliamentarians and to get in touch with them. In order to maximise public access to the conferences, the app was also available to download by other interested parties.



Interactive debates

During both of the COSAC conferences, moderated, interactive panel discussions took place. And during the conference in Brussels there was a special 'catch-the-eye' debate. This new format was very successful and drew many positive reactions from the participants.

Did you know...

... that 150 multimedia devices with automatic camera systems were used for registration, voting and presentations

A woman with dark, curly hair is speaking at a white podium. She is wearing a black top and a gold necklace. A microphone is positioned in front of her. The background is a solid blue color.

Human trafficking in the Digital Age



Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen

Dutch rapporteur on trafficking in human beings and sexual violence against children

"Human traffickers are using new technology to refine their methods. We must fight them using the same – and preferably better – technological weapons. This is our duty to all those victims who are exploited day after day in degrading conditions and circumstances."



Ard van der Steur

Dutch Minister of Security and Justice

"One of the worst crimes one can commit is to take away a person's independence, to violate their physical integrity and to rob them of their humanity."

The first themed conference organised by the Dutch parliament was on the somewhat neglected theme of human trafficking and took place in The Hague on 13 and 14 March 2016. The conference focused in particular on the influence of continuing digitisation on human trafficking.

The internet offers a starting point for perpetrators of human trafficking and for their victims, but also for investigators. Has the internet changed patterns and how can it be used to protect victims and prosecute the traffickers? In her opening speech, Speaker of the Dutch House of Representatives Khadija Arib spoke of human trafficking as *"a modern form of slavery that still occurs on a wide scale."* Ard van der Steur, Minister of Security and Justice spoke about the efforts being made in this area by the Netherlands during its EU Presidency.

An introduction was given by Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen, Dutch rapporteur on trafficking in human beings and sexual violence against children. This was followed by a moving and courageous contribution from Henriette Akofa Siliadin, one of the many victims of human trafficking: *"From the moment I boarded the plane I sensed I had made a big mistake."* During a panel session several experts discussed in more depth the increasing role that the internet and digital communication is playing in investigation, and they also talked about the position and rights of victims.



Andreea Niculiu

Strategic policy officer at the EU border management agency Frontex

"We don't yet know whether this is a temporary migration crisis or a challenge which will be confronting the European Union for many years to come."



Did you know...

...that the number of labour-related victims of human trafficking is rising



Loes Ypma, Chair of the House of Representatives Committee on Security and Justice: *"Hopefully this conference will ensure that the subject of human trafficking will now be high on the list of priorities among my European colleagues."*

During the conference the current migration crisis was also addressed. State Secretary Klaas Dijkhoff, who is responsible for migration in the Netherlands, had the following to say during this session: *"We need each other as never before and we must work together to find solutions to prevent people from drowning and at the same time we must enable the EU member states to meet their obligations."* There were also key-note presentations from representatives of the European Commission, the European Asylum Support Office and from a researcher from Queen Mary University in London.

Did you know...

...that technology in the USA has helped to recover victims by linking the missing persons database to websites where people were offering paid sex

SIDE EVENT

The conference was preceded by an informal documentary and discussion evening on Sunday 13 March 2016. This event was led by Leif Coorlim, director of the CNN Freedom Project. Excerpts from news items and documentaries on human trafficking served as the basis for a discussion among the participants, which also included external experts. The evening was hosted jointly with the Municipality of The Hague.





Energy, innovation and the circular economy



Khadija Arib
Speaker of the Dutch
House of Representatives

"It is our joint responsibility to work together effectively and to find possible ways to make the transition to a sustainable energy supply and a circular economy."



Did you know...

... that in 2020, 14% of the total energy supply in the Netherlands must be renewable energy. At present this is around 5.6%

The second themed conference organised by the Dutch parliament during its EU Presidency was on the subject of energy, including certain aspects of innovation and paying particular attention to the circular economy. There were 170 participants in this conference which took place in The Hague on 3 and 4 April 2016.

The theme of energy is being discussed in just about every national parliament in the EU, as well as in the European Parliament. Ever since the Paris Agreement on climate change was adopted in December 2015, the importance of a sound energy policy has grown increasingly stronger. For this reason the conference was not limited to energy supplies, but took a wider look at energy. The key question was: how can we accelerate a cost-effective transition to a clean, competitive and safe energy future?

The conference was opened by Khadija Arib, Speaker of the Dutch House of Representatives. Speakers during the plenary session in the Hall of Knights included Henk Kamp, the Dutch Minister of Economic Affairs; Maroš Šefčovič, the Vice President of the European Commission; and European Commissioner Karmenu Vella, who is responsible for Energy and Sustainability. All of the speeches were followed by discussions with the audience with contributions from a number of leading international experts including: Fatih Birol, director of the International Energy Agency, Feike Sijbesma, Chairman of the Board of DSM and Andrew Steer, President and CEO of the World Resources Institute.

As part of the interactive character of the conference, participants were invited to an information market in the Hall of Knights where innovative projects from various regions of the Netherlands were presented.



Maroš Šefčovič
Vice President of the
European Commission
and Commissioner of
the Energy Union

"A project like the Energy Union cannot be built in Brussels, it has to take place in the Member States, in our cities and villages. So I say to you: engage!"



Henk Kamp
Dutch Minister of
Economic Affairs

"The creation of a European Energy Market is vital, and the sooner the better. The path to this is difficult and full of challenges, but we must persevere and put aside our national interests in the wider interest of a European approach."



ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE AND SECURITY OF SUPPLY

The transition to sustainable energy also requires changes to the infrastructure. This session showed that the infrastructure should focus more on the future. For example, at present we have separate infrastructures for gas, electricity and heating. These systems need to be merged, but how to do this and the pace at which it needs to happen gives rise to many questions.

ENERGY-SAVING, SUSTAINABLE CITIES

The primary focus of this parallel session was energy savings in households and cities. People can do much to save energy in their own homes, but there are also plenty of challenges in coming up with energy-saving measures. In these issues, attention should be paid to the role of the government as well as the role of home owners.

RENEWABLE ENERGIES

The Paris Agreement on climate change set out a clear, global climate action plan that now needs to be implemented. The discussion in this subsidiary session was on how to come up with new technology for renewable energy. Some countries are still heavily dependent on oil, others on coal, but all signatories of the Paris Agreement have the same goal: to move towards more use of renewable energies.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

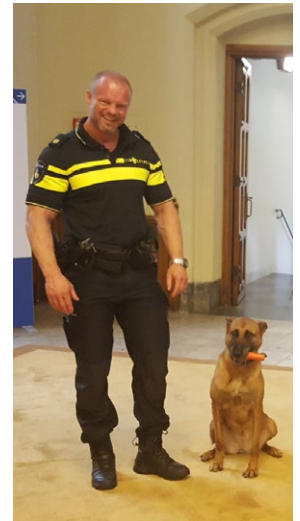
Here the participants mainly discussed how we can accelerate the much needed cost-efficient transition to a circular economy. What market conditions are required for this? What investments are needed? How will the business sector, citizens and governments be affected by the transition? Who is responsible for what? These and other questions led to a very lively discussion.



The conference participants were introduced to how the Netherlands is tackling this issue in practice. On 3 April there was a visit to Westland, the largest glasshouse horticultural area in the Netherlands. This is an important economic sector, but with a high energy consumption. The participants were shown how horticulture businesses use hot water from deep underground to meet their energy needs. There was also a visit to the Port of Rotterdam; another driving force in the Dutch economy. Hosts were the Municipality Westland, the Port of Rotterdam and the Metropolitan region Rotterdam - The Hague.



Organising the parliamentary dimension was an immense project. It required help from almost all the different departments of both houses of parliament and a considerable number of external companies. In addition there were dozens of volunteers from The Hague University of Applied Sciences.



Did you know...?

we used up to 8,5 kilometres of cable, including 800 meters of glass fiber for the translation cabins





Did you know...
... catering staff climbed 80
mediaeval staircases per day





Foreign, Security and Defence policy



Did you know...

...that all live streamed sessions had a sign language interpreter



Angelien Eijssink

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Dutch House of Representatives

"Particularly when it comes to subjects that have a direct impact on people's lives – for example terrorist threats, migration – parliamentarians must play a role. This is only possible if we work together, not only nationally but certainly internationally as well."

On 7 and 8 April 2016, around 200 representatives from the national parliaments and the European Parliament came together in the Hall of Knights in The Hague to discuss European foreign, security and defence policy. The threats and challenges confronting Europe in these areas demand increasingly intensive parliamentary collaboration.

The conference started off with a sporting challenge, as thirty of the participants set off at 7 am on a five-kilometre run taking in the Palace at Noordeinde, the Peace Palace and the Inner Court. At the opening of this interparliamentary conference, President of the Dutch Senate Ankie Broekers-Knol stressed the importance of more intensive collaboration: *"One of the most important steps we as parliamentarians can take to contribute to peace and stability is to optimise and intensify our cooperation."*

Subsequent speakers included the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders and Minister of Defence Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, as well as the Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs Elmar Brok. Koenders called for more collaboration, also with the national parliaments: *"Citizens are fearful of a larger EU and they need to be more involved. National parliaments can play a role in this. We have to do this together, that is the only way."*

His colleague Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert called for more intensive collaboration in the area of defence: *"If this is not THE moment for stronger European defence collaboration, we should ask ourselves if such a moment will ever come."* Alexander Vershbow, Deputy Secretary General of NATO declared: *"Open debate and democratic accountability are as essential to our security as any forces that our nations can bring to bear."*

The German European parliamentarian Elmar Brok warned the conference participants not to put the blame on 'Brussels' for everything: *"If it rains it's the fault of Brussels, when the sun shines it's because of Amsterdam, Berlin or Paris. Europe is not the problem, Europe is the start of the solution to the problem."*



Karlijn Jans

Chair of the Netherlands Atlantic Youth

"My generation did not grow up with the concept of restrictive national borders. Let us not close our borders, let us not close our hearts and our minds."





Federica Mogherini
High Representative for
Foreign Policy and
Security of the European
Union

*"Your contacts with other
parliaments, with society, with
people in your neighbourhood
and beyond, are great building
blocks for our foreign policy"*

The High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini addressed those present via a video message, speaking about the new EU Global Strategy which she was preparing at the time. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte called upon the parliamentarians: *"The government of the Netherlands is asking for your help. Building strong connections between national parliaments is essential for the legitimacy and the effective functioning of the European Union."*

During three parallel sessions, the subjects of a global strategy for the foreign and security policy of the European Union, European weapons exports and migration were discussed. The conference adopted a [document](#) containing statements on foreign aspects of migration, control of weapons exports and strengthening EU defence and a rapid response force.

Did you know...

*...that the construction crew
walked an average of 13 km
each day*





Plenary COSAC



The final interparliamentary meeting of the Dutch EU Presidency was on more effective collaboration between the member states, the rule of law, parliamentary diplomacy, accountability and migration. On Monday 13 and Tuesday 14 June 2016, over 250 parliamentarians from every country in the European Union came together in the Hall of Knights in The Hague for the 55th COSAC plenary meeting.

The plenary COSAC is the meeting of delegations of the European Affairs committees of the national parliaments and the European Parliament. These parliamentary committees meet together twice a year. In her opening speech, President of the Dutch Senate Ankie Broekers-Knol, stressed the importance of the rule of law.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte used his speech to emphasise the key role that national parliaments can play if they work together well: *"A single parliament can only play a limited role in European decision making. But working together with other parliaments enables you to achieve a huge amount, and it also makes your own parliament stronger. This is why the COSAC is so important."* Subjects raised during the discussion with the Prime Minister included the referendum on the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, TTIP and migration.

The debate then moved on to the instruments available to national parliaments for exercising influence on EU policy. Frans Timmermans, first Vice-President of the European Commission, spoke about the red and yellow card procedures that national parliaments can use. These procedures work as a signal from the national parliaments when they feel certain issues should be addressed at the national rather than at the European level.

Member of the European Parliament Sophie in 't Veld and Pieter van Dijk, former member of the Venice Commission, discussed the rule of law. In 't Veld: *"It would be good if we could develop a common framework for rule of law, because it is not just a national affair."* At the end of the conference Frans Timmermans talked about the tension between democracy and the rule of law: *"Democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, you*



Ankie Broekers-Knol
President of the Dutch Senate

"It is vital that we find a way to protect and safeguard our free, open and democratic society and to show that we are determined to uphold the rule of law. The rule of law forms the foundation of the basic values of the EU."



Lolita Čigāne
Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian parliament

"The chosen COSAC format is an elegant and excellent format for multilateral parliamentary diplomacy."

Did you know...

...that 31 kilos of coffee beans were used during the conference, and 4000 biscuits were eaten





Danuta Huebner
Member of the European
Parliament

"I thank the Dutch parliament for the more interactive form of debate and for the well-chosen subjects; they represent the problems that Europe is now faced with."



Alex Brenninkmeijer
Member of the European
Court of Auditors

"If we want to improve governance at national and European level, we would do well to learn from past performance."

can't say that any one of these is more important than the other. They are all necessary." This was followed by a debate on the increasing importance of parliamentary diplomacy.

Day two of the conference started with a debate between the parliamentarians and Alex Brenninkmeijer and Ville Itala, members of the European Court of Auditors. Itala: *"In order to reach the goal of accountability, for example in agriculture, we need better regulations that can be implemented with fewer mistakes."*

The closing debate of the COSAC meeting was on the topic of migration, and in particular the EU-Turkey Agreement on preventing irregular migration flows to the EU. Gerald Knaus, Chair of the European Stability Initiative, referred to the basic idea behind the agreement with Turkey: *"The idea was to move from a chaotic flow of people – which also coincided with the loss of control of the European borders – to an ordered transfer of refugees. Let us make sure that the Agreement works."* said Knaus.

Another speaker during the plenary COSAC meeting was the winner of the essay competition for students initiated by the Dutch parliament. Andrea Finesso presented his vision on a key issue, namely on the role of national parliaments in 25 years' time. Following this the plenary COSAC adopted a document containing the [contributions](#) from this two-day conference. In this document the parliamentarians requested that in future the European Commission formulate its work programme as realistically as possible. This will also enable national parliaments to better align their own work to the European legislative process.



Did you know...

*...that 772 messages
were posted on the website
www.parleu2016.nl*

Collaboration and special contacts

Besides organising the interparliamentary conferences, the parliamentary dimension also brought about intensive contacts between the Dutch parliament and European and foreign institutions. This included hosting the visit of the Former Members' Association of the European Parliament and the meeting of the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue: a consulting organ including members of the European Parliament and the United States Congress.

Discussion with the President and the leaders of the political groups of the European Parliament

A unique meeting took place in the Hall of Knights on Thursday 3 December 2015 between the European Parliament and the Dutch Senate and House of Representatives. Here the various parliaments were represented by their presidents and the leaders and deputy leaders of the political groups. In the opening words of the three Presidents, it was emphasised that the European Parliament and the national parliaments share a joint responsibility to bridge

the gulf between citizens and the European Union. President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz also noted that the European Union contains 42 national governments and 10,000 national parliamentarians. So it is no easy task to get these all in agreement.

A lively discussion on the theme of migration ensued, in which the discord within Europe on the question of how to deal with the refugee crisis was raised. The leaders of the political groups in the Dutch parliament also spoke with their colleagues from the European Parliament about the European budget and the Multiannual Financial Framework. Here the call from the Dutch parliament was for a reform of the budget system and the financial priorities that are set. Members of the European Parliament pointed out that this is a major area of focus. Although reform proposals are already on the table, there remains a lack of consensus among national governments to implement the proposals and outline a future vision for the system of subsidies.





Discussion with the European Commission

On 7 January 2016, for the first time in the history of the Dutch parliament, the entire European Commission paid a visit to the Dutch parliament. The custom of a meeting with the parliament of the country in question and the European Commission at the start of the new six-month term of Presidency of the Council of the European Union was instigated a few years ago. The talks during this meeting focused on two key subjects: the refugee issue and the budget system. The European Commission, led by its President Jean-Claude Juncker, was welcomed by the President of the Senate Ankie Broekers-Knol and the (then) Acting Speaker of the House of Representatives Khadija Arib.

Introductions of the discussion themes by members of the Dutch parliament were followed by a discussion with the European Commissioners. The members of parliament expressed their concerns about the present EU budget system that they see as being too unpredictable and complex. They called upon the European Commission to change to a system that is efficient, flexible, transparent and democratic. The meeting with the European Commission was followed by informal discussions between the leaders of the political groups who were present, EU reporters from the 28 EU member states and the Dutch press.



Colophon

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More information: www.parleu2016.nl and
www.staten-generaal.nl

Follow us on Twitter: @Staten_Generaal

Steering Committee and Political Preparatory Groups

The parliamentary dimension of the EU Presidency was organised under the responsibility of a steering committee, comprising the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the chairpersons of the committees for European Affairs of both chambers and the Secretaries-General of both chambers. For each of the six interparliamentary conferences a Political Preparatory Group was established, consisting of an equal number of members from the Senate and from the House. For the organisation of the conferences a special project team of parliamentary employees was installed.