



# EU Speakers' Conference

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Stockholm, 14-15 May 2010

Background note:

The future role of COSAC

*The meeting of the Secretaries General on 8 March identified the role of COSAC as an issue to be addressed by the Speakers of EU parliaments. The Swedish EUSC Presidency submits this background note for consideration at the meeting of the EU Speakers in Stockholm on 14–15 May 2010. The Presidency suggests that a valuable contribution and role for COSAC would involve focusing on the exchange of best practices regarding EU scrutiny, government scrutiny and general trends in parliamentary work with EU matters.*

## **New provisions on interparliamentary cooperation**

In the past few decades, cooperation within the EU has broadened and deepened immensely. Proposals for EU legislation concern national parliaments in their entirety. As a consequence, EU matters are increasingly on the agenda of the special committees of national parliaments, as effective scrutiny and, subsequently, implementation often require the specialist competence of these committees. Therefore, in the discussions leading up to the Treaty of Lisbon, the importance of networking and regular contacts between the national parliaments, as well as between national parliaments and the European Parliament, was underlined.

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the Protocol on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union, imply a more general approach than before to interparliamentary cooperation. According to article 9 in the Protocol, the European Parliament and national parliaments shall together determine the organisation and promotion of effective and regular interparliamentary cooperation within the Union. Article 10 then foresees certain forms of meetings and activities to be arranged within the framework of a Conference of Parliamentary Committees.

The objectives for the Conference are, according to the new Protocol, in addition to submitting any contribution it deems appropriate to the EU institutions, to promote the exchange of information and best practice between national parliaments and the European Parliament, including their special committees, and also to organise interparliamentary conferences on specific topics, in particular to debate matters of common foreign and security policy, including common security and defence policy.

## **The role of COSAC within the framework of EU interparliamentary activities**

COSAC has acquired a set of skills in the past few years with regard to best practice and exchange of information. Since its creation in 1989, COSAC (i.e. the committees on EU affairs of national parliaments and the European Parliament) has met regularly. It was mentioned for the first time in the Protocol on the role of National Parliaments annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam.

COSAC will discuss its future role at the XLII COSAC meeting in Madrid on 31 May – 1 June 2010. The COSAC Bi-annual Report will contain a chapter on this matter, aiming to identify strengths and weaknesses of COSAC, to take note of suggestions in order to improve the agenda and the debates, as well as to discuss provisions included in article 10 of the abovementioned Protocol on the Role of National Parliaments in the EU.

However, the future role of COSAC should also be seen in the broader context of EU interparliamentary cooperation in general. The current Protocol of the Treaty of Lisbon implies that contacts between special committees should be developed and that the overall coordination of EU interparliamentary meetings and activities should be strengthened. Regular contact between committees specialising in EU matters is a natural and valuable feature in interparliamentary cooperation. However, it is not evident that the COSAC of today is the most suitable forum for taking up the leading and coordinating role of the Conference envisaged in the new Protocol. Instead, a valuable contribution and role for COSAC would involve focusing on the exchange of best practices regarding EU scrutiny, government scrutiny and general trends in parliamentary work with EU matters.

Another possibility would be to develop today's COSAC into a broader, more representative Conference, where each parliament would decide on its own representation, taking into account the specific manner in which it has organised its work on EU matters. The objectives of the Conference suggest a composition of members from different parliamentary committees involved in EU matters, perhaps also including the Speakers, who within the EU Speakers' Conference oversee the coordination of EU interparliamentary activities according to the EU IPC Guidelines.

It seems, however, that such a Conference would be an artificial construction that would overlap other fora. Political debates on specific issues or themes are best held in meetings or other contacts involving the relevant special committees. Committees specialising in EU matters meet regularly, as do other established constellations, such as meetings of chairs of Foreign Affairs committees (COFACC), and of other special committees. The Conference of the Speakers oversee the coordination of interparliamentary EU activities, and indeed the revision of the Guidelines for the EUSC, including its annex, is intended to facilitate an efficient overall planning and coordination of meetings as well as promoting other forms of interparliamentary cooperation.