

The Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments Bratislava, 25 May 2007

INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

**Speech by Sir Alan Haselhurst,
Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom
(Transcript)**

Thank you very much indeed, Mr. President,

This is the point, in which I have to say, which you all know, that we place so much emphasis on neutrality of our Speaker that we are in a different position from many of our colleagues here, and therefore however much we want cooperation together on a parliamentary basis and the exchange of ideas, the UK Speaker really cannot be in the position, where he appears to be taking a political stand on controversial issues. So of course we want to see the improved cooperation, of course we want to see coordination between our activities, but over-formalization does just give a slight worry that we might find the situation, in which the current President of our organisation is making a statement, which would cause some discomfort, some difficulty back in London. So we just enter that caution about what can happen.

Yes, we do believe in the Hague guidelines and of course they need to be renewed as necessary from time to time, but persuasion rather than argumentation should be important to us all. Remembering that we are sovereign states that come together and we inevitably have different ways of doing things, which cannot always conform into some straight jacket.

The other thing is there has to be continuity, because we change our jobs with some frequency. I am now one of the older here but I am constantly meeting new colleagues who come into their positions in their parliaments. So we have to make sure we are moving at the pace that we can bring in the new as it were and not simply rely on the old.

Our rotational Conferences are, and this is the further example being here in Slovakia, pleasant and instructive, but it absolutely right, as Baroness Hayman says, we agree there must be a more equitable sharing of the costs, and we certainly think there is no objection to our paying our own hotel bills and lessening the burden upon the host country.

Lots of other Conferences beginning to spring up, COSAC is the most obvious example, it has led the way; there are other cooperative meetings between the specialist committees of our parliaments, the European Parliament committees have meetings with representatives of national parliaments, and there are other ad hoc joint parliamentary meeting taking place. So, some formalisation of that would probably be a good idea. If you like almost having standing orders, because the experience of participants in some of these conferences can vary a great deal; some are very useful, others are rather less effective, and so it would be a good idea if all these meetings, the coordination of them is cleared through the Speakers office and it is better not to be too prescriptive about what happens.

All the meetings, which take place between us, are helping to thicken and deepen the relations hips between the parliamentarians across the European Union, strengthening the bonds, which will help us to make, we hope, a better Europe. But it takes time and those of us with the right constituency responsibilities are always looking over our shoulder in case those who vote to put us into parliament say. What are they doing spending all that time talking to their colleagues in Europe? So we have to get that balance right, as well.

Thank you.