



REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON IMPROVING INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

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Other relevant documents

Discussion Paper by the WG IPC, Draft revision of The Guidelines for
Interparliamentary Cooperation in the European Union

Introduction

The Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments, meeting in Copenhagen on 29 June – 2 July 2006, mandated the incoming Presidency to establish a Working Group to examine how to improve interparliamentary cooperation.

The working group was invited to prepare a report for the next Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments in Bratislava on the following subjects:

- Can the Hague Guidelines be strengthened?
- Can the coordination between the various forums for interparliamentary cooperation including The Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments, COSAC, meetings of parliamentary sectoral committees and Joint Parliamentary Meetings hosted by the European Parliament and the national parliament of the member state holding the Presidency of the Council, be improved, and if so how?
- Can national parliaments strengthen cooperation between national parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission?
- Can the current scheme of appointing the Presidency of Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments be improved?

The enlarged Troika meeting on 7 November 2006 to which the Slovak Presidency invited the Secretaries General of the parliaments of Denmark, Finland, France and Germany, decided to include the topic of coordination of the three existing websites dealing with interparliamentary cooperation, namely the websites of the Speakers' Conference, IPEX and COSAC.

The National Council of the Slovak Republic, the parliament holding the presidency of the Speakers' Conference, with the support of the Enlarged Troika Parliaments took the responsibility for convening the Working Group and providing the support for its work. (A list of the WG IPC members is in Annex)

The work of the Working Group on Interparliamentary Cooperation (WG IPC) was based on input provided by the participating parliaments on the basis of a questionnaire distributed by the Slovak Parliament in February 2007. The WG IPC held one formal meeting. The National Council of the Slovak Republic prepared and distributed the questionnaire after consulting with the parliaments of Denmark, Germany and Finland as agreed at the enlarged Troika meeting.

Of the 27 Member States of the European Union, 14 have a unicameral parliament and 13 have a bicameral parliament. Due to this mixture of bicameral and unicameral systems, there are 40 national parliamentary chambers in the 27 Member States.

In total, answers have been received from 34 national parliamentary chambers in 24 Member States. The parliaments of the candidate states were also included in the work

of the WG IPC with observer status. Two chambers of the candidate states have answered the questionnaire. The European Parliament also answered the questionnaire.

At its meeting on 1 March 2007 the WG IPC discussed the draft report prepared by the team of rapporteurs on the basis of the answers provided by national parliaments and the European Parliament to the questionnaire.

Report Summary

I. The members of the WG IPC consider that the most important element of the report relates to better coordination of interparliamentary work in the EU; that is, better planning and cohesion in work and agendas and avoiding duplication of effort. To this end, the WG IPC in its report proposes two main lines of action based on the answers parliaments have given in the questionnaire and the discussion of the WG IPC at its meeting:

- a) Proposals for various practical improvements in the different forms and forums of interparliamentary cooperation; these proposals are stated in the Conclusions section at the end of each chapter.
- b) A draft revision of the Hague Guidelines, adapting those elements of the Guidelines that have been overtaken by developments since 2004 as proposed by parliaments in their answers. Since the WG IPC so far did not reach consensus on the draft, the document is tabled only as a separate consultation document the WG IPC will continue its work on (For further consultation, please see Discussion Paper by the WG IPC, Draft revision of The Guidelines for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the EU)

II. The WG IPC discussed proposals to improve the coordination and functioning of various interparliamentary meetings. The WG makes proposals for better coordination between the Speakers' Conference and COSAC, and improved organisation of Joint Parliamentary Meetings (JPM) and Joint Committee Meetings (JCM). The WG also discussed a proposal for improving coordination by introducing a yearly framework timetable that would synchronise the various interparliamentary forums' debates on the political priorities of EU and the Union's work schedule. The members of the WG IPC in general agree that a more structured interparliamentary calendar would be beneficial and support the idea to continue the discussion on finding an appropriate yearly timeframe for the interparliamentary cooperation. However, WG IPC sees implementing the new system of appointing Speakers' Conference presidencies as a first priority that itself will contribute to better coordination. When there is some experience of the effects of the new presidency rotation, the need for further coordination should be studied in cooperation with other concerned bodies.

III. The WG IPC studied ways to develop cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament. The WG notes that there is a need for more cooperation that is practical and demand-driven. What is wanted is further exploration of recent forms of cooperation rather than the creation of new ones. This is explained by the limited capacity of national parliaments to manage and absorb more activities. Thus the focus should be on the qualitative development of current cooperation rather than any quantitative increase.

IV. The WG IPC notes that national parliaments are generally satisfied with the European Commission's initiative to send legislative proposals and consultative documents to national parliaments and to invite their comments. The WG makes some suggestions for improving the transparency and effectiveness of the Commission's interaction with national parliaments.

V. The WG IPC has studied how to assure a more stable and certain rotation of the presidency of the Conference of Speakers, bringing it more closely into line with the rotation of the EU Council's presidency. The WG came with two proposals to be chosen from. The WG further proposes sharing the costs of the presidency of the Speakers' Conference, suggesting that accommodation costs should be borne by each participating parliament.

VI. The WG IPC makes proposals for consolidating the work of IPEX in order to allow its efficient response to the recent demands and expectations of national parliaments. The WG also proposes that the IPEX Board and the COSAC Secretariat be invited to discuss how to eliminate certain overlapping functions on their websites, notably concerning the interparliamentary calendars.

Conclusions

The final draft of this report was consulted by the Secretaries General at their meeting on March 15-16, 2007 in Bratislava. The Secretaries General welcomed the report and acknowledged its eminent contribution to the improvement of interparliamentary work. Having in mind the different opinions raised during the meeting and the Conclusions of the Secretaries General meeting the WG IPC supports the decision of the Secretaries General to give their priority to the presidency rotation system in which the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of a calendar year would hold the presidency of the Speakers' Conference and organise the actual meetings in the following calendar year.

Since there was a clear consensus reached by the Secretaries General on the results of the examination of different aspects of interparliamentary cooperation made by the WG IPC and the suggestions and proposals for various practical improvements in the different forms and forums of interparliamentary cooperation as well as conclusions stated by the WG IPC in this report but one aspect, the revision of the Hague Guidelines, the WG IPC would be happy to receive an endorsement by the Speakers to the Report clearly stating, that the WG IPC is willing to continue its work on the revision of the Hague Guidelines in order to conclude its mandate under the coming presidency. Doing so the WG IPC is also ready to continue the discussion in order to find an appropriate yearly timeframe for the interparliamentary cooperation.

I. The Hague Guidelines

The Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments at its meeting in The Hague, 2 -3 July 2004, agreed upon guidelines, the so-called Hague Guidelines,¹ as a base for interparliamentary cooperation in the EU. Since some aspects and features of the interparliamentary cooperation within the EU over the past years have changed or developed, the question has been raised whether the current Hague Guidelines remain an appropriate framework for interparliamentary cooperation today. This is why the Speakers of EU Parliaments at their meeting in Copenhagen made assessing the Hague Guidelines a task of the WG IPC.

The current Presidency was asked to examine in what way the Hague Guidelines should be amended and whether national parliaments support the idea of strengthening the Hague Guidelines, and if so in what terms.

According to the responses to the questionnaire a large number of the participating chambers indicated that they would like to see a general strengthening of the Hague Guidelines. At the same time a significant number of parliamentary chambers found that the current framework in the Hague Guidelines no longer provided an accurate and up-to-date presentation of the actors involved in interparliamentary cooperation. The reasons were different, as can be seen from the detailed answers to the questionnaires. However, when it came to the objectives of the Hague Guidelines, parliaments were generally satisfied. Thus, the number of chambers that found it necessary to expand the objectives of the Guidelines was clearly smaller than the number opposed. Parliaments were divided when it came to the question whether all necessary fields of cooperation are listed in the current Hague Guidelines.

On the basis of these contributions from parliaments, the WG IPC decided that the most adequate response would be to start working on a moderate revision of the existing guidelines, retaining the balance of the Hague text, but taking into account subsequent developments and the remarks made by national parliaments during this exercise. At the same time, the WG IPC calls for parliaments to pay more attention to the implementation of the Guidelines.

In particular, important developments in interparliamentary cooperation over the past years seem to justify a review of the Hague guidelines bringing them into conformity with current practice. Also, the European Commission's May 2006 initiative, encouraging national parliaments to be involved to a greater extent in the development and performance of the EU's policies, and the subsequent conclusions of the June 2006 European Council, require an adequate response.

Finally, it would appear that most EU parliaments support the broad purpose of the Hague Guidelines, which is to make interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union more effective, orderly and coherent. There is, however, a reluctance to introduce elements that may be construed as institution-building or as limiting the ability of individual parliaments to act proactively and independently on matters of importance to them.

¹ <http://www.eu-speakers.org/upload/application/pdf/a8670b7d/guidelines.pdf>

Conclusion

There is strong support for maintaining the achievements of the Hague Conference of Speakers, while at the same time making those adaptations of the text that have become necessary because of developments in interparliamentary cooperation within the EU. There is less support for changing fundamentally the objectives of the Guidelines.

The WG IPC proposes that the new Guidelines accommodate the amendments that are necessitated by developments since 2004 without fundamentally changing the structure or objectives of the Hague Consensus.

The WG IPC proposes that the Speakers' Conference calls on the incoming presidencies to promote actively the implementation of the Guidelines by all participating parliaments.

Because the WG IPC is not able to reach a clear consensus on the last draft revised version of the Hague Guidelines before the actual meeting of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments during the current presidency, the WG IPC declares its will to continue the work on the revision of the Hague Guidelines under the next presidency of the Speakers' Conference. From this reasons the draft of the revised text of the Hague Guidelines is tabled only as a Discussion Paper for further consultation and shall be understood only as a point of reference for the continuation of the work of the Working Group and not as the final draft to be approved by the Speakers.

The last proposal of the WG IPC is tabled as a separate document (Discussion Paper by the WG IPC, Draft revision of The Guidelines for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the EU) together with an analytical comparison with the original Hague Guidelines.

II. Improved coordination between the various forums for interparliamentary cooperation

Interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union has undergone rapid development over the past years and become more complex. This includes the growth in the number of different interparliamentary forums in particular the so-called Joint Parliamentary Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings organised jointly by the European Parliament and the parliament of the member state holding the Council Presidency, as well as different interparliamentary meetings and meetings of sectoral committees organised by the parliament of the member state holding the Council Presidency.

In the meanwhile the IPEX-website (Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange - www.ipex.eu) has been created as a tool to facilitate an increased information exchange between national parliaments and the European institutions.

Finally, the evolution of the role of COSAC, following the encouragement of the June 2006 European Council to strengthen cooperation within the framework of COSAC when monitoring subsidiarity, has to be mentioned.

The Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments in Copenhagen therefore invited the WG IPC to examine whether the coordination between the various interparliamentary forums and structures could be improved, and if so in what ways.

According to the responses to the questionnaire, national parliaments generally feel that there is a need to improve the coordination and cooperation between the different interparliamentary forums in order to reach a higher efficiency of work.

II.1. Cooperation between the Speakers' Conference and COSAC

A significant number of chambers see a need for improving the coordination of the activities of the Speakers' Conference and those of COSAC.

The WG IPC is of the opinion that there is a need for a functional coordination of interparliamentary activities in general. Better coordination will help to avoid duplication of work, further strengthen interparliamentary cooperation and facilitate better achievement of shared aims and objectives. With this in view, parliaments want better practical coordination in terms of timing and agendas and ensuring that important political issues are dealt with in appropriate ways. Concerning the agendas, a large number of parliaments support the idea of better coordination between the agendas of the Speakers' Conference and COSAC. That is why the WG IPC calls on both conferences to take more notes of each other's conclusions. In this regard, the WG IPC suggests that the presidency of each conference should communicate the conclusions of each conference to the presidency of the other.

The WG IPC believes that new arrangements for a rotation of the Presidency of the Conference of Speakers that is more aligned to the Council Presidency will by itself contribute to better cooperation with COSAC. The two Troikas will, at least in part, bring together parliamentarians and staff from the same parliaments. In short, better communication will resolve many of the current problems of coordination.

Conclusion

In view of the different legal bases, roles and aims of the Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments and of COSAC, the WG IPC proposes that the Speakers' Conference notes that formal, institutionalised cooperation between the two institutions is not necessary at the moment. Also, the different legal bases of the two conferences raise technical and legal issues that cannot be resolved within the time available.

The WG IPC strongly supports the idea of changing the current scheme of appointing the presidency of the Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments, as most of the parliaments see it as a necessary step towards better coordination between the two conferences, the Speakers' Conference and COSAC. Observing that, even after a new rotation is adopted for the Presidency of the Speakers' Conference, the presidencies of the two conferences may not fully coincide, the WG IPC calls on the presiding

parliaments of both conferences to find ways of better coordination, mainly in terms of agendas, communication of the conclusions of each conference to the presidency of the other and timing of meetings in order to strengthen parliamentary participation in EU policy formulation.

II.2. Cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament: Joint Parliamentary meetings and Joint Committee Meetings

Joint Parliamentary Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings have today become a regular form of cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament.

Joint Parliamentary Meetings (JPM) are meetings on broad political topics, which are organised and chaired jointly by the parliament of the country holding the EU Presidency and the European Parliament. *Joint Committee Meetings* (JCM) are meetings on specific political sectors and issues. They are organised and chaired jointly by the relevant sectoral committee or committees of the parliament of the Member State holding the EU Presidency and the relevant committee of the European Parliament.

Joint Parliamentary Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings are different from interparliamentary meetings organised by committees of the parliament of the Member State holding the EU Presidency. They should also not be confused with hearings or other meetings organised by the European Parliament, where representatives from the national parliaments are occasionally invited.

Chapter Five of the 6th bi-annual report of the COSAC Secretariat (November 2006) examined the organisation of these meetings, on the basis of responses sent in by EU Committees participating in COSAC. Issues addressed included the added value of such meetings, the topics, number and frequency of such meetings and their further development. The report states that the national parliaments find the number of these meeting sufficient and that more frequent meetings could affect the work of national parliaments.

In their replies to the WG IPC's questionnaire, national parliaments have broadly confirmed the conclusions in COSAC's 6th bi-annual report. The content of recent JPMs and JCMs has generally met with approval. The same applies to meetings organised by national parliaments holding the presidency. National parliaments usually consider that the current frequency of such meetings is sufficient and note that any increase in frequency would be difficult to absorb.

According to the responses to the questionnaire there is broad agreement that the structure of JPMs and JCMs needs to be standardised and made more transparent. In particular, national parliaments note the need for transparency in setting agendas and goals of such meetings. The equality of participants (speaking time, access to particular parts of debates) is cited as a problem by some national parliaments.

There is also broad agreement that the coordination of interparliamentary meetings continues to need improvement. It still happens that JPM agendas overlap with those of, e.g. COSAC.

While there is agreement on the need for coordination at the practical level, national parliaments are not in accordance on how this should be done. The right of each national parliament and the European Parliament to be proactive is affirmed in several replies. In particular those parliaments not holding the Presidency have a legitimate need for a flexible and generally acknowledged way to introduce new, topical subjects for interparliamentary discussion.

Conclusion

The WG IPC notes that there is broad agreement among parliaments that the structure, timing and content of interparliamentary meetings can and should generally be improved. The structure and procedures of interparliamentary meetings are traditionally decided by the parliament hosting the meeting. The WG IPC sees no need to change this approach now.

However, the WG IPC believes that the problems that some national parliaments raise with regard to Joint Parliamentary Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings could be resolved if the European Parliament adopted standardised procedures for such meetings. Obviously, when first introduced, such procedures should be discussed with national parliaments and should be open for amendment when needed.

The WG IPC notes with satisfaction that the European Parliament is preparing a *vademecum* for Joint Parliamentary Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings and hopes that national parliaments will be consulted during the drafting process.

III. Improved cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament

Since the Joint Committee Meetings and the Joint Parliamentary Meetings have increased the interaction between national parliaments and the European Parliament, the WG IPC feels a need to develop the cooperation and interaction between the members of the European Parliament and members of national parliaments also outside these meetings. Nevertheless, it is broadly understood that this increased cooperation should not have any organised form and should stay exclusively within the organisation of individual parliaments and the European Parliament when it is in their mutual interest. Some parliaments propose developing networks allowing more exchange among civil servants of the European Parliament and national parliament.

The WG IPC also recognises the need expressed by some parliaments to explore new mechanisms for more sustained exchanges of information and views between the "corresponding committees" in national parliaments and the European Parliament. Some parliaments propose setting up a mixed committee of MEPs and MNPs to secure parliamentary control of Europol (i.e. resuming the meetings of Parlapol).

Conclusion

Most national parliaments support further development of the cooperation of national parliaments with the European Parliament. It is clear, though, that what is wanted is further exploration of recent forms of cooperation rather than the creation of new ones. This is explained by the limited capacity of national parliaments to manage and absorb more activities. Thus the focus should be on the qualitative development of current cooperation rather than any quantitative increase.

The WG IPC suggests that the present forms of cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament should be better explored, coordinated and planned instead of creating new forums and structures. Better awareness among MEPs and EP staff about national parliaments' scrutiny of EU legislation and policies will contribute to better cooperation. IPEX has an important role to play in this context.

The WG IPC notes that there is some demand for more interparliamentary interaction in certain policy fields in addition to the Joint Committee Meetings and the Joint Parliamentary Meetings. The WG IPC finds it important that new forms of cooperation should not be institutionalised and should remain demand-driven and flexible. Cooperation is based on the equal and voluntary partnership of national parliaments and the European Parliament.

IV. Cooperation between national parliaments and the European Commission

The European Commission took an important step in developing its relations with national parliaments when Commission President José Manuel Barroso in a communication on 10 May 2006 encouraged national parliaments to be involved to a greater extent in the development and performance of the EU's policies. The Commission called upon national parliaments to submit contributions in connection with the Annual Policy Strategy, the Legislative and Work programme, and other consultation documents such as green papers and white papers. The Commission indicated that it was prepared to respond to statements from national parliaments regarding Commission documents.

The Conference of EU Speakers in Copenhagen welcomed the Commission's initiative and responded to it by asking the WG IPC to consider whether cooperation between national parliaments and the Commission could be strengthened.

IV.1. Transmission of Commission documents to national parliaments

The WG IPC notes a large appreciation among the national parliaments of the implementation of the European Commission's commitment² to transmit directly all new legislative proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments. It was generally felt by the national parliaments that this initiative has increased parliamentary scrutiny and contributed to the transparency of EU decision-making and tends to improve the process of policy formulation within EU.

Some parliaments also expressed that this initiative has helped to facilitate the handling of EU documents within parliaments. On the other hand, parliaments need more time to integrate this initiative into their internal work-flow. For many parliaments it is still too early to give a proper assessment of the initiative at this stage. They therefore propose a more in-depth evaluation after the new initiative is more established. At the same time, some parliaments welcome a more intensive exchange of best practices in terms of this new initiative in order to improve their scrutiny of EU proposals in national parliaments.

² The COSAC's 6th bi-annual report already provided an overview on the measures national parliaments have taken with regard to the reception of and response to documents sent by the Commission.

The COSAC's 7th bi-annual report is providing a follow-up on the procedures applied by national parliaments and has a closer look on the experience parliaments have gathered especially with regard to the Commission's reactions towards their statements.

In order to avoid duplication of work between the Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments and COSAC the working group was not dealing very closely with an assessment of this initiative and its impacts but rather collected some general remarks and comments from the national parliaments. COSAC's 7th bi-annual report will be published on: www.cosac.eu.

National parliaments also broadly welcome the European Commission's call for comments on its proposals and its commitment to take into account the views expressed as well as to provide a written reply to the different comments received from national parliaments.

Despite the parliaments' appreciation of the initiative the WG IPC also notes some suggestions for technical and practical improvements. Some parliaments call for a standardised procedure for the presentation of the Commission's consultation documents, as the Commission uses a number of different types of documents for consultations with different stakeholders, which makes it very difficult for national parliaments to identify the relevant documents. Others call on the Commission to improve its impact assessments and forward information to national parliaments on the outcome of the weekly meetings of the College of Commissioners.

Many parliaments observe that simultaneous transmission of Commission documents in all national languages should be the norm. Even though the statutory time limit for comments by national parliaments begins to run only when the last language version has been delivered, the current practice is not consistent with the principle of equality of Member States.

It was observed by some parliaments that the Commission could be more active in visiting national parliaments, in particular when new, major initiatives are introduced. National parliaments should be better able to draw on the resources of the Commission for factual information.

Some parliaments proposed that the Commission should make public the input of national parliaments on different legislative proposals and consultation papers as well as its responses.

Conclusion

Parliaments in general support the idea of further development of cooperation with the European Commission, with emphasis to be put on the quality of this interaction.

The WG IPC notes parliaments' widespread appreciation of the Commission's initiative to transmit directly its legislative proposals and consultation documents to national parliaments.

The WG IPC proposes that the Commission, on its part, should develop its participation in the consultation process it has created, in particular by making its responses to the input of national parliaments public, as well as by being more active in visiting national parliaments, in particular when new major initiatives are introduced.

In order to improve the transparency of parliaments' comments to the Commission's proposals and the Commission's reactions to them, the WG IPC, agreeing with the request presented at the COSAC chairpersons meeting in Berlin on 13 February 2007, calls on national parliaments and the European Commission to provide parliamentary input and Commission responses to the COSAC secretariat as well as to the IPEX database.

The WG IPC proposes that the next Conference of EU Speakers should invite the Speaker of the Slovak parliament to make the necessary contacts with the President of the Commission in order to enhance cooperation between the IPEX-board and the Commission.

IV.2. Cooperation on the Commissions' Legislative and Work Programme and Annual Policy Strategy

Among the chambers responding to the WG IPC's questionnaire, a large number consider that the Commission's Legislative and Work Programme (LWP) is most appropriately dealt with by Parliaments acting individually. For the Annual Policy Strategy (APS), a significant number of chambers favour a collective approach. Many parliaments observe, however, that this is not an either/or question but that both approaches have merit in particular circumstances.

A significant number of chambers see COSAC as the most appropriate forum for any collective discussion of the LWP and APS.. Unlike the Speaker's Conference or a Joint Parliamentary Meeting, COSAC has the statutory power to adopt political conclusions and address these to the EU Institutions. The existence of a COSAC Secretariat and the timing of COSAC conferences make this organisation best placed to adopt a coordinating role for parliaments acting individually, and for organising collective actions linked to these Commission documents.

Conclusion

The WG IPC proposes that the Speakers' Conference takes note of the state of opinion of participating parliaments that the examination and debate of the European Commission's annual Legislative and Work Programme is primarily the task of individual parliaments, applying their internal procedures.

If deemed useful by parliaments, the LWP may be discussed in COSAC or at another inter-parliamentary meeting in autumn. National parliaments can also organise simultaneous national debates on the LWP. Such debates can be promoted and coordinated by the presidency of either COSAC or the Conference of Speakers. This presidency, or the COSAC secretariat, may also coordinate the exchange of information about the subjects from the LWP that have been identified as suitable for scrutiny to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

The WG IPC proposes that the Speakers' Conference invites COSAC to give consideration to how examination and debate of the Commission's Annual Policy Strategy might usefully be included in COSAC's work programme.

The WG IPC also proposes that the Speakers' Conference invites national parliaments to share their experiences of dealing with the LWP and APS, and remains open to including this topic on its own agenda, when appropriate. In order to prepare the practical background of such an initiative the WG IPC finds it appropriate to continue the discussion on the elaboration of a yearly timeframe for interparliamentary cooperation.

V. Presidency of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments

The Presidency Conclusions from the Copenhagen meeting (July 2006) indicate a need to improve the current scheme of appointing the Presidency of the Conference of the Speakers of EU Parliaments, in order to guarantee better coordination with the presidencies of the Council and gives a mandate to the WG IPC to come up with proposals for a new system.

A significant number of parliaments support the idea of a presidency assumed by one of the two parliaments of the Member States holding the presidency of the EU Council in the same calendar year. Many parliaments were strictly against shared presidencies involving two parliaments, as they found this might lead to confusion and harm coordination.

The WG IPC suggests that the two parliaments decide between themselves which of them actually holds the presidency and hosts all of the meetings. The new arrangement would begin in 2009.

The WG also discussed arguments against this system for appointing Presidencies. Hosting the Speakers' Conference during or in the same year as a Council presidency was viewed as an excessive burden by some, but by no means all, chambers. Others felt that the Speaker's Conference is merely an incremental addition to the typically 6 – 12 large conferences organised by parliaments during a Council presidency. It was also pointed out that the alternative solution (below) raises similar issues, including the need to retain additional logistical and staff resources beyond a Council presidency.

The WG IPC gave second priority to a model in which the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of a calendar year would hold the presidency of the Speakers' Conference and organise the actual meetings in the first half of the following calendar year. This model could be put into practice in time for the Conference in 2009.

The Slovak Presidency will propose an arrangement for assuring the Presidency in 2008 after the decision has been taken on the new model of Presidency appointment as from 2009.

Conclusion

The WG IPC is strongly of the opinion that the system of appointing Speakers' Conference Presidencies must be reliable, simple, and calculable; thus, a volunteer-based system is no longer adequate. A fixed rotation will provide continuity and improve coordination of interparliamentary work.

To this end, the WG IPC, noting the support of a significant number of parliaments for the idea, proposes that the presidency should be assumed by one of the two parliaments of the Member States holding the presidency of the EU Council in the same calendar year. The two parliaments would decide between themselves which of them should actually arrange the meetings relating to the presidency.

As an alternative, the WG IPC proposes, as its second priority, a model in which the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of a calendar year would hold the presidency of the Speakers' Conference and organise the actual meetings in the first half of the following calendar year.

As under the present practice, the WG IPC proposes that the meeting of Secretaries General should formally take note, about two years in advance, of which parliament will assume the presidency of the Speakers' Conference. The Secretaries General should also make necessary proposals in situations where, for example because of elections, the presidency cannot be assured according to the above proposals.

The WG IPC suggests that the costs to the parliament hosting Speakers' Conferences should be reduced. The WG IPC notes the proven success of cost sharing in the language regime of the Conference of Speakers, and suggests that cost sharing should be applied to accommodation costs as well. All participating parliaments should bear their own accommodation costs, as for any other interparliamentary meeting. The new regime could be implemented from 2008.

VI. Improved coordination between the websites dealing with interparliamentary cooperation

The enlarged Troika of the Conference of Speakers meeting on 7 November 2006 raised the question whether it would be possible to combine the information provided by the websites of the Speakers Conference, COSAC and IPEX. It was therefore agreed to invite the WG IPC to include this topic in its report.

A large number of parliaments favour improved coordination between the three websites. Several parliaments stress the need a common access point to parliamentary information – and possibly the creation of a common portal to parliamentary EU information. It was suggested that IPEX could be used to eliminate overlapping questionnaires sent out from various parliamentary forums.

The Conference of Speakers decided in The Hague on 3 July 2004 to facilitate more effective planning of interparliamentary meetings by establishing a Calendar for interparliamentary meetings, which should be hosted on the IPEX-website. Guidelines for this calendar were adopted by the Conference of Speakers on 29 June – 2 July 2006 in Copenhagen. The websites of COSAC and the Conference of Speakers host similar interparliamentary calendars.

Conclusion

The WG IPC welcomes increased cooperation between the IPEX Central Support and the COSAC Secretariat with a view to ensuring that information made available on the IPEX-website is relevant for the end-users of EU information in the national parliaments.

The WG IPC calls on the IPEX Board to take the necessary steps to facilitate the creation of a common portal for the various interparliamentary websites (i.e. links to the various websites). Such a portal could be hosted on the IPEX website.

The WG IPC calls on IPEX to finalise the tasks already set out, and to facilitate an increased information exchange between the national parliaments and the European institutions – including the publication of the Commission's responses to the opinions of the national parliaments on EU legislative and non-legislative documents.

The WG IPC proposes that the Speakers' Conference invites the IPEX Board and the COSAC Secretariat to take whatever action they may deem appropriate to minimise duplication of work with regard to the calendars on the two websites allowing the Calendar of Interparliamentary Cooperation hosted on the IPEX-website to provide the overview of the broader range of interparliamentary activities.

Annex I:

MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

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