

**CONFERENCE OF THE SPEAKERS OF EUROPEAN UNION
PARLIAMENTS ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PARLIAMENTS OF NEW OR
EMERGING DEMOCRACIES**

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In my capacity as Deputy Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies I speak on behalf of both the current Speaker, Mr. Fausto Bertinotti, and his predecessor, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini who, along with the Danish presidency, helped steer the working group towards the successful completion of all its activities. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank our former Speaker, Mr Pier Ferdinando Casini, who is also the current President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for the ideas, proposals and real dedication that he gave to this Conference and to the working group.

And this working group has been a very good example being so fast and concrete.

The processes of democratization taking place at national and international level are fundamental elements of a strategy for peace, and give substance and shape to the principles of liberty, human rights, basic freedoms and the rule of law.

The processes of democratization are inextricably linked to the development of Parliaments, which are the mainstays of their respective country's highest democratic values, and the foundations of civil and political liberties.

It follows that efforts to strengthen the parliaments of emerging democracies are pivotal to the institution-building work that various international organizations have undertaken. At the same time, within a framework of parliamentary cooperation, parliaments themselves are also actively engaged in assisting other assemblies.

National parliaments are unquestionably more capable and experienced than other organizations in offering specific forms of assistance to the parliaments of other countries. While delivering this type of assistance, however, a number of European parliaments have directly experienced a clear lack of coordination and waste of resources, including within the European Union.

The most recent Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments, held in Budapest in 2005, resolved to tackle this issue with reference to a keynote report on “the role of Parliaments in the external relations of the European Union” delivered by the then Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini.

The Conference conclusions entrusted Mr. Christian Mejdahl, Speaker of the Danish Parliament and current President of the Conference, the task of following up the indications contained in the report.

With the support of the other two members of the parliamentary troika of the Conference, Mr. Mejdahl then invited the Italian Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies to promote and coordinate a working group.

Thanks to the personal involvement of President José Manuel Barroso, the working group was able to work to positive effect with the European Commission.

The group accomplished the extremely important task of building up a full picture of the activities and resources dedicated by major international organizations, the European Union and individual parliaments to helping the representative assemblies of new or emerging democracies.

In furtherance of this objective, a technical group was established that included European Commission officials appointed by President Barroso. The technical group achieved excellent results within the space of only a few months (between December and April). Its results are set forth in five published and distributed dossiers, dealing with the European Union and its member states (two volumes), with the most important non-European countries, and with leading international organizations. The fifth dossier consists of an executive summary of the first four.

The group's fact-finding survey revealed the presence of a large number of diverse activities. It also found, however, that international organizations, which have the most resources at their disposal, liaise with parliaments only very rarely, even when operating in the same country. Yet, parliaments are the very bodies with the greatest capacities and scope for action.

The survey calls attention to the need to prevent waste and duplication in view of the high political priority attributed to this type of activity, and in view of our willingness to respond positively to requests for assistance.

To achieve this, we must heighten our mutual awareness of the actions that other players are taking, or have the potential to take, and improve coordination.

It is therefore necessary to select an appropriate setting in which an exchange of information among parliaments, beginning with those of European Union member states, can take place. The working group has already achieved considerable progress in this area, and its survey constitutes a good point of departure, also for extant parliamentary data exchange networks such as IPEX (for the EU), ECPRD (for Europe as a whole) and, at a global level, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

The most important objective of the working group, however, was to establish a linkage between the activities of parliaments and the European Union.

The fruitful cooperation already established between the working group and the European Union bodes well for the future. The cooperation, which is the result of the useful dialogue already initiated by the Dutch, Hungarian and Danish presidencies of our Conference, is taking place within the more general context of a strengthening of direct relations between the European Commission and EU parliaments, a theme addressed yesterday by the Vice-President of the European Commission, Margot Wallström.

The working group found that the European Commission and EU parliaments have hitherto been providing parliamentary assistance for emerging democracies with practically no reciprocal liaison or coordination.

European parliaments are faced with a growing number of direct requests for technical assistance from parliaments worldwide. As things currently stand, EU parliaments enter into direct contact with a

representative assembly that has asked for assistance, but, owing to the inadequacy of their resources in the face of mounting demand, find themselves unable to give full rein to their specialist capabilities.

For its part, the European Commission has significant resources, but covers only a limited number of requests. Further, even when it does take action, it follows procedures that fail to leverage the range of skills and resources that European parliaments have to offer.

To remedy this situation and gradually raise the level of cooperation between the European Commission and EU parliaments in the area of technical assistance to the assemblies of emerging democracies, the final report illustrates a series of recommended actions whose main intent is to ensure the Commission remains abreast of the ongoing initiatives of EU parliaments and is kept aware of their almost exclusive capacity for action in this area.

Acting on the basis of this new awareness, the Commission may decide to adapt the technical specifications that accompany its invitations for tenders to provide assistance services to parliaments and, where appropriate, envisage limited tenders for national parliaments in the implementation of EU programmes. Thanks to the sharing of information by institutions falling within the European Union, it should also be possible to improve the level of coordination in assistance programmes for the same recipient countries. The first beneficiaries might well be neighbouring states and Africa, the two priority areas for parliamentary assistance.

I believe the Conference could ask the Presidency to act in concert with the Secretaries General of EU parliaments in setting up a system for the

exchange of information among European parliaments and between them and the European Commission using the networks that already exist (IPEX, ECPRD and IPU).

The Presidency could strengthen this strand of cooperation at a political level through the negotiation of appropriate arrangements with the European Commission.

Finally, I believe that the important findings of the working group as presented in the final report should be forwarded to the European Parliament and the European Commission, both of which contributed so much to the group's success.

The Italian Chamber of Deputies and other parliamentary assemblies that made valuable and substantial contributions in support of the working group, now hope to see improved interparliamentary cooperation at a European and global level, and a reinforcement of the processes of democratization.

Thank you for your attention.