

CONFERENCE OF THE PRESIDENTS OF EU PARLIAMENTS AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The Conference of Presidents of the EU Parliaments and the European Parliament held in Madrid on the 8th and 9th June 2002 debated the issue "Parliament and European construction" in two separate sessions devoted respectively to "National Parliaments in the European institutional frame" and "National Parliaments and the future of Europe". The second session was also attended by the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Candidate countries .

The President of the Spanish Congress, Ms Luisa Fernanda Rudi Ubeda, introduced the debate with a paper on "The role of National Parliaments in the European Union", in which she stressed the capacity of the present European institutional frame to improve the degree of intervention of national Parliaments in the Community legislative process. To this end she proposed the creation of a harmonised code of conduct at European level in order to guarantee effective control of the Council's handling of the Commission's legislative proposals.

In his detailed presentation, the President of the Danish Folketing, Mr Ivar Hansen, set out the various mechanisms at the disposal of National Parliaments in order to intervene in Union matters. His paper summarised the different proposals to strengthen the role of national Parliaments, and he stressed the need to increase this participation in the future as a means of bringing the UE closer to the citizens.

The contribution of the President of the Polish Sejm, Mr Marek Borowski, dealt with the role of National Parliaments from the view point of a candidate country during the stage prior to accession and once the Union is enlarged. He pointed out the danger of alienation of national Parliaments with respect to European affairs and insisted on the importance of the control of Governments' action in the Council and of close co-operation between National Parliaments and the European Parliament.

The President of the Italian Senate, Mr Marcello Pera, underlined the relevance of the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe regarding the role of National Parliaments in the European institutional frame and proposed that the Convention's final document be considered by national Parliaments before the beginning of the Intergovernmental Conference .

In the debate that followed, the Presidents stressed the following points:

- The President of the Spanish Senate stated that European integration is not an end in itself, but a means in order to strengthen Europe's essential values, human rights and democracy.
- With a view to strengthening European democracy, the Presidents deemed it important to strengthen the participation of national Parliaments, rather than by the creation of new bodies, by means of new procedures. In this sense, several Presidents mentioned the need to increase COSAC's role.
- In spite of the fact that some of the Presidents do not totally reject the possibility of a second Chamber in the European Parliament, most of the participants prefer to avoid complicating the European Union institutional structure.
- The Speakers stressed that it is important that national Parliaments intervene actively in the European decision process, controlling their respective Governments. Thus, it is essential to ensure transparency in the functioning of European institutions. In this respect, some Speakers stressed the particular relation of national Parliaments with matters such as the analysis of the enforcement of the principle of subsidiarity.
- Regarding the intervention of the President of the European Parliament, Mr Cox, the majority coincided in the need to intensify co-operation between National Parliaments themselves and with the European Parliament, either formally by means of an Agreement, as proposed by the President of the European Parliament, or in a more flexible way. However, it was acknowledged that there are difficulties of a practical kind that national parliamentarians encounter when establishing dialogue mechanisms between the different Parliaments. In any case, the Speakers considered favourably the European Parliament's willingness to facilitate interparliamentary co-operation with the national Parliaments in pragmatic terms of equality.
- As for the paper presented by the Presidents of the Italian Senate, Mr Pera, and the German Bundestag, Mr Thierse, the Conference underlines the importance of the work carried out by the Convention on the Future of Europe, expresses its satisfaction with the active participation of representatives of National Parliaments and points out that National Parliaments should particularly include in their respective debates the following of the Convention's work and its conclusions before the beginning of the Intergovernmental Conference.

Finally, the Conference ratified the decision taken at the Stockholm meeting that future sessions should be held in Greece in the course of 2003, and in the Netherlands in 2004.