

TOPIC I

THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALISATION FOR PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS

Rapporteur: Speaker Trillo-Figueroa, Congress of Deputies, Spain

Speaker Trillo-Figueroa (Congress of Deputies, Spain) began by defining the concept of globalisation – a process of change occurring in all areas of international society (economy, information, ecology, technical) meaning that it is no longer possible to take a purely local, regional or national approach to these different questions. Globalisation, he added, is taking place in different fields:

The first is the economy, where interdependency has increased world wide. Then there is culture – in all areas of culture, such as music, literature and cinema, developments take place simultaneously all over the world. To a large extent, the globalisation of culture and the economy is taking place as a result of the globalisation of information.

Thirdly and lastly, there is political globalisation. With the end of the bipolarised model for international relations in 1989, representative democracy has been broadly established, there being at present no political, ideological or moral alternative. The result of this is that frontiers, both internal and external, have lost their meaning. Ulrich Beck has said that one of the essential premises of modernity has disappeared: the idea of the closed spaces limited to national states. These no longer demarcate the political arena in which we move. The concept of sovereignty, such as came into being in the sixteenth century and was consecrated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has run its course.

Sovereignty is now shared, both upwards and downwards. A good example of this is the process of European construction, in which the EU has absorbed elements of classical sovereignty, such as currency, security or even the army. At a lower level, local and nationalist feelings are fragmenting the powers which pertained to the domain of sovereignty. Recent devolution laws in the United Kingdom, the original process of regionalisation in Italy, the Belgian system and the autonomous regions of Spain, are all proof of this. And through privatisation, the State has surrendered to society areas of power which were its own for a number of decades.

Speaker Trillo-Figueroa expressed his conviction that some change was necessary to the life of the democratic institutions in order to respond to the changes resulting from globalisation. We have in effect clear examples of institutional shortcomings – there is still no sense of European citizenship in the EU, and without such a sense of citizenship there can be no sense of European solidarity.

The growth of bureaucratic elites, continued Speaker Trillo-Figueroa, which are not answerable to the citizens has contributed to the crisis in democracy. Some people defend cyber-democracy as a solution to this problem – a kind of hyper-democracy using personalised or family computer links in local, or even European and global, decision making. But Professor Giovanni Sartori was right to point out that this method would have consequences for individual freedom: it is one thing to choose a lawyer or doctor and quite another to conduct our own legal defence or medical treatment.

Speaker Trillo-Figueroa invited those present to reflect on various aspects related to the problem of political mediation. It is true that the systems by which electoral lists are drawn up, the “parasitism” of parties (leaning on semi-public

organisations), the system of public funding for parties and the tolerance of private funding without proper transparency, has divorced the parties from public opinion both inside and outside Europe. It is also true that social interests have been corporised to a very large extent, through mediation tools which end by being elitist.

The phenomenon of specialisation has led, especially since the end of the Second World War, to technocracy, in which the political decision making process is increasingly dependent on expert knowledge, or what Speaker Dahl called specialist intelligence.

There is also political manipulation, through the media, on which there is no control whatsoever.

Fourthly and lastly, politics has been colonised by economics. The instruments of governance are increasingly weak in the face of the imperatives of the economic system, and this has an impact on the principle of political equality – both in terms of equality between citizens and of equality between states. It is significant, in this respect, that the decision to intervene in Kosovo, albeit in accordance with the principles of the Atlantic alliance and after being discussed at the UN, was taken in an economic forum, G7+1.

The nature of political mediation today, Speaker Trillo-Figueroa continued, forces parliaments to face the challenges of globalisation: the difficulty of parliament acting with the speed and synchronicity required by modern society, parliament's at least apparent departure from the sphere of reality, the inappropriateness of some parliamentary procedures, which are too rigid and formal, belonging more properly to the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the inversion of the classical relationship between parliament and the media – it is now the latter who set the political agenda, establish the priorities for public attention and thereby exercise control over the order of business at the parliaments.

Speaker Trillo-Figueroa added that parliamentary control had become less effective and immediate, and that in many cases parliaments now did no more than register the decisions taken by other bodies better equipped with bureaucratic structures and with greater political capacity and capacity for political communication, such as the executives. Citizens see the synchronicity and speed of events generated by globalisation as an essential part of the process of deliberation. Parliaments must learn to respond to the citizens' call for more immediate, direct solutions.

In conclusion Speaker Trillo-Figueroa reaffirmed that parliamentary leaders have a responsibility to open up parliaments to society, to breathe new life in parliamentary procedures, to make them more agile, to strengthen their control, especially over budgetary affairs, and to make them more efficient in performing their legislative function, which today takes months. They must make parliaments into a forum for public negotiation, welcoming new forms of social representation, extending the role of public arena which justifies the existence of our parliaments. He also reiterated his faith and firm belief in the role of parliaments. Homer said

that the Cyclops behaved barbarically because they had no assembly. So many centuries later, the deliberative assembly continues to be the only solution for political conflicts. Parliaments will survive because they are the expression of reason which enquires and listens, which enters into dialogue – the condition which makes us citizens and not barbarians.

Speaker Wolfgang Thierse (Bundestag, Germany) agreed with Speaker Trillo on the consequences of economic globalisation for the work of government and parliaments. The response to these developments had necessarily to involve co-operation between different countries in order to avoid, for instance, tax evasion by multinationals, or to stop these companies from moving to countries without social rules or minimal environmental standards.

Speaker Thierse said he was also sure that the powers of the speakers varied from country to country, meaning that it was difficult to co-ordinate the work of the parliamentary speakers on substantive European Union affairs, but the challenge of globalisation should cause us to reflect on the best way to react to this phenomenon.

This meant, said Speaker Thierse, that more co-ordination was needed in order to create a European democratic public space. This forum could for example be used to co-ordinate simultaneous debates in all national parliaments of topics of real interest to people, such as Agenda 2000. This would be one way of increasing the impact of parliamentary debates on the media.

In order for this to happen, argued Speaker Thierse, one basic resource was needed – information. Information therefore needed to be shared effectively, as Speaker Dahl said in her report. As this would require a firm administrative base, the European *bureau* of the Inter-Parliamentary Union could perhaps be used in order to collect information and make it available online. In the long term this data base could contain all the discussions held in the different parliaments on the great questions facing the European Union and even information on the consequences of legislation and certain possibilities for simplifying legislation.

By way of conclusion, Speaker Thierse said that standardising the collection and transmission of information would make it possible for the parliamentary speakers to implement effective co-ordination. Therefore proposed that a working party be set up to look into the best way of doing this and the means and resources needed for going ahead with such a project.

Speaker Seamus Pattison (Dáil, Ireland) recalled that in recent decades the number of international organisations had rocketed, rising from 1400 in the sixties to 5000 in the nineties. Many of these organisations had brought benefits, as in the case of the EU and the economic development recorded in Ireland and Portugal. For Ireland, membership of international organisations was a form of asserting itself on the world stage.

If, Speaker Pattison continued, it is true that economic globalisation has had positive effects in Europe, the USA and Japan, it is also true that various countries

have been left out of this process, meaning that we should pay special attention to the vulnerability of less developed states and seek to help them consolidate the little they have already gained. He recalled that most of the world's population still lives outside liberal democracies, or outside the rule of democracy.

Speaker Pattison pointed out that, contrary to parliaments, governments and civil services, which are still national, trade and companies have in many cases attained an international dimension. In European affairs, this discrepancy is very clear, given that the role played by national parliaments is practically nil and the EP is very distant from the citizens: this means that parliaments are getting less effective. The solution would be to open up parliaments to the outside, widening the process of parliamentary debate through, for example, commissions of inquiry.

Speaker Jan Lenssens (Chamber of Representatives, Belgium) said that globalisation was not only a threat but also a challenge, something with positive elements. The European Community itself was created on the basis of the free movements of persons, goods, capital and services, because it was believed that this would bring benefits.

But, Speaker Lenssens continued, this challenge obliges parliaments to be the agents of the globalisation process, at least in relation to the generalisation of the rule of democracy. Otherwise, who will take the political lead?

Speaker Lenssens argued that the two traditional solutions to this problem – the idealist notion that it was possible to humanise globalisation by creating a “citizen of the world” with a political identity, and the institutional approach, which trusts in international organisations like the IMF and the WTO to keep the process of globalisation under control – were both inadequate, as they failed to safeguard the democratic process. He therefore called for a third way, with greater decentralisation and a guarantee that civil society could participate. This is where inter-parliamentary co-operation could play a part, as a means of establishing a European and World public space.

Speaker Lenssens described the modern world in terms of the differentiation of social values and rules – the essence of democratic and modern decision making lay in articulating these differences. Parliamentary structures should therefore be polyarchic (the rule of the many), encouraging confrontation and competition between parliamentary initiatives in order to add value to the decision making process. If the approach to inter-parliamentary co-operation is too formalist or institutional, the flow of political ideas will be stifled.

In conclusion Speaker Lenssens said that inter-parliamentary co-operation gives a guarantee of a fifth liberty in Europe – free movement of parliamentary initiatives, in order to compensate for the democratic deficit which has resulted from growing flexibility and differentiation in the context of the European decision making process. Without a major parliamentary forum in which countless different actors could have their say, there will be no democratic legitimacy.

Speaker Laurent Fabius (National Assembly, France) said that globalisation had caused a twofold shift in power. Firstly a geographical shift, from out of the traditional areas, namely Europe. This was not negative in itself: but this geographical shift created the danger of standardisation and the difficulty in preserving differences, even infra-national differences, and this was in fact negative. The European Union is the response to these dangers, and should work to preserve differences, without falling into the opposite trap, which is the creation of ghettos.

The second shift in power, Speaker Laurent Fabius explained, related to legitimacy, which lay less and less with the elected institutions and increasingly with the economic and media sectors. To a large extent the large economic, financial and media groups now dominate the world. The antidote here too is to re-establish the role of democracy and parliamentary institutions.

In this context, Speaker Laurent Fabius argued that the Conference of Speakers, in keeping with the specific nature of the institutions involved and also with the principles of flexibility and pragmatism, should be able to adopt resolutions in the form of recommendations. After a brilliant analysis of the phenomenon of globalisation, he concluded that it was nonsensical that the conference could not decide on anything, despite the fact that all present had been doubly elected – by the citizens and by their peers.

Speaker José Maria Gil-Robles (European Parliament) spoke first of all of the meaning of globalisation, asking whether we live today in a multi-centred world or in a uni-centred world, in which the US Congress is the only meaningful parliament. The response to this danger, he argued, is to develop the European institutions. He therefore alerted the other speakers to the process of institutional reform of the European Union, preparations for which are to begin at the next European Council, and suggested that the national parliaments should call on their respective governments for parliamentary involvement in this process from the outset, and not only at the ratification stage. He informed the Conference that the European Parliament had been putting pressure on the Commission for this to be the case.

Speaker Gil-Robles also argued that it was essential that we learn to use the computer resources at our disposal in order not to be taken over by them and a kind of “Internet democracy”. The European Parliament makes substantial use of the Internet in order to provide a link between voters and the Euro MPs, allowing voters to write their suggestions, concerns, etc.. In addition to this, all resolutions are available in real time, and detailed data on all phases of the budget procedure will soon be put online. At the next COSAC there will be discussion of how information on national parliaments can be provided online. The representation which some of the assemblies have already set up at the European Parliament could contribute to this.

Speaker Gil-Robles then moved on to the question of budget control, informing the Conference that an agreement was soon to be signed with the Commission and the Council of the new fraud control unit for the Union (OLAF). This will be an

authority with powers to investigate the member states and their administrations, as well as community institutions. This is importance, given that of the 927 cases of fraud with community funds detected, 27 took place in community institutions and the remaining 900 in national administrations.

This unit will report to the European Parliament and to the national judicial authorities, meaning that it will be useful to establish a channel whereby national parliaments can have access to these documents. This is an important question, he concluded, because it attracts public opinion and attention, unlike the legislative process, as was seen with the mass resignation of the European Commission.

Speaker Riitta Uosukainen (Finland) said that as a result of globalisation and contrary to what used to be case, politics is no longer seen as something which can influence society through legislation and other measures, but merely as something which can make a country more competitive internationally. Experience has shown that certain crucial aspects of European societies, such as salary levels, welfare benefits and consumer protection are not critical factors for competitiveness, given that levels of productivity are also fairly high.

The crucial question, Speaker Uosukainen argued, was how we should create a legislative environment which is efficient and transparent. All laws should therefore meet two conditions: they should be sufficient, necessary and appropriate in the light of their respective purpose, and they should be easily comprehensible to the average citizen. It is imperative, she went on, to make an effort to improve this aspect of parliamentary work, both in national parliaments and at the European Parliament, given that nearly everyone agrees that community legislation fails to meet these two requirements.

Speaker Uosukainen also argued that it would be necessary in the next decade to clarify and consolidate the many international agreements in the field of trade and investment, an area in which there are currently more than 10,000 bilateral treaties. If we are really aware of globalisation, it will certainly make more sense to move towards broader multilateral agreement under the auspices of the WTO, without leaving aside concerns for the environment and third world development, and parliaments should call on their respective governments to pursue initiatives of this type. This need, she concluded, and also the greater urgency of simplifying legislation, in any case necessary in our democracies, are positive aspects of globalisation.

Speaker Apostolos Kaklamanis (Greece) argued that in this era of globalisation of culture, the environment and also information technology, new forms of economic and corporate management worldwide were having a decided influence over citizens, over traditional forms of solidarity and also the political systems of states, which can be felt in parliaments, which are sometimes excluded from political crisis situations and processes of social change. At European level, he continued, there are huge challenges, such as that of extending the Union, the reform of the institutions and foreign and community security policy.

Speaker Kaklamanis stressed that the political earthquake which had occurred in southeast Europe and the Europe's inability to manage joint intervention in the field of common foreign and security policy, as in Kosovo and Cyprus, was a clear sign of the crisis in European institutions. The global response to the crisis had also been inadequate – the latest decisions of the UN had nothing to increase respect for the institution and the military action had had a huge impact on the countries neighbouring Kosovo, in terms of refugee flows, the environment and political destabilisation, especially in countries where the democratic institutions are still far from mature. Perhaps the real point at issue had not in fact been the protection of human rights, but rather other strategic interests such as undermining attempts of European integration.

Speaker Kaklamanis reported to the Conference that these questions had been considered at length in Greece, not least because of the similarities with the crisis experienced 25 years ago by the Greek Cypriots, when NATO and the USA failed to respond in the same way, despite the resolutions and decisions of the UN on Turkish policy on the island. As a result of this, Greek citizens had lost confidence in the European institutions – 97% of the Greek population is against continuing the war in the Balkans. He therefore argued that the bombing should stop, the troops be withdrawn and that the conditions be created for the return of refugees to an autonomous but not independent region.

Speaker Kaklamanis proposed that the Conference should debate and approve at the end of the meeting on a resolution on the Kosovo problem. This would be one way, he argued, of helping to face the challenge which the end of the cold war has posed for all the peoples of Europe, and for their respective parliaments, strengthening the role of the latter as representative bodies. No institution, he concluded, better represented the people than the parliaments, a fact which constitutes a great responsibility.

Speaker Birgitta Dahl (Sweden), after mentioning that her speech had been agreed in advance with the different parliamentary groups in Sweden, raised the questions of the need to avoid, at this time of globalisation, international co-operation coming into conflict with democracy and to prevent this causing the citizens to lose their confidence in the two ideas. She acknowledged that a deputy's prime task, that of representing the people (because in a democracy all powers come from the people), is more complicated in some cases of international co-operation, which may lead both the citizens and the parliaments themselves to think that it is more difficult to influence power.

But, Speaker Dahl went on, in order to be active and effective in today's world, deputies have to play a double role: internally, one of influence and control and externally, one of seeking out and finding appropriate forms of participation in international co-operation, keeping up a close dialogue with the citizens all the while. This last aspect, she stressed, is essential, as there is no substitute for direct dialogue, even if practically all parliamentary documents are available on the Internet in real time, as is the case in Sweden.

As there were international relations before the invention of parliaments and democracy, Speaker Dahl reminded the Conference that parliaments had never played a major role in this area, originally reserved for the sovereign, and later for governments. She recognised that the trans-nationalisation of political questions had accelerated at such a rate that there had been no time for any deep reflection into the challenges posed by this development, but governments cannot act with credibility and authority if they lack the support of their national parliaments, and therefore of their citizens. By resorting to inter-parliamentary co-operation, she added, it is possible to learn to exert a better and earlier influence on representatives in international negotiations, thereby bolstering democracy in our countries.

In conclusion, Speaker Dahl reaffirmed the need to add an international dimension to all parliamentary work and to add a parliamentary dimension to all international co-operation.

Deputy Speaker Manfred Stolpe (Bundesrat, Germany) said that points made by Speaker Kaklamanis were important, because they show up Europe's weakness in the case of the Balkans. He referred to globalisation as a threat to parliamentary democracy insofar as several of the component parts of the process (the speed of communications, capacity for manipulation, mass information and large economic concentrations on a world scale) could pose a threat to the free election of deputies, which is the very core of democracy.

Deputy Speaker Stolpe argued that the reasons for passing laws should be made clearer – the “how and why” of the laws – and that it should be made clearer to citizens who actually made them – the “who” – so that the citizens could hold them liable. He expressed his opinion that the Conference should give a new impetus to improving the legislative process and, a few days prior to the elections for the European Parliament, should appeal for voters to go to the polls.

Speaker Almeida Santos (Portugal) declared himself a pessimist in relation to the effects of globalisation on parliamentary democracies, because ways of thinking which belong more properly to the past continue to be used to reflect on questions which have more to do with the future than with the present. The political world today, and the institutional world in general, is to some extent out of touch with the relational and informational world where real power is exerted, and where economic power, hand in hand with the power of information, is in charge.

Democracy, said Speaker Almeida Santos, is becoming less representative and more direct, as we can see in the pressure exerted by opinion polls on political decision makers, experiments in tele-voting and “electronic democracy” (with computer voting). This does not mean, he continued, that parliaments will cease to exist – laws cannot be made at the push of a button – but legislative thought will be increasingly under the direct influence of the citizenry.

Speaker Almeida Santos continued that as a fan of representative democracy and the parliamentary institution, we should defend parliaments from their enemies, whom globalisation will encourage if we fail to perceive its results and impact. He

stressed the importance of monitoring, on an almost daily basis, the consequences of globalisation on political thought and parliamentary thinking, suggesting that this topic should be permanently included in the agenda of the conferences of speakers.

Speaker Trillo-Figueroa (Congress of Deputies, Spain) thanked all the participants for their contributions, and pointed out that they had all agreed on both the problems for representative democracy posed by globalisation, and on the positive aspects of this trend.

He also underlined the confidence expressed by all the speakers in the parliaments which the speakers represent and in their future as controllers of the executive, both nationally, transnationally and internationally, and of media and economic groups.

Speaker Trillo-Figueroa added that as they were aware of the challenge ahead, it was perfectly possible for parliaments to adapt to a globalised world.