



Mr Speaker

Speaker's House Westminster London SW1A 0AA

20 December 2011

Dear Marshal,

**Interparliamentary Conference on the Common Foreign and Security Policy,
including the Common Security and Defence Policy**

Thank you for your letter of 29 November, which suggested a compromise on the sizes of the respective delegations from national parliaments and the European Parliament to the new inter-parliamentary conference on common EU foreign, security and defence policy, which the EU Speakers' Conference in April 2011 agreed should be established. It is now six months since the termination of the WEU Assembly, and two years since the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty, and I agree with you that the arrangements for the new conference should be finalised at the April 2012 Speakers' Conference, to enable its first meeting to be convened quickly. In the absence of the WEU Assembly, national parliaments have a pressing need for an inter-parliamentary forum in which to debate and oversee the inter-governmental aspects of the EU's foreign, security and defence policies. Of course it will remain the case that the establishment of the new conference will have no impact on the UK's or any national Parliament's ability and duty to scrutinise the policy of its national Government on relevant matters.

In your letter, you suggested delegations of four members and two alternates for national parliaments and 16 members for the European Parliament.

You will be aware that the views of both Houses of the UK Parliament, as set out in reports endorsed by both Houses before the last Speakers' Conference, are that the European Parliament delegation should be the same size as a national parliament delegation, namely six members each.

This view is based on Article 10 of Protocol 1 to the Treaty on European Union and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the role of national parliaments in the European Union, as amended by the Lisbon Treaty. Article 10 states that "a conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs" (COSAC) may "organise inter-parliamentary conferences on specific topics, in particular to debate matters of common foreign and security policy". We also have regard to Declaration 14 which says that the CFSP provisions of the Treaty "do not give new powers to the Commission to initiate decisions nor do they increase the role of the European Parliament."

Given your deadline for a response, there has not been time for the House of Commons to take a formal position on your compromise proposal. The formal position of the House thus remains that the delegations from the European Parliament and from each national parliament to the new conference should be of the same size, namely six members.

I have however consulted the House of Commons Committees involved in drawing up


the original House of Commons proposal, principally the Foreign Affairs Committee but also the Defence and European Scrutiny Committees. There is a clear preference for the principle that the delegations from each national parliament and the European Parliament to the new conference should be of equal size. At the same time, there is some, albeit reluctant, readiness to accept your proposed compromise, if you were to find it necessary in order to reach agreement among all national parliaments and the European Parliament.

At this stage, in the absence of a clear consensus in favour of the compromise, I am unable to express clear assent to your proposal, or to indicate now that I or my representative would either support or oppose it at the Speakers' Conference. Once you have received responses from all national parliaments, I assume that you will provide further information in advance of the Speakers' Conference; I very much look forward to being able to consult and to allow the House and the relevant committees to consider in good time whatever proposal you decide to put forward.

When you report on the results of this current consultation, I would appreciate your confirmation that in your proposal the "alternate" members attending from national parliaments do so with effectively the same participative rights as full members.

I hope you will also seek to reach an acceptable outcome on the only other outstanding issue, that of the secretariat to the meetings. The House's position on this issue also remains unchanged: there is a strong preference for the existing COSAC troika secretariat, which of course already includes the European Parliament, supported by the network of national parliament representatives in Brussels. I would not support any efforts to reopen the conclusions which were reached by consensus and after long deliberations at the last Speakers' Conference.

I am grateful to you for your efforts to resolve this difficult issue. I hope that you are able to find an acceptable agreement among all national parliaments and the European Parliament, and I look forward to the issue being resolved in Warsaw in April.

Yours sincerely
John Bercow

Rt. Hon John Bercow MP
Speaker
House of Commons

Ewa Kopacz
Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland

Bogdan Borusewicz
Marshal of the Senate of the Republic of Poland



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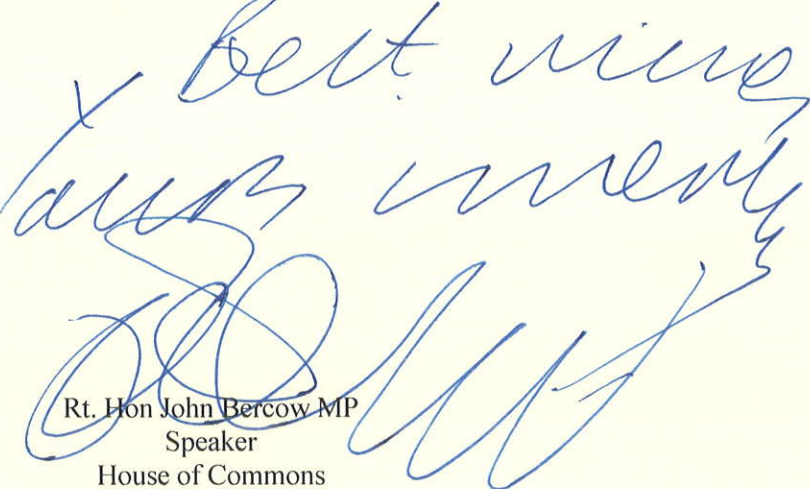
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*Best wishes
and many
thanks*



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Speaker
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