



MEETING OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF THE EU PARLIAMENTS

20 – 21 February, Bratislava

MINUTES

Opening of the meeting

The meeting of Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments took place on 20 - 21 February 2017 in Bratislava, at the Winter Riding School and the Palace of the Bratislava Castle.

As usual, there was a meeting of the Troika (Luxembourg, Slovakia, Estonia and European Parliament) held on Monday 20 February 2017 in order to consult and to pre-approve all related agenda.

Secretary General of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Mr. Daniel GUSPAN welcomed the participants and gave the floor to H. E. Mr. Andrej DANKO, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In his welcome address, he greeted the guests, highlighted work of all Secretaries General of national parliaments, referred to formal and informal meetings taking place during the Slovak EU Council Presidency. In addition, he invited Speakers and Presidents of all Parliamentary Chambers of the EU member countries to take part at the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments to be held on 23-24 April 2017.

Mr. GUSPAN also shared his reflections on the Parliamentary Dimension of the Slovak EU Council Presidency, its preparations, course and outcomes. He underlined importance of the common cooperation agreement signed with parliaments of the Netherlands and Malta, as well as support from Latvian and Lithuanian colleagues in arranging a couple of study visits.


Accordingly, he also brought participants' attention to several fact & figures and a thematic focus of the Presidency events covering mainly Energy Union, Economic and Monetary Union, strengthening of the social dimension of the EU, TTIP negotiation process, globalisation challenges, migration, social and participative economy or development assistance.

After technical instructions, Secretaries General proceeded to the adoption of the agenda of the meeting.

Session I: Draft programme of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments (23 – 24 April 2017)

Thereupon Mr. GUSPAN presented to one of key items in the agenda – draft programme of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments (EUSC):

- a. Opening session of the Conference should have an enlarged format. Slovak Presidency has decided to offer the floor for a brief presentation of achievements of the Slovak EU Council Presidency and its Parliamentary Dimension.
- b. First session will focus on the future of the EU as a global player in the context of the current changes on the global political landscape, and the role of national Parliaments, as well as the European Parliament within these processes. EU is facing several serious challenges: economic imbalances, debt crisis, unprecedented levels of youth unemployment, a destabilised neighbourhood with political turbulences, outright wars, and a refugee and
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migration crisis. It also needs to reconsider own future perspectives, bearing in mind the Brexit issue or eventual shift in the Transatlantic ties.

d. EUSC second session will be dedicated to stir up debate on ways and means enabling to bring the parliamentary agenda closer to our citizens in the modern era, which tools we are having at disposal and which ways we can take to improve current state of affairs. The focal aim of this session is to share lesson learned and best practices in the area of legislative transparency and openness, especially through specific transparency strategies, use of new digital technologies, civic education programs, crowdsourcing legislation, and deliberative and participatory democracy projects.

e. Closing session shall encompass discussion and approval of the Conclusions of the Presidency. This also includes the decision to be taken in regard to Europol – in case of necessity to hold further discussion of the Speakers' level, the session will be given an ample time span.

Mr. GUSPAN also underlined a few key logistical aspects related to the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments. The Chancellery of the National Council is planning to provide two main welcome points for incoming delegations: first one at the Bratislava Airport, the other one at the Bratislava – Jarovce/Kittsee border crossing (for delegations arriving from the Vienna Airport).

He also pointed out that according to the Slovak legislation Speakers/Presidents of Parliaments are considered to be protected persons – that means one security officer of the Bureau for the Protection of State Officials of the Slovak Republic will be assigned to each of the Speakers/Presidents for a whole duration of the Conference.


As added, the accommodation for delegation has been already pre-booked in four Bratislava hotels: Grand Hotel River Park, Sheraton Hotel, Radisson Blu Carlton Hotel, Austria Trend Hotel.

Secretaries General were also advised that the official dinner of the Conference accompanied by a cultural programme will be served on Sunday April 23, 2017 in the premises of the Bratislava Castle.

During the discussion that followed, Mr. Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German Bundestag appreciated that the EUSC draft programme presented by the Slovak Presidency addresses several key and topical points. He also accentuated a separate discussion to be held with respect to the establishment of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol. In his view, the EUSC presents a final opportunity to agree on related organisational details necessary to have properly working parliamentary scrutiny on the European level from the 1st May 2017.

Consequently, Mr. Konstantinos ATHANASIOU, Secretary General of the Hellenic Parliament, stated that the Session 2 of the EUSC draft programme (Bringing parliamentary agenda closer to citizens in the modern era – sharing best practices) is of particular importance for the Hellenic Parliament, mainly regarding the launch of new programme for external relations aimed at the strengthening of links between the national legislative assembly and citizens / civil society as well as bolstering of the Parliament's accountability. In this regard, he endorsed Mr. Nikos Voutsis, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament should be considered as one of keynote speakers.

In his intervention, Mr. Claes MÅRTENSSON, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdag presented an opinion that the Presidency should make the best use of the time when Speakers are meeting in Bratislava and found proposed EUSC agenda a bit meager. As underlined, representatives of the Swedish Riksdag promote practical and real outcomes of



the inter-parliamentary cooperation and in this context they propose the topic on improved use of the IPEX tools to be included in the EUSC agenda.

Thereafter, Mr. Geert Jan HAMILTON, Secretary General of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands stressed that the annual EUSC has already evolved into one of major meetings within the EU proved in his view by largest show-up of Speakers and Presidents of Parliaments. He considers the EUSC draft programme too ambitious bearing in mind the time limitation (although he finds both proposed sessions important) and would appreciate working background papers prepared by the Slovak Presidency to be distributed in advance in order to be able to make a general picture of main key topic framing the discussion. Supporting the suggestion of Mr. H. RISSE, he also asserted a proper time span to be reserved for the topic of the JPSG, regarding the fact that it's up to the EUSC to adopt related political decision. Additionally, he proposed to include a presentation of the state of play of the Maltese EU Council Presidency amongst items of the EUSC programme.

Permanent representative of the Senate of the Italian Republic to the European Parliament, Ms. Beatrice GIANANI proposed President of the Senate Mr. Pietro Grasso to be one amongst key speakers in the EUSC (Session 1) concentrating on parliamentary control of the intelligence within the counter-terrorism activities (thanks to his many year experience as the national anti-mafia prosecutor).

At last, Mr. Paolo VISCA, Head of the EU Affairs Department of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Republic suggested the EUSC Session 1 to be mainly focused on major issues EU is currently facing with Ms. Laura Boldrini, Speaker of the Chamber to act as a rapporteur.


Mr. GUSPAN in his feedback reminded that the preparatory working group for the JPSG has been in operation for almost a year (it was set-up following the EUSC 2016 in Luxembourg) and within this regard it submitted an integrated proposal. He opines that if there are still topics seen as open and needed to be discussed, it should be done within the EUSC Conclusions Session. Concerning the choice of topics related to the EUSC, he supports the principle of quality over quantity as well as Mr. HAMILTON's suggestion to include the Maltese presentation into the agenda. In turn, he expressed his acknowledgments to all of propositions for the EUSC keynote speakers being taken in consideration.

Afterwards, the floor was taken by Mr. Raymond SCICLUNA, Clerk to the House of Representatives of the Republic of Malta, who offered a brief overview of the Maltese EU Council Presidency, its parliamentary dimension, related priorities and planned 6 inter-parliamentary conferences or meetings. He underlined that one of their guiding principles is to keep all citizens informed about what is being done, being discussed or planned. In this context, they launched a website (www.parl.eu2017.mt), set-up a parliamentary TV channel and emitted a smartphone app. Par he appreciates recent cooperation with Parliaments already holding the EU Council Presidency and is ready to share Maltese experience with succeeding presidencies.

Session II: IPEX related issues

In session 2, Ms. Isabelle BARRA, Deputy Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, presented the IPEX Annual Report, the Written Report on the Work of IPEX in 2016 and the draft Conclusions on IPEX and Digital strategy.

As for the Annual Report, she emphasised that during its presidency, Luxembourg has organised various meetings e.g. Meetings of Working Groups, IPEX Correspondents Meeting. She has also emphasised the 4 priorities of the Luxembourg IPEX Presidency – 1. Completion of the Manual on how the IPEX Webpage works including instructions on how to download



information about IPEX; 2. Completion of the IPEX Leaflet which ought to disseminate information about IPEX among the National Parliaments; 3. Finalization of the Digital Strategy and 4. Funding of the Information Admins for the period of 2017-2018.

Ms. BARRA has also informed about the efforts and work of the Luxembourg presidency that have been done in the draft Conclusions on IPEX. Moreover, she provided composition of the IPEX Board for the period of 2017-2018, namely Slovakia, Estonia, Austria, Malta, EP and other Parliaments which have expressed their will to become members. As for the Digital Strategy, she informed about its completion on 27th of January in Luxembourg. The Strategy has been submitted for approval at this very meeting (Meeting of Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments, 20 – 21 February 2017, Bratislava).

Three discussants joined the debate in 2nd session. The first one was Mr. Claes MÅRTENSSON, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdag, who expressed his interest to nominate Swedish representative as a member of the IPEX Board. In addition to this, he also commented on the IPEX three-year Work Programme emphasising his opinion that the national correspondents ought to actively participate in implementing the Digital Strategy. He ended his speech by stating that the Digital Strategy is in keeping with the IPEX intentions, consequently he supported the version of the Digital Strategy that had been submitted beforehand.

The second discussant was Ms. Uršula ZORE TAVČAR, Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, who endorsed the Annual Report and expressed her support for the Digital Strategy. Besides that, she has, however, emphasised the usefulness of IPEX Leaflets and expressed interest in having it translated into Slovenian. At the end of her contribution she expressed her gratitude to all the people who had worked on it.

The last person to contribute to the debate was Mr. Paolo VISCA, the Head of the EU Affairs Department of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Republic, who rendered thanks to Luxembourg for its good work during its presidency and stated that the principal common goal for all ought to be the efforts to further improve the IPEX also in its content.


The IPEX Annual Report has been approved by consensus during the second session of the meeting. Moreover, the Conclusions on IPEX have been adopted, the IPEX Board's composition for the period of 2017-2018 has been approved together with the IPEX Digital Strategy.

In the conclusion of the session, Mr. GUSPAN rendered thanks to the Luxembourgian IPEX Presidency, stated that Luxembourg has met its goals and emphasised that the National Council of the Slovak Republic will try hard to build on the good experience provided by the Luxembourg Presidency.

Session III: Draft proposal for the modalities of the JPSG on Europol – implications on national parliaments' administration

On behalf of the Troika Working Group for the modalities of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JSPG) on Europol, Ms. Vanda ŠIPOŠOVÁ, Permanent Representative of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, presented to the Secretaries General the progress of the Working Group until this point.

The steps involved in the consultation process, including the consultative questionnaire, the discussion in the LIBE Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meeting as well as the preparation of the draft proposal and the draft text, were outlined in detail.



Furthermore, the Secretaries General were informed of the current state of play on the file: four amendment proposals were received from the Parliaments or Chambers of the German Bundestag, German Bundesrat, Polish Sejm and Cypriot Parliament. The Parliaments of Denmark and Norway also submitted comments to the draft text. Further Parliaments or Chambers including the French National Assembly, the parliaments of Sweden, Portugal, Lithuania, Croatia, the Czech Chamber, the UK House of Lords and both Chambers of the Dutch Parliament also submitted their positions on the text to the Working Group.

Subsequently, as the next step ahead of the Speakers Conference in April, where the final decision on the modalities of the JPSG will be made, the Working Group intends to engage in bilateral consultations with the four Parliaments or Chambers who have submitted amendments to the draft text. With the view that a large majority of the Parliaments and Chambers are in favour of the current proposal, the Working Group will seek to better understand the concerns of these four Parliaments or Chambers and will seek to reconcile them with the majority position. During this process, all Parliaments and Chambers will be updated on the progress made via the network of the parliamentary representatives in Brussels.

Several delegates participated in the subsequent discussion.


Mr. Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German Bundestag reiterated the position that each parliament needs to be represented by four members appointed for the duration of the electoral term of the parliament in question in order to reflect political diversity and bicameral systems. Furthermore, the German Bundestag would like to see a more explicit reference to continuity made in the text and less limitation on extraordinary meetings. Moreover, the German Bundestag proposed the creation of sub-groups of the JPSG in this stage of procedure. To this end, the German Bundestag prepared a text outlining its proposals, which was distributed in the meeting. Finally, the German Bundestag stressed that a situation where deliberations over rules of procedure take precedence over political debates should be avoided, and that there should be an opportunity for an in-depth discussion for Speakers on these questions.

Ms. Marie-France HÉRIN, Director of the European Affairs Department of the National Assembly of the French Republic stated that the National Assembly supports the Troika proposal, and at the same time supports the Bundestag suggestions as to substitutes, extraordinary meetings, sub-groups and secretariat. The French National Assembly considers that the JPSG should be a restricted organ and that two members per parliament is sufficient. Lastly, in the agenda of the Speakers Conference sufficient time fairly early should be allocated to deal with the JPSG issue.

Mr. Philippe DELIVET, Head of the European Affairs Committee Service of the Senate of the French Republic presented support to the Troika proposal in part dedicated to the membership of the JPSG. The French Senate considers the Troika proposal to be balanced and reasonable. The JPSG needs to be efficient and needs to have sufficient powers to exercise control. It will be important to ensure proper access to documents, this is why administrative planning should include an operative secretariat. Existing networks should be utilized as much as possible.

Ms. Agnieszka KACZMARSKA, Secretary General of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, reiterated the amendment that the JPSG should be composed of six members per parliament, in order to reflect bicameral status and political diversity. Such a suggestion is reasonable because it builds on the already existing bodies of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

Mr. Geert Jan HAMILTON, Secretary General of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands considered that the Working Group is presented with difficult dilemmas and that the Dutch Senate already agreed on the Troika draft text. It is clear that some are not satisfied and there is a duty to come as close together as possible. It would not be good if the Speakers had to



spend much time on this issue. There is some understanding in the Dutch Senate that some parliaments would like to have the possibility to come with larger delegations, but it is not reasonable to ask for a seat for every political group. Going forward, we should stay close to what the majority wants, but a compromise could be along the lines of “up to four members per parliament” while every country would have two votes. The Dutch Senate could also agree with the rest of the limited German proposal.

Mr. Claes MÅRTENSSON, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdag, stated that there was hesitancy to agree with the number of meetings and the number of members to be allocated to the European Parliament. The Swedish Parliament supports the number allocated in the draft text to national parliaments and considers that it is important that the JPSG does not develop into a big and costly activity. It is also important to have enough time at the Speakers Conference to discuss this.

Mr. Matthew HAMLYN, Head of the Overseas Office of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom stated that the House supports the Troika draft text as it stands and that the JPSG cannot be effective if it is a large body. Other things should be dealt with at a later stage.

Ms. Uršula ZORE TAVČAR, Secretary General of the National Assembly of Republic of Slovenia expressed support for the draft text of the Troika in principle. The Slovenian National Council prefers to stay with a smaller format, but could eventually support a stipulation of “up to four” as well. She also inquired whether the Working Group will prepare a new text and when it would be distributed. On the issue of the secretariat, she pointed to the fact that parliamentary budgets may already be adopted with foreseeing this aspect.


Mr. Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Federal Parliament of the Republic of Austria considered that there is a challenge between efficiency and reflection of compositions, which is particularly difficult for bicameral chambers. He has quite some understanding for the German points, and could be very much in favour of the Dutch suggestion.

Mr. Klaus WELLE, Secretary General of the European Parliament stressed that it is important to respect the process and bring the debate back to the Working Group. In general, the European Parliament supports the Troika draft text. If the current numbers are changed, then this should be reflected on both sides, national parliaments and European Parliament, in which case the European Parliament would want to come back to its original proposal of 16 members for the European Parliament. A relatively speedy take-off of the work of the JPSG should be facilitated, there is no need to go into detail, space should be left for the body to start its work. Finally, he stated that the JPSG is not a voting body and that it should operate on the basis of a consensus.

Mr. Jiří UKLEIN, Secretary General of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic stated that the Czech Senate fully supported the draft text of the Troika and that the proposed number is the maximum. Substitutes could be considered.

Mr. Paolo VISCA, Head of the EU Affairs Department of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Republic considered the Troika draft text as a reasonable and acceptable solution and agreed with the contribution of the European Parliament. He also stressed that there can be possible complications on the establishment of the secretariat. He also recalled the experience from lengthy discussions on the Article 13 conference. As far as the suggestion made previously by the Dutch Senate, this could be considered good.

Ms. Beatrice GIANANI, Permanent Representative of the Senate of the Italian Republic to the European Parliament, stated that discussion on the topic was very timely. There is no formal position that could be shared at this stage, but the issue is important and is being followed closely. It is urgent that the JPSG starts its work as soon as possible.



Ms. Vassiliki ANASTASSIADOU, Secretary General of the House of Representative of the Republic of Cyprus stated that the JPSG is a body that does not have voting rights. Further, she reiterated that the JPSG should be able to convene extraordinary meetings also on the basis of agreement of one third of participating parliaments and that substitute members are needed. It is not in favour of a secretariat due to financial restrictions, conferences such as the CFSP and the Article 13 conference are able to function without a secretariat. The JPSG should decide itself on the issue of sub-groups and the rules of procedure.

In answer to the comments and questions, Ms. ŠIPOŠOVÁ thanked the delegations for their input and stated that all this information is extremely useful for the upcoming work of the Working Group. She reiterated that the Working Group has not yet finished its work and that it intends to fully utilize the upcoming weeks in order to make further progress on the topic through the announced bilateral consultations.

The ambition of the Working Group is to present to the Speakers ahead of their conference as final a product as possible. In the case that in the course of the next weeks and on the basis of the outcome of the bilateral consultation changes to the current draft text need to be made, this will be made available for the Speakers ahead of the Speakers Conference.

Session IV: Engagement of parliaments' administrations in development assistance – lessons learnt, sharing know-how and best practices


Mr. GUSPAN opened the session with brief exposé explaining focal aims of the session. He pointed out that the session would focus on sharing lessons learnt and best practices in the field of development assistance provided by the national Parliaments to the Parliaments of candidate countries, potential candidate countries and third countries. He reminded ongoing process of reform of the Twinning instrument and the 20th anniversary of the launch of TAIEX, which had marked last year.

To etch in the topic he described ways of active engagement of the Chancellery of the National Council of the Slovak Republic within the development and technical assistance. Slovak parliamentary development assistance dates back to 2004, when Slovak experts provided guidance during parliamentary Rules of Procedure drafting in Montenegro. Since then the Chancellery of the National Council managed to co-organize more than 40 events for nearly 500 Members of Parliaments and parliamentary staff.

He underlined that based on cooperation with US nonprofit organization National Democratic Institute (NDI) the assistance had been extended throughout the region to all Western Balkan countries and in 2013 even to Iraq. Apart from NDI Mr. GUSPAN pointed out the relevance of the Centre for Experience Transfer from Integration and Reforms of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, which had funded some activities as well.

He continued that due to cooperation with the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Slovak experts had taken part also in building capacities in the Lebanese Parliament. On the forms of assistance, he explained that the Slovak parliamentary Research Centre called the Parliamentary Institute had developed a carefully formulated methodology enabling various forms of tailor-made guidance.

Mr. GUSPAN concluded stressing key challenges in relation to the parliamentary development assistance. He set forth that motivation is crucial internal challenge and insufficient visibility is key external challenge. With regard to the Twinning instrument, he encouraged to find new communication channels between the national Parliaments and to share information about parliamentary development assistance projects and activities via IPEX. Besides, he called for



such amendments to the Twinning Manual that would comply with the Rule of Law and antidiscrimination principles.

The session continued with address by Mr. Claes MÅRTENSSON, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdag, who shared the Swedish experience with the parliamentary development assistance. He underlined that the Riksdag had been engaged in promoting democracy and transparency in other Parliaments since 1990s. Based on the long-term experience he pointed out that the activities had to be targeted and tailor-made, and had to take into account the political context of the beneficiary.

Besides, the coordination with other ongoing projects was vital, he added. In 2011, the Swedish Parliament introduced a strategy for international development cooperation aiming at strengthening Parliaments within one-year projects.

Mr. MÅRTENSSON emphasized that every political party represented in the Riksdag had been given opportunity to be involved in the projects focused on countries in EU's neighborhoods. Therefore, the parliamentary development assistance started with Moldova in 2012 and Georgia one year later. Forasmuch as this form of cooperation had been considered demanding in terms of resources, in 2014 the decision was taken to focus rather on projects within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and EU.

Nevertheless, parliamentary development assistance activities have continued on ad hoc basis for instance with Ukraine, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Indonesia, Kenya and Brazil. Mr MÅRTENSSON pointed out that if the counterpart Parliament covered considerable part of the visit, it was the evidence of its commitment.

In the debate that followed, 6 participants intervened.


Mr. Horst RISSE, Secretary General of the German Bundestag, confirmed that the German Bundestag had been requested to provide the parliamentary development assistance and to set up the bilateral cooperation by so many Parliaments, that it was not feasible to comply with every demand. Pointing out one of the common principles of IPU, which is the national ownership of the parliamentary development assistance by the requesting Parliament, he underlined that the activities had to be targeted and tailor-made to the needs of the beneficiary. Besides, it was inevitable to avoid duplicating activities already done, he added.

Mr. RISSE highlighted the role of the partner on the ground in the beneficiary country. The German experience had proved that it was helpful to have development-focused organization on the spot such as political endowment, which could serve as a partner, he concluded.

Mr. Albino AZEVEDO SOARES, Secretary General of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic, welcomed that the topic had been included onto the agenda of the meeting. He pointed out that the Portuguese Parliament had been engaged in the parliamentary development assistance since 1987, firstly concentrated on the countries with active knowledge of the Portuguese language such as Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, East Timor and Guinea-Bissau.

On the forms of assistance, he explained, that it contained internships, training sessions, technical assistance missions and material support. More than 150 parliamentary officials had been involved in Lisbon and abroad, he added.

Mr. AZEVEDO SOARES presented that during 2012 – 2015, more than 100 missions had taken place and 65 internships had been provided. Due to this long-term experience with the parliamentary development assistance, the Portuguese Parliament managed to extend these



activities also within the framework of UN, IPU, OSCE, OECD and EU. He mentioned that on this basis Portuguese experts had participated in projects in Azerbaijan, Tunisia, Armenia, Egypt, Algeria and many other countries. He concluded pointing out the cooperation with the Hungarian Parliament within the framework of EU parliamentary development assistance projects in Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Harke HEIDA, Deputy Secretary General of the House of Representatives of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, confirmed that the Dutch Parliament regularly received requests from other Parliaments on development assistance and capacity building. This cooperation was mostly on ad hoc basis, he added, and focused for example on Kyrgyzstan and Armenia within the framework of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, on Fiji islands and Moldova under auspices of UNDP, on Lebanon within EU framework, on Morocco via Westminster Foundation for Democracy, on Georgia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through Centre for European Security Studies. He welcomed including this topic onto the agenda of the meeting and agreed with previous speakers that the parliamentary development assistance activities could be more coordinated and publicized.

Mr. Matthew HAMLYN, Head of the Overseas Office of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, as other previous speakers welcomed that the topic had been included onto the agenda of the meeting. He pointed out that both Houses of the Parliament had long-standing and wide-ranging experience with the parliamentary development assistance.

The United Kingdom as the founder member of IPU had been doing such bilateral relations with Parliaments for more than hundred years, he added, and had considerable experience also in the framework of the Commonwealth. Apart from IPU based cooperation, he underlined assistance under auspices of relevant Government Departments, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, EU and UNDP.

Mr. HAMLYN agreed with previous speakers that parliamentary development assistance is a quite complicated picture and the coordination is a major issue. He confirmed that the House of Commons received many requests for development assistance, some on ad hoc basis, and some as a part of longer projects. As examples, he mentioned extensive project in Burma under auspices of the Speaker of the House of Commons and EU Twinning project in Morocco.

On the content of assistance, he explained that the activities covered wide range of subjects from parliamentary practice and procedure, financial scrutiny, digital capacity of Parliament and public engagement. He continued that the House of Commons regularly hosted weeklong professional fellowships for colleagues from within EU and from all over the world.

Mr. HAMLYN wondered about the capacity of the New and Emerging Democracies and their Parliaments to absorb all the development assistance provided and called for carefulness when complying with requests for assistance. He concluded that in 2015 the International Development Committee of the House of Commons issued a whole report on parliamentary strengthening.

Ms. Sandra PAURA, Head of the Interparliamentary Relations Bureau of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, shared experience from the perspective of a smaller country and Parliament. She pointed out that the Latvian Parliament had been providing flexible forms of parliamentary development assistance and built on relatively recent experience with transition and consolidation of democracy.

Another advantage is common history and lesser language barrier, she added. On the forms of funding, she agreed with Mr MÅRTENSSON. Ms PAURA further elaborated on forms of assistance and she clarified that the Latvian Parliament provided expertise at different levels starting from MPs, parliamentary committees' staff members, employees of financial



departments and experts from foreign departments, all based on Q & A sessions. She mentioned that there are agreements on such cooperation with Parliaments of Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus. Besides, also, the Baltic Assembly cooperates with Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova, she concluded.

Mr. Klaus WELLE, Secretary General of the European Parliament, underlined that within the European Parliament these issues are covered by the Directorate for Democracy Promotion, which functions on four pillars. First pillar is focused on election observation missions for every first free elections around the world, he explained. As a second pillar, he mentioned the special pre-accession unit, which provides regular training programs for parliamentary staff members from Western Balkan countries and Turkey.

He continued that the third pillar is the Sakharov Prize awarded to human rights activists. Moreover, as the fourth pillar he pointed out the conflict mediation. He clarified that the European Parliament had protected Ms. Tymoshenko in Ukraine and from this experience; EP had developed the mediation service, which tries to prevent conflicts.