

3 July 2004

GUIDELINES

INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Introduction

With reference to

- The Guidelines for the Conference of Presiding Officers, article 2 p.2:

“To this end the Conference is a forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experiences, as well as for the promotion of research activities and common action, among the Speakers, on topics related to the role of parliaments and the organisation of parliamentary functions, also with respect to the forms and tools of interparliamentary cooperation.”

- The Protocol on the Role of Member States’ national parliaments in the European Union, annexed to the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, article 9, ¹:

“The European Parliament and the national Parliaments shall together determine the organisation and promotion of effective and regular interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union.”

- Presidency Conclusions at the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, Athens 24 May 2003,

The Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments at its meeting in The Hague 2-3 July 2004 agreed upon the following guidelines as a base for interparliamentary cooperation in the EU field.

¹ Text agreed upon by Heads of State or Government 18 June 2004

I. Objectives

The autonomy of each parliament shall be respected. The degree of involvement in interparliamentary cooperation is decided by each parliament.

Taking into account the principle of national parliaments and the European Parliament being on an equal footing and having complementary roles in the EU structure, the main objectives of interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union should be:

- a) To provide information and strengthen parliamentary scrutiny in all areas of competence of the EU.
- b) To ensure the efficient exercise of parliamentary competencies in EU matters, in particular in the area of subsidiarity control by national parliaments.

II. Framework

The cooperation is performed within the following framework.

Conference of EU Speakers

The Conference has a responsibility for overseeing the coordination of interparliamentary EU activities. A particular coordinating responsibility rests with the host Parliament for the forthcoming Conference.

Meetings of sectoral committees

Meetings of sectoral committees organised by national parliaments or by the European Parliament constitute one of the long-established modes of interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union.

COSAC

COSAC (Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union) handles the cooperation between EU Affairs Committees.

Simultaneous debates in interested parliaments

Interested parliaments can promote simultaneous debates on the EU legislative programme or on the main issues of European policies.

Secretaries General

The Secretaries General or other official appointed by the Speaker should take the lead in preparing the interparliamentary EU work. A particular responsibility for coordination rests with the Secretary General in the host Parliament for the forthcoming Conference. Here close contacts with national parliaments in the Member States holding the EU Presidency are necessary.

IPEX

The objective of IPEX (Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange) is to support interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union by providing a platform for the electronic exchange of EU-related information between parliaments in the Union including a calendar of meetings and forums for exchange of views on subsidiarity control. Each parliament/chamber has an IPEX correspondent to represent the parliament.

Representatives from National Parliaments in Brussels

When having a national parliament representative based in Brussels, the permanent representative participates in the regular exchange of information between the EU parliaments, as well as with the COSAC secretariat in Brussels, and in the coordination on a practical level.

ECPRD

The objectives of the ECPRD (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) are to promote the exchange of information and to strengthen the cooperation between parliamentary services in all fields of parliamentary information, research and documentation. Each parliament/chamber has an ECPRD correspondent to represent the parliament. ECPRD includes all parliaments within the Council of Europe.

III. Fields of cooperation

Interparliamentary EU cooperation is of particular value in the following fields.

Subsidiarity control

Each EU parliament is recommended to inform the other parliaments on its activities concerning subsidiarity control. IPEX provides electronic tools for this exchange of views and serves as a means of communication between national parliaments with regard to proposals, which are thought to offend against the subsidiarity principle.

Exchange of information and documents

Exchange of information and documents should be promoted on all levels and between different committees and services within the framework. Electronic information emanating from different channels should be structured within the IPEX and ECPRD networks in order to avoid confusion and duplication of work.

Conferences and other events

Interparliamentary meetings, be they ad hoc or within the framework of a regular exchange between Speakers, sectoral committees or within COSAC, constitute one of the recommended methods of interparliamentary cooperation in the Union. They are usually organised by national parliaments or the European Parliament.

See annex for practical recommendations

Political areas

Every year the Conference of EU Speakers may indicate priority political areas for interparliamentary cooperation.

Annex - Planning & Practical arrangements

Issues of common interest

Taking into consideration the various working programmes and other strategic EU documents, the Secretaries General² should identify and submit to the Conference of Speakers issues of common interest to focus on during the following years.

Calendar

To facilitate planning and work for the parliaments an overview of activities should be provided. Information about regular meetings with sectoral committees, COSAC or other established forums and networks, as well as scheduled or intended ad hoc interparliamentary meetings, should be sent to the Secretary General of the parliament hosting the forthcoming EU Speakers' Conference in such a time as to allow him/her to present them at a meeting of Secretary Generals and include them in an annual or long-term calendar of meetings. The calendar is subject to the right of any parliament to propose new initiatives.

Invitations

Formal invitations to meetings should be sent to the Speakers of every Chamber with a copy to the Secretaries General.

Documentation

The annual and long-term calendar should be published on the IPEX web site and continuously updated. All invitations, relevant information and documents regarding meetings should be made available through the IPEX web site.

² Or other high official appointed by the Speaker