

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

## DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH SWITZERLAND, ICELAND AND NORWAY AND TO THE EEA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

### INFORMATION NOTE

ON THE

EU-SWITZERLAND PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS  
EU-ICELAND PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS  
EU-NORWAY PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS

Directorate General for External Policies of the Union



16 November 2009/ CH

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## **BACKGROUND INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

Interparliamentary delegations are standing bodies of the European Parliament set up primarily to pursue dialogue with the parliamentary bodies of countries outside the European Union.

The European Parliament's network of interparliamentary exchanges is unique, giving the European Parliament an unusual role in international relations of a kind shared by no other parliamentary institution, inside or outside the EU. Together with Parliament's standing committees responsible for different aspects of external relations, the delegations system provides the institution with an effective tool for influencing not only third countries, but also the other institutions of the European Union itself. By offering the parliamentary bodies of countries around the world a focussed interlocutor at the heart of the European Union, the European Parliament has helped heighten awareness of the EU's role and policies and has provided a democratic dialogue partner that no other European Union institution can provide.

## **EU-SWITZERLAND PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS<sup>(1)</sup>**

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| Swiss application for EC membership          | 26 May 1992    |
| Commission communication on future relations | 1 October 1993 |

### **Chairs**

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1981 - 1984 | Elise BOOT (EPP - The Netherlands)        |
| 1984 - 1989 | Willy VERNIMMEN (SOC - Belgium)           |
| 1989 - 1992 | Günter TOPMANN (SOC - Germany)            |
| 1992 - 1994 | Giacomo PORRAZZINI (GUE - Italy)          |
| 1994 - 1999 | Brian SIMPSON (PES - United Kingdom)      |
| 1999        | Giorgios DIMITRAKOPOULOS (EPP/ED- Greece) |
| 2000 - 2002 | Christos FOLIAS (EPP/ED - Greece)         |
| 2002 - 2003 | Heidi HAUTALA (Green - Finland)           |
| 2003 - 2004 | Matti WUORI (Green - Finland)             |
| 2004 - 2007 | Diana WALLIS (ALDE - United Kingdom)      |
| 2007- 2009  | Bilyana RAEVA (ALDE - Bulgaria)           |
| 2009-       | Pat the Cope GALLAGHER, (ALDE-Ireland)    |

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1989, the EP had one delegation for relations with Switzerland and Austria. By EP decision of 26 July 1989, a separate delegation for relations with Switzerland was set up. In the run-up to enlargement to the EFTA applicant countries, and following the Euro-elections of June 1994, Parliament set up a delegation for relations with Switzerland and Iceland (decision of 27 October 1994). Following the negative outcome of the Norwegian referendum on EU membership, it was decided (on 18 January 1995) to add responsibility for relations with Norway to the existing delegation for relations with Switzerland and Iceland.

## Interparliamentary meetings

|                          |                |                               |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting  | Strasbourg     | 14-15 October 1981            |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting  | Bern           | 2-3 November 1982             |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting  | Strasbourg     | 12-13 October 1983            |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Bern           | 29-30 October 1985            |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Brussels       | 29-31 October 1986            |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Lucerne        | 2-4 November 1987             |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Brussels       | 3-4 November 1988             |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Bern           | 18-19 May 1990                |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Luxembourg     | 6-7 November 1990             |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Basel          | 17-18 May 1991 <sup>(1)</sup> |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 26-27 May 1992                |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Flims          | 28-29 May 1993                |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Luxembourg     | 7-8 April 1994                |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Neuchâtel      | 28 April 1995                 |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 23-24 April 1996              |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Bern           | 25-26 April 1997              |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Strasbourg     | 18-19 February 1998           |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Lugano         | 30-31 March 1999              |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Strasbourg     | 5-6 July 2000                 |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Prangins       | 9-10 July 2001                |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 8-9 July 2002                 |
| 22 <sup>nd</sup> meeting | Stein am Rhein | 8-9 July 2003                 |
| 23 <sup>rd</sup> meeting | Strasbourg     | 18 November 2004              |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Morat          | 11-12 July 2005               |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 10-11 July 2006               |
| 26 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Bad Ragaz      | 24-26 June 2007               |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Strasbourg     | 18-19 June 2008               |

## Subjects discussed

The *11th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in May 1992 coincided with the day of the Swiss application for EC membership.

At the *12th interparliamentary meeting* in Flims in May 1993, the European Parliament members were particularly interested in getting an analysis from their Swiss colleagues of the result of the referendum on 6 December 1992. During that referendum, and by a double majority of the population and the cantons, Switzerland decided not to join the European Economic Area. Members of the Swiss delegation emphasised the attachment of the Swiss parliament and government to pursuing their efforts in the area of European integration, pointing to the fields of trans-border cooperation, and continued cooperation in research. Further, transport was, as always, an issue in discussions. On 27 September 1992, the Trans Alpine transit project - NEAT - had been approved with a significant majority in a referendum.

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<sup>1</sup> On the occasion of the 10th meeting, the EP delegation made a formal declaration to mark the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation, and presented an engraved silver tray to the Swiss Parliament

At the *13th interparliamentary meeting* in Luxembourg in April 1994, discussions on the future of bilateral relations between the EU and Switzerland was dominated by transport issues, in the light of recent Swiss decisions on Alpine Transit. Members of the Swiss delegation had recalled that European integration, up to and including EU membership, remained the goal of the Swiss authorities.

At the *14th interparliamentary meeting* in Neuchâtel in April 1995, discussions centred on the ongoing bilateral and sectoral negotiations between the EU and Switzerland, with MPs insisting on the importance of discussions regarding the Free Movement of Persons, and the difficulties facing cross-border workers resident in EU countries and employed in Switzerland.

Regarding transport, Swiss delegates emphasised the shared interests of their country and the Union, and thus the need for a joint policy in this area. The Swiss side reiterated its perennial wish for cooperation in the field of technical research.

The Swiss members showed much interest in the recent enlargement of the Union, the future of the European Economic Area, and the perspectives for the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference in 1996. Swiss MPs also attached importance to the potential for cooperation in the field of regional policy.

At the *15th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in April 1996, members of the Swiss delegation underlined the importance attached by the Swiss government to European integration, with the ultimate goal of EU membership. In the context of the recently opened Intergovernmental Conference, Swiss MPs demonstrated a particular interest in the potential role of national parliaments in the EU legislative process, and in the principle of subsidiarity.

The delegations also had substantial discussions on the ongoing EU-Switzerland bilateral negotiations. In answer to the suggestion that, where the EU talked of "freedom of movement of persons" Switzerland seemed to be talking about "regulation of movement of persons", Swiss MPs emphasised that the current bilateral negotiations were not with a view to accession. Should this be the case, Switzerland would have to accept the "god-given principle" of freedom of movement of persons.

As ever in EP-Switzerland meetings, transport and transit figured prominently on the agenda. There was agreement on the urgent need for a common Alpine transit policy, and pleas for mutual understanding of the positions taken on both sides.

A point raised (although not on the original agenda) was that of BSE - "mad cow disease". Switzerland claimed to have accurate statistics - some 200 cases had been reported to date - given the obligation on veterinary surgeons to report every case discovered. MPs were interested to hear of efforts being undertaken to control the possible spread of the disease.

At the *16<sup>th</sup> interparliamentary meeting* in Bern in April 1997, the EU-Switzerland bilateral negotiations were discussed. The main outstanding problems concerned the transport and transit questions, where the Dutch Presidency expected a political break-through to finalize the negotiations. The Freedom of Movement of Persons was also discussed and both delegations took note of the fact that the results of the negotiations would be subject to a referendum in Switzerland and to the ratification procedures in the EU. Another topic was the Community

transit system - the legal cooperation between the EU and Switzerland in the customs field, in the context of which a thoughtful discussion on the EP Inquiry Committee report on the Community transit system took place.

It was stated that among other countries, Switzerland had been violating the EU customs agreements especially in connection with smuggling of cigarettes. It was agreed that the legal and administrative cooperation between the EU and the Swiss authorities to avoid customs fraud offences should be improved.

The Swiss delegation informed the EP-side of the unclaimed assets and the role of Switzerland as a financial centre during the Second World War, and the delegations further had an exchange of views on the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union.

At the 17<sup>th</sup> *interparliamentary meeting* in Strasbourg in February 1998, topics for discussion between the two delegations were the EU-Switzerland bilateral negotiations, the future enlargement of the EU, the EMU and the perspectives of a Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union.

The two delegations issued a joint statement to the European Commission and the Swiss Federal Council calling upon the negotiating partners to resolve the outstanding differences with the aim of reaching a conclusion of the bilateral sectorial negotiations between the EU and Switzerland within six months.

Both delegations also expressed their desire that the European Commission should take the necessary steps to open a Commission representation in Switzerland in order to promote and intensify bilateral contacts and exchange of information between the EU and Switzerland.

At the 18<sup>th</sup> *interparliamentary meeting* in Lugano in March 1999, parliamentarians from Switzerland and the European Parliament discussed the seven EU-Switzerland bilateral agreements to be ratified at the beginning of 2001. The agreements were gathered in a balanced package of sector agreements, with a clause in each agreement ensuring that all agreements can only enter into force simultaneously and can only be applied in their entirety.

The Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, where both parties are obliged to remove preferential treatment for indigenous workers and all restrictive practices with regard to the control of wage and work conditions two years after entry into force of the agreement at the latest, as well as the Agreement on Transport, have been the most difficult negotiations to conclude.

The European Parliament was expected to give its assent to the package in autumn 1999 after the EP elections in June, and it was underlined that the possible future Swiss EU-membership should not be linked to the ratification process of the bilateral agreements.

The EP delegation was briefed on the "strategic objective of EU-membership" for Switzerland based on the Popular Initiative "Yes to Europe" and on the Integration Report by the Swiss Government.

The parliamentarians also exchanged views on the cooperation between the EU and Switzerland in the wider context of justice and home affairs. The fight against organised crime and transit

fraud was a topic of discussion, and there was a broad agreement to establish a better cooperation in this field even if the situation had improved lately.

At the *19th interparliamentary meeting* in Strasbourg in July 2000, the main topic on the agenda was the EU-Switzerland bilateral agreements and the ratification process in the European Union and Switzerland. The delegations welcomed the prompt assent given by the European Parliament to the seven EU-Switzerland bilateral agreements and the positive outcome of the Swiss referendum on the agreements. The delegations expressed the hope that the national parliaments of the EU would conclude their ratification procedures without delay for the agreements to enter into force as soon as possible.

The meeting also included a discussion on recent developments in Swiss integration policy based on the parliamentary debate on the popular initiative "Yes to Europe". The discussion was launched during the last session of the Swiss Parliament and was to be continued in September. In this context, an informal exchange of views took place on the role of Switzerland as an economic and financial centre.

Finally, the delegations considered the perspectives of the EU Intergovernmental Conference and of the enlargement of the European Union.

At the *20th interparliamentary meeting* in Prangins in July 2001, members had an extensive exchange of views on the political and economic development in Europe. Delegations shared similar views on a number of issues such as asylum policy, functioning of the labour market, the competitiveness of European economies, the principle of subsidiarity, and federalism.

The two delegations furthermore shared concern that the seven bilateral agreements signed on 21 June 1999 should enter into force by 1st January 2002<sup>(1)</sup>. A swift ratification by EU member states of the agreement on the free movement of persons would be in the mutual interest and would allow workers from all European countries to take advantage of a drained labour market in Switzerland. The start of new bilateral negotiations regarding the fight against fraud, processed agricultural products, statistics and environment was noted with satisfaction. Participants at the meeting expressed their hope for a quick adoption of mandates for a number of further items to be negotiated.

Delegations deplored the recent death of a small Portuguese child in Geneva and asked the competent authorities to rapidly clarify the circumstances of the tragic event.

At the *21st interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in July 2002, members welcomed the entry into force of the first set of bilateral agreements between the EU and Switzerland and hoped that the next round of negotiations could be brought to a speedy conclusion. Both sides were aware that one of the more controversial issues of the ongoing negotiations was the question of savings taxation. They had an open and frank discussion, which facilitated Members' understanding of the negotiation process.

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<sup>1</sup> By December 19, 2001 two of the EU member states have not yet deposit their instruments of ratification.

The delegations further discussed the future enlargement of the EU and its implications for Switzerland. The existing agreements between Switzerland and the EU will also be applied to the future EU Member States.

Additionally the delegations had an exchange of views on the work of the Convention on the future of Europe. Both sides felt that Switzerland could make a fruitful contribution to this process, based on its experience in revising its own constitution and on its traditional direct democracy.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU and the perspectives of the EMU were also discussed.

*At the 22nd interparliamentary meeting in Stein am Rhein in July 2003, members discussed the Swiss-European integration policy, the future of the EU, and the bilateral agreement on the air transportation between Switzerland and the EU*

Discussion of the broad outlines of Switzerland's European integration policy was followed by a debate on the progress of the Bilateral II negotiations. The two delegations welcomed the progress made to date and outlined their respective positions. The one controversial issue was judicial assistance on tax matters, which is relevant to both the Schengen Agreement and the fight against fraud. The two parties hoped that the second round of ongoing negotiations would be brought to a speedy conclusion.

The delegations welcomed the positive developments that had occurred since the entry into force of Bilateral I Agreement, in particular the agreements on the free movement of persons and of the agreement on terrestrial transport. The consequences of Switzerland's non-ratification of the bilateral air agreement between Switzerland and Germany and the restrictive measures taken by Germany against Zurich (Kloten) Airport were also discussed.

Enlargement of the EU and its implications for EU-Switzerland relations were discussed, in particular the extension of the agreement on the free movement of persons to cover the new Member States. Also discussed was the EU's request that Switzerland make a financial contribution towards cohesion. On this subject, the Swiss delegation informed the EU delegation that an interdepartmental working party was being set up to look into the question.

Finally, the two delegations discussed the findings of the Convention on the Future of Europe, particularly the strengthening of the role of the European Parliament and of national parliaments. The Swiss delegation expressed its interest in two EU innovations, namely the European Initiative and the clause on withdrawal from the European Union.

*At the 23rd interparliamentary meeting in Strasbourg in November 2004, the European Parliament delegation briefed the Swiss members on present and future enlargement of the EU. In this context, the JPC reintroduced the wish that the European Commission take the necessary steps to establish a representation in Switzerland in order to intensify the bilateral contacts and exchange of information between the EU and Switzerland.*

Regarding EU-Switzerland relations, the Swiss delegation updated EP members on the situation concerning an eventual Swiss membership of the European Union. The strong tradition of direct democracy in Switzerland was emphasized; the decision making procedure in the EU is, seen

from a Swiss perspective, taking place on a level too far away from the people. The Bilateral Negotiations II was further discussed, and EP members expressed their hope that the Swiss people would ratify the Schengen and Dublin Convention.

The MPs further debated the new Constitution, and possible winners and losers of powers with the adoption of the same. Additional topics on the agenda, and consequently brought up for discussion, were the Railway Transport Policies, the Cross-border Information Policy and the Swiss Integration Policy.

At the *24th interparliamentary meeting* in Morat in July 2005, the members commented on the EU enlargement "one year after", and discussed perspectives of future EU enlargements and their implications for Switzerland. They additionally considered the Swiss Integration Policy, and the Swiss delegation emphasized Switzerland's ever-increasing commitments in Europe. The interparliamentary delegation further noted with satisfaction that the European Commission was going to establish a representation in Bern, hopefully within a year, as it would help improve bilateral contacts between the EU and Switzerland.

Being that the Swiss people in a referendum had said 'yes' to the Schengen Convention, the members reflected on its implications for Switzerland. They further discussed the upcoming referendum on the Free Movement of Persons following the EU enlargement, and the Swiss delegation expressed concern that Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner had indicated that Switzerland could not take part in the Schengen Agreement if the country did not allow free movement of persons from EU-25. The EU side, on the other hand, emphasized that a 'no' in the forthcoming referendum would unfortunately, but inevitably, have consequences for the bilateral agreements between the EU and Switzerland. The members additionally commented on the Free Movement of Services and its implications for Swiss financial institutions.

The EU side further briefed the Swiss members on the ratification process and future perspectives of the EU Constitution, and finally the Swiss delegation briefed members on the New Railway Lines under the Alps.

At the *25th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in July 2006, the delegations began by discussing the "European report" that the Swiss government had recently published, and some European Parliament members, as well as the Commission representative, expressed concern that the document somewhat lacked political visions. The members further reflected on the Swiss contribution to European integration, and the Swiss delegation stressed that it was not true that Switzerland refused to pay money to the EU, but the legal basis for the payments had been severely criticised and a referendum had therefore been launched.

The delegations further considered the current work of the EU-Switzerland joint committees. The discussion mainly revolved around the current dispute over taxation, with the Commission being of the opinion that Swiss tax regimes are structurally likely to lead to a distortion of trade between the EU and Switzerland.

The Swiss members were further updated on the constitutional process in the EU, the Services Directive, as well as on experiences and perspectives of the EU enlargement.

At the *26th interparliamentary meeting* in Bad Ragaz, on the 26th of June 2007, the following topics were discussed.

The Swiss Delegation to the European Parliament lead by the Counsellor of the Member States, Eugen David, and the delegation of the European Parliament discussed the relations with Switzerland, conducted by the European deputy, Diana Wallis, at the meeting in Bad Ragaz. The debates mainly concerned the topic of the imposition of enterprises, the same issues concerning implications of the impact that the recent enlargement of the EU had on Switzerland and the implementation of the Schengen/Dublin Agreement.

The two delegations have initiated the discussions supporting effectiveness of the fiscal systems in Switzerland and within the EU in order to explicitly recall their positions. In spite of the divergences, the two delegations have however recognised the need for an open and constructive dialogue, supporting the vision of well-working close cooperation that has always characterised the relation between Switzerland and the EU.

Among the implications of enlargement of the EU affecting Switzerland, the one that is being stressed being of main importance to highlight regarding the extension of the of the agreement of free movement of persons in the new Member States is the financial contribution of Switzerland regarding enlargement of the EU. The delegations have welcomed the coming opening of negotiations concerning the agreement of free movement of persons regarding Rumania and Bulgaria.

The parties are likewise mutually informed of the advancement of the preparation work of the implementation of the Schengen/Dublin agreements and the SISone4all for all new members of the Union and for Switzerland.

In addition, based on a presentation made by Professor Heinz Hauser at the University of Saint-Gall, the two delegations have maintained their positions regarding the Doha round. The Swiss delegation has henceforth invited the delegation of the European Parliament to further discuss the work of the piercing of the tunnel based in Saint-Gothard in Sedrun, and also to present their work with the sediment and the New Railway Line through the Alps (NLFA).

The European Parliament delegation was impressed upon the engagement of the Switzerland in terms of the profit that has been achieved regarding the policy of European transport.

In connection to the meeting, a press conference was held by the two presidents at the City Hotel of Bad Ragaz.

At the *27th interparliamentary meeting* in Strasbourg on 18-19 June 2008, several important issues were discussed under the joint chairmanship of Ms Brigitta Gadiant (CH) and Ms Bilyana Raeva (EP).

The meeting opened with a discussion on the development, current state of play, future challenges of, and possible options (bilateral relations - full EU membership - EEA membership) for the bilateral relations between Switzerland and the EU, based on interventions from Ambassador De Watteville, Head of the Swiss Mission to the EU, Mr Reiterer, Head of the EC Delegation to Switzerland and the EP Vice President Diana Wallis.

The most controversial item on the agenda was the EU-Swiss dialogue on tax issues. The Commission has decided that certain company tax regimes in Swiss Cantons are a form of State aid incompatible with the 1972 Agreement between the EU and Switzerland. At stake are schemes offering unfair tax advantages to companies established in Switzerland, for profits generated in the EU. The Swiss side is rejecting this interpretation. Based on an intervention from Mr Rübig (EP) the members had an exchange of views on this matter, which is being dealt with in the ongoing talks (dialogue) between the Commission and the Swiss Government. The matter has been raised by the EP delegation at previous meetings with the Swiss members.

Furthermore, special emphasis was put on; free movement of persons and the experiences from the latest EU enlargements, Cross border service provisions and the Schengen/Dublin Agreements, The Swiss financial contributions to the EU enlargement (including Bulgaria and Romania) and Free-trade in agricultural products.

The long relationship between the European Parliament and the Swiss Federal Assembly, almost three decades, has developed a profound knowledge, on both sides, of the political, economic and institutional policies, which are the foundation for the future EU-Switzerland cooperation between Switzerland and the EU.

No interparliamentary meeting took place in 2009 due to difficulties finding a mutual convenient date for both delegations. However, the bureaux of the E P and the Suisse delegations met in Strasbourg on 16 December 2009 to discuss the future work.

## EU-ICELAND PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS <sup>(1)</sup>

### Chairs

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1992 - 1994 | Jens Peter BONDE (ARC - Denmark)          |
| 1994 - 1999 | Brian SIMPSON (PES - United Kingdom)      |
| 1999        | Girogos DIMITRAKOPOULOS (EPP/ED - Greece) |
| 2000 - 2002 | Christos FOLIAS (EPP/ED - Greece)         |
| 2002 - 2003 | Heidi HAUTALA (Green - Finland)           |
| 2003 - 2004 | Matti WUORI (Green - Finland)             |
| 2004 - 2007 | Diana WALLIS (ALDE - United Kingdom)      |
| 2007- 2009  | Bilyana RAEVA (ALDE - Bulgaria)           |
| 2009-       | Pat the Cope GALLAGHER (ALDE - Ireland)   |

### Interparliamentary meetings

|                          |                |                            |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting  | Strasbourg     | 14-15 September 1987       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting  | Reykjavik      | 29 May-1 June 1988         |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting  | Strasbourg     | 20-21 February 1991        |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Reykjavik      | 30 August-2 September 1992 |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Strasbourg     | 14-15 July 1993            |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Reykjavik      | 16-18 February 1994        |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Brussels       | 7-8 September 1995         |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Reykjavik      | 30 June-2 July 1996        |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> meeting  | Strasbourg     | 17-18 September 1997       |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Vestmannaeyjar | 23 June 1998               |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Reykjavik      | 19-20 June 2000            |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 23-24 April 2001           |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Reykjavik      | 19 June 2002               |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 24-25 March 2003           |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Reykjavik      | 17 February 2004           |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels       | 15 June 2005               |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Reykjavik      | 22 June 2006               |

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the decision of the European Parliament of 15 January 1992 creating separate delegations for relations with Sweden, Finland and Iceland, the Parliament had a delegation with joint responsibility for relations with these countries. This delegation was chaired successively by Josep VERDE i ALDEA (SOC - E) (1984-1989), and Christian ROVSING (ED - DK) (1989-1992). In the run-up to enlargement to the EFTA applicant countries, and following the Euro-elections of June 1994, Parliament set up a delegation for relations with Switzerland and Iceland (decision of 27 October 1994). Following the negative outcome of the Norwegian referendum on EU membership, it was decided (on 18 January 1995) to add responsibility for relations with Norway to the existing delegation for relations with Switzerland and Iceland.

|                          |           |                      |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| 18 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels  | 12-13 September 2007 |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Reykjavik | 28 April 2008        |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels  | 16 November 2009     |

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## Subjects discussed

At the *7th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in September 1995 (at which the Icelandic delegations was led by Olafur Ragnar GRIMSON), following EU accession by three of their EFTA partners, the Icelandic representatives underlined the importance they attached to regular contacts with the EP (the only parliament with which *Althingi* holds regular meetings). Icelandic MPs expressed optimism regarding the future of the EEA, EFTA and Nordic cooperation, following EU enlargement. Pleas were made for EU cooperation in ensuring conservation measures in the fishing sector, notably with regard to spawning grounds for redfish stocks.

At *previous interparliamentary meetings*, the over-riding concern on the Icelandic side concerned the future of EC-Iceland relations, in the context of EU accession by other EFTA members. Other issues raised included security, whaling, labour market policy, educational policy, and women's rights issues.

It should further be noted that discussions at various interparliamentary meetings allowed MPs to understand the particular concerns of Iceland in relation to its fishing industry. Regarding the framework fisheries agreement concluded in parallel with the EEA agreement, Iceland was ready to trade "fish for fish" but not "fishing rights for fishing rights".

At the *8th interparliamentary meeting* in Reykjavik in late June and early July 1996, Icelandic MPs were clearly much interested in the Intergovernmental Conference, the perspectives for future EU enlargement, and the progress towards a monetary union. There was also animated discussion on the negotiations with a view to the association of Iceland with the Schengen agreement, and of the political and economic situation in Iceland, which had just elected Olafur Ragnar GRIMSON to succeed outgoing President Vidgis FINNBOGADOTTIR. The leader of the Icelandic delegation, while emphasising that the question of EU membership was "not on the agenda" in Iceland, stated categorically that "the main obstacle to an application for EU membership by Iceland is EU fisheries policy, which -in its present form- is totally unacceptable to Iceland".

At the *9th interparliamentary meeting* in Strasbourg in September 1997, the Icelandic delegation stated that Iceland had no intention for the time being to apply for EU-membership. Iceland was satisfied with its EEA-membership, which gave access to the single market.

The Intergovernmental Conference and the future enlargement of the EU played an important role in the discussions, where the Icelandic delegation expressed its disappointment with the Amsterdam Treaty, which to its opinion did not solve the institutional questions in an enlarged EU, not carrying out the necessary reforms. Other questions raised were the democratic deficit in the EU, the relations between the EP and the national parliaments as well as the European Parliament's future role in the EU.

The fact that Norway and Iceland had joined the Schengen Agreement in 1997 (without voting rights) would improve the police-cooperation in the fight against criminality. A profound discussion was held on the perspectives of the EMU with emphasis put on the establishment of a central bank and its level of independence as well as the creation of a common currency.

Both delegations supported the Commission's proposal to establish a European Documentation Centre in Reykjavik, financed jointly by the Commission and the Icelandic authorities.

At the *10th interparliamentary meeting* in Vestmannaeyjar, the volcanic island south of the mainland, in June 1998, members discussed the bilateral questions of fisheries in Iceland, and the EU Common Fisheries Policy after year 2002. They further touched upon the Schengen Agreement, as well as the ratification process of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the introduction of the EMU.

The main obstacle to an EU-membership for Iceland was EU's current fisheries policy, which was unacceptable to Iceland. Nevertheless, the EP-delegation underlined that the EU was open for an application for membership from Iceland, but it was first of all up to Iceland to decide on a future accession to the EU.

At the *11th interparliamentary meeting* in Reykjavik in June 2000, the EP delegation was briefed on the general elections in Iceland in 1999. The centre-right coalition government, composed of the Independence Party and its junior partner - the Progressive Party, won the elections and continued to have a majority of support in opinion polls after the elections.

Further topics on the agenda were the EU-Intergovernmental Conference, the future enlargement of the EU, the perspectives of a Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU and the European Security and Defence (ESDI), and the EMU.

The place of Iceland in European cooperation in general, and Iceland's membership of the EEA and a future Icelandic EU membership in particular, was further discussed by the two delegations. Members additionally devoted some time for discussion on energy policies in Iceland and in the EU.

(The 11th meeting was scheduled for 1999 but was postponed due to the delayed procedures in the European Parliament to constitute its parliamentary bodies following the European elections in 1999.)

At the *12th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in April 2001 the EP delegation briefed its counterpart on the political, economic and institutional situation in the EU, including the Nice Treaty, the Economic and Monetary Union, and the European and Defence Policy (ESDP). The follow-up of the discussion on the EU-Iceland relations and the place of Iceland in European co-operation from the previous meeting was also on the agenda.

The two delegations also had an exchange of views on the future enlargement of the EU and the perspectives for the EEA, the Schengen Agreement, and the Northern Dimension and Arctic Region, as well as energy and fishery policies in Iceland and in the EU.

At the *13th interparliamentary meeting* in Reykjavik in June 2002, the delegations focused on the political and economic situation in Iceland, as well as the political, economic and institutional situation in the EU in the context of the Convention on the Future of Europe.

The future enlargement of the EU and the perspectives for the EEA, as well as the Northern Dimension, were also up for discussion, as were energy and fishery policies in Iceland and in the EU.

At the *14th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in March 2003, the discussion was focused on the enlargement of the EU and the perspectives for the EEA Agreement, the Convention on the Future of Europe, the new Action Plan for the Northern Dimension, and policies on fisheries in Iceland and in the EU.

The members further had an exchange of views on the European Security and Defense Policy and relations to the United States.

At the *15th interparliamentary meeting* in Reykjavik in February 2004, the main items on the agenda were the European Union Wider Europe initiative and a Common Security Policy, the enlargement of the EU and the EEA as of 1 May, the Northern Dimension and its second Action Plan, and the Intergovernmental Conference on the Future of Europe. Fishery and energy policies of Iceland and the European Union were also up for discussion.

At the *16th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in June 2005, the delegations discussed the European Unions new Neighbourhood Policy, as well as the Northern Dimension and EU/Iceland - Russia relations.

Members further reflected over the enlargement of the EU and the EEA "one year after", and perspectives on future enlargement, and there was a discussion on the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, as well as the EU Consitution and its future perspectives.

Finally, MPs touched upon fishery, and energy, policy of Iceland and of the European Union.

At the *17th interparliamentary meeting* in Reykjavik in June 2006, the members discussed Iceland-EU relations in the context of EU's new Neighbourhood Policy, enlargement of the EEA, the EEA+ and the Free Trade Zone in the North Atlantic, and the new Northern Dimension Policy.

Another topic on the agenda was the security and defence policies of Iceland and the EU, and as many times before MPs further reflected over maritime and fisheries policies, as well as energy policy of Iceland and the EU.

At the *18th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in September 2007, the members discussed EU-Iceland relations in terms of experiences and perspectives, reform policies of the European Union, and maritime and fisheries policies of Iceland and the Union. Other topics discussed were energy policies and climate change, and security and defence policies of Iceland and of the EU.

At the *19th interparliamentary meeting* in Reykjavik in April 2008 the EU-Iceland relations and the EEA Agreement were discussed, especially the perspectives of the future relations between the EU and Iceland. The official policy of the coalition Government is that a EU membership is not an option for the moment, but the debate is going on in Iceland on these matters. It was clear, that if Iceland would join the EURO zone, Iceland should first become a member of the EU.

Another issue that was discussed at the meeting was the Northern Dimension and its implications for Iceland. The country is now a fully integrated partner in this policy together with Norway, Russia and the EU. However, the greater part of the meeting concentrated on the future energy policies of Iceland and the EU, where an introduction given by Doctor Thorsteinn I. Sigfússon, Director of the Innovation Centre Iceland, Professor and holder of the Global Energy International Prize 2007, animated a lively discussion.

At the 20th EU-Iceland Interparliamentary Meeting on 16 November 2009 in Brussels, members of the European Parliament and the Icelandic Parliament (Althingi) had an exchange of views with Mr Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iceland, Mr Olli Rehn, Commissioner, European Commission and Ms Petra Lärke, Counsellor, the Swedish Presidency on "Iceland's application for EU Membership - Future relations between Iceland and the European Union". The future parliamentary relations between the Althingi and the European Parliament as well as the Lisbon Treaty and the enhanced role of the European Parliament and the EU national parliaments were also debated at the meeting.

The Interparliamentary Meeting unanimously adopted a resolution on the future parliamentary relations between the European Parliament and the Althingi, recommending the establishing of an EU-Iceland Joint Parliamentary Committee as soon as possible to secure parliamentary involvement from the very start of the coming accession negotiations.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher (EP) and Mr Árni Thór Sigurdsson (Althingi).

## **EU-NORWAY PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS**

### **Background**

The earliest EP-*Stortinget* (Norwegian Parliament) contacts took place within the context of the activities of the EP delegation for relations with the countries of Northern Europe. Following the Euro-elections in 1984, the European Parliament set up a separate delegation for relations with Norway. This was an explicit recognition of the special nature of Norway's relations with the

European Community, given that accession negotiations, up to and including ratification in *Stortinget*, had been completed in 1972, in parallel with the accession negotiations concluded with Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

On 25 November 1992, Norway re-applied for EC membership. On 24 March 1993, the EC Commission adopted its opinion on this application. The European Parliament's relations with *Stortinget* were consequently transformed from classical interparliamentary relations with annual meetings of delegations from the two parliaments, to a Joint Parliamentary Committee with a wider mandate, and two meetings per year.

By decision of 11 February 1993, the European Parliament set up its delegations to the EC-Norway Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). This delegation consisted of 12 members, as was the case in the previous delegation for relations with Norway. The EC-Norway JPC was co-chaired initially by Mr Francesco GUIDOLIN (EPP-I) and Mr Gunnar SKAUG (Labour Party). Following the Norwegian elections of September 1993, Mr SKAUG was replaced as Chairman of the Norwegian delegations by Mr Haakon BLANKERBORG (Labour Party).

Accession negotiations with Norway opened in Luxembourg on 5 April 1993, and concluded in Brussels in March 1994. On 4 May 1994, the European Parliament gave its assent to the accession of Norway (by 376 votes in favour, 24 against, with 57 abstentions).

The Norwegian referendum took place on 28 November 1994 (after those in Finland on 16 October and Sweden on 13 November). The result of the election was 52.3% against and 47.7% in favour.

Following the negative outcome of the Norwegian referendum on EU membership, the European Parliament decided, on 18 January 1995, to give responsibility for relations with Norway to the delegation for relations with Switzerland and Iceland, set up by EP decision of 27 October 1994.

## Chairs

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1982 - 1984 | James MOORHOUSE (ED - United Kingdom)     |
| 1984 - 1987 | John TOMLIMSON (SOC - United Kingdom)     |
| 1987 - 1988 | Claus TOKSVIG (ED - Denmark)              |
| 1989        | Frode KRISTOFFERSEN (ED - Denmark)        |
| 1989 - 1992 | Hugh McMAHON (SOC - United Kingdom)       |
| 1992 - 1994 | Francesco GUIDOLIN (EPP - Italy)          |
| 1994        | Anne McINTOSH (EPP - United Kingdom)      |
| 1995 - 1999 | Brian SIMPSON (PES - United Kingdom)      |
| 1999        | Giorgos DIMITRAKOPOULOS (EPP/ED - Greece) |
| 2000 - 2002 | Christos FOLIAS (EPP/ED - Greece)         |
| 2002 - 2003 | Heidi Hautala (Green - Finland)           |
| 2003 - 2004 | Matti Wuori (Green/ALE - Finland)         |
| 2004 - 2007 | Diana WALLIS (ALDE - United Kingdom)      |
| 2007 - 2009 | Bilyana RAEVA (ALDE - Bulgaria)           |
| 2009 -      | Pat the Cope GALLAGHER (ALDE-Ireland)     |

## Interparliamentary meetings

In the period preceding the setting-up of the EC-Norway JPC, a total of 8 EP-Norway interparliamentary meetings took place as follows:

|                         |            |                     |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting | Strasbourg | 15-17 November 1982 |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 2-4 May 1983        |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting | Strasbourg | 11-12 February 1985 |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 26-28 February 1986 |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Strasbourg | 9-10 February 1988  |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 17-20 April 1990    |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Strasbourg | 13-16 May 1991      |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 25-27 March 1992    |

The EC-Norway JPC held three meetings as follows:

|                         |            |                     |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Constituent meeting     | Oslo       | 6-8 June 1993       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting | Strasbourg | 18-19 November 1993 |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting | Tromsø     | 21-22 March 1994    |

To date, this gave a total of 11 meetings between delegations from the European Parliament and *Stortinget*. Following the Norwegian decision not to accede to the EU, there was no longer any legal basis for a JPC and relations between the two parliaments reverted to classical interparliamentary relations with annual meetings, organised alternately in one of the working places of the EP and in Norway.

Subsequent EP-Norway interparliamentary meetings have taken place as follows:

|                          |            |                     |
|--------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 12 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 23-24 November 1995 |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Kirkenes   | 27-30 June 1996     |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Strasbourg | 12 June 1997        |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Stavanger  | 24-25 June 1998     |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 23 November 1999    |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Tromsø     | 21-22 June 2000     |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 5-6 March 2001      |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 17-18th June 2002   |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 19 February 2003    |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 19 February 2004    |
| 22 <sup>nd</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 23-24 May 2005      |
| 23 <sup>rd</sup> meeting | Oslo       | 20 June 2006        |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 26-27 March 2007    |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> meeting | Brussels   | 16 March 2009       |

No interparliamentary meeting took place in 2008, due to difficulties finding a mutual convenient date for both delegations.

## **Subjects discussed at JPC/interparliamentary meetings**

At *previous interparliamentary meetings* discussions centred on bilateral EC-Norway relations, and more generally on EC-EFTA relations. More recently, EEA negotiations tended to dominate EP-Norway discussions, the Norwegians attaching particular importance to the social and environmental aspects of the agreement. As EC-EFTA negotiations moved into the final phases, it became clear that fishery was a key issue for Norway.

At the *8th interparliamentary meeting* in Oslo in March 1992, it was clear that the EEA negotiations and the decisions by Sweden and Finland to apply for EC-membership had re-opened discussion in Norwegian political circles, and among Norwegians in general, of Norway's relations with the EC. Attitudes had been sharply divided regarding a possible application for EC-membership, and in relation to the agreement on a European Economic Area (EEA). The consequences of the 1972 referendum on Norway's application still ran deep.

At the *constituent meeting of the JPC* in Oslo in June 1993, discussions centred on Norway's application for EC membership. A general preoccupation was with retention by Norway of control over natural resources - oil, gas, and fish. The issue of whaling was raised, the European Parliament having adopted a resolution on 27 May 1993, condemning Norway's decision to resume commercial whaling. MPs noted with interest the scientific data presented by the former Minister of Fisheries, Ms Oddrunn PETTERSEN, and the unanimous support for the action of the Norwegian government of all political parties represented in *Stortinget*.

On this occasion, the EP delegation also met representatives of Norwegian business and trades unions. Business interests were generally in favour of EC membership; the unions had no stance and planned a national congress where a position would be taken on the basis of the results of the negotiations. (This congress was scheduled to take place in September 1994; current polls of members of LO (Norway's trade union federation) showed 25% in favour, 43% against - one year earlier, the corresponding figures had been 23% and 49%).

Following the meetings in Oslo, the EP delegation travelled to Ålesund on the west coast to meet representatives of farming and fishing organisations. Norway's farmers firmly opposed EC-membership, fearing that Norwegian income support mechanisms could prove incompatible with the Common Agricultural Policy. Among fishermen, the situation was more nuanced - those who caught the fish were concerned about stock management and about reserving access to Norwegian waters, while fish-farmers operating in coastal waters, and those in the business of processing and marketing fish products, were conscious of the importance of free access for their products to EC markets.

At the *2nd meeting of the JPC* in Strasbourg in November 1993, discussions centred on the recent implementation of the Treaty on European Union, the institutional aspects of the enlargement process, public and parliamentary opinion in Norway, and issues concerning health, social and environmental standards. Norwegian MPs were interested in progress towards an economic and monetary union, and towards a political union with particular reference to moves

towards a common foreign and security policy. In regards to the latter, MPs hailed the role of Norway in the talks between Israel and the PLO.

*At the 3rd (and final) JPC meeting* in Tromsø in March 1994, the differences between the main political parties on the question of Norwegian accession to the EU became clear during the discussions. Representatives of both Norwegian government and parliament expressed the wish that the sitting European Parliament gave its assent before the end of the current legislative term to accession.

This meeting was followed by a tour of Tromsø County, with the emphasis on aquaculture and marine biotechnology, and surveillance and control of marine resources.

*At the 12th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in November 1995, when traditional interparliamentary dialogue between the two parliaments had resumed, the Norwegian MPs demonstrated great interest in the perspectives for the Intergovernmental Conference of 1996 and for possible future enlargement of the EU. The delegations also discussed the European Economic Area, within which Norway conducted its current relations with the EU, as well as the future of EFTA and of Nordic cooperation.

*At the 13th interparliamentary meeting* in Kirkenes in June 1996, talks were dominated by the topics of cooperation between the Nordic countries and Russia in the Barents region, and the environmental problems of Murmansk and the Kola Peninsula. *Stortinget* took advantage of the meeting taking place in the north-easternmost part of Norway and took the EP delegation to Murmansk in north-western Russia, where MPs were deeply affected by a visit to the atomic ice-breaker fleet, moored close to the radioactive waste storage vessel "Lepse". Murmansk's regional and municipal authorities clearly counted on EU aid in tackling their enormous environmental clean-up operations, notably pinning hopes on the TACIS and INTERREG programmes.

Other topics discussed at the meeting were transport and telecommunications, the ongoing Intergovernmental Conference (Norway fulfils the criteria for EMU) and negotiations with a view to Norway's association with the Schengen Agreement.

*At the 14th interparliamentary meeting* in Strasbourg in June 1997, the delegations discussed the Intergovernmental Conference hoping that the Amsterdam Treaty would clarify most of the open questions on the strengthening of the first pillar, unanimity/majority votes, and the role of the European Parliament in the new Treaty.

The meeting also discussed the single market, the EMU and which Member States would be able to participate in a single currency zone. The question of democratic deficit and the possible transfer of decision making from the national to the supranational level was dealt with profoundly by both delegations within the framework of the principle of subsidiarity.

The delegations were of the opinion that the creation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union was a priority item on the political agenda including the incorporation of the WEU and NATO within such a policy.

Questions were also raised about the future perspectives of the Schengen cooperation, the future enlargement of the EU (the Chairman of the Norwegian delegation stated that Norway had no

intention for the time being to apply for EU-membership), the situation on the European salmon market and the relations with Russia.

At the *15th interparliamentary meeting* in Stavanger in June 1998, the main topic was the situation on the European oil and gas market, and the delegations were briefed by, and had an exchange of views with, Mr Helge Hove HALVORSEN, Senior Vice-President of Norsk Hydro (the technology factor and the future of the oil and gas industry), Mr Ottar REKDAL, Vice-President of Statoil (a perspective on the European gas market) and Mr Gunnar BERGE, Director General of Norwegian Petroleum Directorate and former finance minister.

The two delegations further discussed the future enlargement of the EU, especially Cyprus' application and the relations to Turkey, the implementation on the Economic and Monetary Union and its implications for Norway, Norway's and the EU's relations with Russia including the framework agreement between Norway and Russia on nuclear safety and the Northern dimension, the negotiations on the Schengen Agreement and the process of ratifications of the Treaty of Amsterdam, and the EU common fisheries policy after the year 2002.

At the *16th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in November 1999, the main topics were the future enlargement of the EU, based on the Commission's progress report, and the institutional reform in the EU (the forthcoming IGC, voting system in the Council of the EU, number of Commissioners and the drafting of a new European charter on fundamental rights). The delegations had an exchange of views on the role of the European Parliament in this context.

The meeting further included a discussion on the political and economic situation in Norway and in the EU, the Schengen Cooperation in the light of the forthcoming IGC and Norway's participation in the decision-shaping process, the European Security and Defence Identity, including the future role of NATO, the WEU and the EU, as well as the challenge of "non-military security risks".

At the *17th interparliamentary meeting* in Tromsø in June 2000, the EP delegation was briefed on the political and economic situation in Norway after the last general elections in September 1997 where the Labour Party Prime Minister JAGLAND was replaced by Kjell Magne BONDEVIK, leader of the Christian People's Party.

Mrs WALLIS briefed the delegation on current developments in the EU, especially on the ICC on institutional reforms. Mr FOLIAS summarised and evaluated the stages of the EMU as well as perspectives of a common economic policy of the EU.

Finally, Mr SIMPSON introduced the Northern Dimension as launched by the Finnish Presidency and largely supported by the EP. Norway's relations with the EU were mainly governed by the EEA Agreement. On the question of EU membership, it was noted that Norway had negotiated membership terms twice, once in 1972, and subsequently in 1994, both times with a negative result. In March 2000, the Norwegian government presented a report to *Stortinget* on a policy towards Europe in which it gave a broad account of the challenges and opportunities in relation to Europe.

The meeting also discussed the future enlargement of the EU and the European Security and Defence Policy.

The security policy challenges in the Northern areas and the cooperation between Norway and Russia in North West Russia were introduced by Mr Otto MAMELUND, Norwegian General Counsel in Murmansk, Russia.

At the *18th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in March 2001, the main item on the agenda was the white paper "Norway and Europe at the Dawn of a New Century" issued by the Norwegian government. The EP delegation further briefed the Norwegian side on the latest developments on the Nice Treaty, the Economic and Monetary Union, and the European Security and Defence Policy.

The meeting also had an exchange of views on the future enlargement of the European Union including the perspective for the EEA Agreement as well as the Northern Dimension, and Norway's and the EU's relations to Russia.

At the *19th interparliamentary meeting* in Oslo in June 2002, the main items on the agenda were the political situation in Norway, fisheries policies in Norway and in the EU, the future enlargement of the EU and the perspectives for the EEA Agreement, the political, economic and institutional situation in the EU, and the Convention on the Future of Europe.

At the *20th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in February 2003, the main topic discussed was the future of Europe based on briefings by Mr Jens-Peter BONDE, EP member on the Convention on the Future of Europe, and Mr Inge LØNNING (Conservative Party and President of the Nordic Council).

Mr Haakon BLANKENBORG (Labour Party) and Mr Bartho PRONK (EPP-ED, NL) briefed members on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESPD). The delegations discussed the future role of NATO and the relations to the USA in the light of the Iraq crisis. Mrs Diana WALLIS (ELDR, UK) presented the New Action Plan for the Northern Dimension and Mr Finn Martin VALLERSNES (Conservative Party) underlined the importance of the co-operation between Norway and North West Russia.

The delegation finally dealt with the enlargement of the European Union and the perspectives for the EEA Agreement. Mrs HAUTALA and Mr JAGLAND introduced the topic stating that the EU enlargement was in its final stage with EU referenda coming up in most of the acceding countries. In the ongoing negotiations for adapting the EEA Agreement in the context of the EU enlargement, the contributions from the EFTA countries to the EU cohesion funds play an essential role.

At the *21st interparliamentary meeting* in Oslo in February 2004, the main topics on the agenda were the European Union Wider Europe initiative, the Northern Dimension and its Second Action Plan, EU/Norway-Russia relations, the state of play of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Future of Europe, the enlargement of the EU and the EEA as of 1 May, fisheries policies of Norway and the European Union as well as Norwegian and EU energy policies. The chairpersons of the delegations furthermore gave overviews of the economic and political situation in Norway and in the EU.

At the *22nd interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels in May 2005, the members discussed, in the context of the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy, a report on Norway's Future Strategy towards Challenges in the High North, which included the Northern Dimension as well as

EU/Norway-Russia relations. They further touched upon the EU Constitution and its future perspective, as well as future enlargement of the EU and the EEA. Other topics on the agenda at the 22nd meeting were regional policies, fisheries policy, and energy policies of Norway and of the European Union.

At the *23rd interparliamentary meeting* in Oslo in June 2006, the policies of the High North, including the new Northern Dimension Policy and EU/Norway relations with Russia, were on the agenda. Another important subject discussed was EU-Norway relations regarding the EEA enlargement, EEA+, and EU's new Neighbourhood Policy. Members further held an exchange of views on the topics of energy and environment policies, as well as maritime and fisheries policies, of Norway and the European Union.

At the *24th interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels on 26-27 March 2007, the policies discussed were EEA legislation and enlargement, the Services Directive, the High North, energy policies, maritime and fishery policies. Promotion of the decent work agenda in the world and the EU contributions to its implementation was presented by Ms Marie PANAYOTOPOULOS-CASSIOTOU. Much discussion was on the nature of Norwegian participation in EEA law-shaping as well as other areas where Norway has important interests. Concerning energy policies, supply, competition and climate change were three main areas. The emission trade scheme was also brought up. The meeting ended with discussions on "Demographic Developments: A framework for measures to reconcile family life with the periods of studies for young people". Ms PANAYOTOPOULOS-CASSIOTOU made specific points about the importance of dealing with the problems of an older population as well as with that of young people's problems, and interlinking this to the working world.

At the *25th Interparliamentary meeting* in Brussels on the 16th March 2009, Co-chaired by Ms Bilyana Raeva, Chair of the SINEEA Delegation and Mr Olav Akselsen, Chair of the Norwegian delegation, members discussed the Development of the EU, the High North and relations with Russia, transatlantic relations, energy and climate, the financial crisis and the EEA and future EU-Norway relations. Furthermore, on request of the Norwegian delegation, the controversial question on trade in seal products was raised at the meeting. On the background of the total ban on trade in seal products as proposed by the Internal Market Committee (Wallis report), the Norwegian members stated that this was not justified, neither on environmental nor on animal-welfare grounds. Hunting of animals is commonplace throughout the EU and the Norwegian seal hunt, conducted according to ethically acceptable standards, should not be affected by a trade ban, should the EU adopt the proposed regulation.

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