

NEWSLETTER

Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments

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New era of inter-parliamentary cooperation heralded by the Lisbon Treaty

Colleagues often seem to be puzzled by the more frequent and increasing number of activities, events and other issues related to national Parliaments. Have national Parliaments become a trendy issue? Is inter-parliamentary cooperation the new fashion? In fact, there is a simpler explanation. The Lisbon Treaty has opened the doors to a greater role for national Parliaments in European Union affairs, while also placing the European Parliament at the centre of the European Union's legislative process. Therefore, a new era of inter-parliamentary cooperation began on 1 December 2009.

And what does the Lisbon Treaty then say?

Often referred to as "The Treaty of Parliaments", already an indication of its potential to develop the parliamentary dimension of the European Union, the Treaty of Lisbon is the first EU Treaty with a specific article on the role of national Parliaments. In fact, it contains 14 references to national Parliaments (in 12 Articles and 2 Protocols). These references grant significant rights to national Parliaments which can be divided into three categories:

- **Subsidiarity:** expressing objections to draft legislation not complying with this EU principle. Football rules inspired the reference to yellow, orange and red cards which national Parliaments may now use when they detect a non-respect of subsidiarity.
- **Involvement:** participating actively in inter-parliamentary cooperation with the European Parliament and especially in areas such as the possible conventions dealing with Treaty changes and in monitoring Europol and Eurojust.
- **Information:** being informed by the EU Institutions of major developments in European policies.

The European Parliament meeting the new challenges

The European Parliament and national Parliaments have, during recent months, worked hard to enhance the parliamentary dimension of the European Union and thus reinforce its democratic basis.

In particular, the European Parliament:

- Set up a **Steering Group** to reflect on internal measures for the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. Its recommendations, which will be on the agenda of the Conference of Presidents after the summer break, include the need for a more coherent and coordinated approach to the organisation of all inter-parliamentary activities.
- Decided to foster the **new IPEX website** and thus further facilitate the information exchange network. IPEX (Inter-parliamentary EU Information Exchange) provides a platform for the electronic exchange of EU-related information between national Parliaments and the European Parliament in the Union.
- Modified its **rules of procedure** to take account of the Treaty of Lisbon's new provisions on the role of national Parliaments.
- Is actively involved in bringing existing organs in the field of inter-parliamentary cooperation in line with the new institutional arrangements:
 - › On 14 May 2010, the **EU Speakers Conference** concluded that there should be further reflection with the European Parliament on how to scrutinize the new policies as far as Security, Defence, Justice and Home Affairs are concerned.
 - › In parallel, the European Parliament participates in the discussions on the future role of the **Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs** (COSAC).

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has also seen a reorganisation of the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments in order to enable it to focus more on the institutional innovations of the Treaty. Therefore its new **Legislative Dialogue Unit** concentrates on facilitating the smoother and more efficient programming and organisation of inter-parliamentary committee meetings as well as ensuring new mechanisms to take account of the ever growing number of national Parliaments' opinions and contributions on EU legislation. The new **Institutional Cooperation Unit** focuses on enhancing the role of the European Parliament in various inter-parliamentary fora (Conference of EU Speakers, COSAC, Joint Parliamentary Meetings, Joint Committee Meetings, IPEX, ECPD, etc.) as well as covering relations with the parliaments of the Western Balkans and candidate countries.

The data

As of 14 July, the EU Institutions have so far received five reasoned opinions from national Parliaments expressing the view that specific draft legislative acts do not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. The objections to five separate proposals have come from the French and Polish Senates, the Austrian Nationalrat, the Italian Senate and the German Bundesrat.

The name

The Belgian Federal Parliament is undertaking a number of inter-parliamentary activities, some with the European Parliament, in the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers. Additional information is available at:

<http://www.parlement-eu2010.be/en/index.html>

Wishing you all happy and relaxing holidays,

The Directorate Team

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NDLR: Following Newsletters will focus mainly on specific news linked to inter-parliamentary events and activities.