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Conferentie van Voorzitters van de parlementen van de Europese Unie

Nr. 5

VERSLAG VAN EEN CONFERENTIE VAN DE VOORZITTERS VAN DE PARLEMENTEN VAN DE EUROPESE UNIE

Vastgesteld 15 september 2008

Van 20 t/m 21 juni 2008 vond in Lissabon, Portugal, een conferentie plaats van de Voorzitters van de parlementen van de Europese Unie. Namens de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal nam de Voorzitter, Gerdi Verbeet deel. Zij werd begeleid door de Griffier van de Tweede Kamer, Jacqueline Biesheuvel-Vermeijden, het Hoofd van de Stafdienst Voorlichting, Jos Jochemsen, en door de stafmedewerker van de Griffier, Gonnje de Boer. De Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal was niet in de gelegenheid de conferentie bij te wonen. De Griffier van de Eerste Kamer, Geert Jan Hamilton, was wel aanwezig.

Het programma van de conferentie, de conclusies van het voorzitterschap en de speech die de Voorzitter uitsprak zijn bij dit verslag gevoegd.

N.G. de Boer
stafmedewerker Griffier
Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal

Informeel debat over het Verdrag van Lissabon

In Lissabon vond voor het eerst een informeel debat plaats in kleine kring – deelname was beperkt tot de Voorzitters zelf en één ander lid uit hun delegatie. Oorspronkelijk was het de bedoeling te spreken over de gevolgen, met name voor de nationale parlementen, van de op niet al te lange termijn verwachte inwerkingtreding van het Verdrag van Lissabon. Met het «nee» van de Ierse bevolking in een referendum over het verdrag op 12 juni kwam de discussie echter in een ander licht te staan. De voorzitter van het Ierse lagerhuis benadrukte dat de uitslag niet moest worden gezien als een stem tegen Europa. Er waren verschillende redenen voor de negatieve uitkomst van de volksraadpleging maar deze betekende geenszins dat Ieren negatief waren over Europese integratie. Net als in Nederland en Frankrijk in 2005 was onbegrip een van de voornaamste redenen voor mensen om «nee» te stemmen tegen het verdrag. Blijkbaar slaagt de politiek er nog steeds niet in om duidelijk uit te leggen was Europa wel en niet voor de bevolking betekent en zou kunnen betekenen, aldus de Ierse Voorzitter.

De parlementsvoorzitters van de overige lidstaten en van het Europees Parlement (EP) toonden begrip voor de Ierse positie. Iedereen erkende de risico's van de kloof die in de loop der jaren is ontstaan tussen de Europese instellingen en de Europese bevolking. Er werd door velen benadrukt dat de nationale parlementen een grote verantwoordelijkheid dragen waar het gaat om het dichtens van die kloof. De voorzitter van het Britse lagerhuis opperde in dat kader dat herinvoering van het dubbelmandaat profijteloos zou kunnen zijn. Niemand wilde paniek zaaien of te haastig conclusies trekken over het verdere verloop van het ratificatieproces, maar allen erkenden wel dat er een ernstige impasse was ontstaan en dat er geen «plan B» klaarlag om hier uit te komen.

Plenaire debatten

Gevolgen voor de nationale parlementen van de EU en het EP van het Verdrag van Lissabon

Het Verdrag van Lissabon geeft zowel aan nationale parlementen als aan het EP nieuwe verantwoordelijkheden en een versterkte rol bij de Europese besluitvorming. Nationale parlementen worden straks in een vroegere fase betrokken bij de totstandkoming van Europese wetgeving door middel van de zogeheten gele en oranje kaart procedures. Nu al wordt via o.a. de COSAC gestreefd naar nauwere samenwerking tussen de parlementen om die procedures effectief invulling te geven. Het EP krijgt ook meer bevoegdheden. De grootste winst voor het EP is dat met het nieuwe verdrag op vrijwel alle beleidsterreinen het recht van codecisie krijgt. Er blijven nog maar een paar terreinen over waar dit niet geldt (o.a. justitie-samenwerking en buitenlands beleid), daar behouden landen hun veto-recht in de Raad.

Door deze ontwikkelingen wordt het van nog groter belang om nauwer te gaan samenwerken als nationale parlementen onderling en met het EP. Als nationale parlementen onderling omdat er meer «massa» nodig is in de Raad, en met het EP omdat deze op bijna alle terreinen medewetgever gaat worden.

De Voorzitters waren positief over de rechtstreekse toezending van Commissievoorstellingen aan de nationale parlementen, sinds twee jaar. Zij spraken tevens hun waardering uit voor de bereidheid van de Commissie

om te antwoorden op de door de parlementen ingezonden reacties op die voorstellen.

Alle Voorzitters waren het er over eens dat – ondanks dat het ratificatieproces nog niet is afgerond – de nationale parlementen en het EP door moesten gaan met de ontwikkeling van procedures voor versterkte samenwerking. Een voorstel om daartoe een werkgroep in het leven te roepen haalde het niet omdat de COSAC onlangs een werkgroep heeft opgericht met een vergelijkbare opdracht. Wel is besloten dat de Voorzittersconferentie de resultaten van het werk van die COSAC werkgroep zal meenemen in een bredere beschouwing van de wijze waarop nationale parlementen in staat kunnen worden gesteld om de nieuwe bevoegdheden die het Verdrag van Lissabon hen toekent, zo goed mogelijk uit te oefenen.

Een voorstel van het Portugese voorzitterschap, om de Voorzitter voortaan tweemaal per jaar bijeen te laten komen en de vergadering te koppelen aan het tijdstip van de Europese Raad behaalde geen meerderheid.

Participatie van vrouwen in politiek

De Voorzitter van het Oostenrijkse parlement, Barbara Prammer, trad op als rapporteur voor dit onderwerp. De Voorzitters van het Estse parlement, Ene Ergma, het Hongaarse parlement, Katalin Szili, en de Voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer, Gerdi Verbeet, traden op als co-rapporteurs. Het onderwerp is op hun verzoek, na een bijeenkomst in Salzburg in augustus 2007, voor de EU voorzittersconferentie geagendeerd. Het Portugese parlement heeft ter voorbereiding op dit agendapunt een questionnaire rondgestuurd om te inventariseren hoeveel vrouwen er lid zijn van de diverse parlementen, hoe actief zij zijn en of er beleid is om de participatie van vrouwen in de landelijke politiek actief te bevorderen.

Ondanks het feit dat Europa internationaal redelijk goed scoort waar het gaat om de participatie van vrouwen in politiek zijn er binnen de EU grote verschillen tussen lidstaten. Qua vrouwelijke parlementariërs scoort Malta het laagst met 8.7% en Zweden het hoogst met 47.3%. Nederland bekleedt een positie aan de hoge kant van het spectrum met 39.3% vrouwen in de Tweede Kamer en 35% in de Eerste Kamer, maar valt op vanwege de uitsluiting van vrouwen bij vertegenwoordigende lichamen door de SGP. Geen enkel ander Europees land kent een partij met vergelijkbaar beleid. Over het algemeen is een voorzichtige opwaartse trend te constateren en nemen vrouwen iets vaker deel aan de politiek, maar er is nog veel ruimte voor verdere verbetering.

Door de diverse Voorzitters werd onder meer gepleit voor actieve en voor spoedige implementatie van de maatregelen die in de EU Routekaart voor gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen uiteen zijn gezet. Er werd gewezen op het eigenlijke democratische deficit dat bestaat nu vrouwen zo ondervertegenwoordigd zijn in besluitvormende organen. Quota's, betere kinderopvang, aangepaste vergadertijden, bewustwording en vervangingsregelingen bij zwangerschap of langdurige ziekte werden genoemd als mogelijke maatregelen die kunnen leiden tot verhoogde politieke participatie van vrouwen.

IPEX

De Voorzitter van het Deense parlement, Thor Pedersen, gaf een presentatie over de nieuwe eigenschappen van de IPEX website. De meeste parlementen, zo werd geconstateerd, vullen de site met enige regelmaat aan met informatie over de fase van hun behandeling van Commissie-

voorstellen en andere gerelateerde informatie. Voor zover dat niet het geval was werd het verzoek herhaald dit vooral te doen, een tijdige uitwisseling van informatie wordt met de gele en oranje kaart procedures immers nog belangrijker. Op de IPEX Board, de vertegenwoordigers van de nationale parlementen in Brussel en het COSAC secretariaat werd het beroep gedaan om behulpzaam te zijn bij het faciliteren van de informatiestromen tussen de nationale parlementen. Op de Europese Commissie werd het beroep gedaan om te zorgen voor tijdige publicatie van stukken zodat deze ook tijdig op de IPEX site kunnen worden geplaatst.

De Duitse Bundestag wordt vanaf september 2008 lid van de IPEX Board. Het voorstel, om de IPEX information officer vanaf januari 2009 door alle parlementen gezamenlijk te financieren was reeds op de Griffiersconferentie goedgekeurd. Op de Voorzittersconferentie werd aangekondigd dat zesendertig kamers inmiddels schriftelijk hadden laten weten mee te zullen werken aan het gezamenlijke financieringssysteem. De kamers die dit nog niet hadden gedaan werden opgeroepen dit alsnog te doen.

Werkgroepen

De nieuwe tekst van de «Guidelines for inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union» is door de Voorzitters, met dank aan de werkgroep interparlementaire samenwerking, goedgekeurd en vastgesteld.

De task force «assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies» is bedankt voor het tot nu toe verrichte werk en is verzocht om verder te gaan met het doen van voorstellen voor verdere stroomlijning van parlementaire assistentieprogramma's. Daartoe zal de task force verder praten met de Europese Commissie, om te bezien in hoeverre deze samenwerkingsmogelijkheden ziet met nationale parlementen waar het gaat om projecten en programma's op het gebied van technische assistentie aan parlementen in ontwikkelingslanden. Tevens zal met de Commissie worden gesproken over de mogelijkheid van actieve informatievoorziening aan de nationale parlementen over programma's, tenders en verzoeken om ondersteuning op het gebied van parlementaire activiteiten.

Om te komen tot een betere informatie-uitwisseling tussen nationale parlementen onderling, over activiteiten die zij ontpoien op het gebied van ondersteuning aan parlementen van ontwikkelende democratieën wordt IPEX ingezet. Het is de bedoeling dat alle nationale parlementen informatie plaatsen over projecten waar zij aan meewerken en activiteiten die zij zelf ondernemen, om zoveel mogelijk te voorkomen dat er dubbel werk wordt gedaan in sommige landen en andere landen juist niet aan bod komen. Op die manier kan ook door nationale parlementen vaker samen worden gewerkt aan projecten.

Toekomst van de EU na het Verdrag van Lissabon

Veel Voorzitters spraken de hoop uit dat er snel een oplossing wordt gevonden voor de na het Ierse «nee» ontstane impasse, omdat met name de verkiezingen voor het Europees Parlement in 2009 dan nog op basis van het Verdrag van Nice moeten worden gehouden en ook de nieuwe Commissie dan op basis van Nice moet worden ingericht. Niettemin werd ook erkend dat de EU gewoon doorwerkt en dat de referenda in Nederland en Frankrijk in 2005 en in Ierland dit jaar steeds duidelijk maken dat burgers vooral willen zien dat de EU daadwerkelijk optreedt om concrete problemen en vraagstukken aan te pakken.

Met name op terreinen als energie, terrorismebestrijding, economische stabiliteit en werkgelegenheid hebben burgers behoefte aan zekerheid en heeft de EU ook veel te bieden. Ook klimaatverandering en de ontwikkeling van alternatieve energiebronnen kunnen goed in EU-verband samen worden aangepakt, en kennisuitwisseling en innovatie kunnen ook meer baat hebben dan nu bij grensoverschrijdende samenwerking.

De conferentie werd door de Voorzitter van het Portugese parlement afgesloten met het presenteren van de conclusies van het Voorzitterschap.

PROGRAMMA CONFERENTIE

Vrijdag 20 juni

09:00	vertrek Voorzitters en één begeleidend delegatielid van de hotels naar het parlement
09:15	welkom
09:30	informele bijeenkomst Voorzitters en begeleidende delegatieleden
11:30	vertrek overige delegatieleden van de hotels naar Aguas Livres Aqueduct voor een rondleiding
12:40	vertrek Voorzitters en begeleidend delegatielid van parlement naar National Palace of Ajuda
12:50	lunch aangeboden door President van de Portugese Republiek
12:50	vertrek overige delegatieleden van Aguas Livres Aqueduct naar parlement voor lunch
14:45	vertrek Voorzitters en begeleidend delegatielid van National Palace of Ajuda naar parlement
15:00	aanvang plenaire vergadering
18:30	einde plenaire vergadering fotomoment
20:10	vertrek van hotels naar Jerónimos Monastery
20:30	diner
23:00	vertrek van Jerónimos Monastery naar hotels

Zaterdag 21 juni

08:40	vertrek delegaties van de hotels naar het parlement
09:00	voortzetting plenaire vergadering
13:00	conclusies en einde plenaire vergadering

SPEECH VOORZITTER TWEDE KAMER

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Nearly 40% of the members of the Dutch House of Representatives are women, a figure of which I am proud! We have come a long way, from a mere handful of female MPs in 1946 to a place in the top five of IPU parliaments today. The ratio of women to men should be 50–50. But according to the IPU, at the current rate, it will take at least until 2050 to reach that level.

I would like to tell you a bit more about the situation in the Netherlands. About the importance of women participation in politics. And about the measures we can take to reach the desired 50–50 level a bit sooner.

Several measures have been taken in the Netherlands over the past years to increase the participation of women in politics.

- Most political parties are voluntarily but consciously placing more women on their candidate lists, one party even consistently chooses for a 50–50 divide. Women and men in this (my!) party occupy alternate positions on the list.
- Female representatives on a local, regional and national level can be replaced temporarily during pregnancy.
- The House of Representatives has its very own nursery, which we have called «The Little House».

Why is it important that women participate in politics?

The more representative political bodies are, the more the political agenda will reflect the issues of concern in society. If the ratio of women to men in society is pretty much 50–50, representative bodies should be of a similar composition. Women in our Parliament have played an agenda-setting role ever since they became electable. Issues such as equality in marriage, a shared responsibility for home care, economic independence, sexual self-determination and domestic violence have all been raised by female politicians. Results in these areas were partly achieved by women politicians working together across party lines.

Women, dear colleagues, are very good at strategic cooperation!

Each policy under consideration should be screened with the position of women in mind. How are the gender relations? Are special measures required to strengthen the position of women? Women politicians still tend to pose these questions more often than their male colleagues. It makes a difference when women participate in politics!

Participation of women in local and regional politics is important as well. Unfortunately, in the Netherlands the level is stagnating at around 25%.

Ladies and gentlemen, why is this the case?

Local representatives almost always combine their political work with a regular job. Add to that the daily care for the home front and the combination becomes nearly impossible for women. Thus they must choose between a regular career and an often lower paid function in local politics.

And there are other examples of obstacles that women are still confronted with in their endeavour to participate in politics and on the labour market: the glass ceiling, old boys' networks, and unequal pay. All three still exist in the Netherlands.

And the solution? Policies aimed at facilitating a balanced distribution of work and care for women and men. This is an essential requirement for increased participation by women in the labour market as well as in politics.

Measures I mentioned before, such as pregnancy leave and child care, have become indispensable. And according to the European Commission, mentorship is a particularly effective tool to increase women's political participation. And finally, courses and work placements aimed at political participation by women from ethnic minorities have added value as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I conclude, I would like to stress that women not only promote women's issues. They consider themselves politicians first and have gained access to policy areas traditionally not considered theirs, such as transport, defence and economics.

A high percentage of women in politics is not only fair from a democratic point of view, it also increases the likelihood of gender-sensitive political agendas. I don't believe we need another forty-plus years to reach the 50-50 ratio. Child and home care should be compatible with participation in society and politics. It just requires facilities.

Women must be left the choice to be politically active. Let us make it our responsibility to make this possible!

Thank you for your attention.

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary remarks

The annual Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments was held in the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, in Lisbon, on 19–21 June 2008. The Speakers or their appointed designates, from 37 parliamentary chambers of the 27 Member States of the European Union, and the European Parliament, as well as the President of the European Commission, the Prime-Minister of Portugal and a Vice-President of the European Parliament participated in the Conference. The Speakers of two of the candidate countries were also present. The Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, Mr. Jaime Gama, chaired the proceedings.

For the first time, the Speakers' Conference was divided into two parts. The first part was explicitly reserved to the Speakers from the Parliaments of the EU Member States and the European Parliament, in order to allow the Speakers a direct exchange of views in an informal environment. The second part followed the traditional arrangements of the Conference, in which the Speakers debated the presentations made on the different items on the agenda: The process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon; The Strengthening of the European Construction: new responsibilities of national parliaments and partnership with the European Parliament; Women's participation in political life; New functionalities of IPEX; Conclusions of the Working Groups (Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and Assistance to new emerging democracies); Challenges and priorities of the European Agenda; and Conclusions and closing of the Conference.

The informal debate on the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon was opened by the Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic, Mr. Jaime Gama, who allowed the Speakers to debate the theme.

The topic on the «The Strengthening of the European Construction: new responsibilities of national parliaments and partnership with the European Parliament» was addressed by the following Keynote Speakers: the President of the Assembly of the Republic, Jaime Gama; the President of the National Assembly of Slovenia, France Cukjati and the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Manuel dos Santos.

The subject on «Women's participation in political life» was introduced by the President of the Nationalrat of Austria, Barbara Prammer, and followed by the Co-Keynote Speakers: the President of the Estonian Parliament, Ene Ergma; the President of the Hungarian National Assembly, Katalin Szili; and the President of the Dutch House of Representatives, Gerdi Verbeet.

The President of the Parliament of Denmark, Thor Pedersen, presented the new functionalities of IPEX. The subject related to the Conclusions of the Working Groups – Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and Assistance to new emerging democracies – was addressed by the Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic, Jaime Gama. Following this presentation, the new Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union were adopted by consensus.

The last item on the agenda, «Challenges and priorities of the European Agenda», was presented by the Prime Minister of Portugal, José Sócrates; the President of the National Assembly of France, Bernard Accoyer; and the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durao Barroso.

The conclusions and closing of the Conference were lead by the Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic, Jaime Gama.

Conclusions of the Presidency

Regarding the first part of the Conference – informal meeting¹ – the Speakers had the opportunity to hold a lively debate on **the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon**.

The first informal meeting between the Speakers from the Parliaments of the EU Member States and the European Parliament allowed the Speakers to exchange views on the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The Speakers exchanged their views, showing due respect for the outcome of the Irish referendum, on the current situation regarding the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, underlining the need for a common approach to the definition of the future of the European Union, as well as emphasizing the role of national parliaments on the development of the relationship with the European Union and the citizens.

The Speakers recalled that the purpose of the Treaty of Lisbon is to help an enlarged Union to act more effectively and more democratically. They noted that the parliaments in 19 Member States have ratified the Treaty and that the ratification process continues in other countries.

The Speakers considered that the results of this exercise – informal meeting – were quite substantive, providing them with the opportunity to express and directly exchange views on the main topics of the current EU and global agendas.

The Strengthening of the European Construction: new responsibilities of National Parliaments and partnership with the European Parliament

The Speakers welcome a strengthened role of national parliaments in EU affairs, both at the EU and national level, which enables a reinforced involvement in the EU decision-making process, noting, however, that it is up to national parliaments, alone and collectively, to assure the full use of their rights, in order to meet the best interest of citizens.

Considering the Treaty of Lisbon, «*National Parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union*» (Art. 12 TEU), it «*encourage[s] greater involvement of National Parliaments in the activities of the European Union*» (PRNP) and «*enhance[s] their ability to express their views*» (PRNP).

The new responsibilities of national parliaments in the context of the Treaty were presented as follows:

1. Broader access to information;
2. Participation in EU Information/Communication/Notification procedures;
3. Participation in evaluation and control mechanisms (e.g. Europol and Eurojust);
4. Monitoring the principle of subsidiarity (the 8 weeks early warning mechanism);
5. Inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The recent developments concerning national parliaments, namely the European Commission's transmission mechanism of its proposals to national parliaments, not only strengthen their role towards the European institutional culture, but also provide an opportunity to develop their own

¹ This part of the meeting was reserved to the EU Speakers, following a 1+1 format, i.e., only one Speaker and one staff member (Secretary-General or an advisor).

domestic scrutiny systems on European – legislative and non-legislative – proposals and, subsequently, to improve the effectiveness of the collaboration amongst national parliaments – mostly through IPEX, COSAC and the Permanent Representatives of national parliaments in Brussels – in order to reach common goals.

The Speakers encourage the European Commission to carry on with the process of transmission of the proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments and welcome the efforts of the Commission to respond to the reactions submitted by national parliaments (as a result of their scrutiny efforts) and to take them into account in further policy formulation.

The Speakers would welcome a more direct involvement of European citizens in the EU decision-making process, namely through their direct representatives in the national parliaments and believe that the enhanced role of the European Parliament as a co-legislator, as foreseen by the Treaty of Lisbon, can also contribute to a greater transparency and democratic legitimacy of the decisions taken at the EU level.

The Speakers discussed the proposal of the Speakers from the Slovenian and Italian Parliaments aimed at creating a working group on the implementation of the provisions on the role of national parliaments laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon. Since COSAC has already created a WG on a similar issue, the Conference of Speakers should reflect on the outcome of the COSAC WG within the framework of the revised Hague Guidelines.

The Speakers, taking into account the work of the COSAC WG, consider it appropriate to start a joint reflection regarding the criteria and procedures for the implementation of the new powers vested in the national parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon, so that they can be implemented as soon as the progress with the process of ratification allows it. Thus, they hope that it will be possible to establish a fruitful dialogue with the European institutions on these matters.

The Speakers took note of the proposal of the Speaker of the French National Assembly to promote, for the countries that so wish, the anticipated implementation of the provisions laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon, which attributes new responsibilities to national parliaments, and invited the French Presidency to present a proposal on that subject during the next EU Speakers' Conference, in Paris.

The Speakers call upon the trio of presidencies – French, Czech and Swedish – to work closely together in order to contribute to better working methods to develop the cooperation between the parliaments in the European Union.

The Speakers also took note of the proposal of the Speaker from the Portuguese Parliament on the idea of changing the periodicity of the Conference to a semester basis, in order to follow the rhythm of the EU Presidency.

Women's participation in political life

When preparing the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments, the Assembly of the Republic carried out a questionnaire devoted to «Women's participation in political life», in order to assess the quantitative and the qualitative level of the participation of women in political life in the EU Member States, in the European Parliament and in the candidate

countries, during the last two legislatures. All parliaments have answered the questionnaire.

The Speakers conclude that, although Europe is internationally in the vanguard in terms of women's participation in political decision-making, there is still plenty to be done. The representation of women in leading political positions needs to be reinforced. Gender equality should be pursued in accordance with the policies outlined in the EU road map, backed by awareness-raising and a legal framework. Raising awareness for gender mainstreaming could contribute to a greater participation of women in political life.

The exchange of information initiated in this Conference can serve as a useful evaluation platform.

IPEX

The Speakers acknowledge and welcome the development of the IPEX website, during its second year of implementation. The new features enabling advanced search and subscription, as well as the new IPEX brochures, containing information about the database, in all the official languages of the EU, are especially welcome.

The Speakers observe that a majority of the national parliaments regularly update their national pages concerning the EU scrutiny carried out by their Parliaments.

In order to ensure that IPEX enhances its role a tool for exchanging scrutiny information even further, especially within the framework of the Treaty of Lisbon – and within the scope of the subsidiarity check and the application of the early warning mechanism, the Speakers:

- Encourage national parliaments to update their scrutiny information in real time, mutually informing each other about their relevant scrutiny activities during the eight-week period. In addition, the Speakers encourage national parliaments to include summaries in English or French and other languages of important decisions, and in relation with the relevant internal scrutiny procedures which were followed;
- Ask the IPEX Board and the permanent representatives of national parliaments in Brussels, together with the COSAC Secretariat, to develop their cooperation and dialogue in order to organize best practices of ensuring the flow of information especially with regards to the subsidiarity mechanism laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon;
- Invite the European Commission to promptly make available, for publication on IPEX: documents with the relevant metadata, the date on which the period of eight weeks will expire, as well as reasoned opinions from national parliaments and the Commission's responses to them;
- Welcome the German Bundestag as a member of the IPEX Board as of September 2008;

¹ Austria (Lower and Upper House), Belgium (Lower and Upper House), Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic (Lower and Upper House), Denmark, Finland, France (Lower and Upper House), Germany (Lower House), Greece, Hungary, Ireland (Lower and Upper House), Italy (Lower and Upper House), Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands (Lower House), Poland (Lower and Upper House), Portugal, Romania (Lower and Upper House), Slovenia (Lower House), Slovakia, Spain (Lower and Upper House) Sweden and the UK (Lower and Upper House).

The Speakers thank the Parliaments of Denmark, Italy, Finland and Sweden for financing the IPEX Information Officer until the end of 2008 and welcome the support of the European Parliament in providing all the necessary facilities for hosting this officer.

The Speakers welcome the letters of intent already received from thirty six Parliamentary Chambers¹ expressing their commitment to participate in the co-financing of the IPEX Information Officer and invite all national parliaments to participate in the co-financing scheme of the Information Officer. The Speakers acknowledge that the scheme should enter into force in January 2009.

Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation

The Conference of Speakers welcomes the work of the Working Group on Inter-parliamentary Cooperation, which has concluded its works on the new version of the Guidelines for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union, adopting them, by consensus. The new Guidelines are a more flexible, concise and permanent instrument and reflect the recent developments of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The new Guidelines also represent a strengthening of the role of national parliaments as well as an added value for the inter-parliamentary cooperation effort in the EU, especially taking into consideration that national parliaments are the ultimate source of democratic legitimacy. The Conference of Speakers considers that national parliaments should reinforce their coordination while maintaining their autonomy when discussing subjects of common concern, and that established cooperation schemes must be further developed.

Assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies

The Speakers appreciate the efforts made and results achieved by the Portuguese Presidency in pursuing the objective set out by the Conference of Speakers in Bratislava concerning the improvement of cooperation of EU Parliaments and the Parliaments of the New and Emerging Democracies (NEDs).

The Speakers underline the need for better cooperation between the EU Parliaments and the Commission on NEDs, particularly within the framework of the initiatives managed by the European Commission for providing assistance to Parliaments of new and emerging democracies.

The Speakers welcome the support from IPEX concerning the work on the NEDs assistance project, especially the publication of the survey containing national parliaments' data collection files on NEDs Assistance Programmes and Projects.

The Speakers support the alteration of the name of the NEDs Project to «Parliament to Parliament Cooperation».

The Portuguese Presidency will inform the European Commission of the current state of progress on this matter and also request collaboration on the reciprocal collection and provision of information, particularly concerning the exchange of information with EU parliaments on programmes, calls for tender and requests for parliamentary assistance submitted directly to the national parliaments.

The Speakers recommend that the incoming Presidency, with the support of the Task Force:

- Continues to explore with the European Commission the possibility to improve the management and the involvement of national parliaments in the current procedures and projects of assistance funded by the EU Budget;
- Continues updating the information of the national parliaments on their «Parliament to Parliament» assistance activities;
- Takes appropriate measures for maintaining and extending the exchange of information on this subject.

Challenges and priorities of the European Agenda

In the light of the discussions, the Presidency identified the following challenges and priorities of the European Union:

- stressing the fact that the EU constitutes an important pillar of the international system and encourage all the European leaders to act jointly in order to strengthen the role of the EU in the world-wide community of States;
- calling upon the defence of peace, fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law, including the respect for international law, stability and prosperity in the world and appeals to the EU to contribute to the effective realization of those ideals;
- underlining the need to reinforce Europe's security for its citizens and for the European continent, by fighting against terrorism, ensuring EU solidarity in energy security, strengthening the European Security and Defence Policy, regional cooperation, the EU Eastern partnership, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and developing the Process of Barcelona: a Union for the Mediterranean;
- underlining that the process of negotiation as regards the enlargement should proceed;
- acknowledging the importance of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, together with the challenges and opportunities presented by the EU approach to migration, the Schengen area, as well as the stability of the euro area, the improvement of growth and competitiveness (facilitating the creation of more and better jobs), implementing the Lisbon Strategy and enhancing the internal market;
- encouraging the EU to take the lead in terms of the defence of sustainable development and social cohesion, as well as of the fight against poverty, alternative energy sources, halting climate change and, moreover, the free movement of knowledge within our societies;

Conclusions and closing of the Conference

The Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament closed the Conference by presenting the conclusions of the Presidency.

The next Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments will be held in Paris, in February 2009, followed by the Swedish Presidency, in 2010.

Transmission of the Conclusions

The Speakers called on the Portuguese Presidency to publish the Presidency conclusions on the Speakers' website and to convey them to the President of the European Commission, the President in office of the Council and the COSAC Troika.