



Directorate-General for the Presidency
Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments

Minutes of the

Parliamentary Forum hosted by Miguel Angel Martínez and Othmar Karas,
EP Vice-Presidents responsible for relations with national Parliaments

EU Parliaments in global governance Tuesday, 18 February 2014, 10.00-17.00

European Parliament, Brussels
Paul-Henri Spaak building, room 3C50



28 Members of national Parliaments from 16 Parliamentary Chambers in 14 countries and 8 Members of the European Parliament took part in the Parliamentary Forum on "EU Parliaments in global governance", hosted by Miguel Angel Martínez and Othmar Karas, European Parliament Vice-Presidents responsible for relations with national Parliaments.

Meeting documents, background information and photos are available on the event website <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/webnp/cms/pid/1983>.

Opening plenary session (10.00 - 13.00)

Miguel Angel MARTÍNEZ (S&D, ES), European Parliament Vice-President responsible for relations with national Parliaments, stated that opinion polls underline the risk of a low voter turnout in the forthcoming European elections, which is a tremendous challenge for all governments. The European institutions are suffering from a lack of trust from the citizens. He believed the EP must become a global actor and make full use of its 24 official languages.

Othmar KARAS (EPP, AT), EP Vice-President responsible for relations with national Parliaments, briefly looked back at the "European Parliamentary Week" that took place in January before outlining the goals for this meeting: To discuss the necessary reinforcement of the role of national Parliaments and the EP in the world, as well as the role of parliamentary democracy at the global level. The Vice President noted the proliferation of intergovernmental processes at the cost of parliamentary initiatives: Decisions with global impact are systematically taken inside organisations lead by governments or diplomats.

However parliamentary scrutiny is necessary in international organizations (IOs). The EP draft report on the "troika" shows how essential it is to introduce more democracy in taking economic decisions.

Anders B. JOHNSON, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), noted a narrowing of the traditional gap that existed between national and international levels because of both the new technologies and globalization of economy. He described the origins and missions of the IPU and stressed that even if the Parliaments now bring a lot to the IOs and the United Nations (UN) system, more progress is still required. He recommended that the incoming EP acted more inside the IPU and that there was no need to create a new forum.

Sérgio SOUSA PINTO, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Portuguese Communities in the Portuguese Parliament, congratulated Mr KARAS for the ECON committee's work on the "troika". He underlined the fact that the EU did not succeed in achieving its goals: the financial markets have been able to surpass member states' sovereignty, while the single currency reduced the room of manoeuvre of individual member states. He argued that we are taking steps backwards, as citizens' trust is put on the line to obtain the trust of the markets.

Gabriela CRETU, Romanian Senator, mentioned the unease caused by a lack of democratic legitimacy for international activities, whereas new kinds of "representative" democracy are growing thanks to social networks. She wondered whether the different initiatives that seek for new forms of governance are relevant since the notion of global "public goods" has not first been defined (such as peace, ecology).

Jo LEINEN MEP (S&D, DE) noted that the EP and the national Parliaments have interests and values in common that they must defend and promote together. He asked how politics and the Parliaments can regain an active role. He suggested that the Parliament of the member state holding the rotating Council Presidency and the EP coordinate their priorities in the different international fora and produce a calendar of meetings. Even if Parliaments (through the IPU) have observer status in the United Nations, their concrete role there is in fact marginal. That is the reason why he supports the project in order to create an ad hoc parliamentary assembly on the model of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Ojārs Ēriks KALNIŅŠ, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Latvian *Saeima*, described a lack of understanding among citizens in terms of what the EP does and what the national Parliaments do. Furthermore, the media focuses on the negatives and encourages euroscepticism. In his view, the notion of global governance is likely to alienate citizens: we have to learn to "think global and act local".

Carlos ZORRINHO, Member of the Portuguese Parliament, pointed out that the last years have seen growing intergovernmentalism: the role of the Council has been increased whereas that of the national parliaments has not been reinforced sufficiently. He suggested an evolution to a federation of nation-states.

Konstantinos MOUSSOULIS, Vice-Chair of the Committee of European Affairs of the Hellenic Parliament, stressed that EU member states are deeply divided between net receivers and contributors on the one hand, and lenders and borrowers on the other. Those divisions are likely to have an impact on the forthcoming elections. He stated that the EP's decision to

investigate the role of the "troika" has contributed to slow the process of decline of satisfaction expressed by the Greek citizens against the EU. For his part, he regretted that ethnocentrism is coming back.

Dara MURPHY, Member of the Irish *Dáil*, explained that the key issue for citizens when they decide to vote is "relevance", quoting the high turnout in the last Irish general elections and the Stability Treaty referendum as an example. Furthermore, he suggested to go back to the basics of voting and facilitate the voting process: Possible ways currently being discussed in Ireland are lowering the voting age, educating school students about the voting system, and facilitating the participation of voters who are travelling or on holiday.

Claudio GRECH, Member of the Maltese House of Representatives, argued that multilateralism could be a tool in order to reinforce the role of national Parliaments; he underlined the fact that globalization has a much greater impact on small countries such as Malta. He wondered how to increase the parliamentarisation among the international forums without reducing the power of the national parliaments especially in terms of subsidiarity scrutiny. He thought that it is possible to create a link between the global, European and national levels but this convergence has to be programmatic and realistic.

Anders B. JOHNSON answered that there cannot be only one single response to the issue of electoral participation. He suggested changing the message sent to the citizens, giving them answers closer to their direct concerns. Regarding the opposition between the global and national levels and the necessity to add more democracy in international negotiations, he conceded that there are strong and established forces against such ideas, but that there are concrete possibilities for parliaments to invest efforts in the international area.

Ricardo BAPTISTA LEITE, Member of the Portuguese Parliament, argued that if national Parliamentarians had been more implicated in global governance, some mistakes would have been avoided. He mentioned the example of the World Health Organization where some decisions taken are seen to be linked to the interests of their contributors. He thought that these previous mistakes must be avoided by attributing a more active role to national Parliamentarians including the scrutiny of IOs.

László KOVÁCS, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Parliament, reminded participants that the role of a Parliament is not only to vote laws but also to check the executive. Only a strong involvement of Parliamentarians can help to mitigate the success of Eurosceptics in the forthcoming elections.

Igors PIMENOVŠ, Member of the Latvian *Saeima*, argued that the role of national Parliaments must be reinforced before considering their more active participation at the global level. The EP could contribute to facilitate this reinforcement.

José MAGALHÃES, Member of the Portuguese Parliament, noted that deregulation is on the rise, while national sovereignty is in decline. He stressed that the EU needs to propose concrete responses to current problems such as poverty and that some urgent measures cannot wait until the new European Commission takes office. He called for a "free and brotherly Europe".

Linus BALSYS, Vice-Chair of the Committee of European Affairs of the Lithuanian *Seimas*, insisted on the importance of reinforcing the role of national Parliaments and stressed the

successful role of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC). To face the need for a more effective interparliamentary cooperation he proposed establishing a structure with a local background that would associate the Parliamentary Assembly of the the Eastern Partnership, the national Parliaments and the EP.

Carmelo ABELA, Member of the Maltese House of Representatives, noted that both globalization and local decisions sometimes have global impacts (e.g. the Arab spring which was launched by individual initiatives) on the contrary to multilateral forums that have some difficulties to communicate amongst themselves.

Ignacio GIL LAZARO, Member of the Spanish *Congreso*, underlined that the huge number of international structures make it difficult for citizens to understand their roles, and more general to coordinate national and international organizations. He proposed to fight against the growing lack of trust towards Parliaments (including national Parliaments) and to work in a pedagogic manner since people know too little about parliamentary diplomacy.

Anders B. JOHNSON confirmed that national Parliaments should exert more control and should participate more in international negotiations. He thought that there are too many parliamentary initiatives and that it is difficult to end the existing overlaps. We have to learn the lessons from these experiences before creating any new structure which is not absolutely necessary. He took the example of IPU that tried to promote synergies and to fight against double work. He argued that some protagonists are sometimes more powerful than governments themselves.

Mr JOHNSON continued to give the example of the World Bank which itself created an interparliamentary network, at the risk of a lack of independence, and emphasised that EU Parliaments could be more active. He suggested the EP should develop its collaboration with the IPU, which should be mutually beneficial.

OTHMAR KARAS thanked all the participants for the quality of their interventions. He stated that the EP is not designed to check the decisions taken by the governments of the member states, and that this is the role of national parliaments. He underlined that the key issue in this area is political will, and that this conference should not be the last event dedicated to this topic.

Session 1: Europe's Parliaments in multinational organisations and international fora: From back seat to front row? (14.00 - 15.40).

Session chair Othmar KARAS opened the session.

Dora BAKOYANNIS, Member of the Hellenic Parliament, Head of the Hellenic Parliament Delegation and Chair of the Committee on Political Affairs in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, noted that the current economic and financial crisis is about to become a legitimacy crisis since the decisional process in the EU is perceived as being far from the citizens. A solution could be to involve the national Parliaments more, which feel neglected at present. That was the case in Greece where the Parliament felt as if it had no choice but to transpose the decisions taken by creditors. Ms BAKOYANNIS proposed to involve national Parliaments more in decision making, to establish closer cooperation between the national

Parliaments and the EP and raised the idea of a "committee of national legislators" that would act as the "Council of State" ("Conseil d'Etat") of the EU.

Vital MOREIRA (S&D, PT), Chair of the Committee on International Trade in the European Parliament, focused on the role of the Parliaments in trade globalization. He claimed that we have to end the practice of preventing national Parliaments from intervening in global affairs. The governments have to associate Parliaments more. He mentioned the initiative taken by the IPU and the EP to organise parliamentary meetings on the WTO, despite the lack of a legal basis. He thought this example could also be used in the IMF or the WTO.

Maciej POPOWSKI, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service, highlighted "parliamentary diplomacy". He noted that the EP and national Parliaments have in many cases more room for manoeuvre than the governments, and can complement actions taken by the national diplomatic services or the EU High Representative and the EEAS, as was the case with the EP monitoring mission to Ukraine which was followed by the EEAS. He explained that the EU needs to have one single message overseas. The Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy is useful even if it has no formal scrutiny powers.

Jan WOUTERS, Professor of International Law at the K.U. Leuven in Belgium and Director of the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, explained that the "Westphalian" state system is still dominating but that the EU can become a global actor. He thought that it is a "scandal" that the EU and the eurozone are nowhere in the IMF. He noted that there is no IO with a real parliamentary dimension, which causes a problem of credibility and transparency for the IOs.

Prof. WOUTERS observed a certain interparliamentary conference (IPC) "fatigue", considering that many interparliamentary meetings are victims of their success (overcrowded agendas, multiplication of meetings...) and he suggested that the fragmentation and excessive specialization should be avoided. According to him, the number of IPCs should be limited, and that these meetings are useful when they allow the focus of the debate to be on a specific subject and to defend the citizens' interests. Finally, he thinks the IOs should get inspired at international level by the interparliamentary conferences organized by the EU while at the same time limiting their number.

Marc ANGEL, Chair of the Committee on Foreign and European Affairs, Defence, Cooperation and Immigration of the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies, stated that interparliamentary conferences are a useful form of "think tanks". He thinks that all Parliamentarians should have the opportunity to learn from the international dimension: it would be better to avoid too much specialization of Parliamentarians within committees.

Ana GOMES MEP (S&D, PT) concurred with the observations about "interparliamentary conference fatigue". She claimed that the EP has to address the issue of a permanent seat for the EU at the Security Council. According to Ms GOMES, the EP should be more organised vis-à-vis the European External Action Service and the Council. She referred to the cases of Libya and Syria as bad examples of the EP's shortcomings.

Carlos COSTA NEVES, Member of the Portuguese Parliament, considered this meeting necessary as there is a lack of coordination between the EP and the national Parliaments. The priority should be to assure the participation of the governments in the IOs, as there is a great

"deficit" at this level and governments should be controlled by their parliaments on all these subjects.

Gabriela CRETU, Member of the Romanian Senat, said that no solution will be found as long as this problem is addressed in the wrong way. She wondered why there are general discussions about the legitimacy of measures, if they are not the right measures in the first place.

Vital MOREIRA MEP underlined that the present meeting is not dealing with interparliamentary relations within the EU, but with interparliamentary cooperation at international level. He claimed that the EU is not an important member of the IO responsible for security and defence (NATO) and he didn't understand why member states stay in the WTO while trade policy is an exclusive competence of the EU. Finally, he raised the question of interparliamentary cooperation in those cases where the EU member states are members of an IO, but not the EU itself. He proposed to use existing bodies (such as the IPU) to avoid the multiplication of the meetings.

Session 2: Connecting Parliamentarians: Global Parliamentary Initiatives (15.40 - 17.40).
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Session chair Miguel Angel MARTÍNEZ introduced the speakers.

Silvana KOCH-MEHRIN MEP (ALDE, DE) presented the first "Women in Parliaments Global Forum" which took place at the EP in November 2013, with more than 500 participants coming from more than 100 countries.

Arnaud LEROY, Secretary of the Sustainable Development Committee of the Assemblée Nationale, France, and Vice-President of GLOBE Europe, described the activities of GLOBE, a cross-party organisation of Parliamentarians working on environmental issues in a hundred countries. He referred to the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 2015 ("COP 21"), which is organized by France at a technical and intergovernmental level, without any parliamentary dimension. Thus in this framework it becomes the task of Parliamentarians themselves to promote these political issues which are close to citizens' concerns. He concluded by inviting all interested Parliamentarians to attend the COP 21 in Paris.

Alain DESTEXHE, Member and former President of "Parliamentarians for Global Action", presented the association's activities in the field of human rights and rule of law. Its actions often dovetail with EU initiatives, such as the fight against the death penalty, and consist of exchanging views and trying to convince Parliamentarians in the different countries in which they are active.

Jo LEINEN MEP (S&D, DE) presented the campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). Such a body is not excluded by the UN's San Francisco Charter (article 22). The EU's observer status is a historical step forward but still insufficient. Many options are possible: to use the IPU and transform it into a UN organ, or to imagine an institution that could gather elected representatives. In any case, this structure should have a consultative and a scrutiny role.

Gabriela CRETU claimed that a reform of political parties is needed in order to change political behaviour and to fight against the overwhelming intergovernmental vision.

Miguel Angel MARTÍNEZ concluded the meeting by quoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "We, peoples of the world". These "peoples" are represented by Parliaments that are not very present in the IOs, which pose many challenges in terms of citizens' trust and democratic legitimacy.

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