



European Conference
of Presidents of Parliament
LIMASSOL, CYPRUS, 10-12 JUNE 2010

Conférence européenne
des Présidents de Parlement
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Meeting of Secretaries General of Parliament

**Saturday 12 June 2010
from 8.30 to 9.30 am**

“Le Grand Resort” Hotel

**DRAFT REPORT OF THE MEETING
IN STRASBOURG ON 23 MAY 2008**

Mr Sorinas, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, opened the meeting at 9.05 a.m. and warmly welcomed participants.

The two co-directors of the ECPRD, Mr Sawicki and Mr Nowina-Konopka, were also present on the platform.

1. DRAFT AGENDA

The draft agenda was **adopted**.

2. MINUTES

Mr Sorinas said that the draft minutes of the meeting held in Tallinn in May 2006 were in Annex 10.1. to the activity report. He noted that there were no comments.

The draft minutes were **approved**.

3. ECPRD ACTIVITY REPORT 2006-2008

Mr Sawicki (Co-director of ECPRD, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) said that the Secretariat had endeavoured to circulate the activity report quite early –March in its English version – and that the annexes were as important as the 30 pages it comprised.

The report took into account the new statutes of the ECPRD approved in Tallinn two years earlier, which included major innovations on a number of points. They specified in particular the objectives, responsibilities and tasks of the various bodies of the Centre. The Executive Committee had been enlarged from three to five members and it had been agreed to appoint co-ordinators for the different areas of interest.

It was with this changed structure that the Centre, established in 1977 at a meeting of Presidents of Parliament in Vienna, had commemorated its 30th anniversary the previous year.

This anniversary seemed the opportune moment to carry out an evaluation of past activities. The evaluation, summarising the Centre's activities over the past 30 years, had been carried out in Yerevan in 2007, at the latest annual conference of correspondents. The commemorative brochure published at this time also contained testimonies of those who had established the ECPRD, among them Mr Klaus Pöhle, its founding father.

As well as the two co-directors, the Executive Committee was now made up of five members elected from among the correspondents. Representatives from Parliaments of the United Kingdom (House of Commons), Slovenia, Estonia, France (National Assembly) and Ukraine were on the committee. Mr Piotr Nowina-Konopka had joined the Centre as a co-director in December 2006 representing the European Parliament.

The ECPRD's main purpose was to promote the exchange of information between its member parliaments. It did so through a network of 62 correspondents, and 42 parliaments had designated deputy correspondents.

For various reasons, the parliaments of Malta, Monaco and Montenegro were not represented. It was to be hoped that they would soon be in a position to appoint correspondents. Equally, parliaments with observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe could appoint a correspondent. So far only Israel had done so. The parliaments of Canada and Mexico were also invited to appoint a correspondent.

A more complete list of the subjects covered by the areas of interest was available in Annex 8 to the activity report, along with the duties and responsibilities of the co-ordinators in charge of the four areas of interest: Parliamentary Libraries, Research and Archives; Information and Communication Technology in parliaments; Parliamentary Practice and Procedure; Macroeconomic Research. The posts had been created after revised statutes were adopted, so as to improve coordination of the Centre's activities in these very particular areas.

Mr Sawicki thanked the secretaries general of the four parliaments which had provided the co-ordinators, for the support given to them: the Portuguese Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Belgian and Austrian parliaments.

The ECPRD's general activities were presented in paragraph 5.1 of the report. The Centre's *raison d'être* were questionnaires and requests for comparative studies from member assemblies. This part of the activities would be explained afterwards by Mr Nowina-Konopka. The Centre also organised seminars, a detailed list of which was in Annex 4. In comparison with previous years, four seminars on average were currently held per year, compared to eight or nine before 2006. This reduction was a response to comments from the secretaries general, who had said that it would in fact be more appropriate to focus on the main tasks of the Centre: the comparative studies.

Mr Sawicki thanked the secretaries general of all parliaments for their co-operation and assistance. In particular, he mentioned those which had hosted the seminars, namely, the Polish Senate, the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Lithuanian Seimas, the Polish Sejm, the French National Assembly, the Swedish Riksdag, the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Czech Republic, the Slovenian Parliament, the House of Representatives and the Senate of Belgium, and lastly the Spanish Senate and the Austrian Parliament, which had held seminars in April and May 2008. The annual conference of correspondents had taken place in London in 2006 and in Yerevan in 2007; it would be held in the European Parliament in Brussels in 2008, and in Bratislava in 2009.

He then mentioned the ECPRD's website, which had been made more user-friendly and comprehensive. He warmly thanked the European Parliament's IT department.

Finally, he paid tribute to the outstanding work of Ms Coppolechia-Somers, who had, in a way, established the ECPRD. She had, among other things, done her secretarial work with efficiency over many years and would soon be retiring. Thanks to her, the Centre had worked well and he felt it would be difficult for anyone to replace her.

Mr Nowina-Konopka (Co-director of the ECPRD, European Parliament) said in turn how grateful he was to Ms Coppolechia-Somers, paid tribute to her professional and personal skills, and emphasised the crucial role that she had played in the history of the ECPRD.

He observed that in five years the number of questionnaires sent by the correspondents had increased fivefold, from 42 in 2002 to 223 in 2007; the number of replies had more than doubled. Some chambers were more active than others; in requesting: the German Bundestag, the Polish Sejm, the Swedish Riksdag, the Georgian Parliament and the Norwegian Stortinget; in replying: the German Bundestag, the British House of Commons, the Danish Folketinget and the Austrian Parliament had each sent more than 200 replies. Then it was just a case of using the results and seeing, in particular, if the exchanges had borne fruit. Given the amount of work taken on, the appointment of more deputy correspondents by the respective parliaments would be very useful. The weak point was follow-up, in other words the low number of finalised comparative studies provided by parliaments which initiated questionnaires. If they had summaries of the questionnaires completed, parliaments could benefit more from the work done, as well as profiting from good practices and possible solutions. Annex 4 to the report listed all the comparative studies requested, the subjects dealt with ranging from questions of constitutional and/or European law to car parking problems. This was real proof that the ECPRD network was a very practical tool, widely used and useful not just for questions about good legislation but also for management of parliaments. The system worked well, thanks to the correspondents. They could usefully draw upon the guidelines presented in Annex 6.

Mr Forsberg (Sweden, Riksdag) felt that more parliamentary departments, especially committee secretariats, should be involved in the Centre's activities. In the Swedish Parliament, the Deputy Head of the Committees Department was the Deputy Correspondent for the ECPRD. The secretaries general should be informed of seminars taking place and there should be more representatives of parliament secretariats at the seminars. As regards the questionnaires, he wondered whether they should all be sent to all the parliaments, whether all the requests were relevant, who was in charge of analysing them and whether the system was not likely to be a victim of its own success.

Mr Delcamp (France, Senate) was impressed by the quantity of work done and the energy displayed by the ECPRD. Following on from Mr Forsberg, he wondered however whether the channels used by the Centre to publicise its activities were still relevant and questioned their visibility. He highlighted the wide range of questionnaires, many of which did not relate to parliaments or to Europe. The Centre could raise the level at which it contacted parliaments; specialised departments were not always objective enough to optimise the Assembly's reaction and to contribute to the orientation of its studies.

It was also necessary to prioritise, as handling too many questions meant less efficiency. The Centre dealt with two categories of questions: those which resulted in a sort of synthesis and were the subject of a seminar, which meant a lot of work, and those that could be classified as resorting to a sort of troubleshooting service, which were not the same and could be dealt with differently; they were often a matter for a correspondent in a ministry rather than the ECPRD correspondents.

The Centre also had to strive to publicise what it was doing. While the ECPRD produced numerous documents and organised extremely interesting seminars, Mr Delcamp, for one, had discovered them by reading the activity report, whereas he would have liked to participate in some of them. Besides, there was not always a proper paper publication of the proceedings of this or that seminar. For example, having spoken himself at a seminar in Vienna, and having provided the text of his speech, he had never received the report of the meeting. All this reflected a communication problem, but also the need to perhaps do less, but do it in depth.

Everything that had been done over the last few years deserved to be consolidated. Thus while the Centre had a website, the report stressed that the Eurovoc thesaurus had not been updated since 1987. That probably needed to be dealt with, particularly as it could be used for the site's indexing.

Finally, the question of co-operation with other organisations appeared all the more important as they were involved in the same field as the ECPRD. For example, links could be strengthened with the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments and with IPU, Commonwealth and Francophonie bodies. The ECPRD could also maintain relations with university research centres.

Mr Sawicki reminded participants that the ECPRD Secretariat sent invitations and convocations to its events on the basis of the information and programme provided by the host country. They were sent to the ECPRD correspondents, who were in charge of nominating participants for the seminars. It was not known whether this was done in collaboration with the secretary general of the parliament. The document given to participants detailed the Centre's seminar programme for 2008-2009, but the 2010 programme was already being discussed, as the proposals had to be examined at the next conference of correspondents in October 2008.

Many of the questionnaires were not sent to all parliaments. In 2006-2007, 160 requests (40 % of the total) had been sent to all correspondents, 110 just to the correspondents of European Union member states and 130 only to the correspondents of certain countries. The decision lay with the correspondents who had sent the questions: if they only expected replies from some countries, they only addressed the correspondents concerned. The Centre left it entirely up to the latter to decide who in their parliament replied to the request, it being understood that the Centre counted on their goodwill to get a response. In general, these were provided and the system worked properly.

A selection was done in the early stages: each time a questionnaire was received, Ms Coppolecchia-Somers checked whether a similar question had already been asked and, if it had, she informed the requesting chamber. It was suggested that correspondents checked on the internet and gave the matter some thought before sending a new question. Correspondents who asked a question were at most asked to use other sources of information and see whether they could find the answer elsewhere. If a question asked was similar to one that had already been dealt with, the Centre attracted their attention to it and suggested that correspondents checked their reply so as to avoid repetition. It was very difficult to assess the relevance of questions, so the initial assumption was that they were important and honestly asked. Doubtless it was sometimes a case of seeking an "SOS service", but the ECPRD was willing to work in that way, as it considered that its vocation was to help parliaments. Moreover, it would be dangerous were the Secretariat to exercise some sort of censorship. Perhaps the system was not very fair, but it was a reasonable price to pay to provide efficient assistance to parliaments.

Eurovoc was not the responsibility of the ECPRD, but of another network. For a while, the Centre had organised seminars on Eurovoc.

It had be remembered that the ECPRD was not an institution but a network of people who wanted to work together and that it had neither a headquarters nor an area to store archives. It was only run by the two directors and the members of the Executive Committee, who held the post on top of their position in their own parliament. Since the structure was based on voluntary participation, the Centre did not build relations with university research units. It was hoped that these relations were developed rather between national parliaments and the research centres concerned.

Drafting reports after seminars was the concern of the national parliaments which organised them, although they could count on the ECPRD's help. Paper publications were rare, but all reports were found on the Centre's website.

Mr Forsberg (Sweden, Riksdag) was pleased with the amount of useful information provided and expressed his appreciation for the Centre's work. Perhaps measures should to be taken in the future to restrict the increase in the number of questionnaires.

Mr Lucion (Belgium, House of Representatives) considered the idea of involving the co-ordinators in Executive Committee meetings very interesting. It also seemed a good idea to increase the number of participants in the forum on the ECPRD's website, under the area of interest "Parliamentary Practice and Procedure", which to date only had around twenty participants. Finally, still within the areas of interest, the launch of thematic pages was a welcome development.

Mr de Rouck (Belgium, Senate) returned to the question of Eurovoc, which could be used to facilitate research and thus make everything on the ECPRD's website more accessible.

Mr Nowina-Konopka welcomed the appreciation shown for the role of co-ordinator, which had improved the governance of the ECPRD and made the whole network far more proactive.

The introduction of internet forums on the areas of interest and of thematic pages were also very important as they provided detailed professional information and established a dialogue which improved the quality of relations.

As regards internet issues it had to be remembered that the European Parliament had taken charge of the ECPRD server and website. Work was under way with the IT Directorate General, so as to have new functions on it by the end of the year. The Centre in fact had a great debt of gratitude to the European Parliament, whose civil servants were always available to help, although it was not their main job. The developments that several speakers had called for could be expected to occur within a reasonable time frame.

Ms Korzeniowska (Poland, Senate) was pleased that the very well structured activity report gave so much useful information and dealt with so many important questions for parliaments. It explained not only the range of the correspondents' work in the member states, but also the role played by the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, especially Ms Hanneke Coppolecchia-Somers.

The secretaries general **approved** the activity report of the ECPRD for 2006-2008.

4. ECPRD PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMME FOR 2008-2009

Mr Sorinas said that care would be taken to ensure that the ECPRD was not a victim of its own success and swamped with requests. He therefore suggested that as well as the priorities for 2008-2009 set out in the document, the Executive Committee be asked to consider the point raised by Mr Delcamp and the idea that the Centre's tasks could not increase indefinitely.

It would also be possible, under paragraph 3 on seminars, to express the wish that reports should automatically be published on the ECPRD website.

Mr Sawicki said that the secretaries general had had the document on the future programme of the Centre for some time now. The priorities for 2008 obviously included the list of tasks and responsibilities determined by the ECPRD statutes. Questions remained the Centre's main task, although the reservations expressed as to their quantity would be forwarded to the correspondents. It was true that the increase in the number of questions could be problematic for the activities of the ECPRD. The development of the areas of interest had to continue, but this sector should be better organised so as to continue with what was already done on the website.

When it came to the forum and thematic pages, changes were doubtless necessary, but it was too early for an assessment. Work was also needed on the question of seminar reports.

As regards the website, the European Parliament was helping to improve the search module; it was to be hoped that this would be completed before the end of the year.

The list in the draft programme for 2008-2009 should include the title of the seminar to be held in Copenhagen in October, on the solutions provided by IT to MPs and parliaments, and the date of the seminar to be held by the parliamentary research departments in London in mid-September 2009.

Mr Sawicki said that the Secretary General of the Portuguese Parliament had just invited the Executive Committee to hold its spring 2009 meeting in Lisbon. This invitation would also be added to the programme.

The priorities and programme for 2008-2009 were **approved**.

5. TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ECPRD CORRESPONDENTS

Mr Nowina-Konopka referred participants to Annex 9 to the activity report. He stressed the importance, highlighted by the debates, of the status of correspondents and the support they received from the secretaries general. Did they not need more time and a stronger position in parliaments with increased competencies? Did deputy correspondents need to be systematically appointed? The quality of the questionnaires, the replies provided and the practical possibility of drawing up a consolidated study to be distributed among the other parliaments depended largely on the manner in which the questionnaire itself and the replies were dealt with by the correspondents; the Centre was not an administration with its own offices and staff.

Mr Sawicki, confirming these words, said that while the document reflected the Centre's view of the correspondents' tasks, it was up to the secretaries general to interpret this and decide what they were could and should be.

Mr Laurence Smyth (United Kingdom, House of Commons) considered the document outstanding and gave it his support. The network would be strengthened if the secretaries general invested the correspondents with the necessary competencies and gave them adequate support. He urged an active participation by all those who attended seminars and conferences.

Mr Harley (European Parliament) said that the network of correspondents was liable to be a victim of its own success, especially as the Treaty of Lisbon would transform relations between national parliaments, the European Parliament and governments. The ECPRD's workload would unavoidably grow with the increase in comparative requests. This being the case, what could be a better way of using the available resources than redefining the tasks of the correspondents, establishing priorities and improving follow-up?

The European Parliament was pleased to be hosting the next conference of ECPRD correspondents and other meetings of the Centre.

Mr Nowina-Konopka thanked all the correspondents and his colleagues on the Executive Committee for their dedication and the quality of their work.

Mr Sorinas confirmed that the document chiefly set out guidelines to clarify the correspondents' work, and that it was up to the secretaries general to decide how to implement them.

The secretaries general **took note** of the document in Annex 9 to the activity report.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Cameron (Assembly of WEU) said that the Assembly of WEU had just changed its name and adopted new regulations and a new charter, and that the ECPRD's index would have to take account of this. He was sure that it would be done quickly.

Interparliamentary relations would be even more important and necessary in the future, with the Treaty of Lisbon coming into force, and would help to reduce the democratic deficit in European integration.

Mr Sorinas thanked all participants.

The sitting **rose** at 10.25 a.m.