



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

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# EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF PARLIAMENT

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENT

**Limassol (Cyprus)  
11 - 12 June 2010**



BOYΛH TΩN ANTIΠPOCΩΠΩN  
TEMSILCILER MECLISI  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
CHAMBRE DES REPRESENTANTS



KYPPIAKH ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
KIBRIS CUMHURİYETİ  
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS  
REPUBLIQUE DE CHYPRE

# REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENT

Saturday 12 June 2010

**Mr Socratous**, Secretary General of the House of Representatives of Cyprus, opened the meeting at 8.35 am and welcomed the participants.

The co-director of the ECPRD, Mr Sawicki, and the co-secretary, Mr Hueschen, were also present on the platform.

## 1. DRAFT AGENDA

The draft agenda, which had been distributed to all the participants, was **adopted**.

## 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 23 MAY 2008

**Mr Socratous** said that the draft minutes of the meeting held in Strasbourg on 23 May 2008 had been distributed. No comments had been made on the document.

The draft minutes were **approved**.

## 3. ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION (ECPRD) 2008-2010

**Mr Sawicki** (Co-director of the ECPRD, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) began by thanking the Secretary General of the Cypriot House of Representatives for his hospitality and the outstanding organisation of the Conference.

He apologised on behalf of his colleague from the European Parliament, Ms Christine Verger, co-director of the ECPRD, who had been prevented from coming to Cyprus by serious family problems. Ms Verger had been appointed to the post in December 2009 to replace Mr Piotr Nowina-Konopka, who, having performed the function for three years, had been appointed by the European Parliament to a new post which no longer allowed him to perform duties for the ECPRD. Mr Sawicki emphasised what a pleasure it had been to work with him.

It was to be hoped that all the delegates had been able to read the activity report, which covered the period from March 2008 to March 2010.

In truth, it was more like a compendium of ECPRD documents than an activity report but this was in keeping with the Executive Committee's wishes.

The report began with a general description of the ECPRD before outlining its activities in 2008 and 2009. Mr Sawicki thanked the Secretaries General for appointing 64 correspondents along with 44 substitutes. The correspondents' task was a crucial but highly onerous one, as the number of questionnaires sent to parliaments, many of which contained a long list of questions, had increased considerably between 2003 and 2007, although it seemed to have levelled off in the last two to three years. However, to use a French expression, this was the ECPRD's "raison d'être".

Every year, some 220 questionnaires were received by the correspondents of national parliaments, who gave some 5 000 answers per year. The co-director believed that this was probably the upper limit, as it amounted to practically one questionnaire a day, although it should be borne in mind that not all questionnaires were sent to all correspondents. There should not be too much change in this situation. Requests by target groups varied from 42% for questionnaires sent to all correspondents to 32% for those sent to European Union parliaments and 26% for those sent to a select group of countries.

Questionnaires could also be broken down according to subject. In 2009, 34% of questionnaires had been on parliamentary practice and procedure, 59% on national legislation and policies, and 7% on other subjects. Mr Sawicki thanked his colleague from the Swedish Riksdagen, who had provided a more detailed breakdown, which had been included in the report. The presentation of the titles of comparative requests (in Annex 4 of the report) had changed. They were now grouped according to Chamber or House. This made it possible for everyone to see what subjects had been submitted by their parliament to the network. The

Executive Committee never investigated the reasons why any particular questionnaire had been sent by any given parliament, simply assuming that there was always some legitimate reason; however, it did systematically check that no identical or very similar request had been sent recently through the network. In such cases, the parliament which sent the questionnaire was warned and if, in reply, it said that it wished to collect further information, the recipient parliaments were informed and given the references of the previous answer.

Mr Sawicki then raised another important issue, namely summaries. He called for those receiving replies to draw up synopses systematically. In 2009, only 61 final summaries of the 220 questionnaires sent out had been produced (the figure of 54 given in the report had been updated). Admittedly, this was not a very encouraging result, but the Centre's Executive Committee did not have many means of inciting or pressuring parliaments to act. Summaries could be published on the site in the national language of the parliament concerned, but this was a weak point and the situation would have to be improved.

Where it came to requests, the document covered the period from January 2008 to December 2009 so that year-on-year comparisons could be made and changes could be assessed. Few changes had been noted in 2010. By the end of May, 106 requests had been submitted through the network, there had been some 2 300 replies and about twenty final summaries had been prepared. It was possible that ECPRD activities had reached a plateau, probably because the correspondents worked for the ECPRD in addition to their own duties and it would be difficult to ask them to do even more.

The seminars held in co-operation with national parliaments related to four subject-areas: parliamentary practice and procedure, parliamentary libraries, research and archives, information and communication technologies and macro-economic research. Attendance at the seminars held last year had been relatively satisfactory. The speaker thanked the Spanish Senate, the Austrian Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the parliaments of Denmark, Slovenia, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Italy and the Assembly of the Western European Union, all of which had hosted seminars – a task that demanded considerable effort and was particularly difficult in times of economic austerity.

The latest annual conferences of correspondents had been held in Brussels, at the European Parliament, and in Bratislava, and Mr Sawicki said that the correspondents set great store by these meetings, which enabled them to establish contacts and strengthen existing ones. The next meetings were this year in Ankara, Turkey, and next year in Stockholm, Sweden.

Mr Sawicki also thanked the Secretaries General of Parliaments whose representatives had taken part in the work of the Executive Committee. In addition to the two co-directors, this body comprised representatives of the United Kingdom, Italy, Slovakia, Estonia and Sweden.

There would be a change in the Executive Committee in October, as the British member would be reaching the end of his term of office and so a new member would have to be elected.

The website had become the real nerve centre of the ECPRD as a result of the European Parliament's efforts. Some 30 000 documents could now be consulted quite easily and many types of research could be carried out automatically without any human intervention. Ulrich Hueschen was the administrator responsible for the management and functioning of the site. He received all the requests and disseminated them. Work was being done to automatise the site more and lighten Mr Hueschen's workload. Consideration could be given to asking correspondents to post documents on the site themselves without going via the secretariat.

**Mr Brattesta** (Norway, Stortinget) thanked the co-directors and the co-secretaries for the substantial work they had done and their very clear and full report. He was impressed by the improvement in the quality of the ECPRD's work. This was a body which, in thirty or so years, had found its own niche among comparable bodies thanks to the relevance of its activities.

As to priorities, he shared Mr Sawicki's concern about not overburdening national parliaments with questionnaires which were not necessarily relevant. He referred to point ii. of paragraph 1 on page 3 of the report on priorities, where it was stated that one of the priorities could be to continue "increasing the number of comparative summary reports produced by requesting chambers". He proposed that the words "increasing the number" should be replaced by "improving the standard and relevance". According to the activity report (page 8), it was necessary "for those who present questionnaires to first make sure that similar queries have not been made previously, and to keep questions – and for that matter answers – as clear and succinct as possible".

In conclusion, he thanked and sincerely congratulated the co-directors and co-secretaries once again for their outstanding work, particularly Mario Heinrich, who had made unstinting efforts for the ECPRD for many years.

**Mr Forsberg** (Sweden, Riksdagen) said that he admired Mr Sawicki's commitment to the ECPRD and would like to know how he saw things from the inside and what he would like the Secretaries General to do to take this tool forward.

**Mr Koller** (Austria, Nationalrat) asked about paragraph 6 of the objectives, particularly co-operation with other bodies such as IPEX, whose roles were somewhat different to those of the ECPRD.

**Mr Sawicki** began by thanking Mr Brattesta for his comments concerning Mario Heinrich and assured him that they would be passed on to him. In the thirty years he had been working for the ECPRD, Mr Heinrich had become an institution, with a prodigious memory. Mr Sawicki himself had been a part of the ECPRD for twelve years and had worked with four or five other co-directors from the European Parliament; he agreed that the network would not have become what it was without the co-directors, but also that the same applied to the correspondents, who were very active.

The correspondents sometimes had the feeling that their role was not properly acknowledged by national parliaments and sometimes even overlooked in their job profiles. Although he did not want to interfere with the management of their staff, he believed that it would be a good idea for Secretaries General to ensure that the function was given more formal recognition for, without the correspondents, the network would not exist.

Irrespective of the human aspect, which was crucial, the development of the Centre was closely linked with the growth of new information technologies. Without the Internet, it would have been impossible to reach the figure of 5 000 replies.

Mr Sawicki believed that the ECPRD met the needs of national parliaments. Efforts would continue to enhance technological tools. He raised the question of whether the Centre should remain in its current configuration, but since people seemed satisfied, he suggested that any new approaches that might be adopted for future years should depend on requests and proposals made at the annual conferences.

The report did mention that the ECPRD should try to avoid duplicating the work of other organisations such as IPEX. The latter was more a matter for those working in the European Parliament, who were involved in both bodies' activities.

The Secretaries General **approved** the ECPRD's activity report for 2008 to 2010.

Mr **Socratous** confirmed that the members of the Conference of Presidents of Parliament would be informed of this decision.

#### **4. THE ECPRD's PROGRAMME AND PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011**

**Mr Sawicki** said that he would be brief because this question had already been raised and the report submitted to the participants differed little from the 2008 one. In reply to Mr Brattesta, he said that the increase in the number of comparative summary reports should continue, as there were still not enough. In addition to exchanging questions and replies, the ECPRD should receive and share information. When a national parliament received a reply, it most likely would make an internal summary of it and it was a shame if it did not try to disseminate this information to other parliaments even though in some cases confidentiality requirements might prevent it from doing so. While he had to agree with the aim of improving the quality and relevance of summaries, numbers were also important.

The second objective was to "strengthen the exchange of information in four areas of interest", whereas the previous report had merely proposed to "develop" this aspect. Mr Sawicki acknowledged that this was only a very subtle distinction.

The programme of activities covered 2010 and 2011. It might be considered surprising that reference was made to 2010 when it was already the month of June and four seminars had already been held. However, this was the way the network worked, and in 2008, no-one had known the precise subjects or dates of the future seminars.

Furthermore, information concerning 2011 had arrived quite recently and did not yet figure in the table on page 4 of the document that had been distributed. For instance, the Danish Folketing had offered to host a seminar on the services that libraries provided for parliamentarians but no official proposal had yet been

made. Similarly, some Greek officials had said that Greece might wish to hold the annual conference of correspondents in 2012 but no formal invitation had yet been issued.

The organisers of the conference to be held in Ankara in October were proposing that it should be preceded by a seminar on the subject: "Parliaments in crisis? New challenges in modern parliamentary life".

**Mr Sibul** (Estonia, Riigikogu) pointed out that the 30 000 documents available on the website contained very valuable information, not just for correspondents but for all those who worked in a parliament.

**Mr Laporte** (France, Senate) began by adding to the compliments that had been paid to the co-directors of the ECPRD, particularly Mr Sawicki, for the impetus that they had given it. Drawing on his twenty-year experience, he considered that having gone through periods of progress, but also of some hesitation and questioning, the Centre had now achieved a degree of stability. This was reflected in the priorities which had been set, which consisted for the most part in continuing activities which had already been started.

He also wished to thank Mario Heinrich, who would soon be retiring. Following the recent departure of Ms Coppolechia, the ECPRD would be losing another of its mainstays.

With regard to objective No. 6, which was to "co-operate with other networks dealing with the exchange of parliamentary information (eg IPEX) with a view to avoiding duplication of activities", it seemed to him that it would be wiser to reverse the order and make the objective to avoid duplication when co-operating with other networks. He felt that this fine distinction might well be worth making.

**Mr Sawicki** proposed that in objective No. 1, the words "increasing the number" should be replaced by "increasing the number and improving the quality and relevance", and that objective No. 6 should read: "To avoid duplication of activities with other parliamentary exchange networks (eg IPEX)".

Both amendments were **adopted**.

With regard to Mr Sibul's comments on research, the co-director said that the priority for 2010 was to improve the website to make it a highly effective research tool. On the matter of access to information, it should be noted that the public did not have access to the questions and replies, which was reserved for visitors with a username and password. It was for the national correspondents to decide how the information was disseminated within their own parliaments, but when the matter had been put to them, they had refused to establish public access. In their opinion, the tenor of the information was likely to be altered by this, as interpretations would differ depending on whether the person consulting it was familiar with the life of parliaments or not.

The priorities and programme for 2010-2011 were **approved**, subject to the two amendments adopted above.

## **5. OTHER BUSINESS**

**Mr Cameron** (European Security and Defence Assembly) pointed out that in twelve months, the European Security and Defence Assembly was to be abolished. However, it was to be hoped that as a result of the considerable efforts that were currently being made, the Assembly would be able to hand over to another body in June 2011.

He notified those in charge of the ECPRD that the European Assembly's archives were available to them.

Lastly, he wished to dispel any potential misunderstanding by announcing publicly that he was not a candidate to succeed Mateo Sorinas in his post as Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

**Mr Socratous** noted that nobody else wished to speak and thanked all the participants.

The meeting **rose** at 9.35 am.