

**STRENGTHENING THE PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION OF THE EUROPEAN
INSTITUTIONS : COUNCIL OF EUROPE, EUROPEAN UNION AND OSCE
“Strasbourg Appeal”**

Adopted unanimously by the participants in the symposium organised by the European
Association of Former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe
or the European Union
(Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, 10 November 2000)

We, former Members of Parliament, reaffirm that the objective of the European Association of Former Members of Parliaments of the Member States of the Council of Europe or the European Union is to contribute to the European architecture and to promote the European ideal and the values which are to be found at the very origin of the principles of individual and political freedom, protection of human rights and the rule of law, upon which true democracy is based. In our view, the increasingly dominant role of governments in forging Europe is a negative development, as it alters the balance between the executive and the legislative on the one hand, and increases the role of the Community bureaucracy on the other. As an inevitable result of this, the gradual cession of sovereignty, and hence of political decision making, from the national level to the European institutions runs the risk of being governed by intergovernmental choices, while being insufficiently supervised and guided by the parliamentary bodies of the nations concerned.

1. A single guiding principle underlies the will of the national Associations of Former Members of Parliament : to strengthen the construction and integration of Europe, which presuppose the expansion of the parliamentary dimension of its institutions, both in terms of representation and of effective legislative and controlling powers. Europe is larger than the EU but smaller than the OSCE, which includes Canada, the US and some Asian countries. The Council of Europe and the EU are complementary instruments for the unification of Europe in a spirit of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. National parliaments are supplemented by international and supranational parliamentary assemblies, such as the directly elected European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Assembly of WEU or the OSCE Assembly, all of which are composed of members of national parliaments. The central task is to institutionalise the relationship between national parliaments and the European Parliament and to connect them with the Council of Europe and other institutions. The ambition of the European Association and its member Associations is to contribute – through the Strasbourg symposium and within the bounds of their role – to a better political culture and a greater commitment to the reform of the European institutions, in order to overcome the now unanimously decried democratic deficit.
2. The discussions and preparations with respect to the enlargement of the Union approximately by a further 15 European countries are not matched by a parallel reform process, which should be its constitutional framework. On the contrary, the latter process is undeniably slowing down. Following the establishment of the single currency, the Euro, the propulsive thrust of the founders seems to have been exhausted, as deadlines approach that are filled with all kinds of implications. Within this context, we feel great concern that no adequate consideration is given to the role of the European Parliament, the Council of

Europe and the other organisations in laying the new foundations of a wider European union, as foreseen by the Intergovernmental Conference of the European Union that will end in Nice in December 2000 and includes among its primary tasks the proposed reform of the Union and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

3. Progress along the path of integration must be guaranteed by more effective procedures for "closer co-operation", aimed at giving the Union's institutions a constitutional basis and democratic legitimacy and above all at securing citizens' understanding and support. Within this context and apart from any assessment of the particular solutions that are being contemplated, the initiative of the German Foreign Minister is to be welcomed. This Fischer Plan has called in clear terms for the revival of the European construction, particularly as far as the relations between the European Parliament and national Parliaments are concerned, within the frame of democratic sovereignty shared between the member states in the field of the European Union, in a spirit of subsidiarity. Thus, the ideas of federalism and of a European constitution have been put forward again, and the Associations share and support these ideas. We have been reminded, 50 years after Robert Schuman, that the European Federation is to be realised through its "parliamentarisation", according to a process of gradual steps and adaptations, but without any paralysing stops. This process should be based on a constitutional treaty approved by national Parliaments as well as the European Parliament.
4. On this point, several Associations have anticipated the above-mentioned proposal and have launched the idea of a framework agreement, aimed at enhancing the role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and of the European Parliament.
5. However, we need to make sure that discussions on the final prospects do not make us lose sight of the immediate decisions that will be taken at the intergovernmental conference at the end of this year, in order to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the European institutions.

Part I

6. In order to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the European institutions, we want the enlargement of the Community to be complemented by the "constitutionalization" of the European Union and preceded by the approbation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of its citizens. Furthermore, this Charter should not be restricted to reiterating the traditional civil and political rights, but should also include social and economic rights as well as the right to health, environmental protection and privacy, and should take into account the European Convention on Human Rights and its additional protocols as well as the revised Social Charter of the Council of Europe. The changes in the Treaties should therefore be submitted to the European Parliament and to the national Parliaments for approval. The aim of this preliminary requirement is to avoid having "less Europe in more Europe", i.e. a larger Europe in which power relations would be more important than the authority of the rules of a constitutional Pact. Ideally, the European Union should accede to the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Commission and the European Parliament have both declared themselves in favour of such an accession.
7. Europe is faced with three main objectives at the outset of a unification process that will involve some 30 countries and nearly 500 million citizens :

- a) Elaborating a global and coherent revision of the institutional system of the European Union
 - that makes it possible to strengthen the authority and democratic nature of the Commission as an executive body;
 - that provides for the generalisation of qualified majority voting in the Union's Council – combined with a reasonable weighing of votes – both on constitutional issues (treaty revisions, accessions and the Union's own resources) and in legislation;
 - and, subsequently, extends the European Parliament's power of co-decision to all constitutional, legislative and budgetary matters – in combination with a reasonable weighing of votes;
 - that provides for the communitarisation of foreign policy and for the creation of a common area of law and internal security, including matters of immigration and non-discrimination against immigrants;
- b) Strengthening the major common policies, in particular within the context of the economic and monetary Union, as well as the fight against unemployment and for economic and social cohesion, so as to create the conditions for the development of a true macro-economic policy of the Union in the interest of its citizens, within which the European Central Bank's autonomous action, backed up by a political Council, must be embedded;
- c) Elaborating a new "founding constitutional pact", capable of meeting the ambitions of all citizens and member nations that wish to strengthen Europe's identity and political cohesion. This pact must encompass the Union's fundamental principles, the foundations of its constitutional organisation, the rules for resorting to closer cooperation within the Union as well as the standards regarding European citizenship, which should be established with particular reference to the Charter of rights and fundamental freedoms. This "constitutional pact" should then be submitted to the European citizens of the countries concerned for approval.

Part II

- 8. Generally speaking and in view of the above, we wish to make the following preliminary considerations : the increase of the legislative power of the European Parliament and of its power of supervision vis-à-vis the executive, which has been furthered by the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, we deem to be positive but insufficient; we also believe that the – essentially consultative – Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE do not have enough influence in specific areas. We are concerned about the unsolved and open question of the parliamentary dimension of the Common European Security and Defence Policy.
- 9. On another level, it also seems necessary to underline that political parties in Europe represent an important factor of European integration. By their awareness-raising role they tend to facilitate the expression of the political will of the citizens.
- 10. Concern should also be expressed about the fact that too many important recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe are not taken into account by the Committee of Ministers.
- 11. Overall, it is necessary :

- a) To stop the trend, or reduce the danger, ensuing from increased intergovernmental cooperation within the EU, because such cooperation completely, or to a large extent, escapes scrutiny and, in the final analysis, is not legitimised by the European Parliament;
- b) To solve the problem which results from the fact that the OSCE has member countries which offer no sound democratic guarantees;
- c) To democratically control and govern the globalisation process, in order to prevent it from developing without rules and thus resulting in the erosion of political management.

12. We are profoundly convinced that :

- a) The primary task of the European Parliament, of the national parliaments and of the international assemblies is to further democracy, human rights, peace, good governance, social, economic and sustainable development, equality between men and women and to ensure that that human beings and the quality of life come before globalisation. To this end, they must strengthen their inter-parliamentary and bilateral collaboration;
- b) A substantial strengthening of the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe, the EU, the WEU and the OSCE will improve European parliamentary democracy, contribute to citizens' awareness of and their participation in the supranational institutions and strengthen the European integration process, which should also involve Russia and be open to cooperation with Asia, Africa, the other side of the Atlantic and the United Nations in particular.

13. For these reasons, we urge the European Parliament (EP), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PA), the Assembly of WEU/interim European Security and Defence Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, as well as the respective parliaments, to take the following proposals into consideration. These parliamentary bodies must :

- a) Guarantee effective legislation and control of the executive and the bureaucracy;
- b) Promote democratic processes and democratic participation of citizens in political decision-making, through dialogue and consultation with the organisations of civil society and by making use of the new information technologies, in order to spread a common awareness of belonging to Europe, while respecting and developing national identities, and to increase the public's knowledge of current issues;
- c) Immediately tackle the issues of common security and conflict management, as conflicts tend to increase;
- d) Establish effective co-ordination and interaction among each other, the rules of which should be laid down in a general systematic agreement, aimed at guaranteeing coherence and harmony in the construction of Europe and taking into account each body's specific functions and respective comparative advantages (Council of Europe : human rights and democratic security, monitoring of the commitments made by member states, cultural cooperation; EU : political and economic security and – in the near future – civil and military security and crisis management through a take-over of certain functions of WEU, with provisions for an adequate political and parliamentary control; WEU : collective defence and armaments cooperation; OSCE : prevention of military conflicts and settlement of conflicts, role of regional actor in the sense of Chap. VIII of the UN Charter).
- e) Develop strategies for strengthening the partnership between men and women in politics and establish action plans to correct present imbalances;

- f) Recognise the pre-eminent role, experience and knowledge of the Council of Europe in the building of a greater Europe without dividing lines;
 - g) Aim at a better preparation of important political decisions and a better follow-up by closer cooperation with national parliaments.
14. The evolution towards a "parliamentarization" of the European Federation must be pursued realistically. It offers several options, which correspond to the emerging trends; however, these options should not serve as alibis for delay.
15. Two solutions are in conflict with each other : the first solution is that of a bicameral parliamentary system with a directly elected EP and a second chamber of the member States; the second solution opts for the single-chamber system, with a Parliament of the Federation that by its very nature should remain the direct and sole expression of the sovereignty of the people and assigns relations with national parliaments to COSAC (Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of National Parliaments of the European Union), as stipulated – albeit in an unsatisfactory manner – in the declaration attached to the EC Treaty by the Treaty of Amsterdam, as well as to the Conference of Presiding Officers.
16. At any rate, this is an issue to be solved, and it requires courageous discussions. Similarly, on the executive level, we want the Commission of the EU to take on the role of an actual government, the President of which should be elected through a democratic process and have wider executive powers.
17. We therefore invite the national governments and parliaments :
- a) To give the Council of Europe sufficient financial means so that its decisions can be carried out and its visibility can be enhanced;
 - b) Not to jeopardise the competence of the Council of Europe as far as the defence of human rights and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights are concerned, thus avoiding useless duplications of these institutions;
 - c) To work for the uniform interpretation of the Council's conventions;
 - d) To transform the OSCE into a real international organisation, with the necessary means at its disposal, suitable democratic control and a statute approved by national parliaments;
 - e) To reconsider the participation of members who have not been elected democratically in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly;
 - f) To seek ways and methods for obtaining greater participation of civil society in European political life (through referendums and other forms of consultation), so as to develop participatory democracy as an integral part of representational democracy.
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