RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

MID-TERM REPORT
2016

European Parliament

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PARLIAMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The functioning of the European Union is founded on representative democracy.

751 MEPs

Citizens are directly represented at EU level in the European Parliament.

Member States are represented in the European Council by their Heads of State or Government and in the Council by their governments, themselves democratically accountable either to their national Parliaments, or to their citizens.

National Parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union by...

...being informed by the EU institutions and having draft EU laws forwarded to them.

...ensuring that the principle of subsidiarity is respected.

...taking part in the evaluation mechanisms for the area of freedom, security and justice and being involved in the political monitoring of Europol and the evaluation of Eurojust.

... taking part in the revision procedures of the EU treaties.

... being notified of applications for accession to the EU.

...taking part in interparliamentary cooperation between national Parliaments and with the European Parliament.

The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall together determine the organisation and promotion of effective and regular interparliamentary cooperation within the EU.

A conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs may submit any contribution it deems appropriate for the attention of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. That conference shall in addition promote the exchange of information and best practice between national Parliaments and the European Parliament.

Sources: Treaty on European Union and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

<u>Mid-term report 2016</u>

<u>Relations between the European Parliament and EU national Parliaments</u>

The Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments advises the political bodies, Members and the Secretariat of the European Parliament in their institutional cooperation and legislative dialogue with the national Parliaments. It provides support for interparliamentary activities, contributes to the implementation of the Treaty provisions on interparliamentary cooperation in the European Parliament, and provides expertise throughout the legislative cycle and other political competences of the European Parliament.

The Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments acts as a knowledge centre for information about national Parliaments and provides information to the European Parliament's administration on best practices in national Parliaments. It represents the European Parliament in the administrative networks of interparliamentary cooperation. It manages relations with the officials who represent the national Parliaments in Brussels and maintains close links with their administrations.

MID-TERM REPORT 2016
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface by the European Parliament's Vice-Presidents responsible for relations with national Parliaments

This 2016 midterm report provides an overview of relations between the European Parliament and EU national Parliaments.

Firstly, we would like to pay tribute to our predecessors who were in charge of relations with national Parliaments during the first part of the legislature, Vice-Presidents Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso and Anneli Jäätteenmäki. It is an honour to take over the role from them and we thank them for their work.

In 2016 the European Union faced many challenges - Brexit, migration, terrorism, the rise of nationalism and conflicts in the EU's immediate neighbourhood - which have received much attention in national Parliaments and in the European Parliament. Some of our citizens have lost trust in institutions and the so-called establishment, whether that be "Brussels elites" or "national elites".

In this increasingly globalised, complex and fast-moving world, we must work better together to find effective solutions.

We need to show now more than ever that democracies require well-functioning institutions.

As we mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, interparliamentary cooperation will play a key role in shaping the future of the European Union.

The European Union must be more responsive and there is a need to improve how we work.

We are all focused on meeting the expectations of our citizens - but these expectations have become more difficult to meet against an ever-changing backdrop.

Our Union is only as strong as the Member States and their national Parliaments allow it to be.

Cooperation between the European Parliament and our national counterparts can foster common understanding in these turbulent times - this report demonstrates the depth and breadth of this relationship.

Mairead McGuinness

Vice-President

Bogusław Liberadzki

Vice-President

1. The context of the report

This report is about the relations in 2016 between the European Parliament and the EU national Parliaments, as well as interparliamentary cooperation. 2016 was a year in which the European Union faced several crises at the same time as well as the outcome of the UK referendum on membership of the EU (the Brexit process). The end of 2016 also marks the mid-term point of the European Parliament's 2014-2019 legislative term, which brings changes in the structures of the institution.

From an interparliamentary perspective, this report analyses firstly the key political developments which dominated the agenda of all interparliamentary relations (part 2).

The following chapters present and analyse the development of the interparliamentary bodies (part 3), the forms of interparliamentary dialogue (part 4), the subsidiarity check carried out by the national Parliaments (part 5), and, finally, the administrative tools and networks for interparliamentary cooperation (part 6).

The key developments in 2016 having an impact on interparliamentary cooperation and examined in this report are:

- the UK's exit process from the EU and the ongoing reflection on the EU's future,
- the third 'yellow card' issued by national Parliaments, on the sensitive legislative proposal on the 'posting of workers',
- the debate on the joint parliamentary scrutiny of Europol,
- the role of national Parliaments in the EU's trade agreements, in particular regarding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada
- the key role of parliaments in strengthening the rule of law within the European Union.

This report, as well as further information related to the European Parliament's relations with EU national Parliaments, may be found on the website of the European Parliament: www.europarl.europa.eu/relnatparl/en/news.

2. Key developments and trends in interparliamentary cooperation

Interparliamentary cooperation is naturally linked to political developments in the European Union and its Member States. The following key developments are mentioned, because they were cross-cutting and omnipresent within almost all fora, institutions and forms of interparliamentary relations and dialogue throughout the year 2016. Their influence will most likely carry on through the coming years.

2.1 The United Kingdom's exit from the EU: reflecting on the EU's future

On 23 June 2016, a referendum was held in the United Kingdom on the question: 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?' 51.9 % of those who voted were in favour of leaving the EU.

Five days later, the European Parliament adopted a resolution[1] on the UK's decision to leave the European Union. It stressed the critical moment for the EU in which the interests and expectations of the Union's citizens must be brought back to the centre of the debate, and called for the European project to be relaunched. The consent of the European Parliament is required both for the withdrawal agreement and for any future UK-EU relationship.

On the future of the European Union, the European Parliament stressed that the Union needs to be reformed, improved, and made more democratic, so to deliver what citizens expect, in particular:

- to reinforce the core of the EU, avoiding à la carte solutions;
- to promote EU common values and provide stability, social justice, sustainability, growth and jobs;
- to overcome persistent economic and social uncertainty;
- to protect citizens and address the challenge of migration;
- to develop and democratise the Economic and Monetary Union and the area of freedom, security and justice; and
- to strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The role of national Parliaments is becoming a part of the debate on the future of Europe.

Against the backdrop of Brexit and the economic and migration crises the EU is facing, the parliamentary dimension of the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council initiated a period of reflection on the state and future of the EU (the so-called 'Bratislava process'). The informal Bratislava Parliamentary Summit held on 6 and 7 October 2016 initiated this process, which will culminate in two EU Speakers' gatherings in 2017: in March in Rome to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, and in April in Bratislava for the annual EU Speakers' Conference.

The issue of Brexit has also dominated - or at least coloured - the debates in COSAC, starting from the Chairpersons' meeting in Bratislava in July.

Since the UK referendum, there have been an increasing number of official bilateral visits from national Parliaments to Brussels relating to Brexit. The visiting delegations have been keen to learn about the European Parliament's procedures, structures and timetables for handling Brexit issues, as well as delivering and receiving political messages between the parliaments.

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[1] European Parliament resolution of 28 June 2016 on the decision to leave the EU resulting from the UK referendum Texts adopted, P8_TA (2016)0294.

2.2 National Parliaments' 'yellow card' for the Commission proposal to amend the 'Posting of Workers' Directive

Protocol No 2 to the EU Treaties sets out a review mechanism regarding proposed legislation which does not fall under the exclusive competence of the European Union. The national Parliaments may review EU draft legislative acts within eight weeks of transmission. If a national Parliament considers that a draft legislative act does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity, it may issue a 'reasoned opinion'.

On 8 March 2016, the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 96/71/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 1996 concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services (COM(2016)0128).

By the 8-week deadline for the subsidiarity check by national Parliaments, 14 national Parliaments or Parliamentary Chambers had adopted reasoned opinions stating that the Commission proposal did not comply with the principle of subsidiarity: the Bulgarian Parliament, the Croatian Parliament, the Czech Chamber of Deputies, the Czech Senate, the Danish Parliament, the Estonian Parliament, the Hungarian Parliament, the Latvian Parliament, the Lithuanian Parliament, the Polish Sejm, the Polish Senate, the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, the Romanian Senate and the Slovak Parliament. Together, these Parliaments and Chambers represented 22 of the 56 votes corresponding to the national Parliaments, thus triggering the 'yellow card' procedure.

This was the third 'yellow card' since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Politically, it can be considered to be the most divisive one so far.

In their reasoned opinions on the matter, the various national Parliaments put forward a variety of arguments, e.g.: that the compensation of workers falls under the exclusive remit of the Member States; that the proposal constitutes an interference in industrial relations; or that it places limits on the freedom to provide services in the internal market. Furthermore, procedural points were raised, such as the lack of a detailed justification of the proposal with regard to subsidiarity, or the lack of a financial impact assessment. Moreover, there were claims that the Commission's consultations prior to the adoption of the proposal were insufficient, and that the Commission should have waited until the expiry of the transposition deadline for the 'enforcement directive' before proposing new legislation on this matter.

On 20 July 2016, the Commission completed its review of the proposal, concluding that it complied with the principle of subsidiarity. The Commission argued that by adopting the 1996 directive and the 2014 enforcement directive the Union legislator had already decided that the objective of facilitating the freedom to provide services while ensuring a more level playing field between national and cross-border service providers and adequate protection of posted workers was better achieved at Union level. The Commission further stated that the proposal established a regulatory framework for the posting of workers at Union level, taking into account the inherent cross-border nature of the posting of workers as well as the fact that if Member States acted unilaterally at national level their action could lead to a fragmentation of the internal market as regards the freedom to provide services. The Commission therefore maintained the proposal.

The 'yellow card' on the Posting of Workers Directive was discussed at various interparliamentary meetings throughout 2016. At the meeting of COSAC Chairpersons in July, it was debated in the presence and with the active participation of Marianne Thyssen, the Commissioner responsible for the proposal. It was also the topic of an interparliamentary

committee meeting organised by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on 12 October 2016. The proposal is currently being discussed in the Council and Parliament.

2.3 Joint parliamentary scrutiny of Europol

On 11 May 2016 the new Europol Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/794) was adopted (to come into force on 1 May 2017).

An important innovation in this regulation is the fact that Europol will be brought under proper democratic scrutiny, to be performed by the European Parliament together with national Parliaments, in accordance with Article 88 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which states: 'These regulations shall also lay down the procedures for scrutiny of Europol's activities by the European Parliament, together with national Parliaments'. The Europol Regulation therefore establishes a Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group to 'politically monitor Europol's activities in fulfilling its mission, including as regards the impact of those activities on the fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons'. While the regulation itself sets out in detail the objectives, tasks and means of the new scrutiny group, it leaves its organisation and rules of procedures to be 'determined together by the European Parliament and national Parliaments in accordance with Article 9 of Protocol No 1'.

In May 2016 the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments, meeting in Luxembourg, agreed to follow a step-by-step approach and to ask a Working Group, comprising the Troika of the Conference of Speakers (the Parliaments of Luxembourg, Slovakia and Estonia and the European Parliament) to consider scrutiny mechanisms and to present a draft proposal for the organisation and rules of procedure of the new joint scrutiny body.[2]

Following the conclusions of the Speakers' Conference this step-by-step approach included a consultation (held in September and October 2016 and taking the form of a questionnaire) of all EU Parliaments/Chambers and of the European Parliament, as well as an exchange of views during the Interparliamentary Committee Meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) held on 28 November 2016 in Brussels.

As a result of this consultation process the Troika Working Group submitted a draft text to all Parliaments/Chambers at the end of 2016. This draft proposal aimed at defining such aspects of the future Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group as membership, numerical composition and presidency, as well as the frequency and venue of its meetings. Ahead of the final decision, to be taken by the Speakers of EU Parliaments and the President of the European Parliament during their annual Conference on 23 and 24 April 2017 in Bratislava, the text has been opened to amendments from all national Parliaments/Chambers.

2.4   EU trade policy and the role of the Parliaments

The year 2016 marked a significant point in interparliamentary relations in the field of EU trade policy. The Treaty of Lisbon placed the common commercial policy under the exclusive competence of the Union. However, so-called mixed agreements do not fall under this category, thus bringing back the discussion on competences. This has become clear in the context of the politically sensitive negotiations on TTIP (EU-USA) and CETA (EU-Canada).

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[2] The conclusions of the EU Speakers' Conference can be found at: www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-WEB/euspeakers/getspeakers

The role of national Parliaments in trade agreements can be twofold. Their ratification is needed in the case of mixed agreements, which makes their position formally very strong. However, besides the issue of formal competence, many national Parliaments, if not all, scrutinise their governments when the Council is giving the negotiation mandate to the Commission, as well as, in some cases, throughout the negotiations and when the agreement is signed. In those cases, the role of the national Parliaments depends on the national constitutional provisions.

In July 2016, the Commission proposed the signature of CETA as a mixed agreement, requiring ratification by all Member States through their national constitutional requirements. In October 2016, the Government of Belgium faced serious difficulties in securing a mandate for the signature of the CETA agreement.

In December 2016, the Court of Justice of the European Union's Advocate-General gave her opinion on the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA), concluding that it should be considered a mixed agreement, too. The matter is still to be decided by the full Court.

The plenary of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC) held in Bratislava from 13 to 15 November 2016 included an extensive and lively exchange of views on TTIP, demonstrating that the national Parliaments do not intend to become bystanders in major EU trade policy issues, neither politically nor legally.

The European Parliament's Committee on International Trade (INTA) responded to the need to enhance the interparliamentary dialogue by holding a working lunch on 29 November 2016. There seems to be a strategic interest in engaging with the national Parliaments all along the negotiation procedures.

2.5 The EU framework for strengthening the rule of law inside the EU: interparliamentary debates

The European Parliament has constantly stressed that the obligations of states as regards the rule of law and democracy constitute a fundamental issue, not only for candidate countries seeking to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria but also as a mandatory element after accession.

Since the introduction by the Treaty of Amsterdam of the mechanism leading to the suspension of a Member State, the European Parliament has been monitoring the compliance of several Member States with the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). Similar but stronger mechanisms exist in other international organisations, like the Council of Europe and the United Nations, where violations can lead to the exclusion of the violator contracting party. The mechanism foreseen by the EU Treaties has led to concerns and complaints, with Member States who considered themselves wrongly pinpointed and singled out by the European Parliament claiming that their voice seemed never to be taken into consideration when raising alarms. At the same time, civil society and the NGO community have constantly blamed the EU for non-action caused by the intergovernmental nature of the mechanism.

As a matter of fact, the nature of the mechanism is political and not jurisdictional. The CJEU cannot exert any control beyond the procedural aspects of the mechanism.

In March 2014 the Commission presented the communication 'A new EU Framework to strengthen the Rule of Law', with the aim of ensuring an effective and coherent protection of the rule of law in all Member States. The framework was meant to address and resolve situations where there is a systemic threat to the rule of law.

The Netherlands Presidency of the Council, in the framework of its parliamentary dimension activities, dedicated a chapter of the biannual COSAC report to the subject of the rule of law and

the role of parliaments, with the aim of outlining, if possible, common definitions of democracy and fundamental rights and suggesting best practices that could be shared among the national Parliaments and the European Parliament. The subject was included on the COSAC agenda and was one of the main topics of the plenary meeting held in The Hague in June 2016. While not reaching conclusions, the debate showed clearly the conviction that 'fundamental values' represent a shared and common set of core principles and that it is incumbent on all stakeholders to uphold and protect them. The European Parliament was represented in the debate by Sophie in 't Veld (ALDE), its rapporteur.

In October 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution with recommendations to the Commission on the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights (see the in 't Veld legislative initiative report under Article 225 TFEU)[3]. The report was accompanied by a European Added Value Assessment whose main conclusion was that there was a gap between the proclamation of the rights and values listed in Article 2 TEU and actual compliance by EU institutions and Member States, resulting in significant economic, social and political costs. The resolution emphasises 'the key role that the European Parliament and the national Parliaments should play in measuring the progress of and monitoring the compliance with, the shared values of the Union, as enshrined in Article 2 TEU'. The European Parliament's proposal for an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights aims to incorporate existing relevant tools in a single instrument.

The European Parliament called on the Commission to present a proposal by September 2017 for a Union Pact for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, in the form of an interinstitutional agreement aligning and complementing existing mechanisms.

Among other proposals, the report recommends the conclusion of a pact to establish an annual 'fundamental rights policy cycle', as part of a multiannual structured dialogue among all stakeholders which should include a yearly interparliamentary debate on respect for democracy, the rule of law and the state of fundamental rights within the Union.

3. Institutional parliamentary bodies

As has been pointed out, the main political themes seem to be cross-cutting all interparliamentary institutions and other forms of dialogue. During the year 2016, the European Parliament has been striving to present coherent positions and messages within the fora concerned. This is a task that requires constant monitoring and further consolidation.

3.1. The Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC)

COSAC, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs, was established in November 1989 in Paris. It is unique in that it is the only interparliamentary forum enshrined in the Treaties (see Protocol No 1 on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union). The national Parliament of the Member State holding the rotating Council presidency plays a leading role in defining the direction and work of COSAC. It is supported by a Presidential Troika of which the European Parliament is a permanent member and can rely on the organisational backing of a small secretariat, hosted by the European Parliament and led by an official seconded from a national Parliament ('Permanent Member'). After some years of relative unattractiveness, COSAC has been revived by the debate on the future of the EU and the role of national Parliaments within it.

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[3] Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0409.

The situation of the EU has had a concrete impact on the activities of COSAC, as on any other inter-parliamentary fora. COSAC could not be immune to the grievances of national public opinion expressing both expectations and complaints regarding 'Brussels', either for its incapacity to act or for its overabundant action.

As far as the agendas are concerned, the Netherlands and Slovak presidencies both gave high priority to the discussions on migration and the refugee crisis, in particular to the different measures and instruments that the Commission proposed in the course of 2015 and 2016. These proposals naturally led to heated debates and, in many cases, irreconcilable positions between southern and eastern Member States.[4]

In this respect, the European Parliament's delegation defended the positions of Parliament and the core values of the EU in a spirit of openness to compromise with the Presidency and the various national delegations. In several cases, this was instrumental in finding a consensus between positions which were initially far apart, in the adoption of contributions.

In the year of the UK referendum on exiting the EU, it is no wonder that the functioning of the EU, its relations with Member State institutions and its capability to meet its citizens' expectations were repeatedly discussed at official or side events during the COSAC meetings. Here also, exchanges were at times quite tense. That being said, following the referendum, although critical nationalist voices continued to express themselves, there was increasing awareness that the remaining 27 Member States had common interests to defend, and could do so much better through the European Union. Clearly, Brexit and the future of the EU will be prominent topics at forthcoming COSAC meetings. Most delegates insisted on the need for a new model of relations with the UK, and reflection is ongoing on whether national Parliaments should follow the Brexit negotiation process in a common institutionalised fashion.

The Brexit debates explain why discussions over the 'green card' or enhanced political dialogue and the 'yellow card' occupied a less important position among the debates of the delegations in 2016. COSAC continued the reflection on its role and on the enhancement of national Parliaments' involvement in EU decision-making, by debating key matters of an institutional nature, notably scrutiny beyond ministerial Councils (i.e. scrutiny of the trilogues), parliamentary cooperation on the Commission's work programme, and parliamentary diplomacy. As a result of the Brexit decision, very few delegations mentioned the 'red card' after the June referendum.

The European Parliament reasserted the need to safeguard the institutional balance established by the Treaties and to work jointly with national Parliaments in order to achieve a more transparent and effective legislative process.

At least two other subjects on the agenda of the COSAC meetings in The Hague and Bratislava witnessed the positive concern and engagement of national Parliaments in relation to concrete actions by the EU institutions. The Netherlands Presidency gave a high profile to a discussion on the role of parliaments in protecting the rule of law within the EU. Developments in several Member States and the recurrent references to activation of Article 7 TEU[5] justified the importance of the choice. As a consequence of the initiatives taken by the European Parliament's delegation and following the indications of Parliament's rapporteur Sophie in 't Veld, the text of the Contribution systematically referred to the triptych 'human rights, the rule of law and democratic governance', highlighting their inextricable linkage, as well as to the legal order of the European Union. However, the resistance of the Presidency to opening a possibly divisive

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[4] To raise awareness on the extent of the crisis, a proposal to organise a fact-finding/delegation visit to Italy in spring 2017 was presented by the Italian delegation. This was an unprecedented development for COSAC.

[5] See chapter 2.5 on the rule of law.

debate and the positions of a number of the other delegations prevented COSAC from expressing support for initiatives to create 'implementation mechanisms'. The final text only mentioned a dialogue to promote the common values of the Union.

At the Bratislava COSAC plenary meeting, the Slovak Presidency chose to insert a topical debate on the TTIP. The deep and long discussion was another confirmation that national Parliaments are following the negotiations very carefully. Their expectations as to a proper involvement in EU trade policy were high. The European Parliament's delegation engaged seriously in an open and thorough debate with them, keeping in mind the need to defend the Treaty provisions.

It is clear that the Presidencies strove to set the agenda in tune with major developments in European and international affairs, with the necessary flexibility to change it accordingly. The main topics on the agenda of the plenary meetings were addressed in the biannual reports. Another positive development consisted of increasing references to debates on related topics held during other specialised interparliamentary conferences, notably the Conference on the Common Foreign and Security Policy/Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP). This shows a positive trend towards a more structured and coherent interparliamentary cooperation.

As in recent years, several members of the European Parliament delegation were invited to address COSAC as keynote speakers or as 'first responders'. They presented the position of the European Parliament on topics ranging from migration and the rule of law in the EU to TTIP.

Some innovative initiatives were also taken such as electronic voting, informal polls, and interactive sessions where a co-panellist and the delegates would interact via a moderator. Videos, a special COSAC application and social media accounts featured among the innovations introduced to improve communication of the work of COSAC.

In conclusion, in 2016 COSAC provided national Parliaments with the opportunity to continue their joint reflections on matters of crucial importance of both a substantial and an institutional nature, as well as launching cooperation on the Commission's work programme[6]. It is hoped that future exchanges on the necessary parliamentary involvement in such matters, profiting also from the much-welcomed increased engagement with national Parliaments from the Juncker Commission, will result in closer positions on major issues and positive changes in the landscape of interparliamentary cooperation.

Taking into account the present political context, and with a view to future institutional reforms, COSAC - being the only Treaty-based forum - has reasserted its importance and attractiveness.

The European Parliament's participation in this forum should therefore continue to adequately reflect the importance of the stakes, in terms of both substantive expertise and political representation.

3.2. The annual and informal Conferences of Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union (EUSC)

The annual Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments (EUSC) is based on the Stockholm Guidelines adopted in 2010. They provide for one annual meeting, organised by the Member State holding the autumn Presidency in a given year so as to take place during the spring Presidency of the following year. The Conference adopts non-binding Presidency Conclusions. It also has the task of overseeing the coordination of interparliamentary EU

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[6] The discussions on the Commission's working programme led to the initiative by the Netherlands Presidency of presenting the Commission with a combined list of priorities of national Parliaments.

> *activities. Extraordinary EUSC meetings can be convened, but in 2016 this format was replaced by an informal Speakers' Summit.*

The annual Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union was held in Luxembourg on 22-24 May 2016 and was mainly devoted to migration and strengthening the European Union.

The topic of migration was introduced by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission. The debate followed three main areas of discussion: the need to find common and efficient European solutions (emphasised by most Speakers), the need for solidarity (emphasised by most, especially those from the most affected countries such as Greece and Italy), and the requirement to respect national sovereignty and the will of nation states in finding solutions (emphasised by Speakers from the Visegrád countries[7]). European Parliament Vice-President Mairead McGuinness spoke defending the European Parliament's positions, while also underlining the need to tackle the root causes of migration and the problems of growth and employment in the EU.

On the topic of strengthening the Union, Laura Boldrini, Speaker of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, presented the Rome Declaration on 'Greater European Integration: the way forward', initiated by the Presidents of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, the French *Assemblée Nationale*, the German *Bundestag* and the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*. The general debate highlighted a wide range of opinions, the Marshal of the Polish *Sejm* proposing a kind of counter-declaration called 'Europe of Solidary States'.

The debate on the role of national Parliaments encompassed various aspects and instruments of national parliamentary scrutiny. Norbert Lammert, President of the German *Bundestag* and keynote speaker, insisted in particular on the fact that all necessary instruments for interparliamentary cooperation already exist and are functioning well. The most important challenge ahead is now to produce qualitative results on such issues as TTIP and Europol. Another keynote speaker, Urban Ahlin of the Swedish Parliament, insisted on the practical aspects of interparliamentary cooperation (IPEX, network of representatives, etc). Most Speakers shared the interpretation of TTIP as a mixed agreement, while the debates on security and fundamental freedoms focused on striking the right balance and the need to fight radicalisation and hate speech.

On the initiative of the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament, Andrej Danko, an informal EU Speakers' meeting, the Bratislava Parliamentary Summit, was held in Bratislava on 6 and 7 October 2016, with the participation of the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz. In the aftermath of the UK Brexit vote, the aim was to discuss the current challenges the Union is facing, the EU's future goals and the role of the national Parliaments. The atmosphere in these debates was positive and forward-looking, even if differences of opinion were clearly present.

The meeting was divided into two panels: the first on the current EU challenges and the second on future EU goals. The aim was to have an open debate, with neither conclusions nor declarations.

The Slovak Speaker and host of the event referred to the many crises the EU was facing (economic, migration and Brexit), and stated that ensuring the security of citizens was imperative. Martin Schulz said that the future of the EU was on the table. National Parliaments were guarantors of the national constitutions, just as the European Parliament - a creation of the EU Treaties ratified by all EU Member States - was a guarantor of the legitimacy of the action of the EU. Recalling that the EU was only as strong as the Member States enabled it to be, he

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[7] Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

encouraged national Parliaments to take ownership of and responsibility for their countries' EU policies. In the context of Brexit, the President emphasised that the Union was based on the equal status of citizens and Member States. As a consequence, there could never be a Union of two classes of citizens or two classes of Member States.

Several Speakers stated that the Brexit vote was proof of the loss of trust of citizens towards the EU institutions and the 'establishment' in general. The Slovak Speaker insisted on the need to improve citizens' trust and interest in the EU and its institutions and on how to proceed with exchanging best practices among national Parliaments.

Many Speakers agreed that any new proposal should be implemented by making optimal use of the Lisbon Treaty, as there seemed to be very little appetite for Treaty reform.

The Slovak Speaker referred to the meeting's motto 'Let's get to know each other better' and proposed that the next presidencies should continue with this type of informal summit, which had proven to be both constructive and positive in spirit.

4. Interparliamentary dialogue

4.1. European Parliamentary Week and the Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union (IPC SECG)

Article 13 of the so-called Fiscal Compact provides for the establishment of an interparliamentary conference to discuss budgetary policies and other issues covered by the Agreement. The Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union adopted the rules of procedure of the Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union (IPC SECG) in 2015. The conference comprises all the national Parliaments and the European Parliament. The member parliaments are free to choose the size and composition of their delegations.

The Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union has emerged as a true forum for interparliamentary debate in these increasingly important policy areas. The agreement on procedural aspects paved the way for more in-depth discussions on the issues at hand.

On 17 February 2016, the States-General of the Netherlands and the European Parliament invited the national Parliaments to the IPC SECG. On 16 February 2016, the European Parliament also invited the national Parliaments to the interparliamentary meeting on the European Semester Cycles 2015/2016. Both events were part of the 2016 edition of the European Parliamentary Week and were attended by approximately 45 Members of the European Parliament, 130 members of national Parliaments and 120 accompanying officials.

The social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the fight against tax evasion, the role of automatic stabilisers for a fiscal union architecture and the common investment programme were the dominant topics of the IPC SECG, organised by the Slovak Parliament from 16 to 18 October 2016 in Bratislava. The event brought together 100 national parliamentarians from across Europe, a European Parliament delegation consisting of 11 Members of the European Parliament, and co-chaired by Anneli Jäätteenmäki, then Vice-President with responsibility for relations with national Parliaments, and Roberto Gualtieri, Chair of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), as well as representatives of the European institutions and the Slovak Government.

The debates were structured into four thematic sessions, preceded by meetings of the political groups and a formal opening session, which was addressed by the Deputy Speaker of the Slovak Parliament, Andrej Hrnčiar, and the Chair of the Financial and Budgetary Committee of the Slovak Parliament, Ladislav Kamenický. Several Members of the European Parliament participated as speakers in the different panels: Maria João Rodrigues, rapporteur for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL); Fabio De Masi, Vice-Chair of the Committee of Inquiry on Money Laundering, Tax Avoidance and Tax Evasion (PANA); Pervenche Berès, rapporteur for the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON); Jean Arthuis, Chair of the Committee on Budgets (BUDG); and Roberto Gualtieri, Chair of the ECON Committee.

4.2.   Interparliamentary cooperation on foreign and security policy

The Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (IPC CFSP/CSDP) is the interparliamentary platform for debate on the EU's foreign, security and defence policy. Organised twice a year, by the Parliament of the Member State holding the rotating Council Presidency in close cooperation with the European Parliament, the Conference is regularly attended by about 100 parliamentarians from across the EU. In addition, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) frequently invites national Parliaments to its meetings in Brussels, complementing the interparliamentary dialogue in this vital policy area.

In 2016, the eighth and ninth editions of the Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (IPC CFSP/CSDP) took place, from 6 to 8 April in The Hague and from 2 to 4 September in Bratislava. The European Parliament delegations to both meetings were composed of members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE). Both were chaired by Elmar Brok, Chair of the AFET Committee.

The CFSP/CSDP Conference held in The Hague brought together Members of the European Parliament, members of EU Member State Parliaments, and parliamentarians from candidate countries and from Iceland, Kosovo and Norway, as well as other political representatives and experts in the field of foreign and security policy. The speakers also included the Deputy Secretary-General of NATO, Alexander Vershbow, and the Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs (since June 2016 Secretary-General) of the European External Action Service, Helga Schmid. The debates during the four plenary sessions and three workshops focused on a strategic review of EU foreign and security policy, the strengthening of EU defence and rapid response, synergies within the EU and with external partners, foreign policy aspects of migration, and arms exports control.

In the conference conclusions, the European Parliament and the EU national Parliaments stressed that, at a time when external and internal security are intertwined as never before, cooperation in the field of CFSP/CSDP needs to be further strengthened.

At the Bratislava Conference in September the main topics discussed were the EU as a global player, a comprehensive approach to sustainable development and migration, and first steps towards a European Defence Union. The neighbourhood policies for the Western Balkans and the EU's eastern and southern neighbours were also debated in the conference sessions and workshops. High-level participants included the Vice-President of the European Commission and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, as well as the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs of the United Nations, Miroslav Jenca.

With the aim of fostering solidarity from all Member States and the collective effort to develop a common agenda, the delegations from Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain signed the so-called 'Bratislava Declaration by EU Member States of the southern border of the European Union'.

4.3. Interparliamentary Committee Meetings (ICMs) and other interparliamentary meetings

> *In addition to the two regular Interparliamentary Conferences, the European Parliament Committees organise annually close to 15 Interparliamentary Committee Meetings (ICMs) inviting the corresponding committees of the national Parliaments to engage in focused debates. Other types of interparliamentary meetings are organised on a more ad hoc basis, often by the Presidency Parliament.*

With a total of 14 Interparliamentary Committee Meetings and two interparliamentary conferences, 2016 confirmed the continuous demand for thematically focused and smaller interparliamentary debates at the expert level. The majority of the meetings followed the format of Interparliamentary Committee Meetings, exchanges of views, or workshops organised in Brussels on the initiative of one or more committees of the European Parliament and with the support of the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments. In 2016, 510 Members of national Parliaments met with 493 Members of the European Parliament, in meetings organised by 13 different parliamentary committees.

There are a number of meetings which have earned their regular place in the calendar of interparliamentary activities, namely the well-established European Parliamentary Week (see Chapter 4.1), an annual exchange of views on the cycle of the European Semester, the meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality marking International Women's Day on 8 March, and the biannual meetings of the Committees on Foreign Affairs in the Interparliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP.

A particular highlight in 2016 was the Interinstitutional Conference with national Parliaments on the Future Financing of the EU, held on 7 and 8 September. With the aim of providing a forum for proactive dialogue with national Parliaments, this conference brought together members of national Parliaments and the European Parliament, representatives of Member State governments and the European institutions, and members of the so-called Monti High Level Group on Own Resources. It created the opportunity for an in-depth exchange of views on key issues of European public finance, and in particular on the future of the financing of the EU budget. The results of the discussions served to feed the final report of the High Level Group, which was due by the end of 2016.

Another meeting of high political importance was the Interparliamentary Committee Meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on the targeted revision of the rules on the Posting of Workers on 12 October 2016. The Commission's proposal (COM (2016)0128) on the posting of workers had triggered the so-called 'yellow card' (see Chapter 2.2) and had thus put the focus on the upcoming negotiations on this proposal in the framework of the ordinary legislative procedure.

Moreover, the 2016 calendar of interparliamentary activities saw two workshops of the Legal Affairs Committee, two exchanges of views on the respective initiative of the Special Committee on Tax Rulings (TAXE 2) and the Committee of Inquiry into Emission Measurement in the Automotive Sector (EMIS), as well as five ICMs, of, respectively, the Committee on Culture

and Education (CULT), the Committee on Budgetary Control (BUDG), the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) and (on CETA, as a lunch debate) the Committee on International Trade (INTA). These all took place during a regular committee meeting slot.

A list of all interparliamentary meetings organised by European Parliament committees in 2016, as well as more detailed statistics, are available in Annex II.

4.4. Bilateral visits from EU national Parliaments to the European Parliament

An evolving tool and format for interparliamentary dialogue are the bilateral visits which individual national Parliaments pay to the European Parliament, often combined with larger sets of visits to the other EU institutions. This format provides a highly focused, tailor-made and flexible, cost- and time-efficient framework for discussions on issues of concern to one national Parliament in particular.

On an annual basis, the European Parliament receives up to a hundred official visits from EU national Parliaments, on its premises whether in Brussels or in Strasbourg. These visits offer an opportunity for a more focused 'bilateral' dialogue on EU issues raised by the visiting national Parliament or parliamentary Chamber.

The participants and topics of these visits vary extensively: from a visit of a Speaker of a national Parliament to working visits of committees covering a wide range of policy areas, or a study visit of officials from national Parliaments coming from many different areas of parliamentary work.

In 2016, the European Parliament welcomed 76 official visits from EU national Parliaments. Following the UK referendum on EU membership on 23 June 2016, the majority of the bilateral visits in the second semester of 2016 focused on the issue of Brexit and the future of the European Union.

In addition to bilateral visits, videoconferencing between the European Parliament and national Parliaments may be arranged, enabling parliamentarians to stay in touch on a particular issue over time or to arrange discussions on current issues without the need for lengthy preparations.

A detailed list of all visits, including videoconferencing, from national Parliaments to the European Parliament that were organised in 2016, with the support of the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments, is available in Annex III.

5. The 'early warning mechanism' and 'informal political dialogue' - Protocols Nos 1 and 2 to the Treaty of Lisbon

Protocol No 2 to the TFEU sets out a review mechanism, the so-called 'early warning mechanism', involving national Parliaments. Under this mechanism national Parliaments may review EU draft legislative acts, and if they see a breach of the principle of subsidiarity may send a 'reasoned opinion' within eight weeks of transmission to the issuing institution. The Protocol provides a procedure for a review and even a compulsory review (respectively known as the 'yellow card' and 'orange card') when the number of reasoned opinions exceeds specific thresholds. In addition, Protocol No 1 to the TFEU allows national Parliaments to comment on other documents such as green papers, white papers and communications from the Commission. Comments on these documents are quite numerous and fall under the so-called 'informal political dialogue'.

Early warning mechanism

As stated above, the 'early warning mechanism' only concerns reasoned opinions.

The Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI), which is responsible within the European Parliament for monitoring compliance with the principle of subsidiarity[8], has decided[9] that a submission from a national Parliament shall be regarded:

1. as a 'reasoned opinion' if it has been communicated to Parliament within the eight-week deadline referred to in Article 6 of Protocol No 2 to the Treaty of Lisbon[10], and indicates the view that a draft legislative act does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity;
2. as a 'contribution' if it does not fulfil those two criteria (submissions sent within the remits of the informal political dialogue are also called 'contributions').

Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, over 600 draft legislative acts have been sent by the Commission to national Parliaments for examination under the terms of Protocol 2. In response, around 2 500 submissions were sent by national Parliaments. Of these, only about 400 (16 %) were reasoned opinions alleging a breach of the subsidiarity principle, while the vast majority (about 84 %) were contributions that dealt with the substance of the proposals.

This demonstrates that national Parliaments have not used this mechanism to stall the legislative process at EU level. So far, only a few national Parliaments have sent large numbers of reasoned opinions. The threshold required to trigger the 'yellow card' review procedure has been reached only three times so far: in 2012 for the 'Monti II' proposal on the right to strike, which the Commission withdrew afterwards (though not on grounds of subsidiarity), in 2013 for the European Public Prosecutor's Office, where the Commission maintained its proposal, and in 2016 (May) against the proposal for a revision of the Directive on the Posting of Workers. In the last-named case the Commission decided to maintain its proposal, given that in its opinion it did not infringe the principle of subsidiarity.

The issue of the Posting of Workers Directive - which was also a key political event of the year 2016 - has been discussed in part 2, chapter 2.2.

While the number of new draft legislative acts decreased significantly in 2014 and 2015 (to 42 and 38 respectively), as did in parallel the number of submissions from national Parliaments (to 151 and 90 respectively), in 2016 the tendency changed again: there were 116 new draft legislative acts, while the European Parliament received 410 submissions (334 contributions and 76 reasoned opinions).

From the above it is clear that national Parliaments are willing to comment on the substance of legislative acts, and that they do not really hinder the decision-making process. On the contrary, they constitute an opportunity and a resource for the European Parliament in the development of its thinking and positions on various areas.

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[8] Rules of Procedure of the EP; Annex V, paragraph XVI, subparagraph 1: '[The] Committee on Legal Affairs Committee [is] responsible for ... the interpretation, application and monitoring of Union law and compliance of Union acts with primary law, notably the choice of legal bases and respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality'.

[9] See Conference of Committee Chairs document of 15 December 2010: 'Common approach for the treatment at committee level of national Parliaments' reasoned opinions and all other contributions of national Parliaments'.

[10] Protocol No 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, Article 6: 'Any national Parliament or any chamber of a national Parliament may, within eight weeks from the date of transmission of a draft legislative act, in the official languages of the Union, send to the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission a reasoned opinion stating why it considers that the draft in question does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. It will be for each national Parliament or each chamber of a national Parliament to consult, where appropriate, regional parliaments with legislative powers'.

Contributions and reasoned opinions are sent (very often accompanied by a summary of all submissions on the same subject) to the rapporteurs, who can use them both as a source of factual information, the content being sometimes very technical, and as a source of political information, the submission revealing the position of national Parliaments on the topic at stake.

This aspect was already patent for the European Parliament when, in its resolution of 16 April 2014 on relations between the European Parliament and the national Parliaments ('Casini report')[11], it welcomed 'the fact that in practice this mechanism is also being used as a channel for consultation and cooperative dialogue between the various institutions within the European Union's multilevel system'.

Detailed statistics for the reasoned opinions and contributions received under the early warning mechanism in 2016 are available in Annex IV.

Informal political dialogue

In 2016, national Parliaments continued to make active use of the 'informal political dialogue' by sending 243 contributions concerning legislative files falling under the exclusive competence of the European Union (and therefore not subject to the early warning mechanism) and a large variety of non-legislative documents, for example relating to ongoing debates at European level or, as already mentioned, consultation documents from the Commission. Since 2009, the European Parliament has received around 1 700 contributions from national Parliaments; these are published in a database on the European Parliament's intranet.

More importantly, at least in the framework of COSAC, it has become clear that the national Parliaments appreciate the Commission's active engagement in debates including them.

6. Tools for exchanging information and networking

6.1. European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)

Managed jointly by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) has as its participants 66 parliamentary Chambers (including 41 in the European Union) from 54 countries and European institutions. Almost 120 Correspondents and Deputy Correspondents represent their respective parliaments in the network and contribute to the ECPRD's principal activities, which consist of an intensive exchange of information and best practices.

Also in 2016, the ECPRD has impressively confirmed its status as an indispensable tool helping parliaments to serve their members and administrations. Its main activities comprise seminars on topical issues and comparative requests on legislative and parliamentary matters.

As regards the seminars, the ECPRD member parliaments normally host five to six seminars a year. In 2016, five seminars were organised jointly by the hosting parliament, the responsible ECPRD Coordinator and the ECPRD Secretariat. They attracted in total 315 participants from ECPRD parliaments. ECPRD seminars are open only to staff in ECPRD parliaments and help to establish networks of competent experts and services. The French National Assembly, together with the ECPRD Secretariat, jointly organised the Annual Conference of Correspondents in Paris.

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[11] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0430.

The European Parliament remains the main financial contributor to the ECPRD in terms of staff, partial reimbursement of travel expenses for some member parliaments, and the hosting of the ECPRD website. In return, the European Parliament relies heavily on the network when services are in need of information and best practices.

As regards the comparative requests, in 2016 ECPRD member parliaments submitted 274 comparative requests to the network, compared to 287 in 2015. This represents the third highest result since the network started operations in 2000. It shows that the involvement of ECPRD Member parliaments is clearly demand-driven, reflecting the needs of parliamentarians in member states and parliamentary administrations in terms of learning from experiences and solutions in other countries. The median reply rate to a request is approximately 63 %, and more than 80 % of replies meet the deadline or arrive shortly after. These figures, which have remained stable over the years, underline the reliability of the network and help in managing both workload and client expectations.

2016 confirms the observations from past years that around 42 % of requests deal with issues related to the functioning of parliaments (administration, bodies, procedures and members' issues), whereas the remaining 58 % are located in the political-legislative sphere. The administration of parliaments on the one hand and social policies (including migration and health) on the other keep their top positions respectively. Legal and financial matters and public safety score highly as well. In general, there is a stable and broad range of topics, which reflect the political and administrative agenda of parliaments and parliamentarians. This underlines the importance of the ECPRD network not only for political and legislative research but also for administrative projects and the exchange of best practices.

As a facilitator, the European Parliament's Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments provides support to the respective European Parliament's services, not only to explain the functioning of the ECPRD network, but also in the context of concrete requests. This work is crucial as it helps to maintain realistic expectations and effective results, bearing in mind that the ECPRD is a voluntary network to which correspondents contribute on top of their day-to-day priorities. As workload has become an issue over the years also for the ECPRD, it should be highlighted that a request should only be made when there are no alternative information sources. The ECPRD secretariat has the important task of checking that requests from all member parliaments meet the guidelines.

In 2016, the European Parliament transmitted ten requests to the ECPRD network on behalf of its services, slightly less than in 2015, for which year there were 13 requests. Two requests were sent out to prepare the annual conference of correspondents.

In the same year, the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments coordinated 34 European Parliament replies to requests from other parliaments, mostly on administrative and procedural matters. This is significantly more than in 2015, where 21 replies had to be prepared. It should be stressed that these replies are essential also as signs of goodwill, as they indirectly motivate other members of the network to contribute with replies in response to the European Parliament.

As regards the ECPRD website, a large-scale refurbishment was launched in 2016. Over the past ten years, the site has been subject to a number of evolutions in the form of new modules and procedures, enhancing its features but without a general revision of the whole structure and interface. At the same time, the world has moved forward in terms of tools, standards and habits. Mobile devices have changed the way we interact and communicate on the web and the PC has lost its predominant role in this field. A modern website and its features have to function seamlessly, immediately and without loss of usability on smartphones, tablets and desktops, an

approach called 'responsive design'. In order to achieve this goal, a series of requirements has been established and a detailed work plan put in place. The daily exchange of information in the form of requests and replies, the ECPRD events with online registration, the ambitious parliamentary factsheets and the powerful search engine require a new platform that can be consulted from everywhere on all devices. The new website will be presented at the Annual Conference for 2017, which will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the ECPRD.

Cooperation with DG ITEC continued to be of excellent quality. New security measures have been implemented to protect the website and contributing partner parliaments against external threats.

Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe

The 'Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe' summarises information on selected topical matters raised by parliaments within the ECPRD network. Topics are chosen insofar as they seem relevant for the European Parliament or coincide with subjects on its political agenda. The Spotlight provides interesting comparative insights on the situation in national Parliaments and helps create a better mutual understanding.

In 2016, the Directorate prepared five new issues of the Spotlight on a broad variety of topics.

A detailed list of ECPRD meetings and comparative requests issued by the European Parliament, as well as an overview of the editions of the 'Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe' issued in 2016, are available in Annex V.

6.2. Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX)

The objective of the Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX) is to support interparliamentary cooperation by providing a platform for the electronic exchange of EU-related information between Parliaments in the EU. IPEX was launched as an initiative of EU national Parliaments and was developed with the technical assistance of the European Parliament. Today, 41 Chambers of 28 national Parliaments and the European Parliament are using IPEX in their daily activities. IPEX is subject to continual improvement to meet the changing needs of its users.

In 2016, IPEX consolidated its position as an essential tool for interparliamentary cooperation.

Building on the work of previous presidencies, the Luxembourg chairmanship successfully completed the work on the Handbook for the Correspondents and the IPEX leaflet, which provides a very short overview of what IPEX stands for, and of its objectives, structure and database.

At their annual meetings in 2016, the Speakers of EU Parliaments called on the Luxembourg presidency to continue the discussions on a digital strategy, which will guide the decisions of the IPEX Board regarding the future development of IPEX.

The digital strategy, drafted by an IPEX working group, outlines the strategic approaches to be taken in order to achieve the goals in relation to the target IPEX audience and the information and services provided by IPEX. It also identifies how to involve national correspondents more actively in the exchange of information and relevant actions for the promotion of IPEX.

After its adoption by the Secretaries-General of EU Parliaments in 2017, the IPEX digital strategy will be complemented by a 3-year work programme, which will ensure continuity in the management of projects that span more than one chairmanship. The priority objectives for the

IPEX Work Programme are: promoting IPEX; enhancing the IPEX network; and improving the IPEX database.

Throughout 2016, special attention was paid to networking and to the users of IPEX. In this respect, promotional meetings continued in the European Parliament, targeting users from the political groups and the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).

There is increasing interest in analysing the possible interaction with other platforms of interparliamentary information exchange. At the suggestion of the European Parliament, a presentation on the Unified Repository Base on Implementation Studies (URBIS) was included on the agenda of the IPEX Board meeting held in Brussels in 2016.

IPEX is considered one of the most successful and concrete projects realised in cooperation with the national Parliaments of the European Union and the support of the European Parliament. The mechanism of the rotating presidencies, the digital strategy and the work programme will lead to an increased feeling of ownership of IPEX by all EU Parliaments.

IPEX currently publishes over 80 000 pages (to be exact, 81 475) from national parliaments and the European institutions, holding scrutiny-related information in 11 500 documents produced by the EU institutions and linked to some 9 350 dossiers. In 2016, the total number of legislative and non-legislative documents recorded in IPEX was 1064.

In 2016, the IPEX website had 253 264 unique visitors. The number of pages visited was almost 7 million.[12]

6.3. Other tools and networks

National Parliament representatives in Brussels

The Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments welcomes and hosts the administrative representatives designated by the EU national Parliaments (or Chambers) to the European Parliament. Since 1991 (2016 marked the 25th anniversary of the arrangement) and with a view to strengthening interparliamentary cooperation within the EU, the European Parliament has offered these representatives complimentary office and other in-house facilities upon request, on its Brussels and Strasbourg premises.

Over time, all EU national Parliaments have sent a national official to Brussels to facilitate relations with the EU. In total, approximately 50 people from 41 Chambers occupy 37 offices. The representatives work in the same European Parliament building that houses the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments. This creates numerous synergies and promotes easy exchanges.

These representatives are national officials whose role is administrative and neutral: their task of mutual information (as a two-way flow between the European Parliament and the national Parliaments) is a key factor in EU affairs, because the ultimate goal of these exchanges is very concrete, namely to find common responses at parliamentary level to the many challenges facing the European Union.

An updated list of representatives is available at: www.europarl.europa.eu/relnatparl/en/about/contacts.

'Presidency Parliament' support programmes

Interparliamentary cooperation and exchanges are intensified in the preparatory phase of the parliamentary dimension of each EU Presidency. Where the Parliament of a country that is holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time requests in writing the assistance of the European Parliament for preparing its activities in the context of the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency, the European Parliament may contribute to the cost of the programme on a shared basis with the corresponding parliament, within the limits of sound financial management. Within this programme, the European Parliament strives to offer tailor-made support based on the Presidency's needs and priorities.

Following changes to the calendar of the Presidencies of the Council of the EU, we now have an unprecedented sequence of Member States all finding themselves at the helm of the EU for the first time: Slovakia, Malta, Estonia and Bulgaria. The Parliaments of these countries have confirmed their interest in the EU Presidency Support Programme.

In 2015 and 2016, the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments agreed to a support programme for the Slovak Parliament, and successfully organised several visits for Members of that Parliament, as well as study visits for experts attached to it to the European Parliament's committees and services.

A similar programme is foreseen for the Estonian and Bulgarian Presidencies, while a visit to Malta was organised in December 2016 in preparation of that country's Presidency. A seminar on subsidiarity and cooperation with the European Parliament was held on that occasion.

Participants in the programme confirmed that thorough early exchanges were particularly useful in setting up the calendar and better planning of the parliamentary dimension. Networking with all relevant interlocutors (Members of European Parliament, European Parliament's officials, parliament representatives, the IPEX Officer, the COSAC Secretariat, interparliamentary conference project teams) and sharing lessons learnt from recent experiences were highly appreciated. The transfer of expertise and the constant communication also ensured the consistency of the work of various presidencies, and short-term secondments to specialised services were also considered of great value.

Connect - the European Parliament's database of national Parliament documents

The Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments manages the Connect database on the European Parliament intranet. This database contains all EU-related documents that national Parliaments have officially transmitted to the European Parliament since 2010.

At present, Members of European Parliament, assistants, political groups, committee secretariat staff and other European Parliament's officials, as well as the Brussels-based representatives of the national Parliaments, can access the database on the European Parliament's intranet at: www.connect.ep.parl.union.eu.

It is envisaged that in 2017 the Connect database will be made available on Parliament's publicly accessible website www.europarl.europa.eu/relnatparl.

Reinforcing the European Parliament's relationship with EU national Parliaments in a global context

In 2016, the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments worked on a project[13] to reinforce follow-up and enhance cooperation with EU national parliaments in multilateral assemblies and global fora.

The first practical steps towards linking the national Parliaments more closely to the work of the European Parliament were carried out in the context of the 'Ukraine Week' held in February and March 2016. This major event was organised by the European Parliament, and aimed at reinforcing the capacity building of the Ukrainian *Rada*. National Parliaments were invited to participate with a view to mapping their activities in order to ensure complementarity.

Another relevant feature of the project was the European Parliament's high-level involvement in the biennial European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments, held in Strasbourg on 15 and 16 September 2016 under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. More than 50 Speakers participated at the event. Vice-President Lunacek represented the European Parliament at that conference, with administrative support and advice being provided by the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments. The regular participation of the European Parliament in these events, organised under the aegis of the Council of Europe, during which the European Union and its institutions are constantly referred to and often criticised, would be a meaningful development.

Also of relevance in relation to this project is the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The President of the European Parliament is invited twice a year to the IPU's assemblies. On the margins of the IPU assemblies, the Association of Secretaries-General (ASG) also meets. The Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments will continue to monitor IPU, with a view to ensuring a successful participation.

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[13] DG Presidency Project 4, 'Reinforcing the relationship with EU national Parliaments in a global context'.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I - COSAC meetings - Topics and keynote speakers 2016

COSAC event	Topics	European Parliament's keynote speakers/panellist
Meeting of the Chairpersons The Hague, 7 - 8 February 2016	• Organisation and cooperation of parliamentary scrutiny on the basis of a case study focusing on Europol • European priorities for 2016 and beyond	
Plenary Meeting of the LV COSAC The Hague, 12 - 14 June 2016	Reflection on the Dutch EU Presidency • Session I: Parliamentary scrutiny, an exchange of best practices • Session II: The role of parliaments in protecting the rule of law within the EU • Session III: Exchange of best practices and experiences in parliamentary diplomacy • Session IV: European Court of Auditors • Session V: Migration • Discussion on the state of play of implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement	**Sophie in 't Veld**, rapporteur of the legislative own- initiative report on the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights **Elmar Brok**, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)
Meeting of the Chairpersons Bratislava, 10 - 11 July 2016	• Priorities of the Slovak Presidency • Social dimension of EU and Cohesion Policy - triple A on social issues	
Plenary Meeting of the LVI COSAC Bratislava 13 - 15 November 2016	• State of play of the Slovak presidency • Strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the EU • The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) • 2016: the Energy Union's year of delivery • Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration	**Danuta Maria Hübner**, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)

For a more detailed information concerning the agenda of COSAC meetings as published by the presidencies, please consult the COSAC website: www.cosac.eu

ANNEX II - Interparliamentary meetings organised by European Parliament committees in Brussels[14] in 2016

EP committee	Event	Participation of			
		National Parliaments[15]			EP
		Members	Parliaments	Chambers	Members
ECON/BUDG/ EMPL	16 - 17 February <u>European Parliamentary Week</u>: Interparliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union (IPC SECG)	134	33	44	45
JURI	17 February <u>Workshop</u>: Workshop on new rules for contracts in the digital environment	4	4	4	4
AFET	23 February <u>Interparliamentary committee meeting</u>: 'Toward the NATO Summit in Warsaw' and 'Conflicts in the MENA region'	37	19	22	91
FEMM	3 March <u>Interparliamentary committee meeting</u>: 'Women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU'	41	29	33	15
TAXE 2	18 April <u>Exchange of views with EU national Parliaments</u>: 'The Anti-Tax Avoidance Package and other EU and international developments: scrutiny and democratic control by national Parliaments'	25	17	19	34
BUDG	7 - 8 September <u>Interinstitutional Conference</u> with national Parliaments on the future financing of the EU	58	20	25	34
ECON	28 September <u>Exchange of views with EU national Parliaments</u>: 'The 2016 cycle of the European Semester'	16	15	15	22
CULT	11 October <u>Interparliamentary committee meeting</u>: 'Cultural and creative sectors in the EU'	29	17	19	11
EMPL	12 October <u>Exchange of views with EU national Parliaments</u>: 'A targeted revision of the rules on the posting of workers'	32	18	22	68
JURI	17 October <u>Workshop</u>: 'Robotics and artificial intelligence - ethical issues and regulatory approach'	4	4	4	4
AFET	8 November <u>Interparliamentary committee meeting</u>: 'State of play of the Common Foreign and Security Policy'	25	14	15	86

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[14] Unless specified otherwise, all meetings are Interparliamentary Committee Meetings.
[15] EU Member States, candidate countries, potential candidate countries, Switzerland and Norway.

CONT	8 November Interparliamentary committee meeting: 'Towards better spending in shared management: a more cooperative model of parliamentary scrutiny'	16	12	12	9
LIBE	28 November Interparliamentary committee meeting: 'Europol and its parliamentary scrutiny in the framework of EU internal security policies'	45	24	31	22
AFCO	29 November Interparliamentary committee meeting: 'The European Parliament's right of inquiry', 'The revision of the EU electoral law', 'The future institutional evolution of the European Union'	30	15	19	18
INTA	29 November Lunch debate with national Parliaments on CETA	10	7	9	14
EMIS	5 December Exchange of views with national Parliaments: Exchange of views with representatives from the national Parliaments of Germany, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom on the parliamentary investigations into emissions measurement in the automotive sector	4	4	4	16
TOTAL		510	NA	NA	493

ANNEX III - National Parliaments'[16] visits to the European Parliament (including videoconferences)

Date	Country / Chamber	Committee / Other
11/01/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members and officials; representatives from the *Confédération européenne des syndicats* and the Centre for European Policy Studies
13/01/2016	UK - House of Lords	EU Affairs Committee
25/01/2016	UK - House of Commons	International Development Committee
26/01/2016	UK - House of Lords	EU Financial Affairs Subcommittee
28/01/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Standing Committee on Labour and Social Affairs
26/01/2016	Nordic Council	Delegation of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council
16/02/2016	SE - Riksdag	Research Service and Library
16/02/2016	ES - Cortes Generales	Officials from the Spanish parliament and regional parliaments
17-18/02/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Working visit of members and officials
18-19/02/2016	UK - House of Commons	Study visit
24/02/2016	DK - Folketinget	European Affairs Committee
29/02-01/03/2016	UK - House of Lords	Officials from the Environment and Energy Subcommittee
01-02/03/2016	UK - House of Commons	European Scrutiny Committee
14/03/2016	UK - House of Commons	Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
15/03/2016	UK - House of Commons	Welsh Affairs Committee
15-16/03/2016	RO - Senate	Committee on Transport and Energy
16/03/2016	IT - Camera dei Deputati	Joint Antimafia Committee
16/03/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
16/03/2016	Meeting with invited EU national Parliaments in the field of security	
21-22/03/2016	BG - Narodno sabranie	Delegation of the South-East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly (SEECP PA) chaired by Tsetska Tsacheva, Speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria
04-05/04/2016	DK - Folketinget	Officials
05/04/2016	DE - Bundestag	European Affairs Committee
05/04/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members
06/04/2016	FI - Eduskunta	Audit Committee
07/04/2016	FR - Sénat	French Senate Bureau
18-19/04/2016	FI - Eduskunta	Grand Committee
18/04/2016	AT - Nationalrat	Officials
20-22/04/2016	SK - Národná rada	Officials on preparations of the parliamentary dimension of the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council
26-27/04/2016	UK - House of Lords	EU Home Affairs Sub-Committee
28-29/04/2016	DK - Folketinget	Officials
03/05/2016	IT - Senato della Repubblica	Joint meeting of the Committees on EU Affairs and Transports (videoconference)
03/05/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members
23/05/2016	NL - Tweede Kamer	Committee on Infrastructure & Environment
26-27/05/2016	UK - House of Commons	Study visit
26/05/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members and officials

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[16] EU national Parliaments; Norwegian Parliament; Nordic Council.

03/06/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Trainees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
06-07/06/2016	FR - Sénat et Assemblée nationale	Joint EU Affairs Committee
13-15/06/2016	SK - Národná rada	Officials on preparations of the parliamentary dimension of the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council
14/06/2016	IT - Camera dei Deputati	Economic Activities, Trade and Tourism Committee (videoconference)
15/06/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises
16/06/2016	EE - Riigikogu	Officials
22/06/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members
24/06/2016	NL - Tweede Kamer	Officials
29/06/2016	DE - Bundestag	Johannes Singhammer, Vice-President
29/06/2016	DE - Bundestag	Tourism Committee
13-14/07	UK - House of Commons	Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
14/07/2016	IT - Camera dei Deputati	Finance Committee (videoconference)
06/09/2016	DE - Bundestag	Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development
06-07/09/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members
07/09/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Officials of the mission of Norway to the EU
09/09/2016	NL - Tweede Kamer	Delegation from the Erasmus Centre for Healthcare Management
16/09/2016	UK - House of Lords	EU Subcommittee
26/09/2016	FR - Sénat	Members
27/09/2016	IT - Camera dei Deputati	Committee on Waste
27-28/09/2016	FI - Eduskunta	Officials of the Parliamentary Research Service
28/09/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members
12/10/2016	DK - Folketinget	Chair of the European Affairs Committee
17-18/10/2016	AT - Nationalrat	Officials
19-21/10/2016	PL - Sejm	Officials from the Chancellery
24/10/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
27/10/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Officials from the Ministry of Finance
08/11/2016	FI - Eduskunta	Grand Committee
09/11/2016	PL - Sejm	EU Affairs Committee
09-10/11/2016	UK - House of Lords	Officials
10/11/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Members and officials
15/11/2016	IT - Camera dei Deputati	Culture Committee
21-22/11/2016	FR - Sénat	Jean Bizet, Jean-Pierre Raffarin and senators (group 'Brexit et refondation de l'Union Européenne')
25/11/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	Trainees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and employees of the Ministry of Justice
28/11/2016	NL - Tweede Kamer	European Affairs Committee
29/11/2016	AT - Nationalrat	Visit of Karlheinz Kopf, Second Speaker
29/11/2016	IE - Houses of the Oireachtas	Joint Committee on EU Affairs
30/11/2016	DK - Folketinget	EU Affairs Committee
30/11/2016	UK - House of Lords and House of Commons	Tripartite meeting of UK MEPs, MPs and Peers
30/11/2016	HR - Hrvatski sabor	Domagoj Ivan Milošević, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee
14/12/2016	NO - Norwegian Parliament	EEA/EFTA delegation
14/12/2016	FR - Assemblée nationale	Interparliamentary working meeting: agriculture, biodiversity and international trade

ANNEX IV - Early warning mechanism data
Reasoned opinions and contributions submitted to the European Parliament in 2016[17]

Submissions received by national Parliaments in 2016			
		Reasoned opinions	Contributions
Member State	Parliament/Chamber	2016	2016
Austria	Nationalrat	0	0
Austria	Bundesrat	5	5
Belgium	Chambre des Représentants	0	0
Belgium	Sénat	0	0
Bulgaria	Narodno Sabranie	4	0
Croatia	Hrvatski Sabor	1	0
Cyprus	Vouli ton Antiprosópon	0	4
Czech Republic	Poslanecká sněmovna	4	10
Czech Republic	Senát	3	35
Denmark	Folketinget	3	2
Estonia	Riigikogu	1	0
Finland	Eduskunta	0	0
France	Assemblée Nationale	0	3
France	Sénat	8	3
Germany	Bundestag	0	3
Germany	Bundesrat	0	25
Greece	Vouli ton Ellinon	0	0
Hungary	Országgyűlés	2	0
Ireland	Houses of Oireachtas	3	3
Italy	Camera dei deputati	0	16
Italy	Senato	3	65
Lithuania	Seimas	1	0
Luxembourg	Chambre des Députés	2	5
Latvia	Saeima	1	0
Malta	Kamra tar-Rappreżentanti	5	1
The Netherlands	Tweede Kamer	3	2
The Netherlands	Eerste Kamer	3	4
Poland	Sejm	2	0
Poland	Senat	3	10
Portugal	Assembleia da República	1	63
Romania	Camera Deputaților	2	21
Romania	Senatul	1	39
Spain	Cortes	0	15
Sweden	Riksdagen	12	0
Slovenia	Državni Zbor	0	0
Slovenia	Državni Svet	0	0
Slovakia	Národná rada	2	0
United Kingdom	House of Commons	1	0
United Kingdom	House of Lords	0	0
TOTAL		**76**	**334**

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[17] This table only lists national Parliament documents that were sent in response to draft legislative acts falling under Protocol 2 of the Lisbon Treaty. It does not include documents sent in reaction to non-legislative consultation documents, green papers or white papers (the so-called 'informal political dialogue').

ANNEX V - European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)

A. Issues on which political bodies and administrative services of the European Parliament consulted the ECPRD network in 2016 through comparative requests

- Delegation of powers to parliamentary committees
- Contributions of national Parliaments to the pre-legislative phase of EU law
- Members' parliamentary activities on official parliamentary websites
- Approval of changes to the electoral procedures for European Parliament elections - constitutional requirements
- Training and introductory courses for new members, including information handbooks
- National Parliaments' support to their employees commuting to work
- Accessibility of parliament buildings for people with a disability
- Hybrid vehicles or e-cars in Parliaments' transport services
- Rules for organising events in Parliaments
- Reactions to committees of inquiry of the European Parliament in Member States

B. ECPRD seminars and statutory meetings in 2016

Seminars		
Seminar 'Parliaments and the new economic and budgetary governance' (Area of Interest Economic and Budgetary Affairs)	Baku	19-20 May
Seminar 'A digital facelift for parliaments' (Parli@ments on the Net XIV) (Area of Interest ICT in Parliaments)	Berlin, Bundesrat	9-10 June
Seminar 'Knowledge and documentation services for a parliament for today and tomorrow' (Area of Interest Libraries, Research Services and Archives)	Oslo	8-9 September
Seminar 'ICT in Parliaments' (Area of Interest ICT in Parliaments)	Den Haag, Eerste Kamer	10-11 November
Seminar 'Legislative scrutiny pre and post' (Area of Interest Parliamentary Practice and Procedure)	Dublin	24-25 November
Statutory Meetings		
Meeting of Executive Committee	Cracow	17-18 March
European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments (with meeting of Secretaries General on ECPRD)	Strasbourg	15-16 September
Meeting of Executive Committee	Athens	22-23 September
Annual Conference of Correspondents	Paris	17-18 November

C. Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe

- Social benefits and rights of citizens and non-citizens (Spotlight No 9 - February 2016)
- Civil nuclear power policy after Fukushima (Spotlight No 10 - March 2016)
- Youth mobility in the EU (Spotlight No 11 - June 2016)
- In vitro fertilisation (IVF) availability in national health services' provisions (Spotlight No 12 - September 2016)
- Quality of legislation stemming from the EU (Spotlight No 13 - December 2016)

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS
OF THE EU MEMBER STATES

March 2017

👤 directly elected

👤 indirectly elected / appointed / other

Belgique/België/Belgien BELGIUM

Kamer van volksvertegen-woordigers/ Chambre des représentants/ Abgeordnetenkammer	150 👤
Senaat/ Sénat/ Senat	60 👤

България BULGARIA

Народно събрание (Narodno sabranie)	240 👤

Česká republika CZECH REPUBLIC

Poslanecká sněmovna	200 👤
Senát	81 👤

Danmark DENMARK

Folketinget	179 👤

Deutschland GERMANY

Deutscher Bundestag	630 👤
Bundesrat	69 👤

Eesti ESTONIA

Riigikogu	101 👤

Éire/Ireland IRELAND

Dáil Éireann	158 👤
Seanad Éireann	60 👤

Ελλάδα GREECE

Βουλή των Ελλήνων (Vouli ton Ellinon)	300 👤

España SPAIN

Congreso de los Diputados	350 👤
Senado	208 👤
	58 👤

France FRANCE

Assemblée nationale	577 👤
Sénat	348 👤

Hrvatska CROATIA

Hrvatski sabor	151 👤

Italia ITALY

Camera dei Deputati	630 👤
Senato della Repubblica	315 👤
	5 👤

Κύπρος CYPRUS

Βουλή των Αντιπροσώπων (Vouli ton Antiprosopon)	56 👤

Latvija LATVIA

Saeima	100 👤

Lietuva LITHUANIA

Seimas	141 👤

Luxembourg LUXEMBOURG

Chambre des Députés	60 👤

Magyarország HUNGARY

Országgyűlés	199 👤

Malta MALTA

Il-Kamra Tad-Deputati	71 👤

Nederland THE NETHERLANDS

Tweede Kamer	150 👤
Eerste Kamer	75 👤

Österreich AUSTRIA

Nationalrat	183 👤
Bundesrat	61 👤

Polska POLAND

Sejm	460 👤
Senat	100 👤

Portugal PORTUGAL

Assembleia da República	230 👤

România ROMANIA

Camera Deputatilor	329 👤
Senat	136 👤

Slovenija SLOVENIA

Državni zbor	90 👤
Državni svet	40 👤

Slovensko SLOVAKIA

Národná Rada	150 👤

Suomi/ Finland FINLAND

Eduskunta	200 👤

Sverige SWEDEN

Riksdagen	349 👤

United Kingdom UNITED KINGDOM

House of Commons	650 👤
House of Lords	825 👤