Outline of COSAC's 20th Bi-annual Report

Chapter 1. European Elections 2014: Platform for Debate on the Future of the EU with its Citizens

The 2014 European elections will be the first since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. They will take place under the conditions of persistent global financial crisis and while the European Union (EU) is taking important steps towards a genuine Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The credibility and sustainability of the EMU depend on the institutions and the political construct behind it.

The history of European integration and the link between the EU and its citizens could be described as a "passive agreement".[1] In recent times however, Europeans have become more critical and demanding. When asked about ways to ensure that their voice is heard by EU decision-makers, six out of ten EU citizens responded that the most effective means to achieve this is by voting in the European elections.[2] Therefore the 2014 European elections offer a timely opportunity to engage Europeans in the debate about their views on the EU and its future.

This chapter of the Bi-annual Report, building on the debate held in Dublin, will examine how the upcoming European elections have been considered by Parliaments. It will outline the views of Parliaments on European elections as well as suggestions. The report will specifically examine the question of whether there should be affiliation between national and European political parties prior to and during the elections to the European Parliament and whether each European party should nominate a candidate for President of the European Commission prior to the European elections.[3] It will also examine the opinions of Parliaments on how to improve voter turnout in the European elections.

Parliaments play a crucial role in engaging EU citizens in the debate on the EU and its future. The chapter will therefore aim to find out how Parliaments have managed to fulfill this role. It will also seek information about the methods used to engage in the discussion with voters for instance, debates in media, public meetings, round table discussions with think tanks.The chapter will examine what outreach and educational activities are undertaken by Parliaments in this regard. In the overall context of the debate on the future of the EU, Parliaments will be asked to express their views on whether the time is ripe for a new Convention on the Future of Europe and how they engage citizens in a dialogue on this topic.

Chapter 2. Democratic Legitimacy in the EU and the Role of EU Parliaments

Parliaments play a distinct role in establishing links between European citizens and European policymaking process. The constantly developing context of European integration, the challenges posed by the economic and financial crisis, the initiatives launched in the field of economic governance as well as foreign, security and defense policy – all require proactive involvement of Parliaments.

The Treaty of Lisbon, often called the Treaty of Parliaments, has reinforced the role of the

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[1] Project Europe 2030. Challenges and opportunities. A report to the European Council by the reflection group on the Future of the EU 2030, p.47

[2] Two years to go to the 2014 European elections, European Parliament Eurobarometer (EB/EP 77.4), 20.08.2012:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2012/election_2012/eb77_4_ee2014_synthese_analytique_en.pdf

[3] As examined in COM (2013) 126

European Parliament and national Parliaments in the EU. Since the Treaty the European Parliament has developed into a key player in the EU legislative process, however, there is still much to be done by Parliaments in order to build a truly comprehensive system of parliamentary accountability in the EU. Despite the intense discourse about the role of national Parliaments in the EU decision making process, there is still no clear understanding of how an effective role of national Parliaments can be defined and achieved.

Due to the different political and institutional traditions, a wide array of mechanisms exists in different Parliaments to exercise parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs. These have further evolved since the Treaty of Lisbon. Scrutiny has also taken place at the European level with the development of the subsidiarity mechanism and the continued evolution of the Political Dialogue between national Parliaments and the European Commission. At the level of interparliamentary cooperation numerous instruments to ensure democratic legitimacy and accountability have been established, including the Interparliamentary Conference for the CFSP and the CSDP, as well as the interparliamentary conference envisaged by Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union.

Chapter 2 of the report will investigate the methods national Parliaments use to pursue democratic scrutiny of and control over of their governments as well as the methods used by the European Parliament to control the European Commission and other executive bodies. It will examine the mechanisms of parliamentary scrutiny used by Parliaments and will specifically look into the scope, relative importance and effectiveness of the scrutiny procedures. It will gather views on the effectiveness of existing tools and formats of interparliamentary cooperation inside and outside the Treaty of Lisbon, including the monitoring of the principle of subsidiarity.

This chapter will collect views of Parliaments on how democratic legitimacy and accountability can continue to evolve in the future. It will seek further insights on how Parliaments see the future of interparliamentary cooperation in order to foster proactive participation of national Parliaments in the EU policy-making process. It will also outline the expectations of Parliaments with regard to their role and place in the EU's institutional architecture in the case of any future treaty revisions.

Chapter 3. Implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy

In the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy the EU Member States committed themselves to aim to provide employment for 75 % of the population aged 20-64, to ensure that the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the 30-34 year olds should have a tertiary degree, and to reduce the number of people in or at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020.

Chapter 3 will examine parliamentary scrutiny of the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy targets as well as the state of play of ongoing reforms and examine best practices and procedures. Parliaments will be invited to share their views on whether the political commitment to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy is properly reflected in European and national policies and budgets. The chapter will also take a closer look at how national Parliaments and the European Parliament can further develop their cooperation in order to contribute to achieving the set targets. This chapter will also examine the extent of parliamentary debate on the impact, especially social impact, of the austerity measures on the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy targets at both the EU and the national levels.