

Austrian Parliament, Parlamentskorrespondenz Nr. 505: "Fasslabend: Europe has its difficulties but it is alive. COSAC adopts a unanimous final document", 23 May 2006

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(see Parlamentskorrespondenz No. 505 of 23 May 2006)

Fasslabend: Europe has its difficulties but it is alive COSAC adopts a unanimous final document

Vienna (PK) – The XXXVth COSAC (Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of the national Parliaments of the European Union and the European Parliament) came to an end today with a unanimously adopted final document. Chairman Werner Fasslabend (ÖVP), referring to the lively and sometimes discordant discussion, stressed the significance of the compromise that had been reached. In spite of the different positions, it had been possible to reach a consensus containing substantive points, he said. "Europe has its difficulties but it is alive. Long live Europe!" he concluded.

Some participants explicitly welcomed the balanced text (Herman de Croo, Belgium, H0use of Representatives, and Pierre Lequiller, France, National Assembly). Jo Leinen, chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Affairs, also expressed his satisfaction at the course of the discussion. It had shown that parliamentarians were doing something to oppose stagnation in Europe and were in favour of a proactive agenda, particularly the major project of a new European treaty. Replying to the discussion of the previous day, Leinen stressed that the European Parliament and national parliaments were partners in parliamentarianism and the democratisation of European politics. The subsidiarity review incorporated an essential principle of the EU, namely decentrality.

The Finnish MP Jari Vilen said that under the Finnish Presidency subsidiarity and neighbourhood policy would remain as central focuses. Regarding subsidiarity, a practical approach would be sought. As far as the neighbourhood policy was concerned, Finland would concentrate primarily on the northern and eastern dimensions. He said that the next COSAC meeting would take place on 20 and 21 November 2006.

More transparency, implementation of subsidiarity and proximity to the public

The main focuses of the final document is subsidiarity and transparency. The effective application of the subsidiarity and proportionality principle on the basis of the Treaty of Amsterdam is described as an important element of the scrutiny role of national parliaments. The Conference welcomes the commitment of the President of the Commission at the Joint Parliamentary Meeting on the Future of Europe on 9 May 2006 to transmit all legislative proposals directly to the national parliaments. The Commission is asked to take into account comments from national parliaments and to offer a reasoned response within an acceptable timeframe. The exchange of information between parliaments will be facilitated by the IPEX website, which will be presented by the speakers of the national parliaments and European Parliament at their conference in Copenhagen from 29 June to 2 July 2006.

The COSAC participants also urge the Commission to devise a method by the end of 2006 to reduce bureaucracy and welcome the initiative by the Commission to simplify existing EU law and to achieve better quality in future.

The document also calls for more transparency in the EU and to allow open Council sessions.

As far as the Constitutional Treaty is concerned, COSAC participants look forward to the presentation of a road map for future action at the European Council on 17 June 2006, which should also deal in general with the ratification process as well as presenting specific proposals as to how the EU could function better. The parliamentarians are of the view that the confidence of European citizens in the EU can be strengthened only if the debate on the Constitutional Treaty is continued at all levels and that the specific concerns and fears of the people are discussed.

Finally, the COSAC participants support the reform and stabilisation process in the Western Balkans and the efforts to bring these states closer to the EU. The reform process in Ukraine is also noted positively. In principle the parliamentarians regard the neighbourhood policy as a necessary complement to the enlargement policy.