

**Speech by Edvīns INKĒNS, a Member of the Latvian Parliament, at  
the European Convention  
Brussels, 28 – 29 October 2002**

First of all, I would like to thank the Convention's Working Group on the Role of National Parliaments, headed by Ms. Gisela Stuart, and to commend the Group for its excellently prepared report.

A deeper study of the report on the role of national parliaments reveals that the proposals of the Working Group, understandably, do not contain many new or original ideas. It is evident that increasing the role of national parliaments is difficult or, one could say, even impossible because of the current structure of the European Union. It is possible to effect slightly more than cosmetic but less than substantial reforms in this sphere.

The first and most important task is to provide to national parliaments the same timeliness, scope and quantity of information that are provided to national governments. This will enable the national parliaments to identify in due time the issues and problems in whose resolution they could participate within the framework of their own parliamentary procedures, and it will be at the discretion of a national parliament itself which mode of conduct to choose.

Secondly, if a national parliament so wishes, it can establish procedures that help it effectively scrutinise the government's decisions on EU matters. However, in this case the Convention cannot go further than just mentioning examples of best practices because the relation between national parliaments and governments is so deeply involved with the issue of sovereignty that one cannot really give advice on it. We clearly know that there are several models of relations between national governments and parliaments, each of them having its roots and traditions. Generally speaking, one could argue that any national parliament could act as a watchdog of the subsidiarity principle (as was mentioned in the report of the Working Group).

Thirdly, with regard to horizontal, or inter-parliamentary, relations, it ought to be said that currently COSAC is the medium for such relations. Recently, the President introduced the idea of a congress, but at the moment it is difficult to comment on this idea because neither its mandate nor its functions are clear, nor is it known in what way it would be different from COSAC. Just now a COSAC meeting on the reform of COSAC ended its work in Copenhagen. I have been participating in COSAC meetings since the Luxembourg meeting, and it is clear that the purpose for reforming COSAC was to improve its functioning and strengthen its administrative capacity. To expect something more was and is unrealistic. At the same time, if countries had political will, COSAC could carry out two new functions:

First, as a stronghold of the principles of subsidiary and proportionality, COSAC could be a good forum for interparliamentary discussions if the representatives had a clear mandate from their national parliaments.

Second, specialised COSAC meetings could be dedicated to discussions of specific EU policies, for instance, third-pillar issues, thus directly or indirectly complementing the work of the Council.

Thus, national parliaments would be better prepared for the implementation of new policies in their countries.

And finally, it goes without saying that I support the recommendations mentioned in the report of the Working Group.

All of them are realistic and relatively easy maintaining. They do not create conflicts between institutions, but at the same time allow national parliaments to play more active role, if they certainly wish so.