



European Security and Defence Assembly  
Assembly of Western European Union

DOCUMENT A/2055

2 December 2009

FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION

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Models and structures for interparliamentary cooperation

**REPORT**

submitted on behalf of the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations  
by Hendrik Daems, Rapporteur (Belgium, Liberal Group)



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Report transmitted to: the President of the Council of WEU; the Secretary-General of the WEU; the President of the Council of the European Union; the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; the President of the European Commission; the EU Commissioner for institutional relations and communication strategy; the Presidents/Speakers and the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and European Affairs Committees of the 39 national parliaments represented in the Assembly; the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the CIS Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation; the President of the European Parliament; the Secretaries General of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe, NATO and the OSCE.

*Models and structures for interparliamentary cooperation*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESOLUTION 137

on models and structures for interparliamentary cooperation

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

submitted by Hendrik Daems, Rapporteur (Belgium, Liberal Group)

- I. Introduction
- II. From cooperation to parliamentary diplomacy
- III. The WEU Assembly model
- IV. The different models for interparliamentary cooperation
- V. The quest for more satisfactory solutions
- VI. Conclusions
- VII. What future is in store for the ESDA?

APPENDIX

Interparliamentary bodies referred to in the report

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the Committee on 4 November 2009.

**RESOLUTION 137<sup>2</sup>**

*on models and structures for interparliamentary cooperation*

The Assembly,

- (i) Aware of the need to preserve interparliamentary cooperation in all its forms and further develop it in the future so that ideas on common problems posed by globalisation can be shared and exchanged;
- (ii) Concerned by the lack of accountability that would result from governments acting together, unchecked by an interparliamentary authority with a popular mandate;
- (iii) Convinced that it is essential for work done in interparliamentary bodies to have greater visibility and determined to spare no effort to ensure that its own work has greater impact within national parliaments,

PROPOSES THAT THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS REPRESENTED IN THE ASSEMBLY:

1. Review their general procedures for appointing members to interparliamentary assemblies in order to examine how best to make the most of the work done within those bodies;
2. Give thought, as a means of drawing more readily on the expertise available to them, to choosing representatives on national delegations to interparliamentary assemblies from among the membership of parliamentary committees whose interests coincide with those of the relevant assembly;
3. Facilitate the adoption of procedures to ensure optimal use is made by the home parliament of the work done by their members at supranational level, so that their knowledge can usefully be shared with their colleagues in the same field;
4. Define the resources needed to comply with international political commitments, bearing in mind that governments have considerable means at their disposal, while parliaments face the risk of seeing their activities confined to the national level on the pretext of making budgetary savings.

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<sup>2</sup> Adopted by the Assembly on 2 December 2009 at the 2<sup>nd</sup> sitting.

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

*submitted by Hendrik Daems, Rapporteur (Belgium, Liberal Group)*

### *I. Introduction*

1. In recent years there has been a plethora of initiatives and programmes aimed at strengthening the exchanges among national parliaments worldwide, sparking off a major debate on rationalising the different forums for interparliamentary cooperation. Interparliamentary relations have flourished, leading to the definition of common areas of interest at regional level and numerous proposals for cooperation among the members of the different parliaments, who are increasingly aware of the limitations of purely national approaches to common problems. While sceptics may complain about spreading resources too thinly and the lack of tangible results, the fact is that such cooperation initiatives are springing up everywhere. It is useful to look more closely at this resurgence of activity, which would appear to correspond to a real need.
2. Without a doubt these developments must be seen in the context of globalisation. The challenges and objectives in many areas go beyond national borders: in our interconnected world we need a collective approach to problems. But a coordinated response calls for exchanges of ideas and a joint process of reflection at various levels. In the political sphere, the national parliaments have responded to that need by creating among themselves various bridging structures, whose form and content vary according to their history, circumstances and political objectives. This is proving to be a surprisingly vigorous trend: one report<sup>3</sup> lists some 50 interparliamentary organisations active worldwide. Our own Assembly has produced two reports<sup>4</sup> on the parliamentary dimension of sub-regional organisations. Mention should also be made of the work done on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe<sup>5</sup> by our former President, Luis Maria de Puig.
3. Interparliamentary activity these days takes many different shapes and forms. It is a global phenomenon: no region of the world is without its interparliamentary body. The largest network is the Interparliamentary Union (IPU), which currently brings together parliamentarians from all United Nations member countries. More than a century old, it was established at the initiative of two parliamentarians – William Randal Cremer from Britain and Frédéric Passy from France – during the first Interparliamentary Conference organised by the pacifist movement in 1889 in Paris. At the other end of the spectrum in terms of size is the Baltic Assembly established by the three Baltic republics immediately following the break-up of the Soviet Union.
4. It is noteworthy that interparliamentary initiatives have tended to flourish at turning-points of history. After the second world war, during the period of decolonisation and at the end of the cold war, for example, parliamentarians very quickly felt the need to look beyond the national borders to seek cooperation with neighbouring countries. Common interests generally stem from geographic proximity, but also from the political or cultural ties among states. Thus most initiatives have been regionally based and have led to the creation of regional or sub-regional assemblies. Particular links may be established at different levels of representation, for example between national parliaments and devolved assemblies: the British-Irish Parliamentary Body, founded by the British and Irish Parliaments then opened up to the parliaments of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, is a case in point.
5. This report will focus on the different models and structures for cooperation among national parliaments that currently exist; the study will for the moment be confined to the continent of Europe. Contact details of the various interparliamentary structures are listed in the appendix.

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<sup>3</sup> Association of Secretaries-General of parliaments “Inter-parliamentary organizations in the world: objectives, functions and areas of interest”, Geneva, October 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Document 1724, “Sub-regional organisations in Europe and their parliamentary dimension – Part I: Central and Southern Europe”, Mrs Agudo Cadarso, Rapporteur (7 December 2000), and Document 1739, “Sub-regional organisations and their parliamentary dimension – Part II: Northern Europe” Mrs Kestelijn-Sierens, Rapporteur, and Mr Koiv, co-Rapporteur (19 June 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe working documents, 2003.

## *II. From cooperation to parliamentary diplomacy*

6. The work of most of these interparliamentary structures can be divided into two main categories: regional cooperation programmes and diplomatic action to establish ties with like-minded bodies.

7. In many cases interparliamentary cooperation is the corollary to intergovernmental programmes. In the economic and social fields, for example, parliamentarians can get together with their counterparts from the other countries to scrutinise intergovernmental action and speed up the adoption of the legislation needed to implement joint programmes and harmonise or coordinate their procedures. Certain interparliamentary assemblies were created precisely for that purpose: through their preparatory work on the legislative front they have paved the way for significant progress in a number of areas that have further evolved with globalisation and the opening up of borders. Examples are environmental protection, security and the fight against trafficking and organised crime, the control of migration and infrastructure programmes in the transport, waterways and energy sectors. The majority of such interparliamentary structures are adjuncts to intergovernmental organisations or are founded on intergovernmental agreements which make explicit provision for them.

8. In other cases interparliamentary conferences provide a forum allowing representatives of countries that are in conflict to put aside their differences and to establish contacts and develop common ideas. By seeking those factors which unite, as opposed to those which divide their members, certain interparliamentary assemblies are models of progress and dialogue. Within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), for example, parliamentary delegations from countries which have seen conflict between them, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia, Russia and Georgia or Russia and Ukraine have been coming together for more than 10 years to discuss common cross-border development projects and to simplify the legislation for specific trade and development programmes. The WEU Assembly too was a pioneer in the field of parliamentary diplomacy; it was born during the post-war years from the bold vision of its founding members who proposed military cooperation among states that had been at war with each other for centuries. Let us not forget that public opinion at the time was not ready to consider Germany as a military partner and that the “educational” work of parliamentarians over 50 years or so most certainly contributed to the emergence of the common ideas underlying the ESDP structures as we know them today.

9. While the role of parliamentary assemblies in preparing the ground for legislation is quite well accepted, the same is less true of their role in scrutinising intergovernmental action. Opinions also diverge somewhat on the issue of parliamentary “diplomacy”. The interparliamentary function is not self-evident and the results are not always immediately visible. One needs a certain historical perspective in order to be able to measure the added value of a given structure and observe its progress over time. Some interparliamentary structures simply ceased to exist when they did not produce the desired results.

10. There is also a trend for interparliamentary assemblies dealing with similar or related fields to converge in one way or another, by offering each other observer status or even full membership, for example, or by signing partnership agreements. If we take the example of the European Parliament, we see that it has given rise to other interparliamentary assemblies composed of MEPs and members of the national parliaments of neighbouring regions. In some cases the EP delegation is just one among other delegations, in some cases it accounts for half the membership of the other body.

11. As further evidence of the mounting level of interparliamentary activity we should mention the latest addition to the family: the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament decided on 15 January 2009 on the principle of creating an interparliamentary assembly for relations with the neighbouring states of Eastern Europe (EURONEST), to be put in place after the European elections in June. It will be the parliamentary component of the partnership with Eastern European states (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) that the EU has decided to establish in order to strengthen the eastern dimension of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The EP will thus extend its relations to a region that was not covered up until now.

### *III. The WEU Assembly model*

12. The model constituted by our European Security and Defence Assembly/Assembly of WEU, given its longstanding existence and the numerous discussions concerning its future, might be a good place to start our examination.

13. Our Assembly, based on the 1954 Paris Agreements modifying the 1948 Brussels Treaty, decided in June 2008 to amend its Charter and Rules in order to more closely reflect the new geopolitical realities of post-cold war Europe. In a previous report<sup>6</sup> your Rapporteur set out in detail the changes it made in order to refocus on its core task of parliamentary scrutiny of the Common European Security and Defence Policy. It assumed the title of European Security and Defence Assembly and changed its membership rules in order to grant full rights to all European Union member states and various other categories of status to the non-EU NATO member states, candidate countries, and other European states including Russia. The WEU Assembly, a pioneer in the field of interparliamentary relations on common security issues and with 60 years of experience, is more convinced than ever of the need for a forum for political debate on these intergovernmental issues of the kind not provided by any other institution in Europe. It is an institutional model which remains as relevant as ever and unequalled by any other of the similar structures that have sprung up in recent years as borders have opened.

14. Technically speaking the Assembly has a “classic” structure based on that of the national parliaments of the western states, with a firm legal basis, a permanent headquarters, a President elected for a term of office sufficiently long to allow him to leave his imprint on the political management of the organisation, members divided into transnational political groups, standing committees each with its secretariat, and clearly defined competences. These elements are essential for the efficiency and continuity of the joint exercise of parliamentary activities at supranational level. We will see the limitations of certain structures in which not all these conditions are met.

### *IV. The different models for interparliamentary cooperation*

15. The following is a brief summary of the different models for regional interparliamentary cooperation that have been adopted in Europe.

#### *Objectives of cooperation*

16. One of the main reasons for relations among national parliaments is to allow a collective process of reflection to take place on specific subjects. The first common structures were created, often in the framework of an international organisation, in order to address specific areas such as common security, economic integration, the protection of rights or issues arising out of a shared culture. Parliamentary bodies on a truly global scale are rare, the only example being the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) mentioned previously. The majority are regional or subregional structures.

#### *Forms of cooperation*

17. The longest-standing bodies such as our Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have the classic parliamentary structure of permanent assemblies with a fixed headquarters and permanent secretariat and regular sessions (two to four each year). Others take the form of annual or half-yearly interparliamentary conferences held in different places on a rotational basis. This model is often that which is chosen for the initial phase of a new cooperation structure. In many cases after a few years it evolves into a proper assembly. A simpler model is that of interparliamentary groups set up to address specific questions such as space or women’s rights; they meet regularly but have a more informal support structure, although in many cases they too evolve, into interparliamentary conferences.

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<sup>6</sup> Document 1999, “Revision of the Charter and Rules of the Assembly”, submitted on behalf of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privileges by Jean-Pierre Masseret, President of the Assembly (France, Socialist Group) and Hendrik Daems, (Belgium, Liberal Group), Rapporteurs.

*Legal basis*

18. The WEU, Council of Europe and OSCE Assemblies and PABSEC are each founded on an international treaty, in other words they stem from an intergovernmental initiative. Other assemblies arose in the framework of an international organisation (such as NATO) but at the initiative of the parliaments of the signatory states. Yet others are based on geographic criteria and were set up at the initiative of the parliaments of the region, examples being the Central European Initiative (CEI) and Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). Some bring together representatives of countries sharing specific characteristics (e.g. French-speaking or Orthodox countries). Each assembly has a charter and rules of procedure adopted by the members and forming its legal basis.

*Headquarters*

19. The WEU and Council of Europe Assemblies are alike in having a permanent seat. A number of others have head offices but hold their sessions in the different member states on a rotating basis. Finally some assemblies have neither a fixed headquarters nor secretariat, but a system whereby they are administered, by turn, by the country holding the presidency of the organisation.

*Membership*

20. Interparliamentary assemblies and conferences are generally composed of individual parliamentarians from their member parliaments. National delegations may be quite large (up to 36 people including both members and substitutes at the Council of Europe Assembly and ESDA/AWEU) and in many cases are proportional to country size and reflect the balance between government and opposition parties.

21. In addition it is stipulated for delegations to the Council of Europe Assembly that their parliaments must comply with democratic standards and that delegations must include members of both sexes.

22. Assemblies generally ratify their members' credentials. If members are appointed to government during the course of their mandate, they are obliged to resign from the assembly, since the two functions are incompatible. Resignations are voluntary but an assembly may also terminate the membership of the representatives concerned.

23. Membership of certain interparliamentary forums such as COSAC and other conferences of specialised committees is confined to parliamentarians sitting in specific parliamentary bodies or in some cases to chairmen or speakers, but with the possibility of sending a substitute to replace them.

24. A widespread practice is to offer neighbouring countries or other parliamentary assemblies the possibility of sending a delegation of observers.

*Presidency*

25. In the classic assembly model the members elect their president for a term of up to three years. In some cases the different political groups take it in turns to nominate the president. There is no requirement for the president, once elected, to give up any mandates he or she may hold at national level.

26. In other models the presidency rotates among the member states. In this case there is no election as such of the president, since it is the speaker of the parliament of the country concerned who fulfils that function.

*Internal organs*

27. (a) The president of the assembly has a team of vice-presidents who are either elected or appointed at national level. If there are fewer vice-presidential posts than there are member states, the different countries take turns. In some cases (e.g. the OSCE Assembly) there are formal elections with competing candidates. The term of office is often the same as that of the president and is often one year only. In the case of a rotating presidency, the procedure for electing vice-presidents may vary from that for the president: vice-presidencies may, for example, be given to the country next in line for the presidency.

28. The bureau of the assembly – although the terminology varies from one body to another - is made up of the president and vice-presidents. In some cases another body exists, the presidential committee, which also includes political group leaders and committee chairmen.

29. (b) In classic structures one of the members, a quaestor or treasurer, is placed in charge of the assembly's administrative and financial management. That person may be the chairman of the budgetary affairs committee, where this exists. In that case the assembly votes in plenary on the institution's accounts. In assemblies with no fixed headquarters and a leaner administration, member countries take it in turns to manage the accounts; the OSCE Assembly is an exception to that rule since it has an appointed treasurer.

30. (c) In most cases the work is divided by subject matter among different committees: these may be standing bodies or ad hoc structures. The committees conduct the preparatory work for a more general meeting. In some cases there is a standing committee that has the power to take decisions on behalf of the assembly as a whole. Each committee elects a chairman from among its members.

31. (d) All assemblies hold at least one plenary session a year. The number of sessions each year varies from one to four (Council of Europe). In many cases mini-sessions bringing together a smaller number of participants are held between full sessions.

32. (e) The situation as regards political groups varies considerably. In some models there is a high degree of interparliamentary integration, whereas in others parliamentarians remain organised in national delegations and are less integrated at supranational level. The rules of the WEU and Council of Europe Assemblies make provision for the formation of political groups in which the criterion of nationality is used only to establish quotas in order to avoid the formation of national groupings. Although the OSCE Assembly has no established rule in this regard, the members have spontaneously organised themselves into groups based on political affinity, in order to bring their influence to bear on the life of the organisation. Indeed, in bodies in which the existence of political groups is rooted in the rules of procedure, the political groups play a role proportional to their size, executive posts are officially shared among them and each group is entitled to a set amount of speaking time during debates. In some cases the political groups receive separate funding and the names of their members are officially set out in the assembly list in the same way as those of committee members.

#### *Parliamentary acts*

33. Parliamentary acts expressing a common point of view on a given subject are voted in after a discussion conducted in several stages. They may take the form of recommendations, motions, declarations or similar texts addressed to governments or other international bodies. In no case are they binding decisions, since the structures under consideration are consultative bodies only. The Council of Europe Assembly is a special case, however, since it elects judges to the European Court of Human Rights.

#### *Voting procedures*

34. In the classic model members vote individually, but in some institutions voting is by national delegation. In the first case amendments may also be tabled individually, or by a specified minimum number of members, and in the second by national delegations. There are often rules concerning the deadlines for tabling amendments, to ensure that they are submitted sufficiently in advance to allow for their translation and distribution to members, in order to guarantee a democratic debate.

#### *Privileges and immunities*

35. Members of the national parliaments come under their national legislation as regards the privileges and immunities of their office. The rules of certain interparliamentary structures contain additional provisions to allow their members to exercise freely their international responsibilities so that borders are no obstacle and their international remit can at times extend further than that provided for by their national legislation. This is the case, for example, of the Council of Europe Assembly, whose particular concern for the protection of human rights begins with the freedom of its members to participate in political activities. National parliaments wishing to limit the freedom of participation of their members must file a request with the member states.

*Budget*

36. Depending on the constitutive act of the interparliamentary structure concerned, its funding is provided either by the international organisation to which the member states belong, or by the founding parliaments contributing on a voluntary basis. A budget committee reports to each plenary session on the expenditure incurred.

*Official languages*

37. Most international assemblies are multilingual, in many cases posing a considerable problem of practical organisation. In some cases the organisation quite naturally adopts the lingua franca of the region, such as Russian for the majority of bodies from the former Soviet sphere of influence. Others have a set number of official languages and must provide for translations of documents and simultaneous interpretation of debates. Translation and interpreting costs are a major budgetary item for all interparliamentary cooperation structures, although there is a growing trend towards using English in order to save time and money.

*Links with the national parliaments*

38. The link between the interparliamentary assembly and its members is provided by a national secretariat. The acts and working documents of the interparliamentary body are in some cases translated into the national language and are often included in the publications of the national parliament.

***V. The quest for more satisfactory solutions***

39. This panorama of the various forms of interparliamentary cooperation enables us to comment on the different options in the light of experience.

40. Looking back over a number of years of interparliamentary cooperation we note that in most cases it takes the form of an interparliamentary assembly. Such an assembly may originally have arisen out of an interparliamentary group set up on a voluntary basis, or a conference that gradually evolved from a one-off into a half-yearly or annual event. However, in cases where the legal basis is the founding treaty of an international organisation (e.g. the WEU and Council of Europe Assemblies, and more recently, PABSEC) it is interesting to note that the interparliamentary dimension was created by the signatory governments themselves. In the case of NATO, however, the parliamentary component was set up at the initiative not of the governments, but of the national parliaments of the member states. Whatever the case may be, a stable legal basis is the only guarantee for the continued existence of an interparliamentary structure, since an initiative stemming solely from the national parliaments may be called into question in an unfavourable economic climate (as was the case with the CEI Assembly) and deprived of support and funding.

41. The headquarters of an interparliamentary body may often rotate to begin with, but as the institution stabilises the need for a more permanent base becomes more pressing. It may start with a small secretariat, consisting perhaps of a documentation centre and treasurer, which progressively takes on other functions such as coordination and archiving, until it gradually evolves into a genuinely permanent secretariat. A secretariat with its own premises does not necessarily mean that the institution itself is confined to one place: meetings and presidencies can continue to rotate among the different countries according to a fixed timetable or on a voluntary basis. This intermediate solution, corresponding to the need for lean structures and direct contacts with partners, is the one adopted by most assemblies, in particular the NATO and OSCE Assemblies, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the Nordic Council Assembly. This system may have been less effective in the past, but with the new communications technologies it now gives satisfactory results. It can happen that an institution (such as the European Parliament) offers its own premises to another interparliamentary initiative; while this solution has obvious economic and practical advantages, it may be somewhat less satisfactory in terms of striking a political balance, given that one of the partners necessarily exerts more influence.

42. Delegation sizes vary considerably. The biggest delegations can be found in our own Assembly and that of the Council of Europe, to which the big countries send 36 delegates (18 members plus 18

substitutes). It should be pointed out, however, that the delegations to the two organisations of the 10 founding member states consist of the same people and that some members opt to participate in one or the other rather than both. At the other end of the scale is the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) with its three-member national delegations (including for countries with bi-cameral parliaments, which means that some members are the sole representative of their chamber) and a large (45-strong) delegation from the European Parliament. The number of parliamentarians involved in a cooperative structure needs to be sizeable in order to ensure genuine participation in all its activities and a permanent follow-up, and to allow effective action to be taken back home in the national parliament. Clearly this is too heavy a workload for only two or three parliamentarians and it makes sense to provide for substitutes to replace members unable to attend. Paradoxically, overly limited resources may turn out to be counterproductive and lead in the end to a waste of resources.

43. The criteria for membership of delegations are generally left to the appreciation of the national parliaments. The Council of Europe Assembly is an exception in that it only admits delegations from national parliaments elected according to democratic standards and including representatives of both sexes. This makes sense for an assembly with competence for human rights and it is worth considering whether it would not be useful for all assemblies specialised in a specific area to select parliamentarians who are members of the relevant committees in their national parliaments (in the case of our own Assembly and the NATO Assembly, the Defence Committee, for example, or for PABSEC the Economic Affairs Committee). However one might question whether the rules or charter of an interparliamentary body can legitimately impose such conditions on sovereign parliaments: in a number of constitutional systems parliament alone has the right to determine its internal organisation and no other institution can interfere. The best solution for effective cooperation might therefore be to express the wish that delegations should meet certain criteria, but leave the final decision up to the national parliament.

44. The first point on which the internal organisation of interparliamentary bodies differs is the role of the president. In the classic interparliamentary assembly the president is elected for several years and candidates are nominated by the different political groups on a rotating basis. This system guarantees that the president plays a role within the institution and provides the political leadership needed to implement a programme. There is a danger with a rotating presidency of the president's role being reduced to simply guaranteeing continuity or of the presidency being no more than a residual function for the speaker of the national parliament of the country holding the presidency. The personality, motivation and commitment of the president are of course also important, but having a president devoted exclusively to that role has the advantage that it can only strengthen the institution. The very fact of having to compete with other candidates for the nomination is a guarantee of motivation and commitment.

45. Political groups, as mentioned above, are another point on which the various interparliamentary assembly models differ considerably. The fact of grouping members together at supranational level by political affinity leads to a high level of integration. Indeed it is precisely for that purpose, in order to avoid national groupings, that representatives must come from a specified minimum number of different countries in order to form a group. Conversely, a system of representation by national delegations remains somewhat rigid and remote: an assembly which is nothing more than a juxtaposition of national delegations will never gain the perspective needed to transcend national interests and there is a risk that delegations will devote all their energy to trying to convince each other of their opinions rather than to finding common ground for joint proposals. Many of the rules of procedure depend on whether or not there are political groups. This issue affects nominations for the posts of president of the assembly and chairmen of committees, committee membership, speaking time, the right to table amendments and above all individual voting: the existence of political groups is a guarantee that members will vote according to their personal convictions rather than national considerations. Voting by delegation will necessarily reflect strictly national interests and project an image of countries working in parallel rather than pulling together. Only in bodies divided into political groups do we see nationality taking a back seat and a common approach emerging within each of the supranational groupings. Without such a system, it is difficult to imagine a genuine interparliamentary assembly as opposed to a simple forum of national parliamentarians.

46. Clashes between the schedules of the national parliaments and those of interparliamentary assemblies are another obstacle to effective action by the latter. Parliamentarians are faced with a difficult choice when called upon to travel to meetings in the midst of a session of their national parliament. Their participation in interparliamentary activities depends on their being able to fit them into an already busy national political schedule. Rationalisation measures are called for, but the question is how such measures can be implemented simultaneously in a large number of countries, when the pace of work of each parliament is governed by a number of independent and largely unforeseeable parameters. The United Kingdom Parliament is the only one, thanks to its constitutional system, to have found a satisfactory solution. Indeed, our House of Commons colleagues are not necessarily assigned to standing committees or equivalent bodies because their membership of an interparliamentary delegation counts as an integral part of their mandate. This is an ideal solution which, unfortunately, is not about to be adopted on the continent. Hence, the simplest solution, in order to reconcile the requirements of all parties in a flexible fashion, might perhaps be for interparliamentary assemblies themselves to take the initiative of rationalising their sessions and missions according to a precise and predictable timetable: Mondays and Fridays are very often less busy for national parliaments than the middle of the week, while certain months like January or September are further away from the annual sessions. One possibility, in consultation with other interparliamentary assemblies, would be to declare one week “international week”, which national parliaments would leave free so that the sessions of all the interparliamentary bodies could be scheduled during that week. This system might be of interest to a large number of parliamentarians: Romania, for example, due to its geopolitical position, is a member of some 15 interparliamentary institutions. As a corollary to that rationalisation process, however, a solution would have to be found for parliamentarians belonging to several interparliamentary bodies: the members of our own Assembly, for example, which for historical reasons shares its delegations with the Council of Europe – an anomaly that it would be desirable to correct when the respective treaties come up for revision – are constantly having to juggle with their schedules.

## *VI. Conclusions*

47. The question most frequently asked with regard to interparliamentary bodies is what real benefit do member parliaments derive from them. Indeed, in the realm of politics and ideas there can be no objective measurement of the results, which may take different forms and not be immediately apparent. There can be no doubt that interparliamentary activities open up a wide sphere of knowledge to those who participate in the meetings and are committed to delving into specific issues. To gain maximum benefit the parliamentarians concerned would need only to occupy functions within their home parliaments which would allow them to make the best use of that knowledge, as members of the relevant parliamentary committees, for example. In this way, they can rapidly pass on information to their colleagues in their day-to-day parliamentary activities on the floor and through written procedures, so that the knowledge gained by some can be shared by all. Indeed, a parliamentarian who does not occupy such a key post finds himself working in total isolation without that immediate support from interested colleagues, a situation which must at all costs be avoided.

48. To resolve that problem our Assembly undertakes as of now to step up its efforts to ensure that proper follow-up is given to its work. Meeting on 28 January 2009 in Strasbourg, the leaders of the political groups adopted a proposal to make it the responsibility of each Rapporteur for a period of one year following the adoption of his/her report to make use of all available procedures within the national parliament to disseminate and debate the contents with a view to submitting questions to government on the subject addressed by the report. Any replies could either form the subject of an oral report during the interparliamentary debate or be incorporated into the official documents. This method would have the twofold advantage of drawing attention to the issue at national level and obliging the Rapporteur to report back to the Assembly committees on the results obtained. The idea is to make this a two-way process which in order to work requires good will on all sides.

49. That indeed is necessary, but still not sufficient! In fact the solution lies with the national parliaments, for it is in their interests to provide delegations with an appropriate membership for a given interparliamentary activity and to adopt effective procedures. Interparliamentary assemblies

cannot be asked to ensure greater transparency and to draw closer to their member parliaments unless their procedures dovetail to some extent. Moreover, with modern information technology the work of the different interparliamentary bodies has become mutually accessible in quasi real time all over the world. Each session yields a mine of information that can be consulted on the internet. This report too will be published on line as soon as it has been approved by the WEU Assembly. Your Rapporteur looks forward to receiving the support of all his colleagues for the resolution contained in his report which he hopes will help mobilise the necessary efforts to ensure a more effective functioning of interparliamentary structures in the future.

### ***VII. What future is in store for the ESDA?***

50. This report cannot confine itself to a purely formal analysis of the existing models of interparliamentary cooperation and the means of achieving that cooperation while question marks hang over the future of the European Security and Defence Assembly/Assembly of WEU. This is a body that has evolved into a forum that is reasonably well suited to act as an umbrella organisation for national parliaments, although, as always, there may be room for improvement.

51. Indeed our Assembly's remit lies in an area where responsibilities are collectively shared by national governments (intergovernmental), which makes it unique of its kind, for at present there is no other interparliamentary institution with competency in the field of European security and defence policy – notwithstanding the confusion that arises as a result of the activities in this sphere of the European Parliament which has set up its own Subcommittee on Security and Defence to follow the evolution of the ESDP. There is of course no reason at all why a European institution should not be involved, quite the opposite! Given ESDP commitments around the world, this undoubtedly lends weight to such action and contributes to success. But a European Parliament subcommittee is no substitute for an interparliamentary body made up of members of national parliaments, the very people who actually have the last word in defence policy decisions, pass defence budgets, decide on troop deployments to international missions and make choices about defence industrial policy and national procurement. Parliamentary work is therefore done at two levels that run in parallel: in the European Parliament, with its Europe-wide outlook, and in our own Assembly which provides a forum bringing together the national parliamentary grass roots. There is no contradiction between the two, provided they work in synergy.

52. When it examined the Treaty of Lisbon, the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany voiced concerns about whether provision was made there for genuine involvement by national parliaments in European decisions. Indeed, some aspects of the new treaty would seem to foreshadow a federal system, while the EU is not a federation. The EU member states have retained sovereignty over a number of areas, particularly over defence, where national parliaments continue to have sovereign power of decision. Therefore our own Assembly remains fully relevant today and should rightfully have its place in the context of present-day Europe. Our Presidential Committee has given serious thought to this and out of its deliberations has emerged a unanimous view that the ESDA needs to become a European Union body, following the same procedure as was used to take the Institute for Security Studies, the Satellite Centre and the various WEU bodies with responsibilities in the armaments field into the Union. Our national parliaments now need to be thinking and working along those lines and it is hoped that the present report will provide a useful basis of information in support of the course of action being proposed.

## APPENDIX

### *Interparliamentary bodies referred to in the report*

European Security and Defence Assembly/AWEU

[www.assemblee-ueo.eu](http://www.assemblee-ueo.eu)

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

[www.assembly.coe.int](http://www.assembly.coe.int)

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

[www.nato-pa.int](http://www.nato-pa.int)

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

[www.oscepa.org](http://www.oscepa.org)

Baltic Assembly

[www.baltasam.org](http://www.baltasam.org)

Nordic Council

[www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org)

Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

[www.pabsec.org](http://www.pabsec.org)

Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council

[www.benelux-parl.org](http://www.benelux-parl.org)

CEI (Central European Initiative) Parliamentary Dimension

[www.ceinet.org](http://www.ceinet.org)

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)

[www.apm.org.mt](http://www.apm.org.mt)

Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly

(European Parliament website, EMPA)

[www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/empa](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/empa)

Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

[www.iacis.ru](http://www.iacis.ru)

Parliamentary Assembly of Francophonie

[www.apf.francophonie.org](http://www.apf.francophonie.org)

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

[www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org)

British-Irish Interparliamentary body

[www.biipb.org](http://www.biipb.org)

European Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy

[www.eiao.org](http://www.eiao.org)

European Interparliamentary Space Conference (EISC)

[www.gpespace.fr](http://www.gpespace.fr)

Conference of European Affairs Committees (COSAC/CEAC)

[www.cosac.eu](http://www.cosac.eu)

Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Women Parliamentarians

[www.ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/euromed/women](http://www.ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women)

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