



VII. Tagung der Vereinigung der Senate Europas
VIIth Meeting of the Association of European Senates
VII^e Réunion de l'Association des Sénats d'Europe
Berlin, 1st – 3rd September 2005

Conclusions of the President

I.

1. The Association of European Senates aims to promote the bicameral system within the framework of parliamentary democracy and to ensure that the bicameral system contributes to democratic dialogue. In order to pursue this objective, the Presidents of European Senates meet once a year to exchange information and experience concerning particular challenges and current developments in the second chambers over which they preside.
2. Over the last few years there have been changes in the remit or composition of the second chambers in some member states of the Association. In others the division of powers and financial resources between the central state and the regional sub-structures and/or constituent federal states has been readjusted. In a further group of member states, committees are working on or will be addressing changes of this type, although discussions have not yet been concluded. There have also been discussions here and there on scrapping second chambers. All of these developments demonstrate that bicameralism and federalism comprise various options to shape the political system; they must constantly be re-discussed, adapt to new challenges and keep on developing.
3. Seeking to learn from the experiences of the other member states in the Association and to draw conclusions to improve their own work, the Senate Presidents shared information with each other about current developments and reform efforts pertaining to bicameralism and federalism in their countries. Interesting parallels and differences emerged in this process:
 - The way in which powers are shared out between the central state and its subdivisions is a controversial topic, not just in member states with a federal structure. The central state seeks to achieve both a legal framework and living conditions that are as uniform as possible across the country, yet this may conflict with voters' desire for decisions to be taken close to citizens at a level where it is easy to keep track of developments, as well as with their wish to contribute to determining and shaping policy. The negative outcome of the referendums on the Constitutional Treaty for Europe in France and the Netherlands underscores how crucial it is to focus on bringing politics closer to citizens. Consistently applying the subsidiarity principle at the national and European level fosters and reinforces this approach.
 - The way in which the state's activities are financed is closely related to the issue of

powers in specific fields, as well as to the question of shifting jurisdiction for particular policy areas. The tier of state that holds responsibility must have the requisite financial resources. It also follows from this that the concomitant financial resources must be made available to any level of the state that is granted powers in a new policy area. However, all the reports made clear how difficult it is to find a solution that is satisfactory both to the party that must renounce jurisdiction and funding and to the party to which these then accrue.

- Transfers of powers from the central state to its sub-divisions also have an impact on the function and the composition of second chambers, in particular in conjunction with regionalisation. It is interesting to note that in some cases this has quite the opposite impact: whilst certain senates feel their role as the representative of the interests of the regions has if anything been enhanced as a result of decentralisation, others feel in contrast that their scope to influence the policies of the central state will be curtailed.
4. In entire mutual respect for the varying traditions and structures, which also became apparent in the Association's previous meetings, the Presidents of European Senates asserted their conviction that the bicameral system must be strengthened and fostered, to guarantee closeness to citizens, the division of powers and democratic control, whilst also improving the quality of legislation. Second chambers are the ideal place to articulate regional interests, as well as to overcome differences between regions. Furthermore, through their participation in the European Union context, second chambers can also make a significant contribution to strengthening the EU's democratic legitimacy and ensuring that the subsidiarity principle is taken fully into account.

II.

The Presidents of the Association of European Senates discussed the proposal that annual International Information Forums be held under the aegis of the Association. They are of the opinion that the development of a European Information Society and a European Information Area are important questions that deserve vigorous consideration. However, the overwhelming majority of Presidents considered that other international bodies, such as the Council of Europe or the Inter-Parliamentary Union, would be better suited to address these questions, as they already consider related topics. In order to avoid duplication of effort, International Information Forums will therefore not be organised under the aegis of the Association of European Senates.

III.

The Presidents of the Association of European Senates stated that they consider these regular exchanges of information and experience to be of great importance and that they wish to continue with such exchanges in the future. They thanked the President of the Swiss Council of States for his invitation to the VIIIth meeting of the Association on 20th/21st April 2006 in Bern.

The IXth meeting will be held at the invitation of the Romanian Senate in Romania in 2007; the Austrian Federal Council will host the Xth meeting in 2008.