



Directorate-General for the Presidency
Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments
Legislative Dialogue Unit

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Subject: **Interparliamentary dimension of the 2013 European Semester Survey among national Parliaments' participants of the interparliamentary committee meeting of 27-28 February 2012**

Results in a nutshell:

26 Members from 23 Parliamentary Chambers in 19 EU member states completed the "European semester" questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections: Part I) feedback on the 2012 interparliamentary committee meeting and Part II) feedback on the interparliamentary dimension for the next European semester.

The feedback on the interparliamentary committee meeting organised by the EP in February 2012 is very positive. All respondents from national Parliaments would be interested in further meetings of this kind, and almost all of them would be interested in attending a "Parliamentary European week" and a second meeting after the Spring European Council. No clear trend emerged as to the preferred timing of the second meeting.

1. Background

On 27 and 28 February 2012, the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (ECON), in cooperation with the Committee on Budgets (BUDG) and the Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL) organised an interparliamentary committee meeting on the European semester for economic policy coordination.

The meeting brought together 68 national Parliamentarians from 24 EU Member States to discuss economic governance issues with European Parliament President Mr Martin Schulz, MEPs, the President of the European Council Mr Herman Van Rompuy, the President of the European Commission Mr José Manuel Barroso and many other senior EU policymakers. It was the biggest interparliamentary committee meeting in the European Parliament so far.

This initiative launched by the ECON, BUDG and EMPL committees, linked to the need of stressing the democratic legitimacy of the European Semester, was also the result of the EP resolution based on the Berès report adopted on 1 December 2011 (2011/2071(INI)).

In this context, and in view of preparing the interparliamentary dimension of the next European Semester, it was deemed useful to seek feedback on the 2012 meeting.

A questionnaire was prepared at the request of Mrs Bowles, Mrs Berès and Mr Lamassoure, respectively Chairpersons of the ECON, BUDG and EMPL committees. Together with an accompanying letter by the three committee Chairpersons, it was sent to the representatives of national Parliaments on 1 June 2012 in order to be submitted to the Members of national Parliaments who had attended the interparliamentary committee meeting on the European semester in February.

By 4 July 2012 the EP had received 26 replies from Members of the following 23 Parliamentary Chambers: The Belgian Chamber and Senate, the Bulgarian National Assembly, the Czech Senate, the Danish Folketing, the German Bundestag, the Estonian Riigikogu, the Irish Dáil, the Spanish Senado, the French Senate, the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Senate, the Latvian Saeima, the Lithuanian Seimas, the Hungarian National Assembly, the Maltese House of Representatives, the Polish Sejm and Senate, the Portuguese Assembleia da República, the Slovenian National Assembly, the Slovak National Council, the UK House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies did not submit a questionnaire, but answered important questions in writing. The Hellenic Parliament and the French Assemblée nationale did not reply because of recent general elections.

With more than half of the national Chambers responding, the results are of significance, but must not be misread as the official position of all national Parliaments. The detailed results are included in the annex.

2. Final results

2.1 Format, debates and networking

The feedback on the interparliamentary meeting organised in February is very positive. All respondents agreed that the meeting was organised at the right time of the European semester governance cycle. An overwhelming majority described the overall programme, choice of topics and speakers as "Excellent" or "Good". A large majority also rated the quality of the debate and the networking opportunities as "Excellent" or "Good", while a minority considered them "OK".

The sessions on the Fiscal Treaty (12 votes), sustainable growth, job creation and social progress (11 votes) and on fiscal discipline (9 votes) were considered particularly interesting, either because of their "topicality", because of their particularly fruitful and lively debate, because they looked beyond fiscal discipline or because they gave a broad overview of topics and points of view. Overwhelming majorities of more than 85% also stated that the meeting addressed the most important issues linked to the European semester, that Members of their national delegation could take the floor upon their request and that the duration of the meeting was "absolutely right" or "appropriate".

Individual suggestions

Concerning the **format**, individual suggestions made by the respondents include an additional panel to **evaluate the previous European semester** including lessons learned and a workshop to debate **practical and procedural aspects of national parliaments' involvement** in the European semester at national level (participant from the Czech Senate); to **develop "new organizational formats"** (working groups, workshops, etc.) for joint activities (respondent from the Bulgarian National Assembly); to **develop "a true working method"** with a more methodic approach where topics are dealt with one by one and all delegations can comment on each of them (Member of the French Senate); and **restricted meetings** on more focused issues (a member of the Portuguese Assembleia da República).

Regarding **logistics**, one participant from the UK House of Lords commented that the **rules on requests for the floor varied** between the first and second sessions and should be harmonised; a Member of the Estonian Parliament said that discussions could become more dynamic if **requests for the floor** could be made electronically; the respondent from the Danish Parliament proposed to allow **more time** for debate between MPs and MEPs. A Member of the Czech Senate suggested that networking opportunities could be strengthened by **seating MEPs and MPs together during the official dinner**.

2.2 Follow-up and future events

More than half of the respondents said that there was some kind of follow up on the meeting in their Parliament, mainly written reports, press releases and debriefings by the participants in their respective committees, but also a hearing scheduled with BUDG Chairperson Lamassoure in the Portuguese Parliament.

All respondents confirmed their Chambers' interest in further meetings of this kind. About three quarters of them would prefer "in-depth discussions of specific topics" to "broad strategic discussions linking several topics". Instead of a two-day meeting with broad discussions, the respondent from the German Bundestag suggests a one-day meeting with in-depth discussions on a specific topic. The respondent from the Czech Senate makes this dependent upon the duration of the meeting: If the meeting is spread out over a week, both broad and in-depth discussions are possible; if the current length is maintained, the debate should focus on broad policy issues.

All respondents apart from the Belgian Chamber and Senate would be interested in attending a "Parliamentary European Week" for the European semester, spread over a couple of days and bringing MEPs and MPs together to debate specific issues in separate, subsequent sessions. The respondents from the Belgian Parliament question whether it is realistic to convene MPs to Brussels for one week. While expressing interest in the event, the respondent from the German Bundestag also underlines that time constraints will make it difficult for Bundestag Members to participate in a meeting spread over a couple of days.

An overwhelming majority would also be interested in participating in a second interparliamentary meeting organised after the Spring European Council. Only the respondents from the Lithuanian Seimas and the National Council of Slovakia are explicitly not interested. At the same time, no clear trend emerged as to the preferred

timing of such a meeting. Only 14 out of the 26 respondents answered the question on the preferred timing. Their proposals ranged from March to November, and from "shortly after the Spring European Council" to "before the publication of the Annual Growth Survey".

The respondent from the Danish Parliament did not answer the questions on the Parliamentary week and the second meeting, stating that participation would depend on the expected outcome of such a meeting. While not responding to the questionnaire as such, the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies expressed its interest in attending an event, spread over several days, preceding the Spring European Council meeting that would gather members of national Parliaments and the European Parliament to debate specific issues related to the European Semester. The Luxembourg Chamber would also be interested in the participation to an interparliamentary meeting, following the Spring European meeting, bringing together Chairs of committees responsible for the European Semester within national parliaments and the European Parliament, to discuss the Commission's proposed recommendations.

Almost three quarters of the respondents would be interested in exploring additional forms of networking among participants, with mailing lists, videoconferencing and internet fora (for instance on the interparliamentary information exchange website IPEX) being cited most often.

Individual suggestions

*A Member of the Czech Senate suggested that the representatives of **national Parliaments are consulted informally** before the organisation of such meetings, while the respondent from the French Senate proposed that national Parliaments' **Finance Committee Chairs meet regularly** with a precise agenda. The respondent from the German Bundestag suggested to involve representatives of the European Central Bank in the committee meeting, in addition to representatives from the European Council and the Commission. Respondents from the UK House of Commons and House of Lords stated clearly that the future ICM on the European Semester **should not prejudge any discussions on Article 13 of the Fiscal Treaty** - once the Treaty is ratified, the format of interparliamentary scrutiny should be agreed in the appropriate forum, either the Speakers' Conference or COSAC. The respondent from the Italian Senate stated that short **conclusions or press releases** should be issued at the end of the meeting.*

3. Next steps

The European semester increases the coordination of national budgetary procedures and recognises that national budgets are of European importance. To enable the smooth and efficient running of the semester, the EU institutions need to find new ways of working together and adapt their internal and interinstitutional procedures to the ambitious calendar. At the same time, the creation of "grey areas" where neither national Parliaments nor the European Parliament can exercise the necessary democratic control over crucial decisions should be avoided. Efficient and regular cooperation between the European Parliament and national Parliaments will be essential to work towards ensuring democratic accountability and reinforced transparency throughout the governance cycle of the European semester.

The European Parliament is currently reflecting on ways to adapt its internal procedures to implement the European semester, of which interparliamentary contacts and activities are an integral part. The feedback provided by national Parliaments in the framework of this survey is a highly valuable contribution and forms the basis for the reflection process on future interparliamentary activities.

Annex: Detailed results

NB: Due to the small number of meeting participants and respondents, percentage points can fluctuate significantly with each new reply. The percentages should therefore be read as trend indicators, not as definitive figures.

"n=" stands for the total number of replies to that particular question, as not all of the respondents replied to all the questions.

Q1. Do you think that the meeting was organised at the right time during the European semester governance cycle?

Yes	No	n=
25	0	25
100,00%		

Q2. How would you rate the meeting on the following points?

	Excellent	Good	OK	Poor
a) Overall programme	5	17	2	0
b) Choice of topics	5	16	2	0
c) Choice of speakers	8	16	0	0
d) Quality of the debate	3	13	8	0
e) Networking opportunities	3	13	7	0

Q3. Was there a session that you found particularly interesting?

Yes	No	n=
24	0	24
100,00%	0,00%	

If yes, which one:

a) First day, plenary session (Mon 27/02, 15h15-17h00)	6
b) First day, session 1 "Fiscal discipline and sustainability of public finances" (Mon 27/02, 17h00-18h45)	9
c) First day, session 2 "Beyond budgetary discipline: How to achieve sustainable growth, job creation and social progress in adverse economic circumstances" (Mon 27/02, 17h00-18h45)	11
d) Dinner (Mon 27/02, 19h00)	2
e) Second day, plenary session "Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union: What Next?" (Tue 28/02, 09h00-11h00)	12
f) Concluding plenary session ((Tue 28/02, 11h00-12h30)	5

Q4. Did the meeting address the most important issues linked to the European semester and economic governance in the EU?

Yes	No	n=
22	1	23
95,65%	4,35%	

Q5. On balance, were the Members of your national Parliament/Parliamentary Chamber given the floor upon their request?

Yes	No	n=
21	3	24
87,50%	12,50%	

Q6. How would you rate the overall duration of the meeting?

Absolutely right	Appropriate	Too short	Too long	n=
4	18	1	1	24
16,67%	75,00%	4,17%	4,17%	

Q8. Was there any follow-up on the meeting in your Parliament/Parliamentary Chamber (e.g., short debriefing by the participating Members in their respective committees, mention of it in the context of the parliamentary debate on your Member State's budget, written report by the participating Members, press release, etc.)

Yes	No	n=
13	11	24
54,17%	45,83%	

Q9. Do meetings of this kind contribute to the parliamentary dimension of the European semester for economic policy coordination?

Yes	No	n=
24	1	25
96,00%	4,00%	

Q10. Would your Parliament/Parliamentary Chamber be interested in further meetings of this kind?

Yes	No	n=
26	0	26
100,00%	0,00%	

Q11. Would your Parliament/Parliamentary Chamber prefer that future meetings focus on broad strategic discussions linking several policy topics or rather on in-depth discussions of specific topics?

Broad strategic discussions linking several policy topics	6	23,08%
In-depth discussions of specific topics	20	76,92%
n=	26	

Q12. One possible future scenario is the organisation, before the Spring European Council meeting, of a "Parliamentary European Week" for the European semester. Such an event would be spread over a couple of days and would bring together Members of national Parliaments and the European Parliament to debate specific issues, in separate subsequent sessions, such as economic governance, budgetary policy, sustainable growth, job creation etc.. Would your Parliament/Parliamentary Chamber be interested in attending such an event?

Yes	No	n=
23	2	25
92,00%	8,00%	

Q13. The EP adopted a resolution last December 2011 on the European Semester suggesting that it "intends to organise, from 2013, following the Spring European Council each year, a second interparliamentary meeting bringing together the Chairs of the committees responsible for the European Semester within national parliaments and the European Parliament (ECON, EMPL, BUDG, ENVI, ITRE) to discuss the Commission's proposed recommendations". Would your Parliament/Parliamentary Chamber be interested to participate in such an interparliamentary meeting on the European semester, organised after the Spring European Council meeting ?

Yes	No	n=
23	2	25
92,00%	8,00%	

Follow-up question: If yes, when should the second meeting take place, in view of the European semester governance cycle and your national Parliamentary calendar?

*14 replies received, proposals range from March to November
12 questionnaire respondents skipped this follow-up question*

Q14. Would your Parliament be interested in exploring additional forms of networking among participants after such events, such as mailing lists, videoconferences, etc.?

Yes	No	n=
19	7	26
73,08%	26,92%	