

Speech made by Mr. Rene Leegte, vicechair of the committee on European affairs, House of Representatives of the Netherlands, at LI COSAC Meeting, 15-17 June 2014, Athens. Speech on the report 'ahead in Europe' a report on strengthening the role of the Tweede Kamer and national parliaments in the European Union.

'Ahead in Europe'

Rapporteur Rene Leegte

Speecht

(Only the spoken text counts)

Chair,

Befor I start with my introduction, I would first like to thank the Troika for the chance they give me to explain my report " Ahead in Europe". The report is the result of an inquiry I made in commission of the Tweede Kamer. The question was how the Tweede Kamer can obtain more grip on the European decisionmaking. The main conclusion: together with you! Better cooperation between the parliaments in the Member States can lead to greater effectiveness and therewith to better quality of European legislation.

In October 2011 I attended a political group meeting of the FDP in Berlin. Most of the items on the agenda were also discussed in our political group meeting in The Hague. I realised that parliaments often treat – more or less – the same matters on the same moment. Therewith I ascertain that those matters concern common, European affairs that increase in number. How can a national parliament exercise oversight and control on those affairs? The answer to this question is found in better cooperation between national parliamenst. That is the core of my report, "Ahead in Europe" . The title of this report emits ambition. It is the ambition to cooperate with national parliaments and the EP. In the report I give recommendations to " be on time" , subsequently recommendations to be "on top of the matter" and finally recommendations to cooperate between parliaments. That is threefold: **Early, Firmly and Together.**

My report does not deal with Treaty change. That is undoubtedly important, but by discussing Treaty change, we walk away from our responsibility. The responsibility to do our job within the current frameworks. The recommendations are therefore about changing behavior, not the Treaties.

I like to cite **the philosopher Johan Crujff, who is also a good footballer: “You can be on time at only one moment, otherwise you are too early or too late”** In order to effectively intervene in the early stages of EU decision making, you will have to know what ideas are out there, who is involved in the implementation, and which procedures can be used to actually intervene.

My report must be seen as an open source. Everyone can take as they please procedures of smart ideas from the report that are appropriate for the processes and culture in their own parliament. Knowledge is like a candle: if more people light one up, the brighter it gets, without harming the first candle.

The biggest benefit can be obtained if we – as colleague parliaments – work together. In the stage of green and white papers, and consultation rounds, we already should tune our perspectives. In the Tweede Kamer the thought is that this stage is appropriate to discuss the subsidiarity check. Later on it could be on proportionality and the implementation of a measure.

Another important insight is that although the Commission has the right of initiative, it has not the monopoly on good ideas. If parliaments would bring forward an initiative together, or object to one, the European Commission can not ignore this. That is the message we should send to our newly elected Members of European Parliament, and also to the new Commissioners.

During COSAC, and also afterwards, I and our clerks are available for questions or remarks. The report and a factsheet is handed to you, of course with all our contacts.

I will briefly share the most important recommendations with you:

1. The most important recommendation is better cooperation (including with EP)
 - a. In order to reach better cooperation, it would be good to organise a “club of 41”. Just **a list of telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of the chairs of the committees on European affairs**. The COSAC secretariat could facilitate this, if we would decide so at COSAC. In this manner we are able to find each other more quickly and exchange information.
This is a small mouse click for the COSAC-secretariat, a giant leap for interparliamentary cooperation!
 - b. Another important recommendation is that parliaments are working more and more together in so called “**clusters of interest**”. Within those clusters of interest parliaments could make suggestions for legislation to the Commission. The Danish parliament took the lead with

these clusters of interest, and we could use this tool even better. One could perceive the initiative for legislation by national parliaments as a **“Green card”**.

2. The second concrete recommendation is that we could take the initiative to improve the yellow card procedure.
 - a. This could be done if parliaments would exchange their priorities on the basis of the legislative program of the European Commission. In this manner we could find each other easier on those priorities. Also here the COSAC secretariat could play an important role.
 - b. Another recommendation is that we make a fixed format for an opening sentence of a reasoned opinion. That way it is immediately clear for the European Commission if it concerns a reasoned opinion and it will not be possible anymore for the Commission to decide itself on the status of an opinion.
3. The third recommendation is to give support to the initiative of the Danish parliament to ask the new Commission to set up a working group to make an action plan on the strengthening of the role of national parliaments.
 - a. In good alignment with Eva Kjer Hansen we have an addition to this proposal. We would like to invite you to come to The Hague this fall for a cluster of interest, to find out what ideas live amongst the national parliaments for this working group. Our ideas could be passed on to the working group for them to elaborate on.

As one of my colleagues already said, this report does not have a smoking gun. It contains no catchy oneliner that works well on the frontpage of the paper. The report is pragmatic. With rain, one could complain, but you could also grab an umbrella and to go out. This report is as the umbrella, with which we could better cooperate.

Thank you.