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**The development of interparliamentary cooperation
in the Balkans**

REPORT

submitted on behalf of the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations
by Milos Budin, Rapporteur (Italy, Socialist Group)

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¹ Adopted unanimously by the Committee on 11 May 2005.

RESOLUTION 126¹

on the development of interparliamentary cooperation in the Balkans

The Assembly,

- (i) Recognising the important role played by regional assemblies such as the CEI (Central European Initiative) Interparliamentary Assembly, the SEECF (south-eastern European cooperation process) and the IAO (Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy) in speeding up the process of democratisation in the Balkans;
- (ii) Aware of the interdependence of regional interests, which need to be examined in a forum in which information is gathered and common solutions can be drawn up in parallel to developments in regional cooperation conducted by governments;
- (iii) Recognising the importance of interparliamentary cooperation, which is conducive to the rapprochement and regional integration of the new democracies in south-eastern Europe;
- (iv) Hoping that the enlargement of the European Union will not weaken the interest of the new member states' parliaments in regional programmes in which they are already participants, and which should be completed,

INVITES THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS REPRESENTED IN THE WEU ASSEMBLY/THE INTERPARLIAMENTARY EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE ASSEMBLY TO:

1. Continue to support regional parliamentary cooperation networks through the judicious participation of their members;
2. Seek factors of regional identity that may bring added value to the interparliamentary work being done within the European common institutions;
3. Become involved in initiatives for the development of meaningful exchanges among parliamentarians with an interest in the same subjects and support the "parliamentary diplomacy" activities being developed within the framework of common projects;
4. Support the process of gradual integration within the interparliamentary institutions while calling for a commitment on the part of all parliamentarians involved in this process, through their legislative and political activities, to put into practice and fully comply with the values and principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

¹ Adopted by the Assembly on 14 June 2005 at the 3rd sitting.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

on the development of interparliamentary cooperation in the Balkans submitted by Milos Budin, Rapporteur (Italy, Socialist Group)

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations is once again looking into the issue of interparliamentary cooperation, this time in the Balkan region. The WEU Assembly has already addressed this subject in the past, in reports submitted by Mrs Squarcialupi in 1998 (Assembly Document 1605) and by Mrs Agudo Cadarso in 2000 (Assembly Document 1724), which provided the basis for an exchange of experience among Assembly members with regard to other interparliamentary initiatives. In an order approved in June 1998 the Presidential Committee was asked to consider the possibility of creating a statutory framework for strengthening relations with sub-regional interparliamentary assemblies and to define the aims and modalities of cooperation on subjects of common interest. Furthermore in a resolution adopted on 7 December 2000 the Assembly called for priority to be given to stepping up interparliamentary cooperation in the most sensitive regions of southern and central Europe.

2. As we take up this theme once again it should be stressed that the recent EU enlargement will change inter-regional relations in the Balkans by adding a new component to the existing network of political and economic cooperative relations. We now have two groups of Balkan countries: those which have joined the EU or will do so shortly, and those which for the moment and perhaps for a long time to come will remain outside this process of enlargement. How are inter-regional institutions reacting to this new situation and how will this affect the corresponding interparliamentary assemblies? Will there be a loss of interest in regional cooperation, or, on the contrary, could the countries concerned envisage forming a specific central European or Balkan "bloc" within the Union? What changes are to be envisaged as regards countries which were formerly closely linked by economic and legal ties and a shared political history, but which now find themselves on different sides of the EU borders? Are the current interparliamentary institutions still relevant today? What added value can they offer and how can they contribute to more swiftly and effectively building the new Europe? Can the different initiatives play a useful role at this stage in creating links with the remaining countries? The WEU Assembly recently changed the status of a number of Balkan countries with a view to enhancing their participation in its activities. Should it continue down that road by establishing contacts with countries that remain outside the network and playing the role that WEU has played throughout its existence: that of a link with many countries prior to their integration in Europe?

3. All these questions remain open for the moment. The aim of this report is to conduct an analysis beginning with a general presentation of existing initiatives, many of which are undergoing a complete transformation. We will study all the interparliamentary assemblies with a formal structure, as well as other associative efforts involving parliamentary and administrative cooperation among the parliaments of the countries bound by geopolitical ties and a shared history in the vast region of central Europe and the Balkans. This panorama will give an idea of the contribution made so far by these different initiatives and the benefits they have brought for the European Union during its enlargement process, and which logically it should continue to enjoy during the future phases of European integration and development.

4. The following table provides an overview of the different interparliamentary initiatives in the region and their membership.

II. Membership of regional interparliamentary assemblies

Parliamentary Assembly of the:	CEI	BSEC	Stability Pact	IAO	CIS	WEU	NATO	EU	Council of Europe
Albania	M	M	M	M		SG	AM		M
Armenia		M		M	M				M
Austria	M	Obs				Obs	AM	M	M
Azerbaïdjan		M			M				M
Belarus	M			M	M				
Bosnia Herzegovina	M		M			SG			M
Bulgaria	M	M	M	M		AAM	M		M
Croatia	M		M			AAP	AM		M
Cyprus				M		AO		M	M
Czech Republic	M		Obs	M		AM	M	M	M
Estonia		Obs		M		AM	M	M	M
Finland		Obs		M		Obs	AM	M	M
FYROM	M		M			SG	AM		M
Georgia		M		M	M		AM		M
Germany		Obs				M	M	M	M
Greece		M		M		M	M	M	M
Hungary	M		M			AM	M	M	M
Italy	M	Obs				M	M	M	M
Latvia				M		AM	M	M	M
Lithuania				M		AM	M	M	M
Moldova	M	M	Obs	M	M		AM		M
Norway			M			AM	M		M
Poland	M	Obs	Obs	M		AM	M	M	M
Romania	M	M	M	M		AAM	M		M
Russia		M	M	M	M	PG	AM		M
Serbia & Montenegro			M	M		SG			M
Slovakia	M	Obs	Obs	M		AM	M	M	M
Slovenia	M		M			AM	M	M	M
Turkey		M	M			AM	M		M
USA			M				M		
Ukraine	M	M	Obs	M	M	PG	AM		M
Council of Europe			M						
European Parliament			Obs						
OSCE			M						

CEI: Central European Initiative

BSEC: Black Sea Economic Cooperation

CIS : Commonwealth of Independent States

IAO: Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy

M: Member – AM: Associate Member – AAM: Affiliate Associate Member

PG: Permanent Guest – SG: Special Guest

AAP: Affiliate Associate Partner

Obs: Observer – AO: Affiliate Observer

III. The CEI (Central European Initiative) Interparliamentary Assembly

5. Following the opening-up of the former eastern bloc countries to the West, the Central European Initiative was the first intergovernmental cooperation project to be established in the region of the Balkans and Central Europe, essentially in order to provide guidance for the restructuring and economic adaptation of the former communist states. The process of democratisation and *rapprochement* with the West involves the consolidation of democratic values and the introduction of market economy rules, in the framework of an organisation that has proven to be both flexible and tenacious. Indeed it has succeeded in attracting a group of countries with common ties but which are at such different stages of development that the CEI – perhaps a victim of its own success – has had to limit its partnership to 16 member states and refuse a process of enlargement that might have jeopardised its positive results.

6. The parliamentary dimension, although less systematically organised to begin with, has been in place since 1993 following the drawing-up of a “document on working procedure” setting out the basis for an interparliamentary organisation. This was endorsed in 1995 when the ministers of the countries concerned approved a set of “guidelines for activities and rules of procedure of the CEI”. From the outset the CEI – an organisation without rigid institutional structures – adopted a flexible and pragmatic approach, with projects that can be adopted by all or only some of the member states, in keeping with the rapidly changing situation in the Balkans during the 1990s.

7. This has had a major impact on the interparliamentary Assembly that was set up within the CEI. For years it worked in the form of a Conference governed by “documents of procedure”, in keeping with its desire to be a flexible but at the same time, pragmatic, working instrument. It was only in 1999, in recognition of continuous efforts that had been made by its member parliamentarians, that the Conference was given the status of an interparliamentary Assembly. Then in 2002, at the meeting of heads of state and government in Skopje, it became one of the three pillars of the organisation alongside the governmental and economic dimensions.

8. The Assembly’s main political event is its annual autumn session organised by the Parliament of the country holding the Presidency, which rotates among the member countries in alphabetical order. It is presided over by the President of the host Parliament. A mini-session attended by a reduced delegation from each member state is held in the spring of each year. The Standing Committee meets at the beginning of each year in order to draw up the programme of work and define the Assembly’s priorities. It is composed of the troika of the heads of delegation from the countries of the previous, present and incoming presidencies together with the chairmen of the permanent committees. The mandates of those committees mirror those of the working groups at government level: transport, productive activities, environment, civil protection, culture and technology, development, migration and minorities, human resources.

9. The size of the delegations is calculated according to the size of the member country’s population: three parliamentary members for a population of up to five million, five members for a population of between five and twelve million and seven members for the larger countries. Votes are expressed by the delegation as a whole.

10. Clearly the Chairman of the parliamentary delegation of the country holding the rotating presidency plays a crucial role in the work of the parliamentary component of the CEI. Assisted by his or her predecessor and successor – indeed the institutional documents make provision for the “troika” system – the President exercises all the functions that are necessary for organising and giving impetus to the Assembly’s work. Given the Assembly’s itinerant nature, the intensity of its activities may vary according to the situation and size of the country concerned. Moreover the dispersal of its administrative and secretarial activities poses problems of continuity and follow-up and does not facilitate the search for overall information about its activities.

11. There have been attempts to rationalise this rather loose structure but they were not followed up due to the concomitant EU enlargement process which had a major impact on the CEI, some of whose member states have now joined the European Union. This has given rise to questions about the compatibility of this organisation with other European structures, the relevance of its objectives and validity of its working methods and discussions are ongoing as to the path to be followed. The

response at parliamentary level will obviously depend on the progress made within the CEI in the area of intergovernmental cooperation. Although the Guidelines have been revised twice in order to underscore the interaction between the three – governmental, parliamentary and economic – pillars, there has been a perceptible slackening of interest on the part of a number of countries which are now focusing as a priority on European integration. The risk is that this will lead to the development of an organisation at two “speeds”, in which cooperation is confined to those countries that are not part of the EU family of nations, already afflicted by problems of economic and democratic imbalance and for which other cooperative initiatives have already been launched. This would mean that the opportunity of maintaining a bridge between the EU and the Balkan region would be lost, a prospect that the members of the CEI Parliamentary Assembly are doing their best to resist.

IV. The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO)

12. The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, which has been active since 1994, is an example of cooperation based on a shared sense of identity in an area of society that is fundamental in many countries of the Balkans. Its creation followed a conference convened by the Greek Parliament in June 1993 in Chaldiki (Greece), where participants approved a manifesto stressing their intention to “exchange views on the basic questions referring to the cultural, social, historical and spiritual significance of the position and the role played in the new European reality by the Orthodox peoples, which comprise approximately half the population of Europe”.

13. Their objective was stated as follows :

“The Conference calls on Greece, as the only Orthodox member of the European Economic Community, to promote all the prerequisites for recognition by the European Community of the progressive role of the Orthodox tradition in shaping European civilisation. The Conference calls on the Russian Federation, as the only Orthodox member of the Security Council of the United Nations, to defend in the Council the common interests of the Orthodox peoples and not to permit any discrimination against them. The Conference calls on all its member countries to oppose existing misinformation in reports of the part played by Orthodox peoples in areas of conflict. It encourages the unanimous contribution of the Orthodox peoples in planning future developments in the Balkans and in Europe. The Conference calls on the Orthodox peoples to exploit the ability of Orthodoxy to transcend any nationalistic tendencies or tendencies to complacency and through its unity and ecumenicality, to stress its own special identity, of the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the pluralism of the common European Home, and to seek for ways in which it can contribute to the building and establishment of peace and justice in the new Europe. The Conference has explored the need for continuous contact between the political sphere, governments, parliaments, their Churches, the intellectual institutions and the personalities of the countries with Orthodox populations, as well as other organisational forms of cooperation between Orthodox peoples. The participants in this parliamentary forum express the will to meet in September in Athens, under the aegis of the Greek Parliament, for organising the Founding Assembly and establishing an Interparliamentary Committee”.

14. This led to the creation in 1994 of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO), which today is composed of representatives of the parliaments of Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. Several of those countries are now members of the European Union and others will soon join, which will considerably affect the influence which the founders intended initially to be exercised by Greece alone. Hence we can expect the creation of a pressure group representing this social and cultural identity and with which the EU will have to contend in its endeavours to harmonise positions and arrive at joint decisions.

15. The executive authority of the IAO is its Secretariat, which consists of seven members elected by the General Assembly for a two-year term of office. Greece and Russia are permanent members of the Secretariat, and the Secretary-General is always a Greek. The Secretariat has its permanent headquarters in Athens, where it meets three times a year. The supreme body is the IAO General Assembly, which is made up of two-member parliamentary delegations from the member parliaments

appointed by the presidents of their respective parliaments. It meets once a year in pre-designated cities in IAO member countries.

16. The following list of topics and conferences fully illustrates the commitment shown by parliamentarians to the defence of a specific regional identity that is a binding force among the orthodox countries and is also reflected in the other regional organisations in which they have various kinds of membership:

- 1993: founding meeting in Ormylia, Chalkidiki: “Orthodoxy in the new European Reality”;
- 1994: Athens, Greece: “The Interparliamentary Committee of Orthodox Members of Parliaments of the European Countries and its mission in the new European reality”;
- 1995: Moscow, Russia: “The Cultural and Enlightenment Tradition of Orthodoxy”;
- 1996: Sofia, Bulgaria: “The Social Dimension of Orthodoxy”;
- 1997: Chalkidiki, Greece: “Orthodoxy in the context of the European civilization – history and future”.
- 1998: Warsaw, Poland: “The problems of the novel heresies (sects) in the EIAO countries and effective ways of dealing with them”.
- 1999: Moscow-St.Petersburg: “Ways of legal protection of the traditional family as a diachronic value of society”.
- 2000: Jerusalem, Israel: “What do people say about the Son of Man (Mat. 16.13) in the year 2000 AD?”.
- 2001: Patmos, Greece: “The contribution of the Orthodox conception in the expanded European Union”.
- 2002: Bucharest, Romania: “Globalisation and Orthodoxy”.
- 2003: Vilnius, Lithuania: “War-Poverty. The Orthodox viewpoint”.
- 2004: Kiev, Ukraine: “Security with freedom ”.
- 2005 Geneva, Switzerland (scheduled).

17. Standing Committees in the following areas were established at the outset by the General Assembly: Finance; Rules of Procedure; Human Rights; Social Affairs; Education; Cultural Affairs, to which was added in 2001, by decision of the General Assembly, the Bioethics Committee, assisted by a scientific sub-Committee composed of distinguished scientists from a number of countries. The Committees’ task is to submit recommendations to the General Assembly and Secretariat. Issues for study and debate may be assigned to them either by the General Assembly, or by the Secretariat within the framework of the General Assembly’s decisions. The Committee itself may also decide to deal with a subject on the recommendation of its Chairman and always with the Secretariat’s approval.

18. At the last session in Ukraine, many parliamentarians voiced their satisfaction with the excellent work done over the years by the IAO. The head of the Parliamentary Delegation of Ukraine, Mrs Katerina Samoilyk, noted in her welcoming speech that the eleven-year history of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy had been marked by mutual understanding and respect and that the Assembly owed its success to the active participation of each of its representatives from the national parliaments. The Russian representative, Valery Alekseev, underscored the role that the Orthodox Church had always played in combating violations of human rights, totalitarianism and all kinds of despotism, and took the view that the orthodox tradition could help find appropriate solutions for removing dividing lines and tackling such problems as poverty, terrorism and moral crisis. Reverend Mitrophanes of Ukraine also highlighted the active role played by the Assembly in promoting freedom and security and debating the crucial problems facing modern society. The President of the Hellenic Parliament, Anna Psarouda-Benaki, noted in particular that:

“(…) The Hellenic Parliament has supported the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, from its start, with exceptional interest, an important initiative that deputies undertook with the

participation of very few parliaments and today this organisation has evolved into an international organisation including a greater number of parliaments. The Hellenic Parliament will continue to support this effort by all possible means, since throughout these 11 years of your Interparliamentary Assembly a great number of useful views have been presented and made known through your activities”.

V. Technical cooperation

1. The parliamentary dimension of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe

19. Launched in 1999, the Stability Pact was the first comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy to be adopted by the international community. Its aim was to support the countries of south-eastern Europe in their efforts to promote peace, democracy and human rights. It serves as a political coordination mechanism for regional cooperation in various fields, working on such topics as “democratisation and human rights” (Working Table 1), “economic reconstruction, cooperation and development” (Working Table 2) and “security issues” (Working Table 3).

20. Working Table 1 focuses on two core objectives: media development and local democracy/cross-border cooperation. Further areas of activity are parliamentary cooperation, gender issues and education.

21. It comprises a Media Task Force (MTF) designed to bring together all key organisations and NGOs active in the democratisation of media systems in south-eastern Europe. The Media Task Force endorses project proposals which enhance regional cooperation between media outlets, improve media legislation and promote quality television productions. These include programmes and documentaries addressing issues such as corruption, reconciliation, youth culture, social issues and the post-war separation of communities. Despite comprehensive international efforts, the region’s media landscape continues to be problematic and bringing media legislation standards up to the level of those of western Europe remains a difficult task. The efforts being made under the MTF will be pursued vigorously despite the fact that parliamentary cooperation is to replace media development as one of the six Stability Pact core objectives as of 2005.

22. In an attempt to focus more international and regional attention on the role of parliaments, a Senior Advisor was commissioned by the Stability Pact Secretariat to prepare a comprehensive strategy for increased Stability Pact involvement in the south-eastern European cooperation process (SEECP). The German Government supported the process of gathering information on the needs of the various parliaments of the region with a view to preparing a long-term strategy for supporting and promoting interparliamentary cooperation through the Stability Pact.

23. The Senior Advisor together with the Stability Pact Secretariat held discussions with partners both within and outside the region. The resulting plans were presented at several high-level conferences, including the Conference of the Presidents of SEECP Parliaments in March, the Summit of Heads of State and Governments of the SEECP in April, and a Conference of the Parliamentary Troika (European Parliament, OSCE and Council of Europe) in November 2004.

24. The initial findings were presented during the Portoroz Working Table meeting and a complete report was presented to the Working Table meeting in Skopje in November 2004. According to the report there remains a strong need to increase efficiency within parliamentary offices and the strengthening of the regional dimension could bring about tangible changes. It therefore recommends coordinating the activities of the various international organisations, governments and NGOs – such as the East-West Parliamentary Practice Project (www.ewppp.org) and the East-West Institute – and placing more emphasis on activities at regional level.

25. On the basis of those findings, the Secretariat envisions focusing the Stability Pact’s attention on:

- promoting the harmonisation of legislation with EU standards;
- enhancing the exchange of information on parliamentary cooperation activities;
- developing links between committees of different parliaments dealing with similar issues;

- institutionalising training programmes for newly elected MPs and parliamentary staff;
- promoting twinning between parliaments (within the region and between SEE and EU parliaments, especially those of the new EU member states);
- supporting networks of women and young parliamentarians.

26. Furthermore, it is also envisaging creating a website portal to serve as a forum for information-sharing between parliaments and the different partners involved in parliamentary projects. The parliamentary cooperation initiative will endeavour to bring a parliamentary dimension to the work of all the existing Stability Pact task forces.

27. A number of initiatives had previously been launched among parliaments of the region with a view to establishing contacts, and a first conference of the Chairmen of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Committees from the national parliaments of the SEECP states was held in 1997 in Athens. Since then conferences have been organised regularly, including in 2004, in Sarajevo. At the last one, which took place under the current Romanian Presidency on 24 March 2005 in Bucharest, a final declaration was issued in which reference was made to “the high responsibility of the National Parliaments in providing a solid legal basis aimed at developing a clear path towards the European integration of the SEECP States, as well as in stepping up the process of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in South-Eastern Europe”. The declaration further underlines the following:

“1. For the first time ever in its long-standing history, the people of South-Eastern Europe are given the unique opportunity to be part of the European values and to bring their own contribution to the building up of the new, free and united Europe.

Our countries, fully aspiring towards EU membership, are determined to take full advantage of this historical opportunity, which opens up a new page of our people’s destiny.

2. The experience of the recent years has clearly demonstrated that the Parliaments are called upon to play a growing role in the reform processes in South-East Europe.

The need for the SEECP to have a strong parliamentary dimension becomes therefore obvious, considering SEECP’s role as a platform for the European integration of its Participating States, integration which stands as an ultimate guarantee of prosperity, stability and peace in South-Eastern Europe.

3. We are confident at this stage that our parliamentarians have to take the lead in elaborating and implementing comprehensive programmes for the harmonisation of our countries’ national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, as an essential contribution to the EU integration process.

At the same time, special attention should be given to enacting laws and regulations aimed at broadening the scope and forms of cooperation among SEE countries.

4. A successful cooperation in South-Eastern Europe depends largely on the degree of understanding and support from the national public opinion. To this end, the SEECP members of parliaments have to commit themselves to better mobilise the potential and creative energy of the academic community, NGOs and the private sector in their respective countries”.

28. A plan of action has been approved which states:

“Fully aware of the essential role of parliamentary diplomacy in developing the positive spirit of partnership in the SEECP region and having in mind the Procedural Framework for Parliamentary Cooperation, adopted by the Conference of Presidents of Parliaments of South-East Europe, Skopje, on 19-21 March 2001, we resolve:

1. To actively promote the bilateral and multilateral cooperation among our Parliaments, at all levels - presidencies, specialised committees, friendship groups, parliamentary staff - and in all fields of mutual interest, thus enhancing the contribution of the SEECP parliamentary dimension to the promotion of the democratic values in South-East Europe and to the building up of the new European architecture;

2. To provide full support, within the scope of the competence of our respective Committees, for the principles enshrined in the Charter on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe, and to the implementation of the Thessaloniki Agenda;
3. To encourage and support capacity-building and technical assistance programs for the SEECP parliaments, enabling them to develop effective parliamentary processes and structures, and in particular to harmonise their national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*;
4. To develop, on a regular basis, the dialogue, consultations, and the exchange of information, experience and best practices among our respective Committees, in relation with the SEECP agenda and the European integration;
5. To support the Stability Pact initiative for the setting up of a web site for a Parliamentary Information Network;
6. To take steps to enhance the efficiency of inter-parliamentary cooperation in our region, encouraging, to this end, in our respective Parliaments, coordinated and coherent actions that make better use of the various organisations and networks;
7. To encourage closer interaction and co-operation among our Parliaments within the various interparliamentary organisations and fora we participate in;
8. To put in place a broad cooperation between the Parliaments in the region and between SEE and EU parliaments in order to establish functional informal networks, on matters of common interest”.

29. On 7 February 2005, during his visit to Lithuania, the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, E. Busek, met with the Chairman of the Seimas Committee on Foreign Affairs, J. Karosas, as well as with the members of the Seimas Foreign Affairs and European Affairs Committees and the members of the Baltic Assembly, to discuss the possibilities for cooperation between the Parliament of Lithuania and those of the West Balkan states: Mr Karosas took the view that Lithuanian involvement on a parliamentary level in the Balkans would be really useful. He drew Mr Busek’s attention to the cooperation proposals drafted by the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Lithuania could host and arrange a couple of meetings with parliamentarians from the Balkan countries, which would be divided into two different groups depending on the degree of progress made. Another possible contribution by the Seimas might be to bring individual states from the Balkan region together with the countries which provided EU accession support to Lithuania. The proposed format for such cooperation would then be: an “old” European Union member state + Lithuania + a West Balkan state.

2. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly: the Rose-Roth seminars and technical training programmes

30. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly now has among its members several countries from the Balkan region (see the table in Chapter II): thus a new interparliamentary cooperation network is emerging in the area of defence. However, a cooperation programme had already been launched back in 1990 by the then President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Congressman Charlie Rose, together with Senator Bill Roth, with a view to supporting the beginnings of the democratic reconstruction process in Central and Eastern Europe and to eliminating potential causes of instability. The original aim of the Rose-Roth Initiative was to strengthen the development of parliamentary democracy in CEE countries. The seminars thus aimed to: involve and integrate parliamentarians from CEE countries in Assembly activities; promote a sense of partnership and cooperation at the legislative level; improve mutual understanding among legislators of their various problems and improve the prospects for finding solutions; familiarise legislators with key security and defence issues; promote the development of appropriate civil-military relations, including the democratic scrutiny of armed forces; share expertise and experience in parliamentary practice and procedures; help the development of a parliamentary staff structure in the CEE parliaments and thus provide CEE parliamentarians with administrative assistance comparable to their western counterparts. While these aspects still feature in

Rose-Roth seminars, the programme also addresses regional security issues, currently with particular emphasis on the Balkans and the Caucasus.

31. The initiative is underwritten by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the many parliaments that host these meetings or support them in kind. Financial support is occasionally provided by NATO's Information and Press Office and by the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces. The Secretariat prepares summary reports of these seminars which are given broad distribution. In addition, the Secretariat coordinates an extensive training programme for the staffs of parliaments associated with the Parliamentary Assembly. This programme aims to provide experience and expertise to parliamentary staff, particularly those working in foreign affairs and security.

32. These training seminars take place in Brussels and involve briefings at the Parliamentary Assembly's headquarters, NATO, SHAPE, and various European Union institutions. They explore security, political and economic issues and also the mechanisms democratic parliaments employ to exercise broad oversight over the formation and implementation of national foreign and economic policy. The Parliamentary Assembly typically runs three or four programmes each year, often at the request of parliaments. The specific programmes are tailored to meet the participants' requirements and interests. Parliamentary staff also participate in the Parliamentary Assembly's Research Assistant programme. This provides parliamentary staff with practical experience in the work of the Assembly and its Committees as well as an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Brussels-based policy community.

3. The East-West Parliamentary Practice Project

33. The East-West Parliamentary Practice Project (EWPPP) was founded in 1990 as a joint initiative of the European Cultural Foundation and the Ford Foundation, with the aim of providing support for parliaments in the newly emerging democracies in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. In January 1995, the EWPPP became an independent foundation under the law of the Netherlands.

34. The EWPPP implements national, regional and international programmes for members of parliament and their parliamentary staffs from Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The programmes, which are non-partisan in approach and pluralistic in participation, focus on different ways in which parliaments can address a variety of political, organisational, procedural and policy issues. Broad and flexible guidelines have enabled the Foundation to adapt its approach from year to year and from country to country, taking into account the changing needs and circumstances of the parliaments with which it works. Some of the issues that have been dealt with in EWPPP programmes include:

- parties in Parliament;
- parliaments and the protection of the rights of minorities in multicultural societies;
- relations between Members of Parliament and their constituents Bicameralism in principle and practice;
- aspects and techniques of the separation of powers;
- the budget process in a federal system;
- legislative strategies towards decentralisation;
- relations between Parliament and civil society;
- Distribution and balance of power between central and regional governing bodies;
- the role of Parliament in territorial and administrative reform.

35. The EWPPP aims to contribute to overall European regional stability by supporting and strengthening the paramount democratic institution – Parliament – in countries faced with the enormous challenges related to the long process of democratic, political, social and economic transition. EWPPP concentrates its efforts on strengthening parliamentary democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia; encouraging the development of an enduring democratic culture in countries

where it is operating; developing channels of communication among members of parliament across national boundaries in the framework of European integration; and promoting cooperation between parliaments and civil society.

36. The EWPPP's broad and flexible guidelines have resulted in a considerable expansion of the Project's scope over time, both with respect to the number of parliaments involved in its programmes and to the range of issues covered. Since its establishment in 1990, the Project has organised programmes involving parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, and Montenegro and Kosovo, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Ukraine. As the Project's flexible character enables it to respond in a timely fashion to requests from parliaments which seek its assistance, the current geographic scope is likely to be extended in the future.

37. Funding for EWPPP activities is provided by the European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. An international Steering Committee determines the EWPPP's policies and programmes. It is administratively and financially responsible to the Board of Trustees of the independent foundation that is its legal basis. Consultative Committees in the countries in which the Foundation is working participate in programme planning and implementation. The Foundation also draws on the advice of an extensive network of members of parliament, policy specialists and scholars throughout Europe and the United States. The EWPPP Secretariat in Amsterdam and the EWPPP Local Partners are responsible for programme administration.

38. The majority of the Project's programmes take the form of multinational workshops on different aspects of parliamentary practice. These workshops provide a politically neutral forum for a candid exchange of opinion and experience. Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum participate in EWPPP programmes.

39. A Public Forum entitled "Commentary on the law on referendums" was held in Sofia, Bulgaria on 23-25 February 2004, at which amendments to the draft law on referenda were discussed. A number of other activities took place in connection with the programme entitled "Legislatures and Citizens: a programme for the parliaments and civil societies of south-eastern Europe":

- A Final Regional Conference held in Budapest, Hungary, on 1-4 April 2004, provided a common conclusion to the "Legislatures and Citizens" programme. Participants included representatives of the Parliaments and civil societies of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo, as well as representatives of the Parliaments of Turkey, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Also present were representatives of intergovernmental agencies, members of the EWPPP Steering Committee and staff of the East-West Parliamentary Practice Project;
- A Public Forum was held in Tirana, Albania, on 5-7 May 2004 on "The culture of dialogue and the role of the opposition";
- Legislatures and Citizens June-July 2004, Evaluation and Progress Reports. Together with the LCCs and the NGOs, the EWPPP conducted individual country evaluations. This evaluation included the other ongoing parts of the project and regional exchanges, and led to proposals for further cooperation;
- A Regional Meeting was held in Tirana, Albania, on 9-11 July 2004, on the subject of "Programme Continuation". Participants included representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and staff of the East-West Parliamentary Practice Project. Discussion focused on the results of the Legislatures and Citizens programme and ideas for the development of a new regional programme. A number of recommendations were put forward: to formalise cooperation at regional level, to organise a standing regional conference of parliaments and NGOs focusing on good legislative practice, including country teams and a regional team; to focus on the role of parliament and citizens in EU integration; and to coordinate *ad hoc* meetings between NGOs

and MPs in the region on specific issues such as a code of conduct and good legislative standards.

40. Through cooperation with its NGO partners in the region, the EWPPP produced a small Networking Handbook entitled “Legislatures and Citizens” at the end of the programme in July 2004. The book contains key contact names and information from all the parliaments of south-eastern Europe and EU member states;

41. Other events in 2004 were a third workshop on “Parliamentary Oversight and Transparency” held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (25-28 November 2004) and a conference on “Aspects and techniques of parliamentary democracy: a programme in support of the Assembly of Kosovo” held in Pristina, Kosovo (9-11 December 2004).

VI. Conclusions

42. The aim of this report is to provide some basic information about ongoing interparliamentary cooperation initiatives in Central and South-Eastern Europe. This region, often known for short as “The Balkans”, is in fact a vast area which has undergone a number of changes that have pushed back the borders of Europe. Over the past fifteen years the political geography of our continent has changed; regional organisations have gradually brought together neighbouring countries bound by a spirit of partnership and an opening up of all aspects of society. Parliaments have understood the need to establish links among themselves and interparliamentary assemblies have often been the forerunners of a dialogue by organising exchanges of information and setting up joint programmes for the harmonisation of national legislation. These forums have greatly contributed to the process of European integration and it would be a great shame, with the end goal in sight, if certain countries were now to turn away from them and their wealth of common experience, in favour of other solutions.

43. This is why the Resolution that the Committee is submitting to the Assembly calls strongly on the latter to support progress in the area of interparliamentary cooperation, and stresses that this project remains to be completed and that the next steps will be equally as important for the future of Europe in the geographic sense of the term, in other words the broader area that goes beyond the European Union, as a common area of peace, stability and prosperity.

