

Impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the development of the institutional balance of the European Union

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The European Parliament adopted by 363 votes to 93, with 19 abstentions, a resolution on the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the development of the institutional balance of the European Union.

MEPs welcome the institutional innovations contained in the Treaty of Lisbon, which create the conditions for a renewed and enhanced institutional balance within the Union. They warn, however, that the new institutional framework demands that each institution play its role in in-depth permanent cooperation with the other institutions in order to achieve positive results for the whole of the Union.

The Parliament also welcomes the fact that the essential elements of the 'Community method' – the right of initiative of the Commission and joint decision-making by the European Parliament and the Council – have been preserved and reinforced by the Treaty of Lisbon.

The main points raised in this resolution are as follows:

The European Parliament: the resolution strongly welcomes the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon fully recognises the European Parliament as one of the two branches of the legislative and budgetary authorities of the Union, while its role in the adoption of many political decisions of importance for the life of the Union is also recognised, and its functions in relation to political control are reinforced and even extended, albeit to a lesser extent, to the area of CFSP. It calls on the Parliament, the Commission and the Council to envisage the **conclusion of interinstitutional agreements** structuring the best practices in these domains in order to optimise their reciprocal cooperation.

MEPs welcome the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon extends to the European Parliament the right of initiative concerning revision of the Treaties, recognises that Parliament has the right to participate in the Convention and that its consent is required in the event that the European Council considers that there is no reason to convene the Convention. They consider that this recognition militates in favour of recognising that the European Parliament has a right of full **participation in the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC)** on similar terms with the Commission.

Lastly, MEPs take note of the **transitional arrangements concerning the composition of the European Parliament**. They consider that the implementation of such arrangements will require a modification in primary law and call on the Member States to adopt all the necessary national legal provisions in order to allow the pre-election in June 2009 of the 18 supplementary Members of the European Parliament, so that they can sit in Parliament as observers from the date that the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force.

The role of the European Council: the Parliament considers that formal recognition of the European Council as a separate autonomous institution, with its specific competences clearly defined in the Treaties, involves refocusing the role of the European Council on the fundamental task of providing the necessary political impetus and defining the general orientations and goals of the Union's activity.

The resolution also welcomes the specification in the Treaty of Lisbon of the essential role of the European Council in relation to revision of the Treaties, as well as in relation to certain decisions of fundamental importance for the political life of the Union. It stresses the particular leading role to be

played by the European Council in the external action area. In this context, the need to **improve the interinstitutional cooperation between the European Parliament and the European Council** militates in favour of optimising the conditions under which the President of the European Parliament participates in discussions in the European Council, which could possibly be dealt with in a political agreement on the relations between the two institutions.

Moreover, the Parliament considers that, as the European Council is now incorporated into the EU institutional architecture, there is a need for a clearer and more specific definition of its obligations, including the possible judicial scrutiny of its actions.

The fixed Presidency of the European Council: the Parliament welcomes the creation of a fixed long-term Presidency of the European Council, which will help to ensure greater continuity, effectiveness and coherence of the work of that institution. The resolution stresses that the nomination of the President of the European Council should take place as soon as possible after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in order to maintain a link between the duration of the newly elected Parliament and the period of the mandate for the new Commission.

The essential role of the President of the European Council will be to drive the Council's work forward, ensure the preparation and the continuity of its work, promote consensus amongst its members, report to the European Parliament and represent, at his/her level and without prejudice to the functions of the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative), the Union externally in relation to the CFSP. In this context, a balanced and collaborative relationship between the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission, the rotating Presidency and, as far as the external representation of the Union in CFSP matters is concerned, the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) is essential.

The Council: the resolution stresses the essential role conferred by the Treaty of Lisbon on the General Affairs Council – and hence its President – with a view to ensuring the consistency and continuity of the work of the different Council configurations. The particular role of the Council in the preparation, definition and implementation of the CFSP calls for reinforced coordination between the President of the General Affairs Council and the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) as chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Council, and between them and the President of the European Council.

To overcome the great difficulties in relation to coordination between the different configurations of the Council due to the new system of Presidencies, MEPs stress the **importance of the “new” fixed 18-month “troikas”** (groups of three Presidencies), which will share the Presidencies of the different configurations of the Council (apart from the Foreign Affairs Council and the Eurogroup), and of COREPER in order to ensure the coherence, consistency and continuity of the work of the Council as a whole and to ensure the interinstitutional cooperation needed for the smooth running of the legislative and budgetary procedures in joint decision with the European Parliament. MEPs consider that the troikas should develop **intense and permanent cooperation** throughout their joint mandate. They call on the troikas to present joint operational programmes – containing, notably, their proposals on the timetabling of legislative deliberations – to Parliament in plenary session at the beginning of their joint mandate.

The resolution also stresses that the Prime Minister/Head of State assuming the rotating Presidency of the Council must be the privileged interlocutor of the European Parliament concerning the activities of the Presidency. He/she should be invited to address Parliament in plenary session, presenting to it the respective programme of activities of the Presidency and an account of the developments and results recorded during its six-month term.

The Commission: MEPs welcome the reaffirmation of the essential role of the Commission as the 'engine' driving forward the activity of the Union, through:

- the recognition of its quasi-monopoly in terms of the legislative initiative, which is extended to all areas of activity of the Union apart from the CFSP, and particularly reinforced in financial matters;
- the strengthening of its role of facilitating agreement between the two branches of the legislative and budgetary authority;
- the reinforcement of its role as the 'executive' of the Union whenever implementation of the provisions of European Union law requires a common approach, with the Council assuming such a role only in CFSP matters and in duly justified cases specified in legislative acts.

Election of the President of the Commission: the resolution stresses that the election of the President of the Commission by the European Parliament on a proposal by the European Council will give a pronounced political nature to his/her designation.

MEPs stress that the fact that a candidate for the office of President of the Commission may be proposed by the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, and that the election of that candidate by the European Parliament requires the votes of a majority of its component members, constitutes a further incentive prompting all those involved in the process to develop the necessary dialogue with a view to ensuring the successful outcome of the process.

MEPs recall that the European Council is bound under the Treaty of Lisbon to take into account the elections to the European Parliament and, before designating the candidate, to hold the appropriate consultations, which are not formal institutional contacts between the two institutions.

Nominations process: MEPs consider that the choice of the persons called upon to hold the offices of President of the European Council, President of the Commission and Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) should take account of the relevant competencies of the candidates. In the nominations to the most important political posts in the Union, the Member States and the European political families should take into consideration not only the criteria of geographical and demographic balance but also criteria based on political and gender balance.

The nominations process should occur **following the elections to the European Parliament**, in order to take account of the electoral results, which will play a primordial role in the choice of President of the Commission. In this context, the Parliament proposes, as a possible model, a procedure and timetable for the nominations, which could be agreed by the European Parliament and the European Council. The proposed scenario should in any case be applied from 2014 onwards.

MEPs consider that the possible entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon by the end of 2009 calls for a political agreement between the European Council and the European Parliament in order to ensure that the procedure for the choice of the President of the next Commission and for the nomination of the future Commission will, in any case, respect the substance of the new powers that the Treaty of Lisbon assigns to the European Parliament on this issue.

Lastly, the resolution recalls that, should the second referendum in Ireland not have a positive outcome, the Treaty of Nice will in any case be fully applicable and that the next Commission will have to be formed in accordance with the provisions under which the number of its members will be lower than the number of Member States. In that event, the Council will have to take a decision on the actual number of members of that reduced Commission.

Programming: the Parliament considers that programming, at both the strategic and the operational level, will be essential in order to ensure the efficiency and coherence of the action of the Union. MEPs propose that the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should agree on a **'contract' or 'programme' for the parliamentary term**, based on the broad strategic goals and priorities to be presented by the Commission at the beginning of its mandate, which should be the subject of a joint debate with the European Parliament and the Council, with the aim of establishing an understanding

(possibly in the form of a specific interinstitutional agreement, even if this is not legally binding) between the three institutions on common goals and priorities for the five-year legislative term.

On the basis of this contract or programme, the Commission should then further develop its ideas for the financial programming, and present, by the end of June of the year following the elections, its proposals for a five-year multiannual financial framework. This would enable the Union to have a five-year multiannual financial framework ready to enter into force at the beginning of year N+2 (or N+3), thus providing each European Parliament and each Commission with the possibility of deciding on its 'own' programming.

External relations: the resolution stresses the importance of the new dimension that the Treaty of Lisbon brings to the external action of the Union as a whole, including the CFSP, which, together with the legal personality of the Union and the institutional innovations relevant to this area (notably the creation of the 'doubled-hatted' Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) and the European External Action Service (EEAS)), could be a decisive factor in the coherence and effectiveness of the action of the Union in this domain and significantly enhance its visibility as a global actor.

Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative): the Parliament regards the creation of the 'double-hatted' Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) as a fundamental step to ensure the coherence, effectiveness and visibility of the whole external action of the Union. In this context, it emphasises the need for a relationship of political trust between the President of the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative), and the capacity of the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) to cooperate fruitfully with the President of the European Council, with the rotating Presidency of the Council and with the other Commissioners charged, under his/her coordination, with the exercise of specific competences relating to the external actions of the Union.

The Parliament calls on the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) to make full use of the possibility of presenting common initiatives in the field of foreign relations, in order to enhance the cohesion of the different areas of action of the Union in the external sphere and increase the possibility of those initiatives being adopted by the Council, particularly in relation to the CFSP. It stresses, in this connection, the need for parliamentary supervision of foreign and security policy measures.

Representation: the Parliament considers that the Treaty of Lisbon establishes an effective, albeit complex, operational system for the external representation of the Union, and proposes that this be articulated in accordance with the following guidelines:

- the President of the European Council represents the Union at the level of Heads of State or Government in matters concerning the CFSP, but does not have the power to conduct political negotiations in the name of the Union, which is the task of the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative);
- the President of the Commission represents the Union at the highest level in relation to all aspects of the external relations of the Union (except for matters concerning CFSP) or any specific sectoral policies falling within the scope of the external action of the Union;
- the Vice-President of the Commission (High Representative) represents the Union at ministerial level or in international organisations concerning the Union's overall external action; he/she also carries out the functions of external representation as President of the Foreign Affairs Council.