



**Speech by the Secretary General of the Danish Parliament,
Mr. Carsten U. Larsen, at the Secretaries General, Rome 13.
March 2015**

The developments in the Political Dialogue

Dear Ms. PAGANO,
Dear Ms. SERAFIN
Honorable colleagues
Ladies and gentlemen

Let me thank the Italian Parliament for having invited me to address good colleagues here today.

How can national parliaments best contribute to ensuring democratic legitimacy in Europe? That is a question which the Danish parliament considers extremely important.

An adequate response is becoming still more relevant as Europe is struggling to recover from the economic and financial crisis – which has also turned into a social crisis with dramatic consequences for many citizens.

National parliaments have a key role to play in bringing the concerns of citizens to Europe – as well as bringing the decisions of Europe to its citizens.

Our parliamentarians have repeatedly stated, that National Parliaments therefore must become proactive players involved more directly in building Europe. However, we need new tools in

the toolbox if we are to fulfill our role as democratic institutions in the still more integrated financial, budgetary and economic policy framework of Europe.

Holding our governments to account is of course key in this regard, but it is only one side of the coin. To reinforce the political dialogue with the European Commission and the European Parliament is the other. I believe it was a breakthrough for our relations with the Commission when President Barroso in 2006 encouraged national parliaments to express our views on all new Commission proposals. Likewise it was a reinforcement of the political dialogue, when the Commission accepted to respond to written inquiries from national parliaments at COSAC in Copenhagen in April 2012. Eva Kjer Hansen, chairperson of the Danish European Affairs committee played a very active role in that achievement.

Let me stress. So far the political dialogue with national Parliaments has proved to be a success, with a clear added value. If national Parliaments submit views at an early stage, these can serve as an early warning system, providing the Commission with an idea of the main arguments on the substance of the Commission's proposals. The total number of opinions received from national Parliaments has increased significantly in recent years but appears to have stabilised at just over 600 per year.

However my parliament believe that we can still strengthen the political dialogue further with the European Commission.

The European Commission last year committed itself to improving its cooperation with national parliaments. It was very encouraging to national parliaments that President Juncker asked Vice-President Timmermans to "coordinate and strengthen the interaction with national Parliaments as a way of forging a new partnership.

National parliamentarians must take ownership of this opportunity. A number of proposals have been tabled by the parliaments of the Netherlands and Ireland and House of Lords in the UK. But also the European Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament presented in January 2014 a paper laying down 23 proposals which among other things seek to enhance the political dialogue with the European Commission.

Let me just mention a couple of the most prominent ideas in this paper.

The establishment of a so-called green card for national parliaments is probably the hottest proposal for the moment. The green card should enable national parliaments to encourage the European Commission to table new European legislation. The Danish Parliament's European Affairs Committee stresses that such a green card procedure should fully respect the European Commission's right of initiative. The European Affairs Committee envisages an informal procedure building on the existing political dialogue with the European Commission. The purpose of the green card is first and foremost to encourage national parliaments to engage in Europe in a more pro-active manner than just being the guardians of the subsidiarity principle.

The green card is on the agenda of the next COSAC plenary taking place in Riga in May, where the Latvian Presidency has promised to present a common vision for the green card. However before establishing any new green card procedures by which national parliament could cooperate, it might be useful to test a green card procedure in practice.

The Danish Parliament's European Affairs Committee has therefore suggested the establishment of a "European Business Forum" as a possible topic for such a "trial" green card. The purpose is to establish an advisory body for the European Commission when it comes to simplifying legislation and removing unnecessary red tape - to make it simpler to do business in Europe.

Secondly the political dialogue with the European Commission could be stepped up by allowing national parliaments to present their opinions and national concerns directly to the European Commission in the context of the European Semester. European Commissioners could appear before national parliamentary committees to sort out any questions national parliaments might have regarding the Commission's Annual Growth Survey or the Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations.

A key challenge for national parliaments in this regard is the degree of extra control that the Commission and Council have acquired over national budgets through the European Semester and the fiscal compact. Although the European Semester provides EU Member States with better tools for coordinating

their budgetary and economic policies, it also enables the Council and the Commission to examine national draft budgets even before they are passed in national Parliaments. This touches upon the very heart of national parliamentary democracy.

National parliaments should also enhance the political dialogue with the European Parliament. The European Parliament has become a fully fledged European legislator with a tremendous amount of influence and expertise in all areas of the European Union. National parliaments could benefit from building stronger bonds to members of the European Parliament. Why not invite European Parliaments rapporteurs to appear before national parliamentary Committees at European debates?

A stronger political dialogue between our parliamentarians and the EU institutions also makes new demands on our parliamentary administrations. That at least is our experience in the Danish Parliament. On the one hand many of our sectorial committees still find it difficult to deal with EU affairs. On the other hand EU legislation has become so complex and technical that it is almost impossible for our European Affairs committee to deal with it alone. Therefore we are presently debating how our EU experts can support committees even better allowing them to engage more in political dialogue with the Commission and Parliament especially at an early stage in the EU legislative process in. An strong political dialogue between the administrations of national parliaments and officials of the Commission and European Parliament would facilitate such efforts

In conclusion. National parliaments have the potential to play an extremely important role when it comes to strengthening European democratic legitimacy.

A stronger political dialogue with the European Commission and the European Parliament is certainly part of the answer.

The European Commission's call for a new partnership with national parliaments has already generated a lot of interest among national parliaments. Exciting ideas are on the table.

Let's get on with the discussion about how the political dialogue can exploit its full potential.

Thank you for your attention