

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

BY THE INTERPARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE¹ ON 'IMPROVING NATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY OF EU FUNDS', THE HAGUE 28-29 JANUARY 2010

1. The Interparliamentary Conference agrees that the role of Member States and national parliaments is crucial in the process of improving accountability of EU funding. Around 80% of the EU budget is implemented in 'shared management'. According to the European Court of Auditors in its latest report, most of the errors identified in EU funding continue to occur at Member State level. In addition, in view of the subsidiarity principle, national authorities are best equipped for the daily management of these funds, and national authorities should therefore be primarily held accountable.
2. Regarding the accountability of EU funding, the Interparliamentary Conference agrees that comprehensible, clear and transparent budget procedures and control procedures on a national level lead to greater legitimacy of the EU in general and EU spending in particular.
3. The Interparliamentary Conference underlines the principle of subsidiarity and recommends that national policy instruments be implemented or strengthened, to contribute to the improvement of the control and management of EU expenditure in Member States.
4. More importantly, the new EU Financial Regulation, to be amended in 2010, should contain improvements to the Annual Summary. In addition, a simplification of EU legislation on procedures and rules connected to the implementation of EU funds will reduce error rates.
5. To be effective, the Interparliamentary Conference agrees that instruments used for the management and accountability of EU funding, must give evidence of a sound audit basis, allow scrutiny by national parliaments, and allow verification by national supreme audit institutions. Preferably, these instruments should be made public and shall contain elements of a common EU framework in order to make comparisons and identify 'best practices'.
6. The Interparliamentary Conference observes that political commitment by all relevant actors within Member States is a necessary condition for the efficient use of both national and EU resources, and for the achievement of the full potential from their use.

7. National parliaments shall strive to translate its political commitment into national policies that have a positive effect on the management and control of EU funding.

8. Notwithstanding the fact that scrutiny by national parliaments of the allocated funds helps strengthen transparency and accountability in the management of public finances, the range of budgetary powers delegated to national parliaments differs across Member States. Taking account of this, and sharing the understanding that the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty since 1 December 2009 empowers national parliaments with respect to the topic under consideration, the Interparliamentary Conference reaffirms the political will to contribute to the efficient and sound spending of EU funds in all Member States.

¹ Hosted by the Dutch national parliament, national Members of Parliament from the following countries were represented at the Conference: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands. Observers to the Conference represented the following institutions: The European Commission, The European Parliament, The European Court of Auditors, the Netherlands Supreme Court of Auditors, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, The German Supreme Court of Auditors and The Netherlands Ministry of Finance. Key note speakers to the conference were: Mr Luigi De Magistris (Chair of the Budget Control Committee of the European Parliament), Prof. Josef Bonnici (Member of the European Court of Auditors), Mr Frans de Nerée tot Babberich (Member of the Dutch Parliament) and Mr Gijs de Vries (Board Member of the Dutch Supreme Court of Audit).