

AFCO to evaluate union's effectiveness

Parliament's constitutional affairs committee (AFCO) will lead the reflection on how to make the union more efficient, more transparent and more democratic. Last May, European citizens voiced their concern that the union is far too complicated and not sufficiently democratic and transparent. Many feel that 'Brussels' does not take their concerns duly into consideration. We also saw how decisions were taken during the crisis: almost always too little, too late and too often behind closed doors.

We must give ourselves the means to change this situation. Although many people may think that institutional issues are too technical and do not concern their concrete needs, they are crucial to allow the union to fulfil its promises. Without institutions functioning properly, the union will be like a driver in a beautiful car, with a fantastic GPS telling him the way to get to a wonderful place, while lacking the engine to arrive at the destination.

In AFCO, we will evaluate the first few years of the Lisbon treaty's application, looking for areas where it has not yet delivered on its true potential. We will consider possible improvements needed in the way we function and take decisions without changing the treaties. The nomination of the top-candidates of the European political families to president of the commission, pushed through by parliament, constitutes a good example. Where necessary, we'll propose a further modification of the treaties in order to allow the union to face upcoming challenges.

An area which will require our particular attention is that of economic governance. The crisis showed abundantly that we were not really equipped to face these kinds of problems. New mechanisms and procedures were introduced under the pressure of the crisis. Many of the decisions taken in this area have an extremely important impact on the lives of citizens of the countries under financial stress and it is important that citizens feel that they are represented by those they elect, both at European and national level. We will propose the necessary changes to reach that goal.

This is just one of the areas in which we will seek to enhance our cooperation with national parliaments, in order to reinforce the parliamentary dimension of European politics. We also have to face the challenge of differentiated integration, and identify possible paths for allowing member states who wish to deepen integration to do so, while also

respecting the wishes of those who want to move at a different, or slower, pace.

We will have to ensure that the mechanisms that guarantee the adequate protection of fundamental rights of citizens function correctly all across the union. We cannot require less from member states than we do, for instance, from candidate countries. Concluding the accession of the EU to the European convention of human rights will be one of our priorities. We will also ensure that instruments allowing for citizens' participation in the life of the union, like the citizens' initiative, work properly and are effective. We'll address the necessary reform of the European electoral law and take steps to guarantee the proper transparency of the procedures leading to the European decisions.

Looking internally, we'll have to ensure that the organisation of the parliament is optimal, notably that it matches the new structure of the commission proposed by president designate Juncker, allowing for proper democratic scrutiny of the EU executive's activity. ★

EU needs to be more transparent and more efficient, says **Danuta Hübner**

Danuta Hübner is chair of parliament's constitutional affairs committee



Powers and responsibilities

Committee responsible for:

- The institutional aspects of the European integration process, in particular the preparation, initiation and proceedings of ordinary and simplified treaty revision procedures;
- The implementation of the treaties and the assessment of their operation;
- The institutional consequences of enlargement negotiations of or withdrawal from the union;
- Inter-institutional relations, including, with a view to their approval by parliament, examination of

inter-institutional agreements pursuant to rule 140(2) of the rules of procedure;

- Uniform electoral procedure;
- Political parties and political foundations at European level, without prejudice to the competences of the bureau;
- The determination of the existence of a serious and persistent breach by a member state of the principles common to the member states;
- The interpretation and application of the rules of procedure and proposals for amendments thereto.