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***Strengthening the role of national parliaments in the EU***

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Reflection on the role of national parliaments in European integration has taken place for years in different fora. I have always understood its goal in terms of building a greater responsibility of national parliaments for Europe. This reflection has also recognized the fact that national parliaments are close to citizens, they can therefore promote effectively Europe at national level, build citizens' trust in European action and even encourage people to participate in European elections. This role of national parliaments is of particular relevance now as we need to rebuild citizens' trust in European solutions to a number of problems Europe has to address effectively.

The European Parliament shares with national parliaments one common responsibility - ensuring the accountability of the executive action at both levels of European governance - the national and the European.

When member states transfer the competences to the Union level, these transfers are endorsed by national parliaments when they ratify the Treaties. Then democratic legitimacy requires that elected representatives of citizens have a decisive word in adopting the EU legislation. This is the role of the European Parliament representing citizens and the Council representing the states. This takes place through the legislative process at the European level.

How can the voice of national parliaments be heard in this process? Decision making in the EU is already a complex process, so creating new institutions or procedures would not be the smartest way to go. That is why over decades national parliaments have developed adequate mechanisms to influence and scrutinize national governments in their European policy making. While these mechanisms are more frequent in case of the participation of governments in the Council of the European Union meetings, it is far less developed for the European Council meetings. There is a huge potential of lessons to be learned from those national parliaments which have a longer history of this type of scrutiny.

This division of labor between parliaments allows each level of parliament to act in line with their own competences within the Treaty framework. This was precisely the conclusion of a rather exhaustive discussion on this issue during the Convention, back in 2002.

With regard to the role of national parliaments in supervising the subsidiarity principle, it seems rational to consider moving from rather defensive attitude to active and constructive political dialogue. The fact that only 15% of the reasoned opinions delivered by national parliaments raise the subsidiarity issue seems to be mostly due to the fact that European Institutions, both the Commission and the Parliament, have invested a lot in the mechanism of controlling the subsidiarity principle and respect it during the entire legislative process. This is also true for the Council which has strong vested interest in protecting this principle.

We must not forget either that national parliaments have the right to request from governments they control to take a legal act to the ECJ to confirm whether subsidiarity principle has been respected.

It would be very useful in this context for the EP and national parliaments to invest more in further developing mechanisms of political debates. Platforms that already exist in some areas of European competences could be improved and made more effective. European Parliament could become more attentive to signals coming from national parliaments and raise this way their impact on European decision making.

There are areas of European integration whose importance will grow in the years to come and where the executive power might dominate and democratic scrutiny will be pivotal. I think here about EMU governance and the defense and foreign policy. We have in these fields embryonic structures - article 13 conference and dialogue on CFSP.

Better law making is not only about legislative initiative. It is about the whole cycle of legislation. It includes also transposition, implementation and enforcement. We see across Europe rather differentiated capacities of national institutions to deliver in this area. Actually, there is some evidence that the institutional capacity to deliver on European commitments and obligations has been weakened over time. Making European law work at national level is to a large extent the responsibility of national parliaments. It would be interesting to hear from you about your experience.