

**STANDING
COMMITTEE**

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NATO Parliamentary Assembly

**THE WORKING GROUP ON
ASSEMBLY REFORM – AN UPDATE**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In November 2005, the Standing Committee appointed a four-member Working Group on Assembly Reform to consider a variety of proposals concerning the functioning of the Assembly¹. This Working Group evaluated a wide variety of proposals concerning all aspects of the Assembly's and developed a series of recommendations which were then considered by the Standing Committee meeting in March 2006. Many of the proposals were adopted, but the Standing Committee asked the Working Group to elaborate or adjust several others.

2. The Working Group met again in April 2006 and presented its further findings and recommendations to the Standing Committee at its meeting during the Paris Session in May 2006. This included amendments to the Rules of Procedure which would be needed to implement certain of the Working Group's recommendations.

3. Lack of time during that meeting precluded detailed discussions, but the Standing Committee responded favourably to the presentation of the Working Group's findings and agreed that the Assembly should proceed with reforms as presented on the understanding that the Standing Committee would not use procedural grounds to challenge their implementation.

4. During its meeting in Québec City, the Standing Committee will have more time to reflect upon the Working Group's recommendations and to assess the initial results of the changes that have been made as a result of the process which began just one year ago. The purpose of this update is to summarize the changes that have been made and to highlight the decisions which are still pending. More comprehensive background material appears in the Working Group's report which was presented to the Standing Committee in May and which is reproduced for convenient reference [106 SC 06 E Bis].

II. THE CO-ORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES AND SUBJECTS

A. Terms of reference for Committees and the Mediterranean Special Group

5. The Working Group has drawn up draft terms of reference for all the Committees and the Mediterranean Special Group. These drafts will be presented to the Committees during the Québec Session. Terms of reference will establish broad guidelines for determining which bodies should address particular subjects.

B. Standing Committee approval for subjects to be addressed

6. At present, the choice of subjects resides with the Committees. However, the Standing Committee accepted the Working Group's recommendation that the Standing Committee should have the right to approve the subjects to be addressed. The Working Group has prepared an amendment to the Rules of Procedure to implement that change.

C. An Improved Co-ordination Mechanism

7. The Standing Committee is generally pressed for time during Sessions, and it does not include all the key members who shape the Assembly's calendar of activities. At the 2005 annual

¹ The members of the Working Group were Senator Pierre Claude Nolin (Canada), Mr Vahit Erdem (Turkey), Senator Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri (Italy) and M. Daniel Bacquelaine (Belgium). The intention was to ensure that the Group included a transatlantic dimension as well as representatives from each of the Assembly's political groups (Conservative and Christian Democrat, Socialist, and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats.) The Working Group met on Saturday 18 February. M. Bacquelaine was unable to participate so Senator Mihail Lupoi (Romania) represented the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats.

session, a special meeting of the Bureau and Committee chairmen took place to review activities planned for 2006. All participants judged this to be an extremely useful process, but it was felt that it could be improved.

8. The Working Group recommended that a Coordination Meeting should take place at each session, and that the meeting should include the Bureau, the Committee Chairmen and the Sub-Committee Chairmen.

9. Such a meeting will take place during the Québec Session. At this meeting, each Sub-Committee should present a convincing rationale for its forthcoming activities and its report. This meeting will review all planned activities and provide an opportunity to identify possible overlaps and gaps, and to propose adjustments such as joint meetings or changes in locations to ensure that the overall "package" of activities is as coherent as possible.

10. The Bureau will review the results of that meeting, and then an updated workplan will be presented to the Standing Committee. **The Standing Committee will remain as the body responsible for approving all activities.**

11. The Working Group envisages the Coordination Meeting taking place at each Session to ensure that activities are kept under review.

12. Any changes to the programme of activities between sessions would require the approval of the Bureau.

13. Again, the Working Group has proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure to implement these practices.

14. It must be pointed out that this coordination mechanism seems better suited to dealing with activities than with the subjects to be addressed: the Coordination Meeting as currently envisaged does not include Rapporteurs. This should be kept under review. The obvious solution – including the rapporteurs – would add about 14 participants to the meeting which might make it rather unwieldy.

15. In sum, the goal is to ensure that activities are driven by political priorities.

III. SESSION STRUCTURE

16. The Working Group believes that it is not practical to be completely rigid regarding session structure. Clearly, geographic location and the specific session venue must be taken into account, as must the prevailing political circumstances. Flexibility and pragmatism must therefore be the guiding principles.

17. That said, whenever practical, annual sessions should open and close with half-day plenary sittings. This has been conveyed to future session hosts and is included in the guidelines for sessions which form the basis for session planning. The final choice resides with the host nation,

18. For spring sessions, host nations have the option of holding the excursion when the working programme is over, and the plenary sitting can take place at either the opening or closing of the working programme. (The Portuguese delegation has already decided to open the Madeira spring session in 2007 with the plenary sitting and to hold the excursion after the working programme has concluded.)

19. The distinction between spring and annual sessions should be retained. That does not mean that the Assembly could not produce policy recommendations during spring sessions, but they could not be envisaged on the same scale as during annual sessions. The budgetary implications simply preclude that option. In fact, the Assembly has produced one or more policy recommendations at four of the last six spring sessions.

IV. NATO-RUSSIA PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

20. The Working Group has proposed that the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee should be separated from sessions, a proposal to which the Standing Committee agreed. At the Paris Session, the Standing Committee agreed to propose an alternative meeting schedule to the Russian delegation. The proposed alternative was to hold a NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee meeting in Moscow once a year, and a smaller meeting in Brussels (along the lines of the former Joint Monitoring Group.) The Russian delegation reacted positively to the proposal to hold a meeting in Russia, and suggested that the smaller meeting need not take place in Brussels but could take place in different locations each year. However, the Russian delegation saw these meetings as taking place in addition to the meetings during sessions.

21. The difficulty is that the Coordination Meeting has also been added to the session programme, and it is difficult to accommodate both this meeting and that of the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee within the Session framework. Nevertheless, both meetings will take place on the day before the Committee meetings at the Québec session, and the key item of business on the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee agenda will be consideration of future activities. Therefore, the final shape and content of the Assembly's cooperation with Russia will depend upon discussions during that meeting.

V. THE DURATION OF MANDATES

22. The Standing Committee accepted the Working Group's recommendation that the duration of mandates for members of the Bureau should remain unchanged. However, during the Paris Session there was no time to discuss the Working Group's recommendation that the duration of mandates for Committee officers should be reduced to three years from the current maximum of four years. At present, Committee officers are elected for one year and can be re-elected three times. The Standing Committee should decide whether this should be changed such that Committee officers should be eligible for re-election twice.

VI. DECLARATION ON THE RIGA SUMMIT

23. Mention must be made of another of the Working Group's recommendations. The Working Group recommended that the Assembly should hold a special Standing Committee in order to prepare a declaration representing our collective views on the issues likely to feature at NATO's Riga Summit. The Working Group's intention was to ensure that these views were made known during the preparatory stages of the Riga Summit and not immediately beforehand when there would be little or no time for them to have any real impact.

24. On 29 September, the Standing Committee held a special meeting in Brussels to consider, amend, and adopt just such a declaration. This was forwarded to NATO's Secretary General, Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, and all the Permanent Representatives to the North Atlantic Council, and to member delegations for circulation to their national authorities. (The response from NATO's Secretary General appears as an appendix to this document.)

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

25. The above summary represents the “tip of iceberg”: a more comprehensive account of the Working Group’s deliberations and recommendations appears in Document [106 SC 06 E bis]. For the moment, it should be stressed that the Working Group does not consider that its task is yet completed. As noted earlier, implementation of some reforms should be kept under review. For instance, the participation in the Coordination Meeting might need adjustment, and it might be necessary to explore other options for the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee, depending upon the outcome of discussions with the Russian delegation.

26. Furthermore, some other Working Group proposals remain to be implemented, such as the formalization of existing cooperative arrangements with NATO and options to involve senior NATO officials and ambassadors more systematically in the Assembly’s work.

The Standing Committee meeting in Budapest in March 2007 will provide an opportunity for reflection on the progress made so far, and further steps that might still be taken.



SECRETARY GENERAL
LE SECRÉTAIRE GÉNÉRAL
Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

SG(2006)0724

16 October 2006

Dear Senator,

I would like to thank the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Standing Committee and you personally for sharing the *NATO PA's Declaration on NATO's Riga Summit* with me. I have forwarded your declaration to the members of the North Atlantic Council and asked Permanent Representatives to circulate it further in their capitals.

The upcoming Riga Summit is of particular importance to the Alliance – to governments as well as to parliaments and the broader public. I am convinced that the Standing Committee's recommendations will be taken into account during the Communiqué drafting process thus proving the crucial value of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's indispensable work.

I am looking forward to addressing NATO parliamentarians on 17 November, by then gathered at the NATO PA's 52nd Annual Session in Québec, through a video link from Brussels.

Yours sincerely,



Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

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