

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Presidents,

The Commission would like to thank the Houses of the Oireachtas for their Opinion on how the role of national Parliaments at EU level can be improved five years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Commission agrees with the Houses of the Oireachtas' assessment of the significance of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty granting national Parliaments explicit powers to scrutinise Commission proposals. The Commission pays close attention to all reasoned opinions received under this mechanism and has undertaken to reply to all of them irrespective of whether the thresholds under Protocol 2 are fulfilled. In this regard, it is important to stress that the Commission does not view the process of national Parliaments issuing reasoned opinions as a sanction but rather as an invitation to engage in a dialogue on the necessity and relevance of proposals.

The Commission welcomes the Houses of the Oireachtas' observations as a useful contribution to the current debate on the future role of national Parliaments at EU level coming as they do at a time when the Commission is seeking ways to forge a new partnership with national Parliaments.

The Commission would like to respond to the specific observations of the Houses of the Oireachtas as follows:

The Commission takes note of the Houses of the Oireachtas' support for the concept of a secretariat for national Parliaments that could emerge from the COSAC secretariat. The Commission would like to recall, however, that it only has observer status at COSAC and believes it is for the European Parliament and the national Parliaments to determine the most appropriate working arrangements for their work within that forum.

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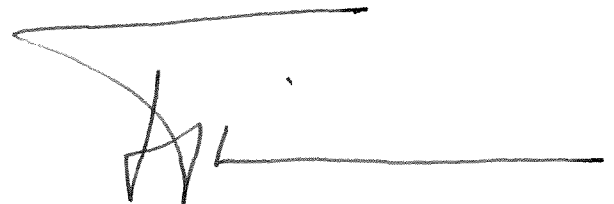
As regards Multiannual legislative programming, the Commission considers the views of national Parliaments as particularly valuable contributions to the debate on the political priorities of the European Union, and President Juncker has put an emphasis on improving the interaction with national Parliaments as a way of bringing the European Union closer to its citizens.

The Commission has taken note of the Houses of the Oireachtas' openness to the initiatives advanced by other national Parliaments on the role of national Parliaments in European decision-making. The Commission would like to stress that it is equally open to considering suggestions as to how to strengthen its relations with national Parliaments and wishes to play an active role and engage in discussions with them in inter-parliamentary meetings and in the framework of the political dialogue and the subsidiarity mechanism. In that regard, the Commission believes, however, that rather than entering into long and complex discussions on procedures and new interinstitutional arrangements not foreseen by the Treaty, an efficient use of the existing tools will make it possible to strengthen and deepen the relations between us to our mutual benefit and in the interest of the EU as a whole.

As regards the Houses of the Oireachtas' question on a more structured organisation of visits to national Parliaments, the Commission would like to recall that President Juncker made it clear in the mission letters to the Members of the College that their visits to national Parliaments to explain important proposals or initiatives will play an important role in fostering the relationship between Brussels and Member States' capitals. In that regard all Commissioners stand ready, whenever possible, to visit national Parliaments to discuss issues of interest to them. In a letter to all Members of the College in December 2014, I addressed the need for a closer coordination of visits to national Parliaments, and this new approach is now taking shape with the cooperation of the Commission's services.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Houses of the Oireachtas and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'F' followed by a horizontal line and a vertical stroke.

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*