



FRANS TIMMERMANS
First Vice-President

Brussels, 18 DEC. 2014

Subject: Relations with national Parliaments

Dear President,

Please find attached a copy of the letter that I addressed today to all Members of the College on strengthening our political dialogue with national Parliaments.

Best regards,

Frans TIMMERMANS

Jean-Claude Juncker
President of the European Commission



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First Vice-President

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Subject: Relations with national Parliaments

Dear colleagues,

Forging a new partnership with national Parliaments is a priority for this Commission. Through our dialogue with national Parliaments we can build mutual understanding and support for EU policies, and improve our own knowledge of the political, economic and social context in the Member States.

National Parliaments play an increasingly prominent role in bringing the Union and citizens closer. They also help us to ensure that we focus our activities on the areas where joint action is necessary to tackle common challenges. This is fully in line with our political approach and complements our unique relationship with the European Parliament and the Council at the heart of decision-making at European level.

This renewed partnership will build on the existing 'political dialogue' through which national Parliaments submit formal opinions on the Commission's proposals. This exchange is important but is only one part of our relationship. There is no substitute for direct contact and so it is vital that we all take the time to visit national Parliaments as often as we can to explain what we are doing and to listen to the concerns of national Parliamentarians. I would like to elaborate further on how I see this working in practice.

First, it is important for the Commission to present its major legislative proposals or initiatives to national Parliaments. This can of course be done upon request from the chambers but in order to establish more frequent and direct contact we should all actively approach national Parliaments to set up meetings where there is an interest. Meeting national Parliaments should be an integral part of our visits to Member States.

For some files, it will be particularly important that we make a collective effort to present our ideas to all national Parliaments. The Commission Work Programme, which we are adopting together this week, is a case in point. I will certainly play my part in presenting it in capitals but will not be able to visit every Member State and so I count on you to help reach out to all the national Parliaments in the first quarter of 2015.

The Commission has also committed to an enhanced dialogue in the context of the European Semester. This is particularly relevant at two key moments: after the adoption of the Annual Growth Survey and after the Council's endorsement of the country-specific recommendations. For euro area Member States, the Commission has also offered dialogue after the adoption of the Commission's opinion on draft budgetary plans. We should make ourselves available for discussions in this sensitive area where an open and constructive dialogue with national Parliaments is particularly necessary. It may not always be possible to travel to all the Member States for this purpose, but we can make full use of technologies such as videoconferencing to ensure that the channels of communication are open.

I would also ask you to look favourably upon invitations to inter-parliamentary meetings and conferences, for example to meetings of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), to conferences based on Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, and to conferences on CFSP and CSDP.

Putting this new approach into practice means that there will be a need for closer coordination of national Parliament visits. President Juncker has entrusted the Vice-Presidents with managing and organising our activities in this area and I would encourage you to discuss these issues within your Project Teams. I will also play an active coordinating role to ensure that we are fulfilling our political commitment. For all practical issues regarding visits to national Parliaments, Unit F3 in the Secretariat-General is available for advice and assistance.

Returning to our written dialogue with national Parliaments, I would like to reinvigorate this well-established mechanism. You may be aware that the Commission sends formal replies both to opinions submitted by national Parliaments in the framework of the political dialogue, as well as to 'reasoned opinions' issued under the subsidiarity control mechanism based on Protocol 2 to the Treaties.

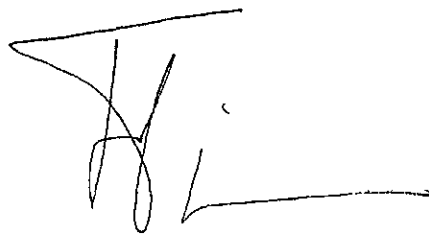
The political dialogue has functioned well but risks becoming bureaucratic if we do not give it our full and personal attention. I invite you all to engage with these replies personally to make sure that they convey the political messages that we want to pass and offer precise answers to the arguments raised. In a break from the past, – I would like to co-sign each of these replies with either the responsible Vice-President or Commissioner, depending on the subject matter. This will underline the political importance we attach to this dialogue.

To keep our dialogue dynamic and relevant I would urge you to ensure that your cabinets and services respect the deadlines. The Commission endeavours to reply within three months and I would hope that we can move more quickly than that in most cases.

Reasoned opinions received under the subsidiarity control mechanism should be given particularly close attention. This process should not be seen as a sanction – but as an invitation to engage in dialogue on the necessity and relevance of proposals. President Juncker and I have made clear that, in the event that the threshold for a 'yellow card' procedure is met, the Commission will respond politically by launching a direct dialogue with national Parliaments before formalising the Commission's response. As these cases require individual assessment and handling, I will initiate a political discussion with you on how to arrange this dialogue should the need arise.

If the threshold for a yellow card procedure is not met, the Treaties do not oblige the Commission to review the proposal and the legislative process would normally continue to follow its course. However, whenever a significant number of reasoned opinions is received we should engage in close dialogue with the national Parliaments that have raised concerns, including by ensuring that they receive individual replies to their reasoned opinions. Of course such opinions should also be taken into account by all institutions during the legislative process.

I thank you all in advance for your cooperation and look forward to working together to build this new partnership with national Parliaments, to which President Juncker has asked all of us in our Mission Letters to commit. I am convinced that it is an investment well worth making, and would be happy to discuss any questions or suggestions you may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'F' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Frans TIMMERMANS