

Glossary

IPEX

IPEX is the acronym for “*Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange*”. It was established following a recommendation by the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments held in Rome in 2000, with the aim of supporting cooperation between EU parliaments through digital information exchanges. To this end, a permanent IPEX website was launched in June 2006 at www.ipex.eu.

The IPEX website is intended to provide the general public with updated information on the work carried out by each of the Member States’ parliamentary chambers regarding the documents provided by EU institutions subjected to a subsidiarity check, particularly after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

All national parliaments of EU Member States, as well as the European Parliament and the parliaments of candidate countries, take part in IPEX. COSAC and the ECPRD (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) are also associated to the project.

COSAC

COSAC is the French acronym for the Conference of Bodies Specialised in EU Affairs. It is a regular meeting of Committees with powers over EU affairs, recognised under Protocol 1 to the Lisbon Treaty. COSAC has its own Rules of Procedure and a Secretariat made up of one permanent member and rotating officials seconded by the Presidency Trio (the Parliaments holding the Presidency during the current, former and forthcoming semester).

Trio Presidencies

The Presidency of the European Council rotates every six months amongst the EU Member States. Since the 2007 German Presidency, the Trio Presidency was established as a form of cooperation between three successive Presidencies in order to optimise resources, given the brevity of each individual term in office.

The Trio team’s main task is to draft a working programme covering all three Presidencies (i.e., three semesters) that coordinates each country’s individual programme under a single agenda. The legal basis is provided by Article 2.4 of the Council’s Rules of Procedure, whereby “*Every 18 months, the three Presidencies due to hold office shall prepare, in close cooperation with the Commission, and after appropriate consultations, a draft programme of Council activities for that period*”.

Subsequently, the Final Act that adopted the Lisbon Treaty intended to grant the procedure a more formal status, whereby the rotating Council Presidency shall be held by pre-established groups of three Member States for a period of 18 months, in order to ensure continuity. The exception to this rule is the Foreign Affairs Council, which shall in all cases be chaired by the newly established High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The Subsidiarity Principle and the Early Warning System

Article 5.3 of the Treaty on European Union, as established by the Treaty of Lisbon, defines the subsidiarity principle in the following terms:

Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level.

The institutions of the Union shall apply the principle of subsidiarity as laid down in the Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. National Parliaments shall ensure compliance with that principle in accordance with the procedure set out in that Protocol.

Protocol 2 to the Treaty of Lisbon on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality includes a reference to the “early warning system”.

Through this system, National Parliaments, to whom the EU institutions have previously circulated their draft legislative initiatives, can, where the case may be, draft a reasoned opinion stating the motives why they consider the draft does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. The reasoned opinion must be addressed to the drafting institution within eight weeks.

These reasoned opinions shall be taken into account by the EU institutions in all cases. However, if the number of opinions tabled by national parliaments on a single initiative is above a certain threshold, the EU institution must reconsider the draft. After reconsideration, the initiating institution may choose to uphold, modify or withdraw the initiative, providing reasons for its decision.