

International Parliamentary Cooperation

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I. Welcoming Remarks and Introduction

In my today's speech I would like to highlight an important topic which is crucial for the international standing of a country and which is very often underestimated. We will be dealing with the valuable contribution of national parliaments to improve international relations. You will see that a parliament can give its part to the presentation of a government, which will over all enrich the external relations.

I should like to give you an overview over the content of my speech: First of all, I will discuss the question how parliamentarians can represent themselves on an international stage competing against their own national government. Then I would like to present some international organisations that are devoted to parliamentary cooperation.

Some examples shall highlight how parliamentarians had to fight for their pursuit of international cooperation with their colleagues from other countries. I will also become clear what significance inter parliamentary assemblies will have these days.

In the last section of my speech, I am going to discuss the functioning of parliamentary groups and other programmes to exchange of views.

II. Parliaments and Foreign Policy- a contradiction only at first glance

1. The Partition of Tasks between Executive and Legislative Power

At first glance it is strange that parliaments and their members have international ties, because their primary task is to discuss and pass laws as legislative body. A second genuine task is to control the government and to support it- or not to support it.

The keeping up of external relations to foreign countries however is the principal duty of a country. It is therefore the executive that has to make ties to other countries.

In some countries the head of state is the sole representative of foreign affairs politics or a parallel body to the ministry of foreign affairs.

2. Foreign Affairs in the Classical Sense

The classical gage of the 19th century clearly distinguished between the internal affairs of a state on the one hand and the relationships between nations on the other. According to this, each state was hierarchically structured in its interior. What kind of rule was implemented (e.g. democracy, monarchy or dictatorship) was up to the state.

States existed side by side and had the same rights between each other.

For a sovereign state interference from outside was frowned upon. At the same time it was customary for other states not to interfere. Only by using "secret diplomacy" nations could try to influence internal affairs of a country.

The classical gage of the 19th century made also clear: only the government of a state was in charge to have official external relations. One can call it government monopoly on external relations.

In order to interact with other nations, "envoys", authorised from the governments were used to represent the state beyond its borders.

According to the classical gage of the 19th century external relations of parliamentarians were an offence to the principle of sovereignty. Some especially the diplomats still see it that way.

3. The Rise of International Organisations

The image of isolated nation states that are only subject to its own laws and using envoys has long been passed.

The invention of new ways of communication at the end of the 19th century changed life significantly on our planet. Telegraphs and later the telephone offered new possibilities to get in touch. The continents came closer to each other. While envoys had to travel for weeks and sometimes months in order to represent the country to another government new technology was sufficient to exchange information, standpoints and demands.

It was the time of birth for the great international organisations: The beginning was made by the World Association of Telegraphs in 1865. It followed a number of other international organisations. Besides the progress of the technique the trend showed the evidence that a lot of problems could only be solved on a global level.

The scopes of questions international organisations have to deal with today are as colourful as our life on earth.

Security and defence policy, trade and economic policy, environment and climate protection, policy of economic cooperation, development assistance are only some examples for topics international organisations have to deal with.

In general, national governments are the one that are to deal with it as far as private organisations are not concerned.

4. The Reason why Parliaments act internationally

As long as decisions are more and more taken on an international level instead of the national one the mightier the position of national governments becomes. It is therefore more and more difficult for the parliaments to control its government and to achieve a balance of powers.

The internationalisation of government acting however requires an elevated level of vigilance.

At the same time there is a certain pressure on the parliaments that have to weaken their position by giving in.

One example: At an international conference the heads of state come to a conclusion after long and difficult negotiations. It is now the question if a parliament can refuse this conclusion by not ratifying it. Such a "NO" to an international agreement will have to thoroughly be thought over.

It is therefore an important and legitimate plan of the parliaments to do something against the permanent loss of their participatory rights by engaging in direct relations with foreign parliamentarians and to form new bodies of control.

It is a question of democracy, when parliaments try to stand up for the will of their peoples on international decision making processes.

Parliamentarians and parliaments therefore exchange more and more information beyond borders and countries.

5. Parliamentary Assemblies

Modern democracies are open to such an engagement of their parliaments. As long as they do not question the primary competence of their respective government in terms of external

relations, parliamentarians have achieved great freedom. The pursuit of a parliament to get more influence can have a certain risk in authoritarian and feeble states. The allegation to breach the government monopoly on the field of external relations can become a welcomed reason for high treason.

A successful way of harmonizing the different interests of governments and parliaments to a fruitful relationship are parliamentary assemblies. (E.g. the Council of Europe which I will refer to later) They are composed by the member states according to a certain proportion. But they do not have real competencies of control.

But it is customary and of course difficult to prevent by the governments to offer them certain rights of information.

The sphere to monitor, control and comment on governments can be extended from the national to the international level- parallel to the decision making process of the governments from the national to the international stage.

The wanted effect: Members of government still feel to be controlled by their parliaments on the international stage.

Even without the back up of parliamentary assemblies with the national level international relations between nations are too precious and important nowadays to leave them to the governments exclusively.

Governments are expected to keep relations between "government and government". Is this relationship strained or does not exist at all, political work will become extremely difficult if not impossible.

6. Diplomacy through the Backdoor of the Parliaments

Parliamentarians however can still influence when the official communication channels have become "congested". They can be more deescalating and trust worthier than a government. Some easing of tension between nation states has its roots in informal gatherings on parliamentary level. Through these contacts the interest for each other grows and positives outcomes might occur.

Parliamentarians active in external affairs gain valuable insight in the political system of another foreign state.

This knowledge can improve the chances of an agreement in a situation of actual dispute.

On the one hand a government may dislike, when parliamentarians pursue their own ways. This can easily give the impression that international politics would be impeded.

On the other hand international politics can also profit from these contacts, e.g., when a message needs to be communicated and the official diplomatic channels can not be used.

Example: In the 1960s, when Arabic states started to have official diplomatic relations with the then German Democratic Republic, West-Germany did not have the chance according to the then actual doctrine but to halt diplomatic relations with these states. In the time to come it were parliamentarians from the West-German parliament "Bundestag" who kept up the contact and a channel of communication to the Arabic world and their governments.

7. Parliamentarians beyond Diplomacy

It is not always the case that governments insist on the handling of tight international relations. The opposite is often the case: Governments are often far milder in their pursuit of certain policies than parliamentarians. Members of government do not like to address sensitive topics in international meetings. Violations of human rights and civil laws are seldom addressed on high level meetings.

There might be or might not be political reasons for such procrastination. Most of the time the governments meeting have their own hidden agenda to get something from their counterpart, e.g. agreement to international commitments or a contract for their home companies. In such situations it is not helpful to bother the other side with difficult topics.

While representatives of the government have to follow certain verbal and thematic restrictions in necessity, parliamentarians can speak out difficult issues more frankly.

An approach that is led by moderate official government behaviour with some accentuated statements by the parliament might cause more conflicts. But it is also more honest! It can not be the aim of international relations to limit them to set phrases of politeness and fugitive common interests. Such a bilateral relationship would hardly hold. And furthermore: this kind of relationship would not satisfy the kind of foreign affairs policy that international law demands.

To undergo the international acting of the government, a better democratic control and more intense company from the parliamentary side, are the main reasons for interparliamentary relations.

8. The Parliament as an Instrument of International Understanding

There are more reasons to mention: The idea of international understanding and the cross border solidarity and cooperativeness of parliamentarians are an important motive for international commitment of parliamentarians.

The enhancement of governmental foreign affairs politics with accompanying inter parliamentary relations offers new horizons to show respect and to deepen contacts.

It is very rare in Germany that the head of a foreign state is invited to speak in the German parliament. It is a very rare and high honour. The foreign head of state has the possibility to directly address the Germany people via its elected representatives. It is a strong symbol to give the head of state a direct way to address the public. Because we need to reconsider: The old gage of state in the nineteenth century would have interpreted the speech of a head of state in front of a parliament as an unlawful interference in the internal issues of a country.

If such "interference" is deliberately made possible it is a great honour and a symbol of trust and respect. Such interference and the alleviation of classical lines between the executive and the legislative level in terms of external relations policy require trust. Not to be forgotten: such customs go beyond the ceremonial content of the encounter between two head of states.

If for example French parliamentarians are present in one of the sittings of the German parliament and vice versa it shows the valuable trust between the two countries.

9. Parliamentarism as a Global Task

Trust however can not be built up by common sittings in the light of the public. Behind the scenes and intensified exchange on the working level between the parliaments of different countries can also help to create better contacts.

In many countries exchange programmes for parliamentary staff and parliamentarians have been therefore created. Participants of such programmes get a valuable insight into the core of national sovereignty of a country- a gesture of tremendous symbolic value.

Besides the symbolic value there is also a high practical value of such institutionalized contacts.

Parliamentarians and staff participating in these programmes become acquainted that they are often facing the same problems as their colleagues from the visited country.

Although the parliamentary reality in each country varies because of different constitutions and legal backgrounds, the challenges for a parliament are generally the same.

Worldwide parliaments are a counterweight to their governments. They all demand certain rights especially the right to be informed and to control government acting and then state budget.

They also have the aim to merge the diverging interest of the people effectively and well balanced into a content of all acting of the legislative and executive level.

10. Parliamentarianism as an Achievement of Democracy

These substantial goals are not taken for granted, history shows that it is not the normal case that a parliament can fulfil its constitutional function with the necessary strength and the necessary self-confidence:

The first German parliament in 1848 was deemed to fail because the King of Prussia denied implementing a constitutional democratic monarchy that was foreseen by the constitution. In the late empire of 1871 the parliament had to struggle first with Chancellor Bismarck and later with Emperor Wilhelm II to have constitutional rights. Clashes between the executive and the legislative level are still very common throughout the world, far more than it would be desirable for the global meaning of democratic structures.

Even worse: Dictatorships install compliant parliaments in order to disguise undemocratic power.

How shall fully committed democracies act towards such countries and such parliaments that play charade? Shall they use the minimum of rights that is offered to these parliaments? Shall they boycott the parliaments in order to show their alibi function?

The important principle of immunity of parliamentarians, the right not to be punished, does not play a role in most of these states. Dictatorships camouflaged as democracies threaten parliamentarians to be punished if they try to represent the will of the people.

11. Common problems-common solutions?

As we can see: Parliamentarians are facing the same problems around the world. They all have therefore the same collegial interests. These common interests do not necessarily mean that elementary questions of the democratic order or their implementation into the state are concerned.

The access to information is one of the most crucial questions that apply to all parliaments. The possibility to make a large number accessible online will have to be considered carefully: How many pieces of information does an elected member of a parliament require at minimum to come to a reasonable conclusion?

How many peaces of information does an MP require in order not to be "drowned" in the information flow?

The inter parliamentary contribution to the solution of these problems becomes visible, if you compare different methods. Cambodia MPs can learn from their German or American counterparts. They can leave out negative experiences und can take over positive examples and adapt them to their needs. The wheel does not have to be invented twice! An inter parliamentary dialogue about the work can bring a great contribution to the learning and performance curve of a parliament.

Intermediary result

As we can see: External relations of a country are not only looked after by governments according to modern government teaching. Besides official external policy there is now also the parliamentary foreign policy. This form of foreign policy is not only conducted by the parliament itself through the control of the government policy but also by delegations of inter parliamentary organisations.

Such inter parliamentary organisations are the forum for exchange of views and opinions between parliamentarians with various cultures. Hence political processes can be followed in the long run and gained working results can be transferred to the respective home country.

After having studied the topic of international parliamentary cooperation in a general meaning, I would now like to present some concrete examples of inter parliamentary organisations and forms of cooperation and exchange. I will refer to examples from a German perspective.

III. Interparliamentary Organisations

Inter parliamentary organisations form the most important bridge of any sort of inter parliamentary cooperation. The German Bundestag, our national parliament, envoys delegations to the following inter parliamentary organisations and regional forums.

- Inter parliamentary Union
- Council of Europe
- Parliamentary Assembly of NATO
- Parliamentary assembly of OECD
- West European Union
- Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly
- Baltic Sea Parliamentary Assembly
- Black Sea Economic Cooperation

1. The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Only few know that the League of Nations had an early predecessor on the parliamentary level: The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU). The IPU is called the "mother" of the League of Nations and the United Nations because of its historical roots.

The IPU was founded in 1889 and exists until today. It is an international association of parliaments to secure peace, promote democracy worldwide and to protect human rights. 143 sovereign nations are currently member of IPU. The IPU comes together twice a year to form the inter parliamentary conference.

The IPU was founded at the end of the nineteenth century, to make governments susceptible for an international court of arbitration that would preserve peace and avoid war.

The first outcome was some international agreements in The Hague in the beginning of the 20th century. Rules and regulations for the event of a war were set up, e.g. the regulation of a land war from 1907.

A real court of arbitration that could mediate in conflicts between governments was not formed until the devastating results and the mass murder on the battle fields of the First World War had come out.

Interestingly enough, it was done by parliamentarians who founded the IPU in 1889 and who kept to claim the necessity of such an institution.

Thanks to them the League of Nations was formed after the First World War. Its foundation was celebrated as a breakthrough towards a "world government". One hoped that the League of Nations would become a worldwide organisation to mediate and regulate conflicts.

But the League of Nations failed 20 years after its foundation due to a lack of authority.

After the catastrophe of the Second World War, that had one of its reasons in the feeble League of Nations, the United Nations took over the lead in 1945.

The UN like the League of Nations is a mere governmental organisation to which the member states send representatives. The UN however does not have a parliamentary component. The IPU therefore tried to become the parliamentary assembly to the UN. The IPU went one step further in this approach in 2002 when the assembly of the UN granted observer status.

It would be good if the UN received its own parliamentary dimension. To achieve further international democratisation, a parliamentary representation of the member states of the UN is necessary in order to identify the UN as a system of global governance.

The work and the achievements of past years clearly show that the IPU could be the parliamentary component or at least be a model for it: The agenda of the IPU is to deal with global problems, such as AIDS and the international financial system. It discusses resolutions and reports concerning these issues. Unlike resolutions of the security council of the UN these resolutions do not have a binding power. But they should entice national parliaments to discuss these issues and to come to their own resolutions.

Very often it is the IPU that comes up first with a new topic before national parliaments become active.

Over all the IPU is a real place to form contacts for a real dialogue between north and south. Especially developing countries estimate these contacts, because they profit most from the transfer of knowledge.

The IPU also fulfils a humanitarian function: If parliamentarians in one state are hampered, criminalized or prosecuted in their work, they can count on the solidarity of their colleagues in the IPU. A committee on human rights uses the means of silent and public diplomacy in those cases.

Members of the IPU are not parliamentarians but entire parliaments. These parliaments send their members to the IPU. The parliamentarians of each member state belong to the council of the IPU that prepares the resolutions.

During the two annual assemblies of the IPU three permanent committees meet: the committee on peace and security, development and finance as well as the committee on democracy and human rights. Special conferences are also held for urgent issues parallel to these committees. Since some years there are also world conferences of the presidents of the parliaments (IPU-PPKs).

2. The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is the oldest political organisation between states on the European continent. Founded in 1949 it has now 46 member states. Apart from Belorussia, which is still a dictatorship, all European countries are now members of the Council of Europe. The most important task of the Council is the protection of human rights, of democracy and the rule of law. The Council of Europe tries to preserve European identity that is based on common values that go beyond cultural differences.

The idea of a Council of Europe was already developed during the Second World War by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. He intended to form an international council for each continent. But only the Council of Europe came into existence without the aspect of security that was foreseen by him. That aspect became part of the UN that were founded shortly before the Council.

How strongly the Council of Europe is committed to its work became evident in 1967: When the military took over the power in Greece, the Greek membership was suspended.

The two main bodies of the Council are the ministerial committee in which member states are represented by its foreign affairs minister as well as the parliamentary assembly to which parliaments of the member states send representatives.

The Council therefore has a strong parliamentary component. Each of the national parliaments sends between two and 18 parliamentarians to the assembly depending on the number of inhabitants of the particular country.

Even if the Council does not have the right to pass legislation, the resolutions e.g. inflammatory contents in the internet or the discussion on euthanasia, have significant impact on legislation in the member states.

Since its foundation the Council of Europe has passed 200 conventions, protocols and contracts. The most famous convention is the one on human rights from 1953. A special success of the Council was the abolition or abandonment of the death penalty due to an initiative of the parliamentary assembly. The rule of democracy and human rights are constantly monitored by the Council of Europe. The strongest tool of the parliamentary assembly is the so called "monitoring- procedure". The assembly can monitor member states by using parliamentarians from other member states, if human rights violations occur. If a member state comes under scrutiny because of prior complaints it is a big offence to the government and an invigoration of the opposition.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly of NATO

Another example for successful international parliamentary cooperation is the parliamentary assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). NATO was founded by 12 European and North American states in 1949. NATO is a military alliance. Members are obliged to settle disputes peacefully and to conduct international relations in an amicable way.

The goal is to preserve the Western liberal society through political, economic, social and cultural cooperation as well as the acknowledgement of democratic principles. In case of attack on one of the member states all other member states are obliged to stand by. The influence of the parliaments on the acting of the governments in terms of defence and security policy is however limited. Governments do not like to be controlled by parliamentarians, especially in the sensitive cases such as national security and defence.

But parliaments still have a say. The German army for example is often described as a "parliamentary army", because the German parliament has to approve the missions of the armed forces.

But as far as interior and strategic decisions between the allies are concerned, the influence of the German parliament is fairly limited.

The acting of the central body of NATO, the North Atlantic Council, or the decisions of the secretary general is not under control of a national parliament.

But still the parliaments managed to get influence on NATO by using the parliamentary assembly.

When NATO was founded in 1949 parliamentarians wished to have a say. But especially Winston Churchill denied this wish. But in 1955 a "NATO parliamentary conference" was

formed on the initiative of the Belgian Paul Henry Spaak. It had the formal aim to endorse cooperation on defence and security questions as well as Atlantic solidarity.

The NATO parliamentary conference was never turned into an official body of NATO, because the governments did not want to. The forum now called parliamentary assembly is until today an independent organisation.

Nevertheless NATO came to an agreement with the parliamentarians: It is now customary that the NATO secretary general participates and holds speeches in the biannual meetings of the parliamentarians. Not only can the parliamentarians be happy about this participation. The secretary general and his colleagues are meeting a high ranking committee of experts in security and defence issues.

Since NATO has the principle of unanimity and decisions can be blocked by the parliament of a single member state, the parliamentary assembly represents an ideal forum to inform parliamentarians about future decisions.

But the parliamentary assembly does not only play an important role as a platform for discussions and announcements. The fall of the iron curtain in the early nineties was decisively orchestrated by it. By doing so, parliamentarians used the fact that their assembly was not an official part of NATO.

As early as 1988, parliamentarians made contacts to communist Hungary. The Hungarian government finally sent its foreign affairs minister to a committee meeting of the parliamentary assembly of NATO. If the invitation had been officially issued by NATO, the former Warsaw Pact would have seen it as a threat and it would have caused diplomatic difficulties. Thanks to its independence the parliamentary assembly could act freely and could do more than the NATO-governments. In 1989 the committee offered again the ideal stage to narrow the gap between Washington and Moscow. The Soviet vice head of the general staff gave a speech to one of the committees of the assembly. A delegation of NATO - parliamentarians visited the Supreme Soviet in Moscow. Such actions helped to end the cold war.

The alliance of today counts 26 members. The parliaments of these countries as well as their 13 parliaments of associated members of the assembly, send their delegates to biannual meetings of the parliamentary assembly which are held each time else where on the invitation of a member state.

The example of parliamentary cooperation shows that inter parliamentary cooperation can successfully be established even if it was not planned by the governments in the beginning.

4. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Another organisation that has an international parliamentary component is the organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This organisation was formed as a predecessor of the conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1995. All European countries, the successor states of the former Soviet Union, the U.S. and Canada are among the 56 member states. The OSCE stands for securing peace and reconstruction after conflicts. Unlike NATO, the OSCE does not have a military branch. It sees itself as a collective security system that narrows gaps of potential political foes. For that reason engagement by parliamentarians is not only helpful but inevitable. The OSCE functions as an early warning system, conflict prevention, crises management and conflict aftercare in one.

It was as early as 1967 that the Warsaw Pact demanded the implementation of a conference on security and cooperation in Europe. The West was very reluctant before it eventually agreed. The Americans argued that the Soviet Union tried to push them away from Europe politically. After many preliminary talks the conference was finally opened in 1973- with the presence of the U.S. and Canada. 15 NATO states, seven Warsaw Pact states and 13 neutral states had held discussions for two years in the Finnish capital of Helsinki. The result of this attempt was the CSCE-final communiqué, also called Helsinki final communiqué.

In exchange for major steps in disarmament the Soviet Union and the Warsaw-Pact-States had agreed to respect the human rights and the basic right of freedom, especially the freedom of thought, of consciousness and religion. In return the communists had achieved recognition of West-Germany and the GDR as sovereign states and partners on the international level.

The implementation of the Helsinki final communiqué was monitored in several follow up conferences. The content of the agreement was quickly dispersed among the people of Communist Europe and was very reviving for democratic dissident scene.

According to historians the CSCE- communiqué does not only mark the peak of the policy of détente of the seventies but also the beginning of the end of the communist block.

With the fall of the iron curtain the role of the conference had changed. In 1992 the CSCE was recognized as a regional organisation by the UN and started missions to potential trouble spots in Europe and the Caucasus. These missions are deemed to find out how the visited states work and if human and civil rights are respected as demanded by the communiqué.

In 1995 the CSCE was renamed in Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

In its core, this organisation is mainly a government organisation which is thematically influenced by the ministers council of the member states. But the parliamentary assembly of this organisation gains more and more influence. The topics being discussed are mainly influenced by actual topics of the ministers' council. In this assembly expertise and commitment of parliamentarians notably on South East Europe and Central Asia are taken together- notably in those regions the OSCE has current missions. During the entire year parliamentarians are active in election observation missions and take part in symposia and regional conferences.

It is customary that the head of the council of ministers, the foreign affairs minister of a member state, reports to the parliamentary assembly and answers questions to the parliamentarians.

5. The European Inter Parliamentary Assembly for Security and Defence in the Western European Union (WEU)

Let us have a look at the European Inter Parliamentary Assembly for Security and Defence in the Western European Union (WEU). The current WEU was founded by Germany, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy in 1954.

Members should stand by in the case of an assault and should promote peace and security in Europe. With the foundation of NATO WEU soon lost significance. In the nineties however the WEU was revived to form a common European defence and security policy. Its parliamentary assembly, to which the member states send representatives, was renamed into the "European Inter Parliamentary Assembly for Security and Defence".

In the meantime, the European Union is on the best way to integrate into an alliance with a military component as it has been already done economically and politically.

With the ongoing ratification process of a new European basic treaty the role of the WEU will have to be re-discussed again.

The Inter Parliamentary assembly of the WEU tried early to find ways to integrate the WEU into the EU and worked out multiple options for it. In so far, the actual development is completely in line with the aims of the WEU.

Besides the discussion of very broad general questions actual topics of the assembly are issues of European security and defence policy. E.g. missions of the EU member states to secure peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Parliamentarians use the Inter Parliamentary assembly of the WEU to make a mark as a politician in defence and security issues- independently from NATO.

Interestingly, the WEU-parliamentarians force to work more closely with European neighbour Russia and criticise the US plans to install an anti missile defence system despite existing agreement for disarmament.

6. The Euro Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly for a Partnership between the Mediterranean and Europe

Another inter parliamentary organisation, which I would like to present is the Euro Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly for a Partnership between the Mediterranean and Europe.

In 1995 the EU set up the Barcelona-process in order to intensify the partnership between the Mediterranean region and Europe. The term stands for a cooperation based on equal rights between the EU and the states bordering the Mediterranean Sea in the light of security, economy, social issues and culture.

The creation of an EU-Mediterranean Free trade Zone until 2010 is the goal. The Barcelona-process was accompanied by parliamentarians since 1998 by the Euro Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum. In 2003 the forum became a permanent assembly with the name "Euro Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly". Germany became a member in 2004.

The assembly holds sessions once a year in one of the member states. It is composed of 240 parliamentarians, half of them are from member states of the Mediterranean, and the other half is from EU countries.

Aim of the assembly is the political stability of the Mediterranean region. A stronger institutionalization of the parliamentary dimension shall give new input into the Euro Mediterranean dialogue.

Parliamentarians also want to have better control over the use of development funds in partner countries.

7. The Baltic Sea parliamentary conference and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

A similar approach can be found in the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference as well as in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

In 1991 parliamentarians of the states bordering the Baltic Sea founded the Baltic Sea Conference in order to bring together what had been united since the early middle ages in the Hanseatic League.

It is a forum to discuss the environmental problems of the sea that can only be solved in a common solution.

By using the parliamentary conference former communist states shall be helped to comply with higher Western standards of ship security in order to avoid accidents which can easily lead to a natural catastrophe for the entire region.

Like at the Baltic Sea states at the Black Sea look back at a common cultural identity and century old economic relations. The region had several internal conflicts in the past years, but has a dominant role for crude oil supply. The German parliament as well as the French national assembly and the Israeli parliament send delegates with an observer status to the parliamentary assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation that is designed to stabilize the region.

8. Inter Parliamentary Cooperation between the EU and Asia: ASEP

I would like to finish this part of my speech with a small excursus of the inter parliamentary cooperation between ASEAN and Europe.

Since 1996 representatives of EU member states as well as of the European Commission gather with members of the Asian countries, especially ASEAN member states in the Asia-Europe-Meeting (ASEM). ASEM is an informal dialogue forum. Aim of the ministerial talks and summits every two years is the exchange about problems of Asia and the EU. Ministers also meet regularly- mostly once a year.

But once again we have to highlight: It were parliamentarians that made early contacts with the EU and Asia. The first parliamentary contacts between the European Parliament and the ASEAN states date back to the seventies. In 1979 regular inter parliamentary relations between the EP and the parliamentarians of the ASEAN States were made. In 1996 the contacts were

intensified by implementing the Asia- Europe-Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP). ASEP is designed to be a parliamentary counterweight to the government meetings of ASEM.

ASEAN and EU member states take turns in hosting the annual ASEP meetings. Since ASEM comprises all EU states and the most important Asian countries, especially the ASEAN countries, ASEP is clearly the best forum to accompany the dialogue on the government level with ideas from the parliamentary level.

More inter parliamentary organisations with German participation

IV. Parliamentary meeting programmes

The mentioned examples for parliamentary organisations show: such organisations are an important part of international parliamentary cooperation. They are by far the most visible form of cooperation and exchange of parliamentarians beyond national borders.

But inter parliamentary organisations are not the only form for parliamentarians to meet. The daily praxis of parliamentary work is far more shaped by various parliamentary meeting and exchange programmes that are bi or multilaterally implemented between states.

The German parliament has a vivid exchange of parliamentary groups with other countries. There are also exchange programmes for students, young professionals, interns and co-workers of the parliament and a programme of inter parliamentary help for apprenticeships.

1. The Parliamentary Groups

Parliamentary groups are the most vivid link between the parliament and abroad. In the German parliament there have been parliamentary groups for more than 50 years. Through them parliamentarians have bilateral contacts to national parliaments of one or more partner states.

The approach is to seek discussions with the parliamentarians and other representatives of the partner states in order to exchange information and opinions.

In many partner parliaments there are groups that deal with Germany that pursue the same goals for their parliament.

Most of the time parliamentarians are active in these groups that have a close political or cultural interest in a particular state of region. It is of minor importance what political group the member of the parliament belongs to. In general each parliamentary group has a board that is represented by all political groups of the parliaments.

In Germany parliamentary groups are newly formed and implemented by the president of the parliament with the beginning of each legislative term.

It helps to keep an overview of the activities of these groups and to assure the support of the administration of the parliament.

The parliamentarians of one group decide what political content shall be discussed. Pressing political issues are on the agenda most of the time.

Parliamentary groups of the German parliament have the right to visit the partner state or region with a delegation of roughly seven people once during the legislative term.

In return they can invite their foreign counterparts once a year. The travel expenses and the reception of the guests are paid from the budget of the German parliament.

Parliamentarians being a member of one of these groups regularly show their interest in the partner region. However there is no obligation to be committed. Those who do it do it on a voluntary basis and are usually highly motivated.

It is customary to stay with the parliamentary group even if parliamentarians take multiple legislative turns. In doing so it happens that they over last various ambassadors and foreign affairs ministers and become a real influential expert for the partner state.

Through the parliamentary groups members of the German parliament receive privileged access to information. They have the chance to meet foreign affairs ministers, heads of governments and presidents of parties on a personal basis and therefore widen their possibilities to get more information.

If there bad vibrations between the governments of the two partner state and ones own state, parliamentary groups can use their connections fruitfully, because among parliamentarians there is a generally open and friendly atmosphere of discussion.

Let me give you one example: When the relations between the U.S. and Germany had come to a freezing point over the Iraq war in 2003, parliamentarians of the US Congress Study Group on Germany still came to Germany to discuss the differences when a lot of other bilateral contacts were already put on hold. The contact between the parliamentarians had never been cut no matter how cool the relationship between the governments had been.

Parliamentary groups can also keep contacts that are internationally not recognized. The German government does not have official contacts with Taiwan because it follows the "one

China policy". But the German parliament has the parliamentary friendship group Berlin-Taipei with relations to Taiwanese members of parliament.

Another example for a very fruitful parliamentary group is the German-Korean parliamentary group. There are now thoughts to arrange a meeting in Berlin with parliamentarians from both North and South Korea in order to exchange experiences and challenges for a reunification.

2. Conferences of Presidents of Parliaments

I would also like to mention that not only parliamentarians from different countries but also the presidents of various parliaments meet for regular exchange. So called conferences of presidents give the institutional framework for it.

3. Exchange Programs

But not only the parliamentarians and the presidents of the parliaments have contacts with their counterparts from other countries.

The German parliament as well as other countries offers internships and exchange programmes for students, young professionals and graduates as well as parliamentary staff.

Let me briefly talk about these programmes because in my opinion they extend the international parliamentary cooperation beyond pure parliamentarism.

a) The Parliamentary Godfather Programme for Students and young Professionals

The most important exchange programme is the so called parliamentary Godfather Programme. It targets young professionals and students. The programme dates back to an agreement between the German parliament and the US Congress and is limited to the US. The programme first started in 1983, because of the 300th anniversary of the first German emigration to the "New World". A lot of Americans - roughly 50 million- have German ancestry. Besides the close link with Germany it shall also show the traditionally sound relations to the US.

Each year 300 students between 15 and 17 years of age and 100 young professionals not older than 22 from Germany spend one year in the USA in order to learn and to work. The same number of Americans goes to Germany to do the same.

Participants are chosen by experienced exchange organisations together with parliamentarians who stand as godfathers. The expenses for preparatory and aftercare meetings, flights, insurance and the entire programme for the German participants is covered by the German parliament.

The godfathers have to care for the young people and to keep in touch with them. A positive side effect: youngsters get more interested in politics.

b) The International Parliament Internship

Since 1986, the international Parliament Internship offers 100 young graduates from 21 countries the opportunity to learn about the work of the parliament.

This internship is a unique scholarship. Patron of this programme is the federal president who grants the stipends in collaboration with universities from Berlin.

The programme is especially focused on future leaders who want to learn more about daily parliamentary work and who want to look behind the scenes of daily politics.

Through the international parliament internship people from different regions of the world shall live together and learn to make contacts. Young citizens of established democracies as well as developing ones get together to make experience to create a better future for their nation in cooperation with others.

c) The Exchange of Parliamentary Staff and Inter Parliamentary Training

The German government also carries out a bilateral exchange of staff with some parliaments from foreign countries. Staff of the parliamentary administration learns about the processes and procedures of the other parliament. Personal contacts can be made and the relations can be fostered sustainably.

An inter parliamentary training is done for parliamentary co-workers from African, Asian, Latin American and European countries. They all come from nations that are in a process of transition or democratic restructuring.

The administration of the German parliament makes regional and thematic focuses.

While the focus was mainly on countries from the so called third world in the eighties, it has now shifted to central and Eastern Europe, the CIS states in the nineties and since 2001, it is also extended to southeast Europe.

These programmes give an ideal overview about the structure and procedures of the parliament administration to the participants. These programmes should give an idea about the tasks and standing of a parliament in a modern parliamentary democracy.

V. Summary and Result

Let me summarize: Parliamentarians collaborate internationally in many ways with their colleagues from other parliaments. This is not only done through international organisations that are designed for meetings and gatherings in form of parliamentary assemblies. Collaboration is also carried out by bilateral and multilateral parliamentary groups as well as various exchange programmes for staff and young professionals on the working level of the parliament.

Parliamentarians have opportunities to act for peace, friendship among peoples, democracy, the rule of law and human rights despite their government's main competence for foreign affairs.

I would be happy if my speech could give you some helpful advice for more international commitment in the Cambodian parliament.

Thank you very much for your attention!