

Plenary Session 2

The Role and Participation of Parliamentarians in the Integration Processes

Summary of the Plenary Session 2

Chair:	Mr. Gilbert Parent Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada
Vice-chair:	Monsieur Joseph Facal Member of the National Assembly of Québec Parliamentary Assistant to the Prime Minister Vice-President of the Conference
Speakers:	Mr. Luis Hierro López Senator of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay President of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur Mr. Julio César Turbay Quintero Senator of the Republic of Colombia President of the Andean Parliament Mr. Ernesto Lima Mena President of the Central American Parliament Mr. Georgios Anastassopoulos Vice-President of the European Parliament Monsieur Juan Adolfo Singer Member of the Chamber of Representatives of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay President of the Latin-American Parliament
Secretary:	Mr. Gaston Bernier National Assembly of Québec

Mr. Luis Hierro López is President “pro tempore” of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur. From 1985 to 1994, he was a member of the Chamber of Representatives of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, where he also held the position of President in 1989. In addition, he was President of the Committees on the Constitution, General Legislation, Administration and Human Rights. A Senator since 1995, he sits on the Committees on Education and Culture, on Finance, and on Housing. Also, Mr. Hierro López is currently chairing the Special Study Commission on anti-corruption legislation and is a member of the National Executive Committee of the Colorado Party.

President Luis Hierro López explained that the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur, an internationally recognized legal entity, plays a political role that is increasing in scale, insofar as Mercosur is now in a process of rapid economic growth. It must fulfill many popular expectations and build relationships of trust between the population and Mercosur by explaining to the population the economic difficulties to be faced, as well as the challenges represented by economic integration.

The fundamental functions of the Committee are to accelerate the internal legislative processes with a view to applying the directives of Mercosur, thereby contributing to the harmonization of legislation between member countries. A real gap unfortunately exists between the standards of Mercosur, which have a legal validity, and the national legislation of each country. The Committee must see to filling these legal gaps.

The Parliamentary Committee also plays a political role connected with the mandate of parliamentarians. In this respect, it must ensure the application of the democratic clause stipulating that Mercosur could not function without the most rigorous possible respect of the democratic rules and codes of conduct within the member countries. It also aspires to broadening the dialogue in order to ensure that integration includes social, cultural, spiritual and political dimensions, thereby allowing a defence of common values and a coming together of the peoples.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur intends to bring a very valuable contribution to the integration process of Mercosur, through the broadening of the political dialogue, by enabling Parliaments to participate much more actively in the political negotiations in the framework of Mercosur. It is up to parliamentarians to define the political objectives and to open the path that will enable governments to make progress.

According to Mr. Hierro López, the challenge that is presented to the parliamentarians of the Mercosur member States is not to defend the legitimate interests of each of their respective countries, but rather to defend the community interests of the region, even if these different interests are not always convergent.

The parliamentarians of the Mercosur member countries deeply believe in the coming together of the Americas, a feeling that they have inherited from their ancestors and from the different Latin American leaders who have dreamed of a united America; but their task is hardly an easy one. The member countries of Mercosur have fostered the opening of markets and now hope that North America will do the same. Mr. Hierro López considers that it is possible today to create a free trade area of the Americas, but to do so, it is necessary for a fertile, fraternal and sincere political dialogue to take root between all countries of the Americas.

Mr. Julio César Turbay Quintero is President of the Andean Parliament. A Senator of the Republic of Colombia, he is a member of the Committee on External Relations. He has sat in the Chamber of Representatives for the electoral district of Bogotá and Cundinamarca, where he was a member of the First Standing Constitutional Committee and of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the National Liberal Directorate. Mr. Turbay Quintero has degrees in law and in socioeconomic sciences, and a Master's degree in political science from New York University.

The Andean Parliament, whose Founding Treaty was signed in 1979, and whose head office is located in Santa Fe de Bogotá, works for the promotion and orientation of the integration process put forward by the Andean system of integration. For this purpose, it analyses the different operational structures of the national Parliaments in order to propose frameworks for reconciliation and harmonization of legislation.

For President Turbay, the Conference constitutes an unprecedented event that will foster the development of a reflection on hemispheric unity and the emergence of a spirit of cooperation between the States of the Americas. While they have not always been constant, the efforts devoted to the establishment of dialogue between the Parliaments of the continent in the area of integration have been numerous. Throughout the century, and particularly during its second half, a number of

organizations have tried to foster a coming together of the Parliaments of the Americas. Aware of the need to continue the search for values common to the Americas, the Andean Parliament affirms its intention of participating actively in the new hemispheric bloc that should begin to operate at the start of the next millennium.

According to Mr. Turbay, it is the people who, through their actions and conviction, will confer a legitimacy and a guarantee of success on the consolidation of the international processes. For this reason, through a protocol added to its constituent treaty, the Andean Parliament has determined that within five years, its parliamentarians are to be elected by direct universal suffrage. Since its formation, the Andean Parliament has demonstrated that integration responds not only to economic imperatives, but also that it has moral and cultural objectives, in order to guarantee a vast popular participation in the integration process of the Andean group.

The creation of a hemispheric bloc must not lead to the dissolution of the already existing regional and interparliamentary groups. Parliamentary diplomacy, in particular, does a remarkable job of supplementing the action of governments, since it contributes to the settlement of conflicts that traditional diplomacy sometimes has difficulty in resolving. As legitimate representatives of the populations, parliamentarians are called on to play a role at the forefront, both with regard to integration and with regard to the concerns of citizens in the areas of the environment, the economy, human rights and the fight against crime and drug trafficking.

Reflections and dialogues will not suffice to carry through with the integration project if precise actions, on the local and hemispheric level, do not accompany its progressive evolution. It is indispensable, particularly, to call for hemispheric solidarity to fight against the poverty of peoples. Similarly, a commitment to strengthen democracies is necessary. According to Mr. Turbay, the long road that consists of building and consolidating permanent forums for dialogue between all nations of the Americas is only beginning, and in his opinion it is indispensable to provide a follow-up to this

Conference in order that it may lead to the instigation of a Parliamentary Forum of the Americas.

Mr. Ernesto Lima Mena is President of the Central American Parliament. Born in El Salvador, he was elected a member of the Central American Parliament under the banner of the Nationalist Republican Alliance Party for the period 1996-2001. He holds a degree in legal science from the Doctor José Matías Delgado University in El Salvador, where he now holds the position of Director General of the Master's program in international law. He also obtained a Master's degree in international commercial law at Notre Dame University in London. Mr. Lima Mena has served as an advisor to the minister of Planning and the Minister of External Relations, and has represented El Salvador at many international organizations.

President Lima Mena put into context the current perspectives on integration, recalling that as early as 1822, a famous Central American author, Mr. José Cecilio del Valle, already presented the essential aspects of what we consider today as an “Americanist” vision. Describing the Latin American independence movement, then in full swing, this author advocated the building of a supranational spirit and the regrouping of the new Central American States. Mr. Lima Mena recalled, among other things, that since 1821, no fewer than sixteen attempts at Central American political integration have been initiated, all of which have involved the setting up a regional parliament.

In 1986, during the meeting referred to as Esquipulas I, the Presidents of the Central American States declared that it was necessary to create and complete the efforts toward regional cooperation and understanding through the creation of institutional mechanisms allowing for the reinforcement of dialogue, joint development, democracy and pluralism. Out of these fundamental elements, essential to the peace and integration of Central America, arose the Central American Parliament.

The Central American Parliament constitutes a forum of deliberation that analyses the common political, economic, social, cultural and security-related problems of the countries in the region. It

also has the mandate to initiate and orient the integration processes and to foster a maximum of cooperation between its members.

Mr. Lima Mena underlined that the Central American Parliament, which results from Central America's democratic aspirations, shares the privilege of being one of the only two regional parliaments in the world to enjoy full legitimacy, stemming from the holding of free and direct elections. Convinced that integration must allow the articulation of the political ideologies of all peoples, he pointed out that the regional parliament has essentially a representative function toward its peoples, who are the true guarantors of its legitimacy, and who must be the principal beneficiaries of integration.

While a process of integration has as an objective the integration of policies, the legitimacy of this process will depend to a large extent on the active participation of the parliamentarians. In this regard, the creation of a free-trade area of the Americas will represent a challenge to be taken up during the coming years, and for which very strong political support will be necessary. Also, this Conference is the appropriate forum in which to initiate a debate on the review of the different dimensions taken on by inter-American relations.

In conclusion, Mr. Lima Mena underlined that the Central American Parliament subscribes to the principles underlying the holding this historic Conference, and furthermore he considered that they are the same as those expressed 175 years ago by one of the fathers of Latin American independence: *"From now on, America will be my only concern. America will be the most worthy issue for any American."*

Mr. Georgios Anastassopoulos has been Vice-President of the European Parliament since 1988. A graduate of the Athens College and of the Faculty of Law of the University of Athens, he completed post-graduate studies in Comparative European law at King's College, University of London. A

journalist by profession, he followed courses at the School of Journalism at Northwestern University in the United States. From 1974 to 1981, he was Director General of the Athenian Press Agency. In 1977 and 1981, he was appointed Secretary of State to the Presidency. He was elected a member of the European Parliament in 1984, and then assumed the position of Chairman of the Committee on Transport. Mr. Anastassopoulos is currently a member of the Committees on Institutional and Legal Affairs of the European Parliament.

Mr. Georgios Anastassopoulos dealt with the evolution of the role of the European Parliament and its contribution to the European integration process. He recalled that it was in accordance with the Luxembourg accord (1966), which marked the first revision of the Treaty of Rome, that the European Parliament began to acquire real legislative powers and to establish a veritable European institution, thereby making it possible to reduce the democratic deficit within the European Union.

He underlined that it was in December 1952 that the first “European Parliamentary Assembly” was held, which then included 78 members. Already at that time, the inclusion of such an assembly reflected the concern and the need to incorporate a certain minimum level of democratic control within the European Community.

Although at the outset, the Parliament enjoyed only a consultative power limiting it to the presentation of motions of non-confidence, over the years it has acquired legislative powers. The European Parliament is now firmly established as a legislative European institution, at least with regard to a certain number of fields of Community legislation. Its legislative, budgetary and supervisory powers, although substantial, nevertheless remain limited. They have, however, proven sufficient to enable the Parliament to intervene in the integration process.

The Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force on November 1, 1993, greatly increased the powers of the European Parliament, in several fields. In the near future, other powers should be granted it, with the signature of the Treaty of Amsterdam, which includes six chapters, 14 protocols and 46 declarations, and for which the Parliament participated in consultations on an informal basis, prior to the negotiations.

From this point on, democratic legitimacy, supranationality and the unique role that the Parliament can play, where the intergovernmental process has flagged, require any reform of the European Union to provide for the participation of the European Parliament as a constituent body of the Union, and for the close collaboration of the national parliaments of the member States. In the meantime, the Parliament will continue to support the process of European integration with the same conviction and the same will that it has so far shown. In immediate terms, this means that it will work on the preparation of the economic and monetary union — decisive for the future of the Union — and that in the long term, it will continue to act as a catalyst for European integration, while respecting the cultural identities and diversity.

Monsieur Juan Adolfo Singer is President of the Latin-American Parliament (Parlatino). Holding degrees in law, social sciences, philosophy and business administration, he has been active in politics since 1963. First he was a Deputy in the Chamber of Representatives of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay from 1963 to 1971, and then Senator until the military coup d'état in June 1973. During the military regime (1973-1984), he pursued underground political activities. Re-elected Senator in 1984, he was appointed Vice-President of Parlatino by the Uruguayan Parliament at the XIIth session of Parlatino in 1988. Once again a Deputy from 1990-1995, he was elected President of the Chamber of Deputies in 1991, and in the same year he was also elected substitute President of Parlatino. He was re-elected as a Deputy in 1994 for the period 1995-2000, and chairs the Committee on Internal Affairs of the Chamber of Representatives.

President Singer recalled that the Latin-American Parliament is an interparliamentary organization that was created in 1964. It was after the signing of a treaty in 1987 that it became an international public organization. The Latin-American Parliament is composed of an Assembly, an Administrative Council, and Advisory Council and a series of parliamentary and advisory committees dealing with the most important issues.

In all, 3,500 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking legislators in Latin America are represented in the deliberations of this organization, which enables it to have a significant political, economic and

cultural impact.

Mr. Singer recalled that among the objectives of the Latin-American Parliament is the need to harmonize legislation in Latin America and to set the groundwork for the community of Latin American nations, of which the Latin-American Parliament constitutes the main assembly.

The theme of integration affects all levels of society, and for this reason, the Latin-American Parliament has always sought to establish close relations with the various organizations of Latin American society, such as labour union, academic, business and religious organizations. Already an integration of all these entities is being seen on a regional level, and according to Mr. Singer, Latin American society is progressing more rapidly on this level than are the States themselves.

The Latin-American Parliament gave itself the mandate to promote and participate in the consolidation of all processes of sub-regional integration. For this purpose, it has signed conventions with all the sub-regional Parliaments, with the exception of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur, with which negotiations are nevertheless under way.

With respect to questions of integration, Mr. Singer wished to clarify two important aspects. On the one hand, unacceptable economic inequalities, as well as highly different levels of development within the Americas, constitute fundamental injustices which prevent us from speaking of a true integration, whether it be of a commercial nature or otherwise. Moreover, in his view, integration must be based on three essential concepts, namely cooperation, competitiveness and solidarity.

Mr. Singer underlined the importance of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, as a first meeting between parliamentarians from North America and those from Latin America. He considered that this step marked the beginning of an interparliamentary dialogue among all countries of the Americas, and probably the establishment of a new type of relations between North America and Latin America. In his opinion, however, the long-term continuation of these meetings would necessitate greater participation by the United States.