



**European Association of Former Members of Parliament of the member states of the
Council of Europe or the European Union**

**FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS IN EUROPE:
WHAT ROLE AND WHAT STATUS IN POLITICAL
AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

Report

Presented by Mr Nandin de Carvalho (Portugal), rapporteur

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Introduction

It's the first time that former European parliamentarians are examining their situation, particularly with regards to their parliament and civil society.

In effect, the FP-AP conducted an inquiry in 2007 among the 14 members of the time but it concerned only the origins of the funds held by the national associations and the costs entailed by their premises and personnel. Some of the questions posed were of interest, especially regarding:

- Whether national associations are recognised or not by their parliaments,
- Whether former parliamentarians can freely enter parliamentary sittings,
- The number of initiatives and conferences of national associations,
- The existence of websites.

The Lisbon seminar therefore stands out in that it is attempting a summary analysis of the various positions expressed by the member associations in their answers to the questionnaire the FP-AP sent them. We wish to thank the associations which kindly accomplished this exercise: the answers we have received are of great interest. We indeed feel it is important that former parliamentarians associated at the national level should be aware of belonging to a community of former elected representatives who have exercised public responsibilities and wish to continue to make their political and legislative experience available to the various components of civil society.

This report will recall the eminent role played in this context by the FP-AP and will present the goals to be reached while mentioning the instruments to be implemented to reach them.

I. THE FP-AP: AN IDEAL SETTING FOR ANALYSIS AND ACTION BY FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS IN EUROPE

Founded in Paris in 1994, the FP-AP today forms an irreplaceable meeting structure for all the former parliamentarians of Council of Europe member states. The association is based on the foundations it shares with the national associations.

A. The status and role of national associations

National associations have major importance in the life of the FP-AP. National associations each operate according to their own rules. Whether it be a matter of the recruitment of members, their legal and material situation with respect to their parliament, the funding of activities (dues paid by members, subsidies from parliaments), the logistic aid of assemblies, the organisation of political or cultural activities or the provision of information to citizens, the answers to the questionnaire given by the

member associations provide precious information giving evidence of different cultures and political traditions.

B. Latest developments at the FP-AP

Last year the FP-AP experienced major development summarised as follows:

a) Regarding the way it works:

- The reform of its statutes has been started. Guidelines on the organisation of events by the association have also been developed.
- The FP-AP's secretariat was strengthened by the election in March 2008 of a Deputy Secretary General whose job is to help the Secretary General in his task, as well as the rapporteurs.
- The association's new website has been rolled out, providing it with improved visibility.

b) Operationally, note can be taken of the:

- Continuation of the enlargement of the association (*inter alia* the joining of Ukraine where the 2010 colloquy will be held); granting of observer status to the Principality of Andorra; and ongoing negotiations with Finland, Poland and Armenia.
- Strengthening of relations with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), with which a memorandum of understanding and cooperation has been concluded.
- Holding of the Athens colloquy in 2008 on participatory democracy which enjoyed great success and whose final statement has been distributed in Strasbourg at the Council of Europe.
- Organisation of mini-conferences on the margins of the Bureau meeting, (as was the case in June 2009 in Luxembourg, with the hearing of the Minister for Finance on the international financial crisis) and of seminars (such as that in Lisbon in October 2009 on the role of former parliamentarians).

II. ANSWERS TO THE RAPPORTEUR'S QUESTIONNAIRE

The following associations have answered the questionnaire: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland as well as the FMA (revised version).

Two considerations of a general nature arise from these answers:

- First, the situation of former parliamentarians varies from one country to another, depending on national traditions
- Second, the engagement of former deputies in various activities, and especially at NGOs, is at their initiative and depends on their personal profile.

1. Status of former parliamentarians

Nowhere apparently is there a genuine former parliamentary status. Former parliamentarians admittedly often enjoy an honorary title and access facilities to parliament but scarcely anything more.

The French Association specifies that former deputies who have been elected at three general or by-elections can style themselves as Honorary Members of the National Assembly. After a tenure of eighteen years, deputies can claim the title of Honorary Member of Parliament.

The Portuguese Association states that former parliamentarians who have served as such for 4 years are entitled to an identity card issued by parliament, as laid down by law, with the national colours and the official logo. This card allows them to freely access parliament to attend sittings, go to the library or restaurant, receive publications and enjoy free car parking.

The Luxembourg Association, which grants the title of honorary parliamentarian after a five year mandate, proposes that European parliaments should agree on a harmonisation of the honorary title of former parliamentarians, combined with facilities of a practical nature.

The Maltese Association states there are ongoing discussions to strengthen ties between former parliamentarians and parliament.

The European Parliament FMA proposes that parliaments and former parliamentarians should be able to conclude a written agreement granting official status to former parliamentarians in order to increase their prestige. An 'appropriate retirement pension' should be granted to them.

Information has been supplied on the various pension regimes but note is to be taken of the particularly firm position of the Italian Association regarding this point, as it feels that the parliamentary mandate does not give rise to a public or private work relationship. The Italians therefore feel that former parliamentarians should be granted a 'life indemnity' depending directly on the parliamentary indemnity and aimed at avoiding parliamentarians being under the influence of powerful external powers. As such, this indemnity cannot be compared with or said to be complementary to public or private retirement regimes.

The Luxembourg Association feels that the former parliamentarian's end-of-mandate pay should be paid for a period related to the length of his mandate, without being shorter

than a minimum to be determined. In addition, at the end of their mandate, parliamentarians should enjoy an employment re-entry right. Governments, parliaments, parties and political groups should offer all former parliamentarians similar conditions and opportunities for redeployment: training in new technologies, intermediary or transitional jobs, permanent jobs with training sessions, entitlement to unemployment benefit, specific retraining benefits. A national body should be created to address and help solve the redeployment, reintegration or pension problems of former parliamentarians. Men and women should have similar access conditions to a parliamentary mandate and should be equal regarding the consequences of election or non-re-election.

The Spanish Association proposes a fully fledged bill unifying the role of former parliamentarians in Europe. The thrust of this bill, as stated by the Spanish Association in its contribution, are provisions recognising the legislative work of former parliamentarians and solutions to better use their experience. The association also calls for an official recognition of associations of former parliamentarians across all European countries.

2. Operation of national associations

The question of their funding has of course been aired. Generally speaking, associations collect dues from their members (but not always) and either a direct or indirect subsidy from parliament, for instance by the FP-AP dues being paid for. Specific financial aids may be provided for on the occasion of colloquies or seminars, as is the case for the Lisbon seminar. Parliaments, and sometimes also political parties (as is the case in Austria), provide logistic aid in the form of personnel or premises.

In France, there is no contact with political parties, in accordance with the statutes of the national association which is apolitical (Art. V 'are members of the Group of former parliamentarians [without any distinction of Republic, political party or length of mandate], those who...'). The same applies in Portugal.

The associations are often invited to political events. They encourage individual initiatives on the part of their members with regards to civil society. Major NGOs are also presided by former parliamentarians, in particular in Switzerland, Austria, and Portugal. The FMA proposes that a table should be published on the Internet listing the qualifications of former parliamentarians in order to facilitate contacts with civil society. In Germany, the association is developing contacts with the Association of former elected representatives of the Länder. In Portugal, the association grants priority to the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa and Latin America and to relations with the former parliamentarians of these countries. As for the safeguarding of their collective memory, books on former parliamentarians complete ceremonies like that organised in 2009 by the FMA. In Portugal, homages to former speakers of parliament who have died are organised by parliament with support from the association.

The Luxembourg Association regrets that the collective memory of former parliamentarians, their careers, their lives and their merits is most often non-existent and does not interest the active political class. It proposes a former parliamentarians' website managed by themselves to keep the collective memory alive.

The French Association emphasises that regarding collective memory, the National Assembly services are very competent and a division is specifically tasked with this memory work. These services compile the dictionary of French parliamentarians, biographical notes and archives debates as a whole.

The Belgian association Pro Lege pursues a twin aim:

- Promoting friendly contacts between former parliamentarians.
- Seeing to the moral and material interests of former parliamentarians and their beneficiaries.

A working group has been created to organise activities aimed at highlighting the experience of former parliamentarians and to succeed in creating an opinion-giving committee. It organises as a rule two study days per year that take place at the Belgian parliament.

Pro Lege is an active participant in the FP-AP.

The Irish Association of former parliamentarians is officially recognised. Except in certain cases, the association maintains contact with political parties. The association has 134 members and organises various social events. Also, traditional relations with the United States mean that the Irish Association of former parliamentarians maintains traditional relations with the US Congress.

The Greek Association feels it is important to maintain the prestige of former parliamentarians. All the potential of the Internet must be exploited to strengthen ties between former elected representatives and the FP-AP.

The Portuguese Association was officially recognised on 12 January 2006 as having 'parliamentary (public) interest', and therefore an annual subsidy is included in the parliamentary budget. Since September 2009, the association has had the benefit of three meeting rooms in a listed building next to parliament. The rent, facilities and electricity, etc, for these rooms are paid for by parliament.

3. Role of the FP-AP

To fund its activities, must the FP-AP call on private sponsors? The answers are generally cautious: fear of losing independence for Switzerland, no urgency for Germany which refers to this possibility only for specific questions. The Cypriot Association suggests having recourse to resources arising from events or public activities.

Like the French Association and others, the Maltese Association is opposed to private funding. Malta feels the solution would rather be to seek funding at the European Union and the Council of Europe which already grant aids to several institutions and NGOs.

The Luxembourg Association asks parliaments to co-fund to a reasonable extent the activities of former parliamentarians.

As for the FP-AP's relations with Asia, Africa and America, the Swiss Association emphasises the insufficiency of the financial means. The German and Austrian associations favour relations with the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.

The FMA would like to have contacts with the Pan-African Parliament. Malta emphasises its role as a bridge between southern Europe and northern Africa. The group of former French deputies is behind the creation of the Union Mondiale des associations d'anciens parlementaires francophones (UMAPF – World Union of former French-speaking parliamentarians), grouping twenty or so countries.

The FP-AP's goals should in particular be:

- For Cyprus: seeking all similar associations in Europe with a view to forming a large Federation.
- For the FMA: working on a Deontology Code for political duties and activities; participation in working out the practical details of the citizens' initiative laid down by the Lisbon Treaty; studying a participation in the statutes of national organisations; development of an action plan for press and public relations services – these tasks can be assumed by two to three working groups; participation in election observation missions; creation of a blog as well as an online information exchange.
- For Germany, we should stick to the FP-AP's goals as laid down in Article 1 of the statutes, which offers more opportunities for visibility.
- For Austria, care should be taken not to overload the Agenda. The main field of activities should be located at the national level.
- For Malta, the FP-AP must support the Greek Association's project to create a European referendum and opinion-poll institute. The FP-AP should also analyse the major challenges of the 21st century: international financial capitalism, climate change, social inequalities, demographic evolution, terrorism, energy sources, fragility of certain states, affirmation of democratic values.
- For France, it is necessary to respect the statutes which have allowed the FP-AP to operate suitably since its creation. The aim laid down in Article 1 'to make European institutions better known' is more topical than ever, given the very high abstention rates at European elections.
- For Luxembourg, the FP-AP should seize the opportunity afforded by the Lisbon seminar to launch an appeal to all Europe's former parliamentarians. The Luxembourg Association, which is in favour of a concrete and positive message, supports the idea of a 'European charter for former parliamentarians'

The idea of a European charter for former parliamentarians, which concludes this rapport, could ultimately allow a synthesis of these various desires.

III. A EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS

Apart from a portrayal of the current situation which the Lisbon seminar is to give and which will allow a better identification of the questions arising for former parliamentarians, wouldn't it be opportune to follow-up this event by thinking along new lines in the direction of a draft European charter for former parliamentarians? The draft charter referred to here would group all of the principles, goals and methods guiding the inspiration and work of the FP-AP and would also group the various points of convergence bringing together former parliamentarians in Europe, in particular:

- Acceptance of a basis of joint values defined by the FP-AP colloquy in Rome in 2002: dignity of the human person, gender equality, freedom and responsibility, democracy and the rule of law, solidarity and social justice, the protection of nature, tolerance, respect for minorities and cultural diversities as well as peace and cooperation among peoples.
- Attachment to sustainable development and to a more humane and more social economy.
- Determination to use the experience of former parliamentarians to develop the information citizens receive on European institutions.
- Regular organisation of colloquies or seminars to explore the new ways of exercising democracy in the day and age of the Internet.
- Setting up of partnerships with European and international institutions on the model of the memorandum of understanding concluded with the Council of Europe.
- Development of relations with NGOs.
- Support for the creation of a United Nations parliamentary assembly which has become essential in order to ensure better supervision of the major world institutions, especially economic and financial ones... The globalisation of the economy must go hand in hand with the globalisation of democracy.
- Role and calling of former parliamentarians after their civil society mandate.

These are just suggestions which could, if the associations so desire, be studied as a follow-up to the Lisbon seminar.