

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

ASSOCIATION DES SECRÉTAIRES GÉNÉRAUX DES PARLEMENTS  
ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS



*CONSTITUTIONAL*  
*AND PARLIAMENTARY*  
*INFORMATION*



**The parliamentary system of Belgium**

---

**The administrative and financial  
autonomy of parliamentary  
assemblies**

---

**The European Parliament on the eve  
of the year 2000: the main political  
and legislative challenges**

# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

## Aims

The Inter-Parliamentary Union whose international Statute is outlined in a Headquarters Agreement drawn up with the Swiss federal authorities, is the only world-wide organization of Parliaments.

The aim of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is to promote personal contacts between members of all Parliaments and to unite them in common action to secure and maintain the full participation of their respective States in the firm establishment and development of representative institutions and in the advancement of the work of international peace and co-operation, particularly by supporting the objectives of the United Nations.

In pursuance of this objective, the Union makes known its views on all international problems suitable for settlement by parliamentary action and puts forward suggestions for the development of parliamentary assemblies so as to improve the working of those institutions and increase their prestige.

## Membership of the Union (November 1999)

Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea (Dem. P. R. of), Korea (Rep. of), Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Associated members: Andean Parliament, Central American Parliament, European Parliament, Latin American Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

## Structure

The organs of the Union are:

1. *The Inter-Parliamentary Conference* which meets twice a year.
2. *The Inter-Parliamentary Council*, composed of two members from each affiliated Group. *President*: Mrs Najma Heptulla (India).
3. *The Executive Committee*, composed of twelve members elected by the Conference, as well as of the Council President acting as *ex officio* President.
4. *Secretariat of the Union*, which is the international secretariat of the Organization, the headquarters being located at: Place du Petit-Saconnex, CP 438, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland. *Secretary general*: Mr. Anders Johnsson.

## Official publication

The Union's official organ is the *Inter-Parliamentary Bulletin*, which appears quarterly in both English and French. This publication is indispensable in keeping posted on the activities of the Organization. Subscription can be placed with the Union's Secretariat in Geneva.

---

# Constitutional and Parliamentary Information

Association of Secretaries General  
of Parliaments

*No. 177/ 1st Half-year • 1999*

*Forty-ninth year*

## *Contents*

### **I. The parliamentary system of Belgium**

Presentation by Mr Herman Nys, Clerk of the Senate, and Mr Francis Graulich, Secretary General of the House of Representatives. Brussels Session (April 1999) . . . . . 3

### **II. The administrative and financial autonomy of parliamentary assemblies**

Report prepared by Mr Michel Couderc, Secretary General of the Questure of the National Assembly of France, adopted at the Moscow Session (September 1998). . . . . 15

### **III. The European Parliament on the eve of the year 2000: the main political and legislative challenges**

Communication by Mr Harald RØmer, Deputy Secretary General of the European Parliament. Brussels Session (April 1999). . . . . 60

## I. The parliamentary system of Belgium

### **Presentation by Mr Herman NYS, Clerk of the Senate, and Mr Francis GRAULICH, Secretary General of the House of Representatives, on the parliamentary system of Belgium. Brussels Session (April 1999)**

Mr DAVIES gave the floor to Mr Herman NYS and Mr Francis GRAULICH to present the Belgian parliamentary system. He said that the presentation would be followed by questions.

Mr Herman NYS, Clerk of the Senate, made the following presentation:

"On 5 May 1993 the Belgian Federal Parliament introduced the most important reform in its history. Both its composition and its functioning had been fundamentally revised. This reform was the culmination of a double process the main lines of which I will sketch out.

For the last thirty years the unitary Belgian State had slowly been transforming into a Federal State. The federal bodies have come into being. They have progressively obtained a larger and larger autonomy. This evolution is original and should be underlined. Whereas the majority of federal states are established by a process of association, summarised in the Latin formula "e diversitate unitas" the Belgian Federation was born through a process of disassociation. Belgian federalism is thus a centrifugal process.

I will not describe the Belgian Federal system in all its complexity. That would be tedious. I will therefore limit myself, and here we come to another original characteristic, to making clear that the Belgian Federal State consists of two groups of federal bodies which are superimposed in the same territory. These are the communities and the regions. Belgians acknowledge three communities, the Flemish community, the French community and the German-speaking community. They have competence in everything that relates to education and culture in its wider sense. Belgium also consists of three regions, the Flemish region, the Wallonia region and the Brussels region whose competences are essentially in the socio-economic sphere. The process of the disassociation of the state has had two consequences for the composition of the Federal Parliament. On the one hand the number of members of the Federal Parliament has been reduced in a drastic manner. It was important to avoid an inflation of

the number of political mandates. On the other hand, as is the custom in federal states, it was necessary to establish within the Federal Parliament a representation of the federal bodies. The Senate was partially transformed into a "Chamber for the meeting of communities".

In parallel to the process of transformation of the Belgian State, another factor contributed to the reform of the Federal Parliament. The development of Belgian parliamentarism had resulted, as it also had in other countries, in the establishment of a bicameral system which was undifferentiated and evenly balanced. The two chambers were from the point of view of their composition and their powers practically identical doing, one after the other, exactly the same work. It was impossible to deny that the organisation of parliamentary work was a cause of slowness and sterile duplication of activity. It was necessary to make the Federal Parliament a modern and efficient institution. The reform of 5 May 1993 attempted to achieve this objective, introducing a certain specialisation into the chambers and rationalising the legislative procedure. Thus the political control of the government and of public finances was entrusted to the House of Representatives. The Senate was transformed into a "Chamber for Reflection" to guarantee the quality of legislation. The two chambers retained a common competence for everything relating to the foundations of the Belgian State. This new division of responsibility between the chambers, what we have come to call rationalised parliamentarism, will be described in more detail by my colleague from the House of Representatives.

I, for my part, wish to come back to the composition of the chambers as it emerged from the reform of Parliament. In fact, it was necessary to put in place a bicameralism which conformed to a federal type of state. It was important from this perspective that the communities were represented in their own right in the Federal Parliament and through this means participated in the drawing up of federal law. So what has been the result?

The House of Representatives consists of 150 deputies directly elected by the electorate in twenty constituencies. The parliamentary representation of each constituency is calculated on the basis of the size of its population. The Senate was transformed into a chamber for the meeting of communities. Twenty-one senators out of a total of 71 are designated by the Parliaments of the three communities from their own numbers, 10 by the Parliament of the Flemish community, 10 by the Parliament of the French community and one from the Council of the German-speaking community. As they remain members of the Parliaments which have nominated them, these senators have a double mandate, sitting at the same time at the federal level and at the level of the federal bodies. Forty senators are directly elected by the electorate. The electorate is grouped into two electoral colleges, the French college which elects

fifteen senators and the Flemish college which for its part elects twenty-five senators. Finally the Senate consists of ten co-opted senators of whom six are nominated by the other Flemish speaking senators and four by the French speaking senators. The composition of the Senate is hybrid. It might seem complex. In order to be complete I should add furthermore that there is a fourth category of senator. The children of the King are senators by right from the age of eighteen years. They do, however, abstain from any political activity.

Despite the multiplicity of these political bodies which comprise the institutional landscape, the Belgian political reality is characterised by the co-existence on a single and the same territory of two large communities, the Flemish speaking majority and the French speaking minority. The federal institutions have been fashioned in a way to guarantee above everything else the balance between these communities. With regard to the Federal Parliament, each assembly is divided into two linguistic groups, the Flemish speaking elected members comprise the Flemish linguistic group and the French speaking members comprise the French linguistic group. This division into linguistic groups is important. The adoption of major laws which define the structure of the State requires, in addition to a two-thirds majority of the total number of parliamentarians, a majority of the votes in each linguistic group. This means that such laws cannot be voted into effect against the wish of one of the two large communities. The essentially dualist character of Belgian federalism is also manifested in the linguistic parity within the Council of Ministers, in the Higher Courts such as the Jurisdiction and Procedure Court, the Court of Cassation and the Conseil d'Etat, as well as in the high levels of administration. This characteristic certainly constitutes a key element of the Belgian institutional architecture.

A second principle informs the composition of the federal legislative assemblies. The constitution applies to the election of deputies and senators the rule of proportional representation. This rule explains the very large number of parties represented in the Federal Parliament and this tendency is increased through the fact that there are no longer national parties in Belgium. The principal political families are represented by different parties in the north and the south of the country. There are currently nine political groups in the Chamber and in the Senate, and the Government consists of a coalition of four parties. The principle of proportional representation determines the composition of all bodies and parliamentary delegations. The mandates of the permanent committees are divided between the political groups according to this principle. This means that a political group must have a minimum number of members to sit with a deliberative vote in parliamentary committees. The elected members of small groups are not excluded from the activities of com-

mittees. They can participate in debates and even table amendments but they do not have the right to vote. The constitution of the political group has material advantages as well. All political groups receive, from the funds at the disposal of the House of Representatives and of the Senate, subsidies to ensure the functioning of their secretariat and to employ staff. The amount of this assistance is proportional to the numerical significance of each group."

Mr Francis GRAULICH, Secretary General of the House of Representatives, made the following presentation:

"As my colleague from the Senate has just described one of the objectives of the reform of the federal parliamentary system on 5 May 1993 was to rationalise parliamentary work. For my part I am going to examine this aspect of the reform and try to give the main aspects of the new division of responsibility between the House of Representatives and the Senate. To do this I will distinguish as is the custom between the three traditional parliamentary functions, the function of oversight, the budgetary function and the legislative function.

Parliaments do not have the exclusive mission of fulfilling a legislative function. In the first place it is for them to exercise a political oversight of government action. In Belgium this oversight is entrusted to the House of Representatives. This chamber alone is in a position to call to account and sanction the Federal Government. This does not stop senators also asking questions of the Federal Government, nor from adopting resolutions, but in the Senate there is no political sanction attached to these procedural mechanisms. At the establishment of a new Federal Government the Prime Minister makes a speech in the House of Representatives. He sets out the main themes of the governmental agreement. This speech is then debated in the plenary session and the debate ends with a vote of confidence. It also happens during the Parliament that the Prime Minister comes before the Chamber to present a new Government Declaration. This would for instance be the case when he wishes to confirm the stability of his team or announce new policies proposed by his Cabinet. At the time of such a Declaration the Prime Minister might consider it useful to put down again the question of confidence in his Government.

Parliamentary interpellations take place solely in the House of Representatives. They constitute the most important means of oversight of government action. They provide for genuine debate. Most interpellations are held in committee. Motions can be tabled at the conclusion of an interpellation. Votes on such motions always take place in a plenary session. The House can adopt by a majority of its members a motion of no confidence. When a motion proposes

a successor to the Prime Minister, what one calls the "constructive no confidence" the Government has to resign. If, in contrast, the motion of no confidence does not contain the name of a new Prime Minister it is up to the King to resolve the crisis and he can dissolve the House. The deputies can also adopt, at the end of an interpellation, a reasoned motion, what is called "a motion of recommendation" or a motion pure and simple, through which the Chamber simply carries on its work and passes to the next point on the Orders of the Day.

The two assemblies have the right of inquiry. During the present Parliament, which will end in a few days, the two chambers have instituted in total no less than five committees of inquiry. The much more frequent recourse to parliamentary inquiries is certainly a characteristic trait of recent parliamentary history. It explains in great part the regaining of interest from both the media and the public in the Federal Parliament.

I will conclude these various thoughts on the oversight function of the Federal Parliament by recalling a fundamental principle of Belgian public law. Political oversight cannot extend to the person of the King which is inviolable. The Sovereign never acts alone. All his actions carry the counter signature of a minister who through this renders himself alone responsible. This is why political oversight only extends to the government.

The second traditional function of parliament is the budgetary function. Historically, the intervention of parliament in the budget vote constitutes the first form of oversight of government action. The budgetary function is exercised by the House of Representatives alone. It includes not only the adoption of the budget but also the oversight of its implementation. In this latter task the House is assisted by the Auditor General's Department whose members are nominated by the House.

The third parliamentary function is the legislative function. In this area, as my colleague from the Senate has already mentioned, a rationalisation of procedure has been in operation since 1993. Henceforth there is a distinction between three types of law. For those laws which deal with the structure and institutions of the state, the House and the Senate are both competent on an equal footing. This means that for such matters, bills are only adopted if both chambers agree on an identical text. It is of course the same for the Constitution itself. It is interesting to note that the Constitution remains an exclusively federal matter. International treaties are also submitted to the consent of the two federal chambers for those matters relevant to federal powers. International relations come within the competence of the Government. Members of parliament do not have the power of direct initiative. The Constitution, however, has



aimed in European matters to strengthen democratic oversight by imposing on the Federal Government the task of informing the legislative chambers of every negotiation aimed at revising the European Treaties as well as draft regulations or directives. This obligation allows the chambers to organise a preliminary debate and possibly effect the position of the Belgian delegation. These drafts are examined in committee on which sit senators, deputies and also Belgian members of the European Parliament.

For all other matters the Constitution has opted for a limited bicameralism. The intervention of the Senate is optional and the House of Representatives has the last word. The Senate constitutes a sort of house of reflection. The bills of the Government are tabled in the House of Representatives. When that House has adopted a bill the House then sends it to the Senate. If fifteen senators request it, the Senate examines the bill in its turn. In parliamentary jargon, the Senate exercise its "droit d'vocation". It can amend the bill during a period of sixty days and send it back to the House of Representatives which looks at the bill again. The number of times the bill can pass between the two chambers is limited and the House of Representatives has in any event the last word. In certain particular areas the legislative power is exercised by the House of Representatives and the King to the exclusion of the Senate. In the first case, this exclusion relates to laws concerning the penal and civil responsibility of federal ministers. This is readily understandable. It is the House of Representatives which lifts the immunity of federal ministers therefore it should also be the one with the power to establish the regime of their civil and penal responsibilities. The Constitution enumerates other laws which are described as monocalameral: the adoption of budgets and the accounts of the State, the fixing of the army's contingent as well as the granting of naturalisations. In effect it concerns acts of the House which are not of a normative nature.

This concludes the-overview of the Belgian parliamentary system. My colleague and I are happy to answer your questions. Allow me, before giving you the floor, to recall the definition which Raymond Aron, the French sociologist, gave to the word democracy. "Democracy, more a means than an end, is the system which... gives the best chance of safeguarding liberty ... elections, the agreement of parties, parliamentary assemblies in the end are merely procedures to choose governments. This choice does not determine the goals which those elected are proposing but these procedures, so long as they are respected, guarantee the transfer of power from one man or one group to another man and another group".

Mr DAVIES, in the name of the Association, thanked the two speakers who had given a very good overview of the Belgian parliamentary system. He had two comments. Concerning the competence of the King, Mr GRAULICH had said that the King could not act alone in political matters and that he had to obtain the support of a minister through a form of countersigning. Mr DAVIES asked if this applied to the dissolution of the House and to the appointment of a new prime minister. The second point - Mr GRAULICH had spoken of a game of ping-pong between the two assemblies. Mr DAVIES asked if it was the Constitution which fixed the number of times a bill could go back and forth. In fact, in the case of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, there could be up to five shuttles before the House of Lords finally rejected a bill.

Mr GRAULICH responded on the competence of the sovereign by saying that the King did not have the right to dissolve the chambers except in two cases: in the case of the resignation of the Federal Government if the House of Representatives expressed its assent by an absolute majority of its members, or in case of rejection of a motion of confidence by the House of Representatives or the adoption of a motion of no confidence without a proposal to the King of a successor prime minister. The dissolution of the House of Representatives meant the dissolution of the Senate. Both the Royal Order to dissolve the chambers and that through which the new prime minister was appointed required a ministerial counter-signature. Mr GRAULICH responded to the second comment on the "ping-pong" of bills between two chambers by saying that for those matters governed by total bicameralism, the House of Representatives and the Senate found themselves on an equal footing. This meant that public bills and private members bills were only adopted if the two chambers agreed on an identical text. This complete bicameralism related to the structures of the state and the federal entities. In other matters the intervention of the Senate was optional and it could receive the bill on two occasions. The House of Representatives had the last word. This was limited bicameralism and indeed in certain areas there was a monocameralism in favour of the House of Representatives.

Mr CHIBESAKUNDA (Zambia) thanked the Secretaries General for their communications. He asked Mr NYS how the objective was achieved of guaranteeing a balance in legislation. He also wanted to know the number and nature of the existing committees.

Mr NYS said that the committees were constituted by proportional representation of the political groups but all members of the Senate could participate in their work without having a right to vote. It was necessary to be part of a group of four members to have the right to vote. He added that the Senate had six permanent committees, each one consisting of fifteen members and that it was also possible for the Senate to establish committees of inquiry or ad hoc

committees. Mr NYS said that one of the tasks of the Senate was to guarantee the legislative quality of law. The Senate was preparing to create a department for the evaluation of bills but there did not exist any political type of oversight of legislation.

Mr KHATRICHHETRE (Nepal) congratulated the Secretaries General on their extremely interesting communication. He wanted to know what were the existing mechanisms to resolve the difference between the two chambers in the course of the legislative process and wondered if the Senate was independent.

Mr NYS said that by definition there was no conflict in the case of monocameral matters and that for certain optional areas the last word was with the House of Representatives. Finally for those fully bicameral matters, there was no solution, the two chambers having to reach an agreement. He said that the Senate, whilst it had less power than the House of Representatives, was not for all that any less independent.

Mr HONTEBEYRIE (France) congratulated Mr GRAULICH and Mr NYS on their very complete and interesting communications. They had explained that there were three categories of law which were subjected to three different procedures. He wanted to know what was the competent authority to decide on the category of law in the case of a dispute. For example, he asked if there existed provisions in favour of parity.

Mr NYS said with regard to different categories of law that the originator of a public bill or private members bill had to indicate in the first article of the bill which category it belonged to. If it was a government bill the Conseil d'Etat verified this determination in an opinion which it gave to the government before the tabling of the text before one or other house. If it was a private members bill initiated by a member of parliament the Conseil d'Etat could be called upon to give its opinion on a bill already tabled before one of the chambers. In the case of a dispute once the public or private members bill had been tabled, the Committee for Inter-parliamentary Disputes could receive the issue and make a definitive judgment. On the question of parity, he said that the Cabinet was composed of fourteen members, seven Flemish speaking and seven French speaking, not including the Prime Minister.

Mr ALBA NAVARRO (Spain) asked about the competences of the sovereign, all decisions of the King having to be counter-signed. He wondered what would happen if the King did not wish to sign a bill adopted by Parliament. He mentioned the existence of a precedent concerning abortion.

Mr NYS said that in fact in that particular case the King refused to sign and gave to the Council of Ministers the ability to substitute itself for the sovereign.

Mme PONCEAU (France) asked for more detail on the geographical zones and the definition of competences between the communities and regions.

Mr GRAULICH said that the Belgian people also sometimes had difficulty in finding their way in this area! The regions essentially had responsibility for socio-economic issues and with regard to the development of the territory. The communities essentially had competence in matters of education and culture. The Flemish community exercised its competence in the Flemish region and in the region of Bruxelles-capitale. The French community also exercised competence in the Bruxelles-capitale region and in the Wallonia region in the south of the country. So the two communities overlapped on the Brussels territory. The education which was not bilingual was provided in one or other of the two languages according to the particular community.

Mr HAHNDIEK (South Africa) said that since 1993 South Africa had instituted the same system but on the basis of provinces rather than communities. He asked about the evaluation of bills and how the Senate could amend a bill if it considered, during the course of an evaluation procedure, that the bill needed to be modified. Moreover, he asked if the Senate was really an effective part of parliament and how co-ordination of the programme of work between the two assemblies was achieved.

Mr NYS said that there was not as yet any experience of evaluation available. The department which had just been created was still at an embryonic stage. He said that the Senate was an effective part of parliament but political oversight, budgetary oversight and the government declarations took place in the House of Representatives. The Senate could ask questions of the government without however having the power to defeat it.

Mr NIKITOV (Russian Federation) wondered if the bicameral system was the most effective system for Belgium or whether it was simply a historical tradition.

Mr MYTENNAERE (Belgium) said historically Belgium had first created the House of Representatives but then later, in reaction, as in many European parliaments, a more conservative chamber had been established. Originally this was not necessarily responding to any regional objective. That objective had evolved later on. The two chambers had different compositions so as to be able to balance each other. As to whether it was a good system, he said that of course there were other systems also.

Mrs REYES (Philippines) asked for the list of the six committees and if there was a committee for the responsibilities of civil servants.

Mr NYS said that with regard to the Senate the powers and names of the permanent committees were decided upon by the Bureau for the duration of the parliament, whereas in the House of Representatives they were decided upon by the President of the House after advice from the Conférence des Présidents, the internal body of the House. Actually there were, in the House of Representatives, ten permanent committees whose competences corresponded for the most part to the competences of the ministerial departments. The committee charged with internal questions was thus competent for all that related to the status of parliamentary officials. On the other hand there was not a committee explicitly charged with the responsibility for officials and in application of the principle of the separation of powers that would appear to be impossible in Belgium. The committees were composed respectively of fifteen and seventeen members, fifteen in the Senate and seventeen in the House of Representatives, appointed in conformity with the principle of proportional representation.

Mrs REYES (Philippines) said that she was not thinking about the judgment of officials but of the conduct of inquiries in order to obtain the drawing up of better laws. She wanted to know if certain laws could be drawn up by one or other of the two chambers.

Mr NYS recalled the fact that Belgium had a system of three competences according to the three legislative areas. A bill authorising the ratification of an international treaty had to be tabled in the Senate but it had to be voted on by both assemblies. On the other hand no law could be voted on solely by the Senate. The Senate had the power of amendment. Giving the example of the bill on publicity against smoking which had been rejected by the Senate, he said that this bill had nevertheless been sent to the King for Royal Assent.

Mr ZUNIGA OPAZO (Chile) asked at what moment the consultation with the Conseil d'Etat took place to decide on the category of law and the procedure to be followed. Was it possible to reclassify a law during the course of the legislative process?

Mr GRAULICH answered that in the course of parliamentary procedure a joint committee comprising members of the House of Representatives and the Senate could consider and deal definitively with the question of the reclassification of the bill but the Conseil d'Etat could also be consulted in advance for its opinion.

Mr IDRISSEKAITOUNI (Morocco) asked about the existing procedure for ratification of treaties. He wondered whether there was in particular special procedure for treaties of association with the European Union.

Mr NYS said that treaties concerning regions had to be approved by the parliaments of the regions. The bills implementing international treaties and supranational treaties were considered according to the full bicameral process.

Mr MYTTENAERE (Belgium) added that this was a peculiarity of the Belgian system and explained that there had been a devolution of responsibilities to the regional assemblies. Thus certain treaties no longer came within the federal competence or they required the approval of the regional assemblies. For the most part this did not pose any problem. On the other hand, with regard to the Treaty of Maastricht and then the Treaty of Amsterdam, certain regional assemblies had tried to assert elements which emphasised their particular competences. A region could thus block the approval of the treaty. But if that sometimes surprised foreign observers it was important to consider the example of Denmark where a referendum had blocked approval of the Treaty of Maastricht.

Mr FALL (Senegal) asked for more detail on the procedure for the transfer of bills between the two houses and asked in particular to know if a bill could be blocked.

Mr GRAULICH said that in conformity with article 82 of the Constitution, a parliamentary committee for dialogue composed equally of members of the House of Representatives and the Senate enjoyed two competences. It decided on conflicts of competence arising between the two chambers and could thus disallow the initial attribution of a bill to one or other matter. It could also at any point extend the period allowed for the examination, principally in the Senate, of bills according to the classic legislative procedure. With regard to the transfer of bills between the assemblies there was no limit on the number of times a bill could go back and forth in the case of those matters which were fully bicameral but there was a limit by contrast for those matters where the House of Representatives had the final word.

Mr HONTEBEYRIE (France) said that the Belgian system was relatively complicated. He recalled, concerning federal institutions, that in Flanders the bodies of the Flemish community exercised also competences in the Flemish region, the result being from the Flemish point of view that there was only a single Flemish council. On the other hand with the French speakers there was a council for the French community and a regional council for Wallonia. Mr HONTEBEYRIE asked with regard to the council for the French community and the council for the Walloon region if it was possible to be a member of both councils at the same time.

Mr GRAULICH agreed that the Flemish system was the more functional to the extent that there was only one council but because the competences of the Flemish community and the French community extended also to the territory of the bilingual region of Bruxelles-capitale, the Flemish council and the council for the French community also included members of the council of the

Bruxelles-capitale region sent from the Flemish linguistic group and the French linguistic group respectively of that council. Mr GRAULICH added one cultural precision. All the Walloons were Francophone but all Francophones did not consider themselves to be Walloons, thus there was a region of Bruxelles-capitale which was bilingual.

Mrs REYES (Philippines) said that there were different communities in many countries of the world. She wondered if the choice of the federal system did not risk the development of Belgium towards secession.

Mr NYS said that that was a political question but that in fact there was a risk. There was a political party in Flanders which favoured secession. It had to be noted that Flanders was better placed from an economic point of view than Wallonia but that the federal system did imply the existence of social solidarity. Personally he thought the good sense of Belgians would prevail.

Mr AL-MAS ALHA (Jordan) said that the federal system seemed to him the best system in countries which appeared to present a risk to secession as a means of overcoming such a danger.

Mr DAVIES said that perhaps that comment was of a political nature. He warmly thanked the Belgian Secretaries General and those who had contributed from the floor for the discussion and recalled that Tuesday morning would be dedicated to a visit to the Belgian Parliament during which other questions could be put.