

**Speech by Mr Claes MÅRTENSSON,  
Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Riksdag  
at the Meeting of the Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments on 27 January 2014 in Vilnius**

## Anförande GS-mötet i Vilnius, 26-27 januari 2014

Dear Colleagues,

First of all, let me start by thanking the Lithuanian Presidency for arranging this meeting and for the invitation to the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) Administration to speak about the important topic of Best Practices of EU Coordination.

Since Sweden became a member of the EU in 1995, the Riksdag Administration has introduced new routines and changes in order to consider and take an active part in parliamentary work with EU affairs, which has consequently lead to changes in the coordination of EU affairs for the Riksdag Administration. It is clearly stated that the Riksdag shall take part in the EU decision-making process as early in this process as possible.

Let me begin by giving you a brief overview of the organisation of the Riksdag.

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There are **15 parliamentary committees** with the task of monitoring EU-related matters within their respective fields. In practice, this task includes examining EU proposals and writing statements on certain EU documents, monitoring the compliance of EU proposals with the principle of subsidiarity and ensuring that all items of EU business are considered thoroughly before any decisions in the Council

of Ministers are taken. The Government confers with the committees on EU matters relating to the committees' respective areas of responsibility.

While an issue is being considered in the EU, the Government deliberates on a regular basis with the parliamentary committees. However, when it is time for a decision in the Council, the Government proceeds to consult with a special body; the **Committee on European Union Affairs**. The shared responsibility between the parliamentary committees and the Committee on EU Affairs requires a certain level of interaction. For this reason, all members of the Committee on EU Affairs are also members of one or more parliamentary committees. The Committee on EU Affairs, unlike the other committees is not responsible for any specific policy areas and is purely a consultative body with which the Government must consult on Sweden's position prior to Council meetings. The Government must seek support from the Committee on EU Affairs and is expected to follow the Committee's mandate. If the Government fails to observe this position, it risks criticism and ultimately a vote of no confidence in the Chamber of the Riksdag.

As EU affairs have become an increasingly important aspect in the daily business of the Riksdag, new functions and tasks have been introduced in the Riksdag Administration. The responsibility for EU Affairs in the work of parliament is decentralised and divided between the parliamentary committees, the Committee on EU Affairs and the Chamber. Unlike several other national parliaments, the Riksdag's Committee on EU Affairs, its secretariat and its officials, do not have overall responsibility for EU-matters, or coordination thereof. In order to facilitate, coordinate and provide advice on EU matters, there is an **EU Coordination unit**, mainly at the service of the committee secretariats, but also for the Speaker and Secretary-General of the Riksdag. The unit consists of one head of unit plus three EU advisors and our permanent representative in Brussels. It was formally established a year and half ago.

So what does this EU Coordination unit actually do? Its main task is to **provide support and advice to the secretariats of the committees** on institutional and procedural aspects of EU matters. This means in practice, for example, that it receives and analyses all incoming **EU documents**, including making a preliminary assessment of whether a draft legislative proposal will be subject to a subsidiarity check or not, and deciding which committee should be responsible for this. Furthermore, the unit selects EU documents it deems strategic and suggests to the Speaker that it may be the subject of a statement to the EU from the Riksdag.

In order to **monitor important EU matters proactively**, the unit analyses the Commission work programme and planned proposals. In order to do this, it is in close contact with the committee secretariats, the Government Offices, the Commission and other national parliaments. The unit is the **general contact point both internally and externally**, for example, with the Prime Minister's Office.

Finally, I would like to mention that the unit coordinates the parliament's **inter-parliamentary activities** and prepares notes and speaking points prior to COSAC meetings, EU speakers' conferences and Secretary General meetings.

I have to say a few words on the **permanent representative** in Brussels in this context. In my view, the representative plays a very important role in monitoring activities in Brussels and in other national parliaments. The network of representatives of the national parliaments is increasingly important. Our representative provides the Riksdag and our administration with quick reports, valuable information from the EU institutions as well as other parliaments, and has provided us with an increased knowledge and understanding of the work and views of other national parliaments. The significance of the representatives' network and its information-sharing has been clearly demonstrated regarding reasoned opinions and the importance of coordinated practice in this context. Furthermore, the representative has a central role in explaining and informing others of the work of the

Riksdag and - not least - strengthening cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

A few words on **IPEX** since it is on the agenda of this meeting. The main responsibility for submitting information and updating the IPEX database lies with the relevant committees. This decentralised system means, in practice, that the official responsible for writing a statement or reasoned opinion bears the responsibility of providing information to the IPEX database. The overall coordination and general contact point is, however, the responsibility of the EU Coordination unit. Consequently, the IPEX correspondent is an official from this unit.

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Let me now mention some concrete **best practices** of the Riksdag.

The EU Coordination unit has, in cooperation with and at the request of the committee secretariats, put together a series of **seminars** that aim to increase knowledge of EU affairs for officials. Recent seminars have focused on the EU institutions and the decision-making process, the principle of subsidiarity and scrutiny by parliament, and interaction between the parliamentary committees and the Committee on EU Affairs. The seminars during this coming period will deal with, for example, the coordination and organisation of EU work in the Government Offices, cooperation and interaction between the Government and Parliament and their respective administrations, and the upcoming general election and European Parliament election. In addition, the officials of the unit participate actively as audience and speakers in various internal and external seminars.

Another activity that has been introduced during the past year is the distribution of a **weekly EU newsletter** on upcoming EU-related activities in the Riksdag. This may,

for example, include decisions on subsidiarity checks and reasoned opinions, EU-related debates in the Chamber, deliberations on EU matters in the parliamentary committees and consultations with the Committee on EU Affairs as well as participation in inter-parliamentary activities and meetings. The newsletter is circulated among parliamentary and government officials, the permanent representation offices in Brussels, Swedish Members of the European Parliament and officials at certain authorities.

**EU network groups** have also been set up both within the Riksdag - with representatives of the Secretariat of the Committee on EU Affairs, the EU Coordination unit, the EU Information Centre - and with external actors - such as representatives of the Government Offices, the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies and the representations of the Commission and the European Parliament in Sweden - with the aim of exchanging information and discussing potential areas of cooperation and joint events.

Coordinating EU matters can be quite a task and the EU Coordination unit is a very small unit. A new working method has been introduced so that each member of staff of the EU Coordination unit has been appointed a number of committees for which he or she acts as a **contact person and an EU adviser** vis-à-vis the committee secretariats in order to enable the staff to further deepen their knowledge of the committees' subject matters, thereby providing them with proactive advice and support with enhanced quality. An ambition is to gather information about the committees' foreseen priorities at EU level on a bi-annual basis – which will both serve as guidance for the unit's EU monitoring activities and priorities, as well as information to the Speaker's Office.

Furthermore, the EU Coordination unit is responsible for and participates in **monthly briefings with the Speaker of the Riksdag** on relevant EU topics, which may span

from initiatives on new inter-parliamentary forums, reasoned opinions, proposals regarding inter-parliamentary cooperation, priorities of the incoming presidency etc.

Together with the Secretariat of the Committee on the Constitution, the EU Coordination unit devotes a considerable amount of time to assessing and following up matters relating to the **subsidiarity check**, such as studying how the principle has been applied by the committees, recent overall practice in the Riksdag, other national parliaments and the Commission, as well as producing statistics.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the invaluable work of the representatives. Our representatives are doing an excellent job in networking and exchanging information with other national parliaments, and in their monitoring of and contacts with the European Parliament. It is, however, our ambition to build on and further improve the channels of **communication- and information-sharing with other institutions** such as the Commission.

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These were a couple of examples of Sweden's best practices of EU Coordination. There is always room for further improvement and we strive to continuously improve and strengthen our working methods. I am curious to hear about other parliaments' views and forms of coordination of EU Affairs. And I welcome any questions and remarks or reflections on this subject.

**Thank you for your attention!**