

## Speech Senator Andries Gryffroy (Belgium)

General Debate *'Strengthening international law: Parliamentary roles and mechanisms, and the contributions of regional cooperation'* - 141st IPU Assembly (Belgrade – 13-17 October 2019)

Dear colleagues,

Multilateral cooperation is necessary. More than ever. International public goods are under the pressure of the scale, the complexity and the speed of global challenges. This requires a coordinated approach and agreements. Multilateral solidarity enables us to strive for the interests of the global community but a good coordination between national and international objectives has to be ensured in order to make this cooperation efficient.

Gandhi has once formulated this as follows: *'To be an internationalist, one has first to be a nationalist.'* And he was right. Way too much superficial analyses oppose nationalism and internationalism while the nation state is a condition for real international cooperation and internationalism has to be in line with the national approach. International responsibility is only possible if there is a basic level at which the democratic decision-making process and thus the solidarity can be organised.

If we want to conserve and strengthen the public support for multilateral actions, subsidiarity has to be the guiding principle. It is only when scale advantages effectively lead to better results and when the same results can't be achieved at a level closer to the citizen that a higher decision level can be justified.

Belgium is quite a particular case in this regard. Since the principle *'In foro interno, in foro externo'* has been laid down in the Belgian Constitution in 1993, the Regions and the Communities have autonomous powers for their foreign policies. Regional decrees are at the same level as federal laws and the federated states have the same autonomous power to conclude treaties which have to be discussed and ratified by their own parliaments. The parliaments of the Regions and the Communities are national parliaments, certainly regarding their own powers. This arrangement, which is unique, is of course extended to the actions at international fora.

In this way, Belgium and its regions and communities now have a large number of possibilities at their disposal to actively influence the international agenda. This means that multilateral cooperation is being organised through a limited number of effective and efficient multilateral organisations which strive to achieve the policy priorities of these organisations as well as those of the three regions.

A constructive but also a critical approach of this multilateral cooperation is necessary. Just like any other policy levels, multilateral organisations have to be evaluated permanently, based on their return on investment. Do they manage to realize the international as well as the different national objectives, preferably with a reinforcing effect?

On a side note, I would like to refer to the increasing role of the European Union at the multilateral stage. This is an undeniable evolution, certainly since the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon. For the European countries and the federated states, the EU is an important lever for the multilateral action that shouldn't be underestimated. The EU concludes cooperation agreements with different multilateral organisations or it can even be a party to a treaty and it is increasingly acting for its member states on international fora. This means that an adequate representation during the

European decision-making as well as at coordination fora of the EU within the multilateral institutions is crucial.

International policy has a big impact on our daily life and it is still increasing. Multilateral organisations are issuing treaties, directives and recommendations that the member states, but also the regional and the local levels of government have to execute and apply. Multilateral institutions also often gather data and publish reports and benchmarks to situate their members in international comparisons. By doing so, they indirectly put pressure on the decision-making process of higher and lower levels of government. It is clear that we shouldn't settle for being passive observers. On the contrary, we have to participate actively in these decision processes.

The difficult challenge for lower government levels consists in having an impact on the decision-making process in this multilateral context, in order to express their needs or their specific concerns and to put them into context. This also means that they can hit the brakes if necessary. The multilateral level faces the same challenge itself. If multilateral institutions and organisations want to succeed in their missions, the procedural obstacles in this field have to be removed in order to develop a decision-making process which enables us to reconcile efficiency, democracy and the interest of the various levels of government.

Thank you for your attention.