

'Codecision — a success story!' from Tribune pour l'Europe (November 1996)

Caption: The Presidents of the Parliament and the Council signed the first codecision act on 23 March 1994; the European Parliament subsequently became a co-legislator.

Source: Tribune pour l'Europe. Informations du Parlement européen. Novembre 1996, n° 11. [s.l.]. ISSN 0255 - 8815. "La codécision, ça marche !", p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

Codecision — a success story!

Since the first codecision act was signed on 23 March 1994 by the Presidents of Parliament and of the Council, it has had a considerable effect in improving the legislative process. Parliament has now become a genuine joint legislator in important matters such as the free movement of workers, the right of establishment, freedom to provide services, the approximation of laws with a view to the completion of the internal market, education, culture, health, consumer protection, trans-European networks, research and the environment.

Whilst the conciliation procedure is required for some texts because there are differences of views between the two institutions, others are approved after the Council has established its common position, agreement being reached at this stage of the procedure. By 8 November 1996, 48 of the 85 codecision procedures completed had not required the convening of the Conciliation Committee. Meetings of that Committee have been chaired on Parliament's behalf by Mrs Nicole Fontaine (PPE, F), Mr Renzo Imbeni (PSE, I) or Mr Josep Verde i Aldea (PSE, E), and whilst they have often given rise to tough negotiations between the two joint legislators, they have enabled Parliament to add a further 'European' dimension to many texts, making them more ambitious and more beneficial to the citizens of the Union.

To take just a few examples:

In the matter of multiple ownership of property (time-shares) Parliament has secured better protection for consumers' rights: the purchaser now has a ten-day cooling-off period following signature of the contract during which he may withdraw from it.

There are now better safeguards for consumers when credit institutions become insolvent. Following tough negotiations, the amount of guaranteed compensation payable to depositors in the event of deposits not being available has been raised from ECU 15 000 to ECU 20 000 per depositor.

In the fight against cancer, Parliament has ensured that the action programme includes scope for developing additional health education measures aimed at specific groups, particularly children, promoting publicity campaigns to encourage healthy lifestyles, a diet rich in fruit and vegetables and consumer councils, and taking vigorous action to counter the aggressive advertising of tobacco products targeted at young people.

Notwithstanding initial reluctance on the Council's part, Parliament has persuaded it of the need for a more open approach to the question of measures to combat drug addiction.

The 1996–2000 programme adopted jointly by the two institutions regards drug addiction as a 'health problem' to be dealt with in social welfare terms. The text lays down its priorities as the prevention of drug addiction and 'rehabilitation' of addicts. Measures will target all types of drugs in all situations, especially in the prison environment. In order to reach certain risk groups, the programme will emphasise action 'at grass-roots level' and 'work on the street'.

The Council has also acknowledged the role played by families and those in the immediate circle of addicts who will benefit from experience gleaned during the programme and the exchanges of information resulting from it.

As regards the programmes concerned with young people and education, Parliament secured a sizeable increase in the funds earmarked for two programmes: ECU 850 million for 'Socrates' (the Council had initially proposed 760 million) and 126 million for 'Youth for Europe' (Council proposal 105 million).

Over and above the budget, the Council also agreed to a number of other requests made by Parliament, including easier access to programmes for those most disadvantaged in society as a means of combating social exclusion. Thus, in the case of the 'Youth for Europe' programme, the Council acknowledged the importance of measures aimed at young people of immigrant parentage which would put them in touch with their culture of origin but not stand in the way of the objective of integration.

For disabled people, in the directive on the approximation of laws relating to lifts, Parliament pushed through an amendment guaranteeing access to lifts for the disabled. Prior to that, legislation on an industrial product had never included any requirement of this kind for disabled people.

At its sitting of 14 November, Parliament called for the codecision procedure to be extended to cover all legislative acts. The procedure should also cover citizenship, competition, legislative acts concerning the right of individuals (visas), economic and monetary union, the trans-European networks, industry, research, the granting of powers of the Court of First Instance, measures to combat fraud and the Euratom Treaty.