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## **EUROGROUP CHIEF PLEDGE ON TRANSPARENCY AFTER MEETING MPS**

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Portuguese finance minister and head of the Eurogroup Mario Centeno has said he will make the Eurogroup more transparent, and that he will respond to transparency concerns raised by Dutch MPs before the end of the year.

Three Dutch MPs presented Centeno with a set of recommendations on Monday (19 February), aimed at making lawmaking by the Council of the EU – where national governments meet – less opaque.

The recommendations were given on behalf of 26 national parliaments from twenty EU countries.

"Naturally a letter that has the support of 26 European parliaments deserves our attention – this is why I received the Dutch delegation and I've kept the document," said Centeno.

"I will analyse it and we will respond later this year," he added.

Among the recommendations is a formalisation of the Eurogroup, where the eurozone's finance ministers meet. It is a powerful body, but lacks an institutional framework.

"The Eurogroup is an informal body that discusses issues related to the euro. Our goal is to coordinate policies and ensure a smooth functioning of the euro," said Centeno.

"This informality must not prevent the Eurogroup from being more transparent and accountable," he added.

Centeno noted, via his spokesman, that all finance ministers are accountable to their national parliaments, and that Eurogroup president Centeno meets with members of the European Parliament.

"Additionally, the Eurogroup has taken two years ago a transparency initiative where it committed to publish key documents, such as agenda, conclusions and some programme-country documents," he added.

"This has improved the transparency of our discussions. We will continue on this path," said the Portuguese, who took over the Eurogroup presidency from Dutchman Jeroen Dijsselbloem less than six weeks ago.

## **No immediate yes or no**

Centre-right Dutch MP Pieter Omtzigt was one of the three who met with Centeno.

"We thought it was nice of him to receive us," Omtzigt told this website in an interview in Brussels.

He said the MPs asked Centeno to meet with them in a few months time to discuss their recommendations, which also include making council documents public by default □ instead of confidential by default, the current practice.

"I understand that he did not immediately say yes or no [to the proposals]," said Omtzigt.

"I think in a couple of months that meeting will take place. And then I expect some answers from him," said the Dutch MP.

He noted that it was important to be able to scrutinise the Eurogroup, in particular now that there are discussions about setting up a European Monetary Fund.

But to Omtzigt, the formalisation of the Eurogroup was more a means than an end.

"You can formalise the Eurogroup through treaty change," he said.

"To me it is more important that the practice changes, rather than that I am pleading for a treaty change," he said, adding that he knew very well how difficult such a change can be, since it needs agreement by unanimity as well as a difficult ratification process.

Omtzigt noted that even as informal body, the Eurogroup could also take up transparency rules and access to documents provisions in its internal statute.

The MP spoke to EUobserver in the European Parliament, after meeting with MEPs.

"The [European] parliament can ask questions to the president of the council. We can't do that," he said about members of national parliaments.

"They could ask the council president if this issue will be put on the agenda. A very simple question – but very relevant."

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