

I would like to start by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to reflect over what has happened since at least some of us met in Stockholm one and a half year ago. The aim of the conference was to maintain the continuous exchange of information amongst parliamentarians on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) issues with the aim of using ICT to strengthen the importance of Parliamentarians and Parliaments. Parliamentarians throughout Europe recognise that there is a growing demand for exchange on ICT issues themselves. These issues influence the everyday work of parliamentarians, the development towards eDemocracy and ICT as such.

As you surely remember we decided focus on four major themes:

1. eDemocracy
2. The Mobile Parliamentarian
3. eCommunications an Information/ Knowledge Management
4. ICT Policy

For the ones of you that did not participate in Stockholm I will give you a short summary.

1. eDemocracy. The participants of the Conference recognised that eDemocracy is a rising priority on the political agenda. It can be observed that parliamentarian's focus in the discussion of eDemocracy is moving towards complex participation schemes rather than concentrating on single aspects like eVoting. It was recognised that eDemocracy must be considered as a very complex process that involves technical, social and political questions.

2. The Mobile Parliamentarian. The concept of the Mobile Parliamentarian remains in the focus of the Conference. Against a background of principal technical feasibility and of growing expectations for the availability of parliamentarians, the necessity of finding mobile working solutions is increasing. Nowadays we parliamentarians are always expected to be

easily contacted by e-mails and we are supposed to use the internet so that we can work not only from our office, but from wherever we may be in the world. But I think we all experience the problems with spam and mass mailing. Even though our Parliaments are using fire walls and we have both private and public e-mail addresses it seems to be a constant struggle against non-democratic forces.

3. eCommunications and Information/Knowledge Management. As regards the inbound communication of Parliamentarians, the conference in Stockholm encouraged its participants to present and discuss the Dutch solution in the respective Parliaments. Hopefully we can discuss the results from the different countries this time. However, more good and best practice cases have to be identified, investigated and presented to this conference. As concerns individual web sites as one of the major outbound communication channels of Parliamentarians, actual strategies and applications were investigated. In general, the Stockholm conference recognised a need to improve web site strategies of Parliamentarians. The conference recommended developing guidelines and minimum standards with regard to quality and usability of Parliamentarian's web sites.

For Information/Knowledge Management, two models of parliamentary practise were presented. The conference appreciated the existence of a portfolio of different solutions in the different member states in order to maximise the experiences with different approaches. However, the conference recommended a continuous observation and documentation of experiences gained in order to establish knowledge based on long-time investigations.

4. ICT Policy. At the conference, the Swedish IT Policy Strategy "Towards an Information Society for All" was presented. As a major finding it was stated that Parliaments plan an

important role in following up the implementation of ICT strategies and taking up new and upcoming eServices.

In Sweden we have begun to work with the next step towards the Information Society. The Parliament has voted for a new strategy that's called "From an ICT policy for the society towards a policy for the ICT society". This strategy focuses on more eService for the citizens and ICT support in the health sector, for example through a national patient overview and by using eCommunication for sending and receiving information between different levels in the national health care. This is an important improvement for the patients who will get a better and quicker treatment. But we also have to remember the risk of creating a broader social gap between who has the possibility to use a computer and who don't. It's important that everybody is given the same benefits that eCommunication will bring to us. Elderly who are not comfortable to use this new technology or people who just cannot afford a computer must not be left behind. One of the initiatives is to educate people with no natural contact with computers and internet using public information channels like television, radio and public study groups. I also would like to mention what the Swedish National Post and Telecom Agency has done for disabled people. We call it "the pocket translator" and it is a service through the cellular phone that calls up a central with translators that translates the spoken language into sign-language.

I can also see that there are other important matters to discuss and to prepare for in order to achieve a world class administration, using the possibilities that the technology gives us. Like the possibilities of all citizens to participate in democratic and governance processes. To promote an inclusive information society we must pay attention not only to equal access to ICTs, the design of public services online, digital literacy and the geographic and social

digital divide, but also prioritize the creation of new opportunities and mechanisms for citizen participation in government and parliamentary policy and decision-making processes. This also means that public administration reform must include the necessary internal reform to make it ready to be able to cope with and respond to inclusive citizen-centred and democratic services.

An efficient and effective government includes enhancing democracy and transparency. The ICT-inspired public sector reform and transformation which is taking place, should apply to democracy and transparency. Transformation in public administrations should include innovation in the area of transparency, to allow for better scrutiny by both citizens and parliament. Better government also means better scrutiny of government by the elected assemblies, an area where ICTs still have an underdeveloped role.

Parliaments are a key actor in the e-governance sector. As a key actor in the governance sphere, Parliaments need to be included in the evolution of the e-government sector, particularly where they can benefit as public administrations in delivering better services to citizens. This includes sharing resources, knowledge, best practices, standards, technologies and supporting cooperation amongst Parliaments in particular, and public administrations in general.

So, what are the challenges we are put in front of right now? I think it's to create trust in ICT as an instrument for people in their daily life. To expand the high speed broadband even in the countryside. To prevent the enlargement of a social gap between ICT-users and non ICT-users. And find ways to prevent the problems and the interferences that non democratic forces bring to our political work.

