

Ninth European Conference of Members of Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies (EPRI Conference), Lisbon, 19/20 March 2007

Summary

On 19- 20 March, the Ninth European Conference of Members of Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies (EPRI Conference) took place at the Portuguese Parliament in Lisbon.

Following the invitation of the President of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic, Mr. Jaime Gama, 105 participants, amongst them 59 delegates from the parliamentary assemblies of 20 EU member states, met in Lisbon for the Ninth European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies.

The subject of the conference “Simplifying the complex – Creating the space for complex political topics on the web” marks one of the major challenges that parliamentarians and parliamentary organisation have to deal with.

Parliaments and parliamentarians increasingly develop and produce formats and content for today’s Web-based information and communication services and media. It is generally assumed – yet not proven – that a strong presence and an active interaction in these web-based media space is essential for maintaining citizen’s participation in parliamentary decision making at a satisfactory level.

Parliamentarians need to develop and promote means and tools that provide them with an interface with their constituency which has to be at the same time broad in scope, easy to manage, and filigree in terms of content presentation and discussion. They have to cope with the fast development of technologies and formats (IPTV, Web 2.0, “viral” content, etc.).

The conference addressed the following questions:

- How will 21st century citizens perceive complex content through the various web based formats, and how do they use new web services to discuss this content?
- What options do elected representatives have of using advanced web services and technologies in order to get closer to their constituency?
- What exactly is clientele that can be reached using those web services? What are visitors of Parliamentarian web services expecting? Is there that certain Web-skilled groups gather more attention than other? Good web services certainly enhance transparency of democratic decision making, but do they also enhance democratic participation?

It aimed at mapping experiences of parliaments and their members onto the findings of those who analyse, how 21st century citizens perceive complex content through the various web-based formats. Therefore the conference brought together members of parliaments and experts.

Consequently, the conference took up results of the former EPRI conferences as well as intermediary actions and initiatives of the EPRI community of Parliamentarians like workshops and studies that had been worked the past year.



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Experiences that MPs have made with some of their ambitious Web projects as well as those from other projects that transport complex political content were presented and discussed. That way the conference gave attendees an impression of what impact, reaction and sustainability they can expect when using today's web formats to bring their messages to their constituency and trigger discussions and citizen participation.

The participating parliamentarians expressed their interest to know whether the improvement of web services (more attractive, easy-to-use, elements of infotainment, transparent, interactive) could lead to an increased democratic participation. They suggested that the next conference focus on the "democratic payoff" of web activities, including whether these could help to increase voter participation.

The participants of the conference appreciated the invitation of the Irish Parliament, the Houses of the Oireachtas, for the Tenth EPRI Conference of Members of Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies 2008 in Dublin.