

Final Declaration

On 27-28 October, the Seventh European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies (EPRI Conference) took place at the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdagen - in Stockholm.

Following the invitation of the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, Dr. Björn von Sydow, 108 participants, amongst them 78 delegates from the parliamentary assemblies of 22 EU member states, met in Stockholm for the seventh European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies.

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 that can be supported by ICT as well as 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.

Main issues raised during the conference

The discussion focused on four major themes:

- eDemocracy
- The Mobile Parliamentarian
- eCommunications and Information / Knowledge Management
- ICT Policy

e Democracy

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.

As an example the e-legislation project undertaken in the Bundestag was presented, that aims at providing the parliament with an electronic workflow and addresses a number of technical and organisational problems.

The Conference wishes to continue to explore the technical, social and political aspects of eDemocracy, in particular the areas of representation, consultation, participation, electioneering, and the relationship between voters, MPs, Parties and Parliaments.

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.

The subsequent convergence of communication and information technologies raises complex questions and thus the need for a consistent Mobile Working Strategy for Parliamentarians.

Following the useful demonstration of technology and specifically of mobile devices and strategies employed by the Swedish Parliament, future conferences could provide possibilities

for demonstrations by more parliaments or MPs on their technologies accompanying the main conference debate. This would enable the debate to focus on reflections and analysis of the strategies and implementations of these technologies.

eCommunications and Information / Knowledge Management

In general the participants of the conferences wish to put the daily working requirements of Parliamentarians in the centre of the discussion of the EPRI conference. It is suggested to organise the next conference in a way that allows a focused and parliamentarians-driven discussion in smaller working groups.

The conference discussed four sub-themes connected to this subject.

As regards the inbound communication of Parliamentarians, the discussion was focused at spam and mass mailing problems raised in the Berlin Conference already. A solution that was implemented in the Dutch Parliament was presented and discussed. The conference encourages its participants to present and discuss that solution in the respective parliaments. However, more good and best practice cases shall be identified, investigated and presented to the conference.

As concerns individual web sites as one of the major outbound communication channels of Parliamentarians, actual strategies and applications were investigated. A number of pitfalls and undesired negative impacts on the users of the web sites were identified and presented. In general, the conference recognised a need to improve web site strategies of Parliamentarians. The conference recommends developing guidelines and minimum standards with regard to quality and usability of Parliamentarian's web sites.

For information / knowledge management, two models of parliamentary practice were presented. The conference appreciates 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 recommends a continuous observation and documentation of experiences gained in order to establish knowledge based on long-time investigations.

The conference raised the discussion of information exchange between National EU Parliaments. As a concrete initiative, IPEX, the InterParliamentary EU Information Exchange was presented. It aims at providing information on parliamentary work throughout nearly all National Parliaments of Europe. It is the challenge of that project to bring together decentralised responsibility in the respective parliaments with centralised information provision.

The conference recommends to support and further observe the activities of IPEX and to link the EPRI web site with the IPEX offerings.

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 play an important role in following up the implementation of ICT strategies and taking up new and upcoming eServices. Examples are the discussion of Opens Standards initiated at the Berlin Conference 2003 or the take up of new technologies like Voice over IP by the public sector.

The conference appreciates the role of parliamentarians in shaping Information Society Strategies at regional and national level as well as in actively participating and influencing the Information Society discussion on the European Level. Further good and best practice examples shall be identified and presented in order to gain maximum experiences from regional and national approaches.

Conclusions and Follow-up

The participants of the conference wish that the next conference increases the focus on the daily working requirements of Parliamentarians. Therefore participants of the conference suggest that the issues raised during the conference should be considered in respective virtual working groups.

Three working groups on

- WG1: eDemocracy
- WG2: ICT for Parliamentarians
- WG3: ICT / IST Policy

were initiated at the conference. These virtual working groups shall be supported by the EPRI co-operation and dissemination platform. These working groups shall continuously follow-up the identified action lines and develop activities leading to concrete results to be presented at the next EPRI conference.

As a first concrete step the conference suggests to evaluate a synopsis of working procedures and the respective IT support in the different parliaments. Furthermore, contributions from outside the European Union, namely from the United States and from Asia are appreciated.

The EPRI Conference appreciates that the Hungarian Delegates invited the conference to jointly investigate and prepare the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest as the potential next conference venue.