
Summary
**7th European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on
Information and Communication Technologies (EPRI), 27 and 28
October 2004 in Stockholm**

Wednesday 27 October 2004- Morning Session

Björn von Sydow (Speaker of the Swedish Parliament) welcomes the delegates and states the importance of the conference in terms of how modern technology can help to bridge the gap between voter and politicians. Especially in times of decreasing participation in elections and fewer citizens that are willing to undertake voluntary political appointments, Information Technology can open new roads by arousing political interest especially among the younger generation. Further, he points out that it has to be kept in mind, that e-democracy is always linked to the ordinary democratic process. In his speech he also refers to three main categories of IT democracy "rapid democracy", "strong democracy" and "distant democracy". While "rapid democracy" focuses on direct participation by citizens in decision-making, "strong democracy" stresses political dialogue as a tool. The last category "distant democracy" the "election" itself is seen as being more important than the "participation" of the citizens. Nevertheless, all three categories use Information Technologies either as a means of participating in direct democracy, creating areas for public debate or participating by commenting upon public services. According to Mr. von Sydow in Sweden Information Technology has primarily been used to supply services along the lines of "distant democracy". Nevertheless, within the last few years, he states, a considerable progress in this field has been made.

He further emphasizes that parliamentarians have to face the urgent need for their institutions to adapt to the new reality that knowledge intensive society has brought about. He also sees a challenge for the Parliaments, in order to reach out to the citizens and to increase transparency, to adjust parliamentary procedures to the conditions of the media without disregarding the need for thorough deliberations. Besides this, he is aware of action groups and political movements, which concentrate on one or two issues and that they demand quick results. Thus, he underlines the necessity of a better communication, with them, in terms of what parliamentarians are doing, what time frames they are working within and what considerations they have to take. Thereby he states, that efficiency is not only about speed.

He re-emphasised again the need of Parliaments to use the opportunities, which IT offers. He points out the struggle, Parliaments have to face everyday in competing with newspapers, radio stations and television channels in providing opportunities for the citizens to make their voices heard. At this point the Internet provides the opportunity to make the decision and committee reports of the Parliaments immediately available. In the following he states, that although the amount of e-mails often increase the burden for the individual politician increases as well. In this respect the question should not focus on how to solve this problem, moreover, it should concentrate how to understand better the thoughts behind those messages.

In his opening speech he is also convinced that in future "e-democracy" will increase in the sense that more and more activities on the internet will be connected to the democratic processes. Nevertheless, there should be realistic expectations when it comes to e-voting, e-consultations and e-elections.

Before wishing a productive meeting and expressing the desire that the conference should resound appropriately in national and international future work, Mr. Von Sydow closes his opening speech with the statement: "Cyberspace democracy will come-but maybe not so fast"

(for more information please [click here](#))

Claes Roxbergh (Chairman of the Committee on Transport and Communications) also states a warm welcome to all participants of the 7th EPRI conference in Stockholm. After pointing out some general information, he focuses on the reasons why Sweden decided to organise the 7th European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on ITC, Information and Communication Technology. Thus, in his speech he states that IT is of profound importance for our society and that IT development is mainly based on the market being the main actor and driving force. In these terms the public sector has important functions as a regulator and a procurer and it has to be requested at what level, measures to promote ITC should be formulated and implemented-at local, regional, national or international level.

In the following Mr. Roxbergh also points out his position on this and describes in depth why the Swedish Parliament decided to organise the 7th EPRI conference. His elucidations are based on the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, which aims at promoting development towards an Information Society for all. In general his main postulation is the need of international cooperation in order to work towards these goals. (1) International cooperation enables to share experiences, pool research and development. (2) Additionally, it is necessary to look beyond ones own borders to promote ITC in the most efficient way. (3) Also in a more and more global society, IT can expand inter-parliamentary relationships and cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels and thus enhancing parliamentary democracy and diplomacy.

As a closing point he refers to the need of a closer partnership between Parliaments in Europe of which the 7th conference is one important step in this direction.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Dr. Susanne Kastner (Vice President of the German Bundestag)
Summary of the previous conference

Prof. Ann Macintosh's (Professor of E- Governance) contribution was dealing with the political challenge of e-Democracy. She introduced a research group at the International Teledemocracy Centre, which works on developing e-democracy tools. Aim of these tools is to motivate and to engage people in democratic debates and to help government and parliaments to respond more effectively. In this regard the fragile nature of democracy and the low turnout in Europe forms the intention of the investigations. As an outstanding example, Ms. Macintosh was referring to a statistic which found out that in the UK, Spain and Portugal less than 42% of the respondents had discussed politics with friends. Thus, in connection with the advances in technology i.e. interactive digital TV, such developments should be used to increase and strengthen the citizen engagement in policy- making processes. By not adopting this technology into e-democracy there is a risk that political processes are seen to be remote from the citizens point of view. Additionally, the benefits of e-engagement are obvious. Providing relevant information up to reaching a wider audience are only a few benefits of involving new technology in the policy- making process.

Further, Mrs. Macintosh introduced an example how parliamentary debates are documented in the Scottish Parliament. Thereby she pointed out the disadvantages of an official report, which contains a lot of information and covers all the proceedings in the Scottish Parliament. In order not to get lost in the flood of information Mrs. Macintosh presented a graphical way to view a "debate". Thus, it is possible to create valid representations of political debates. On this note, maps enhance the user's comprehension of issues and allow him to get an overview about their density. Due to the network and the visualising of large amounts of information, the reader gets support in understanding the complexity.

In general she argues that technologies should be used for future effective dialogues. Nevertheless, those integrated technologies have to be conform with the expected result. However, the emerging effective dialogues will lead to a broader and deeper democratic interaction. Furthermore, it allows the decision-making to be more open and transparent and to strengthen representative democracy.

(for more information please [click here](#))

The following discussion among the participants showed that interactive TV, in order to televise parliamentary debates, is widely distributed in Europe. Nevertheless, this service is differently developed in the countries. The delegation i.e. from GB reported that besides televising political debates, governmental services are additionally available. Also the main debates are televised live. The delegation from Portugal reported that, since 1997 debates from their Parliament are televised via cable TV. Although the experiences are positive there is no articulation between Web and TV and the participation rate is relatively low. At this stage Mrs. Mactintosh stated that there is a digital divide and in order to counteract this, especially the exchange of experiences is necessary. She further claimed that individual technology should be used individually and that a cost-benefit equitation is useful in order to adopt specific approaches in terms of eDemocracy.

Another topic in the debate was, as mentioned in the 6th EPRI conference, the problem of Spam and how to cope with it. Especially delegates from the host country saw a serious threat for eDemocracy and thus they were interested in finding solutions about how to cope with this problem and thus they kept in mind the importance of this problem.

The presentation by **Mr. Lennart Blecher** (Innovator & Computer Integrator, Swedish Parliament) on "The mobile MP" started with the question "What info does a MP want mobile?" During his presentation he showed various ways of being online during the day. In this respect he was giving an overview about the current situation in the Swedish Parliament. All together there are 89 users of smart-phones in the Swedish Parliament and all 349 MPs have online access, which is used daily. He further explained that in terms of implementing new techniques, there are possibilities of learning to handle these. Thus the acceptance of these new techniques and their implementation is constructed in a more user friendly manner.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Mr. André van der Meer's (Member of the Dutch Parliament) contribution about e-mail management for Members of Parliament is built around the final declaration of the EPRI conference 2003 in Berlin where it is stated:

"Parliaments should support their members when it comes to answering the huge amounts of e-mails that they receive daily

- *by eliminating unwelcome messages through filters, additional e-mail addresses etc.*
- *by structuring and selecting the incoming messages*

The parliaments are invited to provide their members with additional means keeping in mind that the sender of an e-mail expects an immediate and personal answer by his/her representative.

The conference should keep track of means and ways that would help cope with the increasing number of Spam mails, by information technologies as well as by legislation."

The problem of e-mail overload is well known in the Netherlands. Thus, in 2003 the Presidium of the House requested a solution for the members in order to divide their mail into two categories: public and confidential. That would help them to provide more specific answers. To help Members on this point, the Dutch Parliament has implemented the following solutions:

- an e-mail management system that reads and analyses the contents of e-mails from selected e-mail boxes and gives suggestions to answer those mails. The suggestions come from a knowledge base maintained by a specific department or the political party of the MP in question. Every user group can decide on whether or not an individual mailbox should be attached to the email management system. Our experience up till now is that it saves time;
- all MP's are given a secret email address for their personal electronic communication. Their public e- mail account remains and will be attached to the email management system.
- MP's also get a folder in their mailbox for parliamentary documents only. This makes it possible for them to select quickly all relevant information on the parliamentary process
- Filtering of SPAM is organized on several levels, by means of a firewall (Exchange server) and the e- mail management system. Spam is reduced by 90%.
- An active form of Frequently Asked Questions was put into use to reduce the number of mails and telephone calls.

All these measures form an integrated solution, which the Dutch Parliament is planning to refine in the coming months. The strength of this solution is, that every part of the organisation can implement it as far as they want to themselves. The solution is realised by a project team with members from political groups and official departments.

The presentation of Mr. Van der Meer caused interest among the participants. Therefore several details concerning the project were requested. Among others, the participants were interested in who is answering the e-mails and how many MPs of the Dutch Parliament are involved in this system. According to Mr. Van der Meer currently seven factions and 85% of the MPs are involved in the system. In respect to the proposed answers by the system there is currently no evaluation existing. Nevertheless a positive effect is recognisable.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Wednesday 27 October 2004- Afternoon Session

The afternoon session started with a presentation by **Dr. Thomas Zittel** (PhD in Political Science) with the title "MPs and the Internet-between the rock of technology and the hard place of politics?" First, he was outlining the general trend of decreasing voter turnout in advanced industrial democracies, with the exception of Sweden. Thus, he stated that although the number of democracies has continually increased since 1900, the general trend is the increasing disinterest in participating in the democratic process. This general trend can be seen by decreasing party membership within the European countries. He also showed using the example of Sweden that confidence towards the parliament and thus towards politics has decreased dramatically. In terms of eDemocracy, as a way to involve citizens more strongly in the democratic process, he requested that MPs use the Internet as a way to communicate with their voters. In this respect he was pointing out some factors, which can foster this communication, but at the same time what the obstacles are. In order to get an overview of how far MPs use the Internet to communicate, he introduced a comparative study carried out in the German Bundestag, Swedish Riksdag and the US House of Representatives. The data, which was used for the analysis, is based upon content analysis of personal websites, explanatory interviews with MPs and staff as well as standardized in-depth interviews with MPs. In his analysis he found out, that those who were involved in the research can be categorized as erratic users of the Internet. This means, they attempt to use the Internet without any visible meaningful purpose. He further pointed out the significance of these results. Thereby, he saw negative effects on the attitudes and behaviour of citizens and indicators for a complex set of conflict incentives. In the following he showed by using some examples the attitudes of the MPs towards the Internet and also influenced by the party unity. In his presentation, Dr. Zittel distinguished between:

- Internet as a means to become a more effective legislator
- Internet as a means to claim credit for legislative Achievements
- Internet as a means to be responsive to the demands of various constituents
- Party unity as a constraint to digitalized direct communication
- The lack of resources as a constraint to digitalized direct communication

At the end of his presentation he also introduced the in his opinion, three options for solving the problem of the erratic use of the Internet:

- Focus on marginal uses of the Internet
- Adopt centralized solutions
- Change the basic structure of political representation

(for more information please [click here](#))

Dr. Uwe Küster' s (Member of the German Parliament) presentation dealt with eLegislation in the German Parliament – problems and solutions. Due to the fact that general mechanics have been replaced by electronics, also the workflow has to be reworked. Whereas the media types are often changed in the process of law making, the process of bill making itself has not changed for the last 150 years. Also the attitudes towards the use of Internet and e-mail have changed within the last years. Two years ago a text to introduce a bill had been delivered as a paper version as well as via e-mail and many people doubted that this would work. Nowadays, everybody feels comfortable with this possibility. In the following Mr. Küster introduced further steps towards eLegislation such as:

- Work order of committee for ICT to furnish an advisory opinion
- Discussion of the results
- Recommendation to proceed
- Adoption of by-laws
- Testing

Also pending problems and possible solution for solving them were presented in his presentation. According to Mr. Küster there are current problems in terms of signatures, delivery and document standards.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Lars Ilshammer (University of Örebro, Sweden) opened the round table discussion on the afternoon session of the 7th EPRI conference. Five parliamentarians were invited to join the round table:

- Ene Ergma (Member of the Estonian Parliament)
- Lothar Binding (Member of the German Bundestag)
- Edmund Wittbrodt (Member of the Polish Parliament)
- Richard Allan (Member of the British Parliament)
- Monica Green (Member of the Swedish Parliament)

How is ICT affecting the traditional representative democracy? Is there a tendency that increased use of ICT in parliaments boosts a new, faster or more direct form of democracy?

Mr. Ergma talked about the experiences, which have been made in the Estonian Parliament. Thus, he stated that there is good direct communication between citizens and representatives, although there might be an old-fashioned use of Internet and E-mail. In this respect he admit that there is a need to distinguish between politicians and citizens.

Mr. Binding referred to the presentation by Ann Macintosh and agreed with her statement that IT changes social communication. He further stated that IT does not always allow the transport of didactic and pedagogic preparations.

Mr. Wittbrodt explained that in Poland, all possibilities to communicate with the citizens are used. At this stage he confirmed, that not only the way of communication is important, but also the willingness to use those methods is an essential factor. As an example he reported from the Polish Parliament and that only some people own or use their own e-mail address.

Richard Allan explained that he is using the whole bandwidth of IT. Especially from the professional point of view, IT is somehow natural i.e. in the office everything is managed technically. Nevertheless, in everyday life social communication is at least of the same importance.

Monica Green also stated, that she is using IT the whole day through. Also her homepage is one step towards public-friendliness and strengthens i.e. the relationship between representatives and voters. She further reported on the fact, that each school in Sweden is online with its own website. Thus, different subjects as well as material are also available via Internet. As a matter of fact 80% of the Swedish population have their own computer and thus the coverage is really high. Due to these facts Ms. Green stated that Sweden is moving towards an IT society.

Can we see an emerging digital divide in parliaments between those members who are frequently on the net, feel confident on the net etc. and those who are not yet hooked up?

How do parliamentarians deal with the growing tension between the need to answer e-mail, manage their web sites, be present on the net etc. and the ambition to communicate with people through traditional channels and meet their voters in real life?

Ene Ergma reported that all representatives of the Estonian Parliament use Internet and thus there is no digital divide. Also the majority of the Estonian population uses Internet in their everyday life, it is seen as a part of life. Nevertheless, there is a need to establish possibilities for using IT. He further stated, that although there is a need to establish those possibilities and thus to use virtual communication, social interaction cannot be replaced.

Mr. Binding explained that he has a personal relationship to his voters and thus, the social interaction is of high importance. In this respect, he reported that he is not distinguishing between different target audiences, further he covers a broad spectrum. He further pointed out obstacles of using e-mail. Therefore, it is for example not possible to communicate on an individual basis. Especially in terms of Spam mails there is a problem in distinguishing those from regular e-mails. Therefore, he confirmed the need of criteria through which it is possible to sort out Spam without touching serious e-mails. In this respect he requested, who is actually expecting e-mails to be answered? Now, that almost everybody is reachable via e-mail the expectations attitudes for an answer are relatively high.

Mr. Wittbrodt reported that his country is currently in transition. Differences in IT infrastructure still exist and thus the possibility to access the Internet is not always given. Additionally, there is still a need for special programmes to inform citizens about IT and its possibilities. In the future he does not see any problem, because the younger generation knows how to use IT, but the current older generation causes problems. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that democracy is a process between the people and thus also the social interaction is essential and necessary. In his opinion it is possible to increase efficiency, but quality should not suffer from that. Due to these facts he agrees with the other participants of the round table, that Internet should be treated as an instrument.

Mr. Allan represented the opinion that the time aspect is the biggest problem to deal with. The expectations of the citizens might be sometimes too high, thus it is perceived as negative if an MP does not answer a request immediately. On the other hand, he says that of course there are also MPs who do not submit to this pressure. In this respect there is a discrepancy between the single representatives. On the one hand those who feel the pressure and those who do not.

Ms. Green again confirmed the importance that representatives are the reflected image of the citizens and thus some are interested in IT and others are not. It is up to everybody and thus individually which kind of contact is perceived as being necessary and useful. She further stated that it depends on the age of the respective voter. Therefore, voters among the older generation can be reached more easily in a personal way, whereas the younger generation is also reachable via chat rooms.

What are the best and worse cases in relation to political use of ICT? Are there lessons to be learnt from outside Europe?

Ms. Green proposed that IT should also be used in local elections.

Mr. Allan states that IT facilitates the possibility to reach a wide audience for democracy.

Mr. Wittbrodt agreed and stated again the importance of social relations. IT should be seen as an instrument and thus eDemocracy is an instrument. From a political point of view, it is important to keep in mind that parliamentarians are representatives of society and the fact that they were elected, is also a result of personal contacts with the voters.

Mr. Binding claims that there is a voter turnaround and thus, to strengthen the relationship between voters and representatives is really important. He further states a "culture of understanding" is important and thus the possibility to distinguish between right and wrong information.

Mr. Ergma distinguishes between cyber pessimists and cyber optimists. In his opinion a mixture of both would be the best solution. He further states that Internet should be useful for the entire society and thus it should be used by the entire society.

Conclusion Mr. Ilshammar.

In his conclusion Mr. Ilshammar states that cyberspace is coming, but it might appear in another way to how we are expecting it. He further thinks that nowadays we might be at the level of tDemocracy (TV, Telephone etc.) and not eDemocracy. He explains his opinion by the fact that by now telephone and TV are widely distributed among society.

Marco Langhof (EPRI secretariat) introduced the EPRI knowledge project. He informed about the duration and aim of the project. The EPRI knowledge is a 36 month-project of the 6th Framework Programme. It aims to raise awareness of Information Society Technologies (IST) among parliamentarians from the EU, national and regional level. The project is intended for Parliamentarians, which are already involved or interested in Information Society Technologies, and IST related themes.

The project's main strategic objectives are (1) to initiate, to monitor and to observe a structured and targeted process of development and diffusion of knowledge on information and communication technology, (2) to actively involve high level parliamentary decision makers in the discussion of new technology developments by a series of dedicated high level workshops, (3) to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between parliamentarians and parliaments through yearly EPRI conferences, (4) to disseminate information about IST issues and results to parliamentarians in Europe dedicated communication channels and tools.

In order to foster the political debate of future IST activities, the EPRI knowledge project provides several services such as studies, workshops, conferences, and dissemination activities throughout the entire project duration. In general, the studies aim to develop knowledge and understanding of Information Society Technologies issues among European, national, and regional parliamentarians through conducting new original research. Therefore, parliamentarians will be supported in their debates on innovative IST demands, solutions and strategies.

The workshops will be held twice a year. They are targeted to parliamentarians with special expertise in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and ICT related decision-making and will assist in the development of policy and collaborative working

practices among parliamentarians on Information Society Technologies and related issues.

A further fundamental part of the project work is communication networking and dissemination activities. Therefore, the EPRI knowledge website www.epri.org will provide information on project related studies, workshops, conferences, on Information Society Technologies related themes as well as a knowledge base.

In order to organise and implement the provided activities of the EPRI knowledge project, an EPRI secretariat is acting as a direct channel to EU, national and regional parliamentarians. It is a direct contact point for questions related to the project activities.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Thursday 28 October 2004- Morning Session

Maria Häll, Member of the Swedish Parliament and administrative manager, introduced the Swedish IT policy strategy group. After outlining the background items and introducing the 40-year experiences of eGovernment, Ms. Häll spoke about the present ICT policy in Sweden in general. As an example she quoted the new governmental bill, which is planned for spring 2005. The new governmental bill is based on an evaluation beforehand, where the Swedish ICT policy was evaluated. Thus, it was possible to list requirements and themes for the new ICT policy i.e. the information society as a learning society. In the following Ms. Häll reported on the IT policy strategy group, which has existed since 2003. The aim of this group is to be an advisor to the IT minister and the government. All together there are five priority areas:

- ICT in schools and learning,
- ICT and healthcare,
- Economic growth in ICT industries,
- ICT culture
- ICT infrastructure and broadband

Further, Ms. Häll pointed out strategies in order to work towards these five priority areas, mentioned earlier. In this connection the key issues as well as the next steps towards IT infrastructure deployment were introduced. Therefore the key issues will be:

- Mobility – transparency
- Open networks
- Convergence
- Increased competition in the local loop

In this respect Ms. Häll also listed some general questions, which typically arise out of the realisation process. At the end of her presentation Ms. Häll referred to the eEurope 2005 action plan and its goals as well as a summary of important issues for realising these goals in Sweden as well as within Europe.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Filippos Tsalidis (Member of the Hellenic Parliament)

After outlining that the creation of a knowledge based society is a possibility to work towards a global democracy with the EU developing federation, Mr. Tsalidis reported on the current situation in the new Hellenic government. Therefore, he mentioned that Greece is moving towards the plan of a structured national strategy for Research and Technology that consists of several goals, such as:

- The gradual increase of the expenses for Research and Technology, so that research networks in Hellas (Universities, Research Institutes, private and public sectors) respond effectively to the rhythms of the international community.
- The foundation of a National Committee for Research and Technology, for the planning of a national strategy in the sector of research and technology of the country.
- Freeing funding of research activities from every kind of clientele-oriented relations, corruption, exclusions and preferences.
- Introduction of new motives for the private sector to invest in research and technology.

- Stimulation for expansion and improvement of the collaboration between Universities and Research Institutes not only within the country but also abroad.
- Support with special motives, by using a system for continuous and reliable evaluation of progress of the researchers and the research centers.

Following, Mr. Tsalidis reported on the targets of the Hellenic Parliament. Thus, it aims to increase the research expenses from today's 0.65% to 1.5% by 2010. However, he also points out that increasing the budget for research cannot be enough to have positive results in the reinforcement of the economy competitively, worldwide. Moreover, research must lead to innovation, in both private and public sectors.

In regards of eDemocracy during the presentation the question emerged, how technology will effect the electronic-democracy and electronic government. Thus, Mr.Tsalidis states that the use of new technologies increases the possibilities for:

- **Information**, where the government produces and delivers information to be used by citizens too and, in the case of the parliament, by and for its members.
- **Conference**, where the parliament's members provide the body with their perspectives and opinions. The Parliament's instances determine the topics to be discussed and lead the procedure while the members contribute their own points of view.
- **Active participation**, that is a relation based on the co-operation with parliamentary departments, where the Parliament's members participate actively in the definition of the procedure and the content of policy making.

Within the last part of his presentation, Mr.Tsalidis reported on the Hellenic Parliament today. Due to the fact that the Hellenic Parliament has nowadays its own Internet site as well as its own TV channel, Mr.Tsalidis states "it is essential that new technologies offer the possibility for procedures that upgrade the Parliament's function, parliamentary work and the work of the members and everybody else who is involved". In the end he called upon the participants of the 7th EPRI conference and thus on a widely varied audience to voice concerns and to use ICT to work towards the revitalisation of parliamentary action, representative democracy and the establishment of a European, democratic and institutional governing body that would restore European people's hope and trust.

(for more information please [click here](#))

In the following, a few participants showed interest on the EPRI knowledge project and proposed a few aspects, which would be interesting to pick up on. Thus, a parliamentarian for the Dutch Parliament expressed its interest in getting to know more about the relationship between government and voters. A Member of the British Parliament stated its interest in having more workshops in the EPRI initiative. The last comment was given by a Member of the Portuguese Parliament with interest on further discussions about open standards.

Robert Key (Member of Parliament for Salisbury) talked about PIMS, which is a system dealing with information management. The idea for PIMS was set out in the original project brief presented to House authorities in April 2001.

- The overall goal is to provide 'Information Management'; to support the business processes of the House at all levels. It will be achieved by developing and maintaining an information infrastructure that is unified, consistent, and seamless.

- It should be easily accessed by, and appropriate to the needs of, all of the various user communities. For users to be able to access its information and services, it should not be necessary for them to understand the internal structures of Parliament. Each user should be able to access the information and services that he or she needs, in a manner that is convenient and logical to them. Where, for example, information is held or used by many parties and it needs to be changed, it should be possible to change it once and once only.
- Users of Parliamentary services would gain access through a common interface or 'portal', which will enable them to see and access only those services that are relevant to them.

Whereas the House of Commons Library's POLIS system has stood the Library in good stead over a period of 24 years, it was designed by librarians for librarians, and was never intended to be easy for non-expert users. PIMS, on the other hand, has been designed with the Member of Parliament as customer and user in mind.

Under the surface, the information has all been categorised, structured and stored so that access appears unified and seamless to the user. The structures have been developed to meet the specific search requirements of Members, based on many years of experience gained by the Library staff of Members' information behaviours. A customer value study carried out by the Library last year recognised that Members' information needs do vary considerably, and that individual Members can have different requirements at different times. Thus, many Members and their staff will wish to be able to search for information for themselves, but there will also be times when they would prefer to discuss an issue with one of the Library's experts.

The Library's 'knowledge base' comprises material such as:

- Parliamentary questions and debates
- Legislation
- Committee reports
- European documents
- Newspaper articles and press notices
- Official publications
- Library research papers and briefings
- Links to relevant external sources of information
- The Library's on-line catalogue of books and periodicals.

PIMS will provide seamless access to this extensive range of information, and create links between individual items. PIMS will also allow users to store their personal preferences, so that they can receive notification of new material matching their profiles when it arrives in the PIMS knowledge base.

Mr. Key mentioned that it had been hoped that PIMS would go live by the end of 2004. But unexpected delays in data migration from the old POLIS systems have meant that only some of the applications will be available at the end of the year, and most users will not now see the full benefits of the system until Easter. In the meantime, however, the House authorities are already planning for a second phase of PIMS, in conjunction with projects to improve Parliament's intranet and Internet sites; and to introduce document and records management more widely.

(for more information please [click here](#))

Anders Forsberg (Member of the Swedish Parliament) introduced the inter-parliamentary EU information exchange (IPEX), which was adopted in a memorandum by the Conference of European Union Speakers in Rome on 22-24 September 2000. The Speakers proposed measures to promote cooperation and the exchange of information between Institutions and Parliaments in the Union. The Speakers requested that the administrations of the respective parliaments should look more closely into the matter. At a subsequent meeting in Stockholm in March 2001, of the Secretaries General of these parliaments, a working group was set up and was given the task of looking into ways to promote closer links between European Union parliaments. The objective of IPEX is stated in the guidelines for Inter- parliamentary Cooperation in the EU, which was agreed upon by the Conference of Speakers in The Hague in 2004.
Section II – Framework:

“The objective of IPEX...is to support inter- parliamentary cooperation in the European Union by providing a platform for the electronic exchange of EU-related information between parliaments in the Union including a calendar of meetings and forums for exchange of views on subsidiary control. Each parliament/chamber has an IPEX correspondent to represent the parliament.”

In the conclusions from The Hague conference, it was also stressed that IPEX will serve as an important tool for the exchange of information, for example by directly distributing legislative proposals from the European Commission to the IPEX database.

The current web site was introduced in the beginning of 2004. Beforehand a questionnaire was sent to all parliaments involved. Thus, information upon how parliaments gathering and sharing parliamentary information, such as the transposition of EU legislation into national law etc. was gained. The IPEX web site can be seen as the first step in establishing a more versatile web site, offering more information and – perhaps more importantly - more structured information. One of the next steps of the IPEX working group will be to launch a new web site, built around a database. Thus it is possible for the parliaments that take part in the IPEX network for example to upload proposals from the European Commission. By assigning various status values to the documents, it will be possible for any country to follow the development of specific issues and also to keep the track of the standpoint of other countries. In general the IPEX working group has identified three factors, which are seen as being essential for the success of the IPEX initiative.

- Simplicity
- Quality
- Integrity

All together some of the important tasks for the IPEX project are:

- Exchange views on current EU issues
- Exchange information on the subsidiary
- Calendar of inter- parliamentary meetings
- A bulletin board

(for more information please [click here](#))

Besides general question, the final discussion also dealt with the acceptance of the Final Declaration of the 7th EPRI conference by the participants. Among others the question arose "how can the paperwork be decreased by ICT systems?". In this respect various approaches were discussed i.e. using more electronic equipment. Nevertheless, it was also mentioned by Mr. Allan (Member of the British Parliament) that ordinary paper as well as computers have to be used in a qualified respect. Susanne Kastner (Member of the German Parliament) stated her interest about which systems are being used by the single Parliaments within Europe in order to decrease paperwork by ICT systems. In this respect she proposed to treat these questions also in the upcoming 8th EPRI conference.

In general it was also proposed that in the coming 8th EPRI conference, working groups should be involved and it was asked how possible topics would look. In this respect Mr. Langhof explained, that in the future one of the planned activities of the EPRI secretariat would be to establish working groups, which will also be integrated into the following conference. Thus, the conference programme would be facilitated and demand driven. In general the idea of working groups and to integrate them into the upcoming 8th conference was of active interest.