

Role of IPEX – a strategy for IPEX website and database

After 5 years of functioning of the Lisbon Treaty, 4 years of new version of IPEX database, and taking into consideration new IPEX structure written down in new IPEX Guidelines adopted in March 2015 by the Secretaries General, EUSC conclusions adopted in April 2015, as well as first academic papers concerning IPEX, it would be important now to undertake a certain summary and self-reflection. The agenda of the next IPEX Board, on 29 June in Luxembourg, includes an item on the role of IPEX.

DEBATE ON THE OBJECTIVES OF IPEX

The goals of IPEX written down in the IPEX Guidelines didn't change under the last amendments. According to point 2 of the Preamble:

"The objective of IPEX is to support interparliamentary cooperation in the European Union by providing a platform for the **electronic exchange of EU-related information between Parliaments in the Union**. In particular, the IPEX web site contains a database for the exchange of information about parliamentary scrutiny in EU affairs including aspects of subsidiarity, as well as a calendar of interparliamentary meetings, forums for the exchange of views, a news section and the web site of the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments as well as web sites of other EU interparliamentary conferences."

In April 2014 in Vilnius, the Speakers Conference which, according to Article 1 of the Guidelines, has the competence to lay down the objectives of IPEX, stated that IPEX – thanks to correct use of symbols and upload of relevant documents – should stay "a reliable tool for interparliamentary cooperation and exchange as well as **an important source of information for the European citizens**".

In March 2015, at the Secretaries General meeting, on the motion from the representative of the Dutch Senate, the Secretaries General changed point 8 of the conclusions on IPEX, which took the following form: "The Secretaries General recognize the constant efforts[...] **to widen the use** [...] of the IPEX website".

In April 2015 in Rome during the EUSC "The Speakers have assigned the Italian Chair of the Board the task of **continuing with the joint examination of the role and potential of the IPEX system**. [...] They also look forward to **an expansion in the exchange** of information and documents on EU-related activities of Parliaments through IPEX correspondents, in addition to the existing database."

DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF IPEX PLATFORM

The duty of the IPEX Board is, taking into consideration the limited resources of IPEX – **to execute the tasks set by the Speakers with maximum of accuracy**. Taking the above into consideration, the tool

which is IPEX, namely the website and the database, should **continue to function** on 3 levels that can be characterized as follows:

- 1) IPEX as an information channel,
- 2) IPEX as a reference website,
- 3) IPEX as an institutional memory of the EU interparliamentary cooperation.

Every of these aspects can and should be improved, with due account of the costs. The proof that this is possible is provided by the work of the *Working Group on the improvement of the IPEX website* (with participation of the European Parliament, which maintains the database on its server and bears the costs of possible changes), where specific demands in line with the characteristics of IPEX operation presented below are discussed and submitted for implementation.

- 1) IPEX as **an information channel** – this aspect is about a reliable tool for current consideration of EU matters by parliamentarians and their staff that is:
 - on the one hand – a correct and timely uploading of information about scrutiny of EU documents by national parliaments (task of IPEX correspondents) which would allow for looking up for information and coordinating of activity, especially during the 8-week period (subsidiarity),
 - on the other hand – appropriate search tools: currently the work is going on in the working group on improving the quality of the search engine and preparing clear information about search results.

Proposal

Informing about the possibilities of various website's and the IPEX database's tools, such as internal forums and the new document notification system.

- 2) IPEX as **a reference website** (currently updated information and expertise).

This aspect includes information and tools existing already on IPEX, such as:

- cooperation network (contact lists of: speakers, secretaries general, correspondents and other specialists),
- subpages of permanent interparliamentary conferences,
- calendar of cooperation in accordance with the *Guidelines on interparliamentary cooperation*: data about meetings and documents themselves,
- terminology - IPEX Glossary in preparation.

Proposal

Adding a new section to the Calendar and possibly News on informal interparliamentary cooperation, to which all national parliaments have been invited (*cluster*): information to be posted on the IPEX website only with the consent of the participants in such cooperation.

- 3) IPEX as **an institutional memory** of the interparliamentary cooperation that is archives of cooperation, complete and searchable in the highest possible degree (taking costs into account) This aspect of the website is the least obvious for the IPEX Board, however the need of developing it was noticed. Just in this vein, upon request of the *Working Group on the improvement of the IPEX website*, a separate section with basic documents was introduced on webpages of the interparliamentary conferences: for CFSP/CSDP and on SECG. The IPEX Board

considers also the issue of archiving all existing webpages of the EU Council Presidency parliamentary dimension. The working group discusses how to keep in the database all important, once introduced, information, (for example deadlines for subsidiarity in procedures with changed legislative proposals).

CONCLUSION

Such a holistic, threefold approach to IPEX goals, as presented above, should produce a kind of **synergy enhancing the usefulness of the platform and increasing the use of the database** by users for whom it should constitute a friendly tool. Therefore, acting in the framework of these three levels – while always balancing the right proportions – could constitute guidance for the IPEX Board.

The IPEX Board should read the needs of parliaments and keep up with the evolution of interparliamentary cooperation, adapting the tool of this cooperation, which is IPEX, to the tasks set by the Speakers and instructions of the Secretaries General. This direction - giving the floor to users - has been expressed during this year's first IPEX Users' Conference, which is to be repeated the next year.

Finally, IPEX task doesn't consist in producing special information intended specifically for external users but there are no obstacles that the **information produced for parliamentary users be presented in a way easily understandable by the general public**, which is conform to the documents of Speakers and Secretaries General.

Regina Wąsowicz

Correspondent and IPEX Board member