



IPEX USERS CONFERENCE **REPORT**

Copenhagen, 26 January 2015
The Danish Parliament (Folketing)

The first IPEX Users Conference was organised by the IPEX Board on 26 January 2015 in the Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen. The conference was hosted by the Danish Folketing. It was attended by 69 IPEX users from 23 Member States, the European Parliament and 2 Candidate Countries, including 17 national Parliament representatives in Brussels. The Conference was broadcasted live which allowed an additional 288 people to follow it on-line.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the conference was to improve the utility of the IPEX platform and to better exploit its potential by learning about the needs of IPEX users with regard to both the IPEX database and its network. The ultimate goal of the Conference was to ensure a good exchange of information amongst the EU Parliaments thus enabling effective contribution to the EU legislative process. The feedback from the users was intended to serve as an inspiration for the IPEX Board in the further development of IPEX.

PLENARY MEETING

The plenary meeting of the Conference was held in the *Landstingssalen*. It was chaired by Mr Mongin FORREST, Advisor of the International Department of the Danish Folketing and the Danish member of the IPEX Board.

The participants were welcomed by Ms Pernille DELEURAN, Head of the International Department of the Danish Parliament, who underlined the importance of information sharing among national Parliaments, in particular through IPEX. Ms DELEURAN encouraged the participants of the Conference to share their views on how IPEX could be further improved.

Ms Eva KJER HANSEN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament, also welcomed the participants and then focussed on the need to improve work of national Parliaments with regard to EU matters. Ms KJER HANSEN gave an overview on the ongoing debate in the Folketing on the improvement of scrutiny of EU affairs, including the timing of government mandating, the introduction of a national semester as a part of the European Semester and the so-called “green card” initiative as a more positive pro-active contribution to the EU decision making process. The Chair underlined that in this respect IPEX was indispensable as national Parliaments needed to understand each other’s positions and to find common ground. Ms KJER HANSEN encouraged participants to share new ideas and insights on how to take advantage of the as yet untapped potential of IPEX.

In the first part of the Conference dedicated to the role of IPEX three speakers took the floor. Mr Mongin FORREST gave a thorough introduction to the IPEX network and went through the milestones of IPEX pointing out that it was designed for general scrutiny and not just for

subsidiarity checks and also that IPEX was meant to be a network of people who had a website at their disposal.

Ms Loreta RAULINAITYTĖ, Director of the Communications Department of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and the Lithuanian Member of the IPEX Board, representing the IPEX Chair, presented the priorities of the IPEX Board. In particular Ms RAULINAITYTĖ focused on the new draft IPEX Guidelines, which, *inter alia*, provided for the rotating Chair of the IPEX Board and simplified governing bodies of IPEX. As to the role of IPEX, she suggested exploring the full potential of IPEX forums in specific EU policy areas as well as hosting websites of Presidency Parliaments on IPEX.

Mr Calin-Mihai RACOTI, IPEX Information Officer, gave a detailed presentation on the IPEX database pointing out that the database was just one part of it. He went through all the possible tools that could be used for parliamentary work, including the storage of research and the alerts available in “My IPEX”.

The subsequent debate focused on the role of IPEX: further evolution of the network, optimal use of the IPEX contact points, target groups of IPEX, priorities for users, etc. Participants, *inter alia*, suggested using IPEX as a primary network of EU interparliamentary cooperation, also serving as a guardian of institutional memory and talked about concentrating all information on IPEX, merging calendars and launching specific forums. Referring to the Conclusions of the EU Speakers Conference in April 2014 in Vilnius, in particular to IPEX as “an important source of information for the European citizens”, one of the participants suggested a threefold approach to the IPEX website and database: an information channel, a reference website and an institutional memory of the interparliamentary cooperation.

The second part of the plenary debate dealt with the topic of “Using IPEX, views from the trenches”. The debate was opened by Mr Morten MESSERSCHMIDT, Danish Member of the European Parliament. Mr MESSERSCHMIDT underlined the importance of IPEX as a coordination tool in the EU “institutional battle”. Mr MESSERSCHMIDT called for a well-functioning IPEX system which would highlight the concerns of national Parliaments with regard to conformity of EU legislative proposals with the principle of subsidiarity. As the “vertical approach” whereby an MEP would need to check the position of 28 national Parliaments was considered to be inefficient, there was a need for a horizontal automatized coordination mechanism. When 3-5 national Parliament committees began a subsidiarity check, a warning signal should be sent out to other Member State’s parliamentary committees. As the eight-week period for subsidiarity checks was very short, such an awareness mechanism could be extremely helpful. Mr MESSERSCHMIDT suggested involving IPEX at a much earlier stage, before reasoned opinions became official. National Parliaments should be much more pro-active in voicing their concerns on potential breaches of the principle of subsidiarity and should, for instance, initiate video conferences with corresponding committees in the European Parliament in order to signal such concerns.

Ms Maria João COSTA, Permanent Representative of the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic in Brussels, focused on her individual approach to IPEX. She noted that individual users could customise the IPEX database by creating their own IPEX homepages, i.e. by saving their searches and by subscribing to certain dossiers. Ms COSTA called for the synchronisation of the information published on IPEX with Outlook, which would save time as a result. She supported the idea of a horizontal approach towards the utility of IPEX, suggesting that a warning signal should be sent after eight national Parliaments identified subsidiarity concerns. In this context,

IPEX contact points played an important role in ensuring exchange of real time information both among the EU Parliaments and a wider circle of IPEX users.

Ms Janneke TIMMER, EU advisor of the Committee on Education, Culture and Science and the Committee on Emigration and Justice of the Tweede Kamer of the Dutch Parliament, thanked the organisers of the Conference which allowed active users of IPEX to become aware of its full potential. She suggested stepping up training of users so that they could swiftly locate and share the vast information available on the IPEX database. With regard to the database, Ms TIMMER suggested improving the content of the information published on IPEX. She referred to the December 2014 Report “Engaging with Europe” commissioned by the Dutch Parliament which included several suggestions for IPEX, such as sharing information on national priorities, sharing feedback on green and white papers, alerting by e-mail all parliaments after eight reasoned opinions were adopted, also publishing summaries of reasoned opinions in English and sharing of contact points details.

The subsequent debate on the further development of the IPEX database produced suggestions on sharing national priorities on IPEX and improving awareness of the vast array of IPEX features, for instance, saving one’s own searches. Some users suggested going ahead with the “green card” initiative and testing the reactions of the EU institutions as well as creating IPEX forums for specific EU policy areas, especially those not covered by the three existing interparliamentary conferences organised on a regular basis. Reference was made to the well-established 25-year-old COSAC network bringing together politicians and staff members of the Committees on European Affairs. In contrast most of the sectoral committees in national Parliaments lack such forums. Representatives of the Lithuanian Seimas informed of their initiative to set up the first such forum on the Common Agricultural Policy. In this context some participants drew attention to the fact that some parliaments have limited human resources and to the need to avoid duplication of work currently performed by national Parliaments’ permanent representatives in Brussels.

Following the lunch break, the participants reconvened within four working groups, in order to discuss four different aspects related to further improvement of IPEX.

Concluding the IPEX Users Conference, the last plenary session focused on the outcome of the working groups presented below.

WORKING GROUP 1

Challenges regarding subsidiarity control

Moderator: Ms Lotte Rickers OLESEN, the Danish Folketing

The participants considered timing as the biggest challenge for subsidiarity checks. As only formally adopted reasoned opinions are currently published on IPEX, informal information shared by permanent representatives in Brussels was considered to be more useful at an early stage of the eight-week deadline allocated for subsidiarity checks in national Parliaments. However, IPEX was considered a useful source of information on adopted reasoned opinions. IPEX was a place to find specific concerns voiced by national Parliaments not only on subsidiarity but also in the framework of political dialogue.

Lists of pre-selected proposals on which some national Parliaments intended to do the subsidiarity checks were also considered to be a useful source of information for other Parliaments as well as information on parliamentary scrutiny of green and white papers before specific EU proposals

were brought forward by the Commission. These were the identified ways of using IPEX for information sharing on subsidiarity checks.

The participants also highlighted challenges linked to sharing information on IPEX. These related primarily to confidential government information and informal information which could not be published or shared on IPEX as an open database.

WORKING GROUP 2

Improving the IPEX database

Moderator: Ms Ina SADAT, the Belgian Senate

The participants shared their views on further improvement of the content, structure, and specific features of the IPEX database.

The participants identified reasoned opinions as the most sought-after information. Some of them raised the issue of the lack of transparency as regards to ongoing procedures in the Council working groups. Therefore, the idea of having access on IPEX to the Council documents resulting from those procedures was suggested.

The IPEX calendar was mentioned as a reliable source of information, due to its detailed structure, although other related websites have their own calendars too. There was agreement on the need to consolidate information on EU interparliamentary cooperation in one source in order to save time. Follow-up of the implementation of the Directives was also considered important, and IPEX was identified as a major tool for that. It remained rather unclear why the original intention of a role for IPEX in this regard seemed to have disappeared.

The use of IPEX accounts was also brought up by the participants. Even though opening an account was considered to be easy, users felt somewhat uncomfortable to register or were unsure about the security of the procedure. Lack of knowledge was identified as the main reason that stood on the way of tapping into the full potential of IPEX.

The information on the EU Speakers' Conferences constituted another subject for debate. The participants noted that Presidencies sometimes published documents and information that was incomplete, sometimes minutes, keynotes speeches or conclusions were not published. In this respect IPEX was considered to be not just a database, but also the archive of the EU interparliamentary cooperation.

As to the training on IPEX, the participants agreed that usually the parliamentary staff directly involved in the process of the EU scrutiny participated in training activities organized by the units in charge with EU affairs, but not on a regular basis. They also underlined a need for trainings of IPEX correspondents who deal with IPEX on a daily basis.

As to the IPEX News section, it was considered to be underutilized and often of poor quality. The reason for that was the source for information, i.e. IPEX Correspondents who did not always communicate this information with full clarity. Users were willing to give them a helping hand.

WORKING GROUP 3

Improving the IPEX network

Moderator: Mr Calin RACOTI, IPEX Information Officer

Participants of this working group discussed how to improve the IPEX network whilst bearing in mind that this is not the only network of interparliamentary cooperation in the EU. Furthermore,

within the IPEX network itself they identified several potential additional networks. Apart from the existing network of IPEX correspondents, the debate brought about ideas on creating forums of contact points in sectoral committees dealing with specific policy areas. These *ad-hoc* forums could exchange unofficial information needed in the early stages of policy-formulation. However, it was underlined that the availability of resources in national Parliaments had to be taken into account.

The participants identified the need to promote IPEX among a broader group of users, including parliamentary staff in political groups. The coordination and information sharing functions of IPEX could benefit from a larger pool of users. The participants agreed that the visibility of IPEX needed to be boosted, while training on the vast array of IPEX functions needed to be stepped-up.

WORKING GROUP 4

The language barrier

Moderator: Ms Laura AUTORE, European Parliament

The main purpose of this working group was to find out how to overcome the language barrier issue for IPEX, as it was essential to find a common language that could be understood by its contributors and users.

The participants focused on matters related to the uploading of documents on IPEX, the role of the representatives of national Parliaments and the need to follow-up the results, the importance of the translations of reasoned opinions *versus* the contributions in the context of political dialogue. It was agreed that English was the language used most frequently. The participants suggested developing a standard template for summaries in English and French, which could create uniformity of the documents and would encourage people to make use of it. They also underlined the importance of promoting forums and the most efficient way of participation in them.

RÉSUMÉ

Based on the presentations and debates of the IPEX Users Conference, the following issues have been identified and should be discussed by the IPEX Board:

1. Further improvement of the quality of information and user-friendliness of IPEX,
2. Further promotion of IPEX among its users,
3. Training of IPEX users on the available features of IPEX,
4. Early involvement of IPEX in signalling subsidiarity concerns,
5. Encouraging national Parliaments to publish their priorities according to the Commission Annual Work Programme on IPEX,
6. Starting IPEX forums for specific EU policy areas,
7. Synchronising IPEX with Microsoft Outlook,
8. Using the IPEX network to overcome the language barrier,
9. Publication by national Parliaments of short summaries of uploaded documents in English or French, possibly with the help of a specific template.