

# ANNUAL IPEX CORRESPONDENTS' MEETING

14-15 November 2019, Vienna

## REPORT

### Introduction

Within the framework of the Austrian IPEX Chairmanship the Annual Meeting of the National Correspondents took place in Vienna 14–15 November 2019. The Meeting was moderated by Ms Heather WOKUSCH and was attended by 55 participants from 28 member states and the European Parliament. Two fellows from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of North Macedonia, who stayed at the Austrian parliamentary administration in the framework the newly established Fellowship Programme of the Austrian Parliament together with the European Funds for the Balkans, attended the plenary meeting. This was a good opportunity also for them to get familiarized with the IPEX network and to have an exchange of views.

### Teambuilding activity

In response to a request made by the Correspondents at their last meeting in Tallinn, the meeting was opened with a teambuilding exercise. This new format allowed the Correspondents to get to know each other better and to reflect together on their work on IPEX as well as on the improvements and accomplishments made so far.

The Correspondents had to first make a brainstorming and drawing of what IPEX represented to them by reflecting conrecent achievements of IPEX, its goal in the next five years, its values and of the significance of the IPEX core network. The key words and titles of these topics were: *stronger together, one stop shop, united in service of cooperation, bringing national Parliaments closer - sharing European information, transparent parliament, facts that attract, empowerment through sharing, transparent parliament.*

Secondly they were asked to debate among each other where they saw room for improvement and if they could make suggestions on how to connect national Correspondents with each other, how to raise awareness about their work in their national parliaments/chambers as well as how to facilitate their contributions to IPEX. The teambuilding encouraged the emergence of many new ideas for the future of IPEX, ideas that will be taken up by the Board Working Groups and implemented after evaluation by the Board. The spectrum of suggestions, wishes and ideas was manifold and ranged from closer networking via social media, teambuilding, fora and twin city models to more visibility and involvement within the administration. Last but not least a powerful support from the hierarchy and more capacity were some of the mentioned key points.

## **Training Sessions**

On 14 November 2019, Mr Calin RACOTI, the IPEX Information Officer, held two consecutive training sessions. The first was aimed at newcomers, while the second was dedicated to experienced Correspondents, both focussing on improving and solidifying the skills required in the daily work of a national Correspondent.

## **Plenary Meeting and Workshops**

### Morning Session

#### *1. Welcome*

The welcome address was delivered by Mr Harald DOSSI, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament. He highlighted that interparliamentary cooperation, exchange of information and networking among parliaments have gained more importance in the last few years, in particular IPEX which has a crucial role as a forum for exchange of know-how and best practice and is becoming a reliable “one-stop shop”. Further, he pointed out that the Correspondents are the anchor of the IPEX network playing an increasing role in interparliamentary exchange in EU affairs. Both the network of IPEX Correspondents and the IPEX database as such are effective instruments to foster interparliamentary collaboration and to promote EU affairs within the parliaments and beyond.

Mr Harald DOSSI continued by recalling the main achievements of IPEX in the past year, such as the new rules regarding the GDPR and EDPR, the integration of the COSAC website into IPEX, the strengthened cooperation between ECPRD and IPEX, the pilot phase of the social media activity of IPEX and last but not least, the new website and new functions in the database enabling a more efficient promotion of IPEX. Last but not least he took the occasion to sincerely thank the European Parliament for its engagement by financing the new website.

#### *2. IPEX Privacy Statement*

Mr Calin-Mihai RACOTI, presented the implementation of the GDPR and EDPR provisions into the IPEX framework, recalling that in an interconnected environment the protection of personal data is of utmost importance.

Then he continued by explaining the main contents and the implementation of the GDPR, such as the protection of individuals’ rights, the need for transparent procedures and the storage of processed data. Also, he explained that the EDPR was specially designed for the European institutions to ensure that the standard of data protection within the EU institutions and bodies was in line with the standards for data protection provided in the GDPR.

In his presentation, Mr Calin-Mihai RACOTI detailed the general principles on how national Correspondents are to deal with personal data within the parliaments. In this context, he listed, among other things, the rights to transparency, to access, to erasure, to processing restrictions, to data portability, to be informed, to rectification, to object as well as not to be subject to automated individual decision-making. Overall, data must be processed fairly, lawfully and only for legitimate purposes. In this regard, IPEX developed, with the help of the

Data Protection Officer of the European Parliament, an IPEX Privacy Statement.

The New IPEX Privacy Statement has already been published on the IPEX Website and approved by the IPEX Board. It is also accompanied by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the IPEX Board and the national parliaments/chambers to determine the responsibilities of each data controller of the IPEX platform: on the one hand the IPEX Board through the IPEX Information Officer and on the other hand the national Parliaments/Chambers through their National Correspondents. These responsibilities implied among others the implementation of GDPR/EDPR provisions, the development of policies for implementation and cooperation, the information of involved parties and the respect of agreed parameters.

### *3. Follow up of the promotion of IPEX*

Ms Birgit VON PFLUG, Chair of the Working Group on Strengthening the Promotion of IPEX, gave a short overview of the work accomplished during the past year in her Working Group (WG). In total, five actions were proposed, three of them have already been implemented, such as the paper "Promotion of IPEX: Best practices and proposals", the new frame of the IPEX homepage for the new website, the improved visibility of IPEX in search engines (eg Google) through the use of keywords. The two remaining actions, the tutorial videos and the printed handout regarding how to use IPEX, were put on hold until the technical improvements regarding the IPEX website have been implemented by the Working Group on Improving the Digital System. Regarding the findings of the questionnaire which was sent out shortly before the NCM ( twenty-seven replies out of forty-one) Ms Birgit VON PFLUG pointed out that there was room for improvement concerning the translation of the Wikipedia articles about IPEX in the national language of the NCs. Also, even if the large majority of the respondents confirmed that IPEX is mentioned on the website of their national parliament, this was not the case for the intranet.

The use of crosslinking between IPEXrelated information and documents was largely used within the parliaments but could be improved by introducing crosslinks to IPEX in the EU-related databases. Regarding the translation of the IPEX leaflet, the results are encouraging (19 languages so far). Still, Ms Birgit VON PFLUG stressed the importance of translations into all the EU languages in order to increase the visibility of IPEX. Around half of the responding parliaments/chambers had newsletters related to EU affairs, but only a few included direct references to IPEX.

Trainings for IPEX are an important tool to promote IPEX within the parliaments' administrations and political groups. About half of the replies indicated that their parliaments/chambers provided these kinds of trainings only on specific request or at the beginning of every legislature term. Finally, the proportion of time available for the work as IPEX Correspondent represented around five percent or less of the working time, which would not allow deepening the tasks with training sessions or promotion work.

### *4. Follow up of the new elements of the IPEX Digital System*

Mr Jerry HILBERT, Chair of the Working Group on Improving the IPEX Digital System, introduced the new IPEX website to the Correspondents. After presenting the collected ideas

for improvements in of the Digital System, he highlighted the new sections that would compose the new website. Overall, the aim was to have a website which is comprehensive and is an exhaustive source of information through the addition of new content and types of documents. Further, the homepage is going to undergo a major redesign, incorporating sections for important issues, documents with high activities, upcoming events, news, pictures and videos.

The new website will enable IPEX to be the referent site hosting all the EU interparliamentary conferences. The third point, which was elaborated by Mr HILBERT was the renewed site structure fit for mobile devices and taking into account some ergonomic principles such as ease of navigation, simplicity, interactivity and readability. Finally, Mr Jerry HILBERT outlined the improved access to content on IPEX through improved search functions and indexing based on systematic use of relevant keywords, new document classification and the providing of dashboards.

He stressed that not only the front office but also the back office would be redesigned to a simplified structure enabling more activities in less time. Also, the promotion of IPEX across the general search engines such as Google and Yahoo would be implemented. Concluding his presentation, Mr Hilbert announced that the implementation of the new IPEX website was expected in 2020.

#### *5. New categories of information*

Ms Regina WĄSOWICZ introduced the new categories of information in the planned new IPEX database. According to her, adding new content on IPEX implied extending the scope of EU related parliamentary documents, for example on general or multi-thematic issues or parliamentary information such as newsletters and research papers, in addition to the existing database.

She highlighted the responsibility of the national parliaments and the Correspondents as crucial in particular concerning the choice of information to be uploaded and the search possibilities in this regard. Ms Regina WĄSOWICZ outlined the differences between documents from the national parliaments and information items. While documents expressed an official position of a given parliament/chamber or its body, the information items did not.

Referring to the new classification system proposed for the new part of the IPEX website, she detailed the new categories of national parliaments' documents relating to EU matters such as documents of individual parliaments on EU general or multi-topical issues (DIP), common parliamentary documents (CPD) and parliamentary documents concerning an EU document not included in IPEX Documents database (PDNI). Regarding the information items, she identified the following categories: newsletters or any structured information (NL), research papers (RP), and information notes (IN). Concluding, Ms Regina WĄSOWICZ stated that this represented a unique opportunity to reform the IPEX platform according to the needs of interparliamentary cooperation which could be deepened and discussed during the workshops.

## *6. My role as national Correspondent*

This topic was organised as a moderated panel discussion between two national Correspondents. This new format underlined the role and function of the Correspondents and gave them the opportunity to reflect on their roles as national Correspondent and to exchange views about the tasks and the challenges they face in their daily work. Therefore, Ms Heather WOKUSCH interviewed Mr Herbert DEGENS, national Correspondent of the Dutch House of Representatives and Mr. Ioannis TSAGADOPOULOS, national Correspondent of the Hellenic Parliament, asking them various questions ranging from the awareness of MPs about IPEX, the developed skills sets, the added value of being a Correspondent and the main obstacles faced to the possibilities of increasing communication within the IPEX network.

Mr Herbert DEGENS declared that the most attractive aspect about IPEX is that it was one website which hosted all the available interparliamentary information and was therefore worth knowing. Further, he explained that he had started as an IPEX curator adding mostly scrutiny and the yearly list of priority dossiers to the database. With time he became more and more an IPEX promoter in charge of the translation of the leaflet into Dutch. Also, he considered it important that the network keeps working and that correspondents meet on a regular basis to get to know each other better. According to him, a common newsletter or an innovative communication matrix on the website with a linked information page with photo for every correspondent thus putting a face to a name, could help tighten that network. Finally, he welcomed the new website which should have a positive impact on his daily work.

Mr Ioannis TSAGADOPOULOS agreed with Mr Degens, that IPEX brought together all the information on EU-related activities from the national parliaments and was to be considered an important information hub. Mr. Ioannis TSAGADOPOULOS noted that his work as national Correspondent allowed him to improve his communication and presentations skills as well as his ability to work within working groups. Through this process, he had the opportunity to explore new ideas like the creation of videos or newsletters and to discover new working fields such as the optimisation of search engine usage. Further, he outlined the impact of projects within his parliament that had originated from the exchange of views in IPEX NCM's.

According to Mr. TSAGADOPOULOS the available time for IPEX-related work was always an issue. The awareness of IPEX was not always apparent within the parliamentary administration and would require therefore involving and familiarizing more colleagues from the EU departments with the platform in order to get more support. Regarding the relationship among the Correspondents, he stated that in order to build trust, it was important to spent time together.

Finally, Mr TSAGADOPOULOS took this opportunity to also welcome the work achieved in the realization of the new IPEX website. He felt this would help considerably to increase the promotional work of IPEX.

## *7. Best practices – cooperation with ECPRD*

Ms Elisabeth DIETRICH-SCHULZ, ECPRD Correspondent for the Austrian Parliament started her presentation with some facts about the ECPRD history, its activities and the network composing it. Then she spoke about the excellent cooperation among the staff members being responsible for IPEX and ECPRD within the Austrian parliamentary administration. According to her, both groups know each other very well and have a close relation. Furthermore, the new ECPRD password as well as ECPRD requests, replies and summaries with EU content are always forwarded to the IPEX Correspondent and to the Austrian Permanent Representative in Brussels. Finally, both groups inform each other about relevant coming events and include each other in the reporting process. With regard to the differences between the two networks, she stressed that ECPRD could derive inspiration from IPEX, in particular regarding the trainings provided to newcomers and the team building activities. Also, Ms Elisabeth DIETRICH-SCHULZ expressed her support for joining both training groups from ECPRD and IPEX together as this offers the opportunity to exchange directly best practices and to create effective synergies. Concluding her presentation, Ms DIETRICH-SCHULZ showed some best practice examples for searching and using EU-related content on the ECPRD Website.

#### *8. Best practices – social media activities*

Ms Petra JANKOV, social media expert from the Swedish Parliament, presented an introduction to social media activities within the Riksdag. Overall, the aim is to promote knowledge about its work and to ensure that communication about democracy is reliable, easily accessible and tailored to the recipient. Taking into account the various challenges parliaments are facing in the digital landscape, it is of the utmost importance to be able to guarantee that the information is reliable, correct, objective and neutral. Therefore, the question was raised that if a subject should be communicated, how to do this and which channels are the most appropriate to reach out with the communication.

Ms Petra JANKOV further explained that the website was the most important communication channel for the Swedish Parliament. Other social media such as twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and recently LinkedIn, were also in use. She detailed the advantages and limits of each channel. She also stressed that it was very important that everything always be updated and not used as an archive. The tools and supports used are numerous: videos, photos, stories, short or detailed postings. According to her, there were different challenges the Riksdag was facing. The implementation of GDPR for example had a direct impact on their daily work. Also, due to the Act on Responsibility for Electronic Bulletin Boards and the fact that the comments section cannot be turned off, made it difficult to use Facebook as a social media platform.

#### *9. Debate*

After the presentations, several questions were directed to both Ms Petra JANKOV and Ms Elisabeth DIETRICH-SCHULZ.

Regarding the social media activities, the participants wanted to know, first, how often tweets were published on twitter and how the comments were managed. Ms Petra JANKOV replied

that a significant number per day were published. Regarding the comments, the Riksdag would either answer questions directly or redirect them to the competent department.

Secondly, she was asked how many persons were working in the social media department and how the cooperation with the EU Affairs Department was organized. She answered that as it was a fast moving work field and around five or six employees were engaged. There was a systematic ongoing dialog with other departments, in particular with regard to the question concerning transmitting pedagogic content without over-simplifying it. Replying to the inquiry about the content and input given to the topic, Ms Petra JANKOV explained that every decision was to communicate, hence a close cooperation among all the committee departments, including the EU Affairs Department. Also, she specified that different strategies were incorporated depending on the media used. Finally, the last question raised was how and where the videos, photos or posts created by a parliament were archived. Ms Petra JANKOV outlined that generally social media were not used for that purpose as the parliament's website served as the main archive platform.

Regarding ECPRD, Ms Elisabeth DIETRICH-SCHULZ replied to a raised question by elaborating on the added value of interconnection areas between ECPRD and IPEX. In her opinion, both IPEX and ECPRD were internet platforms which offered relevant content and worked as reliable sources of information, which was, in a connected world, of utmost importance. Asked about the interaction between both the colleagues responsible for ECPRD and IPEX, she answered that it could be very helpful to explore synergies and develop them within a parliament.

### Workshops

All the participants were split into two workshop groups. Participation in both workshops was mandatory. The workshops dealt with these topics:

- New categories of information on IPEX and the newsletter pilot project (chaired by Ms Anna UHNÁKOVÁ and Mr Cédric SCARPELLINI)
- State of play: Activities in support of the NCs and NC's tasks (chaired by Mr Calin-Mihai RACOTI and Ms Ilse VAN DEN DRIESSCHE)
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In the plenary meeting afterwards the workshops' chairs presented the findings of the debates.

#### *Workshop 1: New categories of information on IPEX & newsletter pilot project*

Mr Cédric SCARPELLINI reported that the participants discussed the objective to be reached with this new feature and the expanse of the scope of national parliament documents in the IPEX database. He recalled that the contribution of the national Correspondents was essential for the uploading of documents and the indexing of keywords. The results of a survey run on an interactive tool were promising, the distinction between document and information items was clear and could be applied in most parliaments/chambers. Nevertheless a training session to increase competence and ability to upload would be most welcome according to the participants. Most of the national Correspondents declared that they could provide short summaries and translate them into English and French. However, concerns were expressed regarding the additional workload.

Concluding his presentation, Mr Cédric SCARPELLINI noted that the general guidelines for uploading and indexing, as well as a predefined list of categories needed to be agreed upon by the Board. Ms Anna UHNÁKOVÁ invited the participants to send some feedback on these new categories, or the need to create new categories.

Besides that, the participants also discussed the creation of a newsletter. Currently, most of the parliaments/chambers already use newsletters, but the idea is to put in place an integrated IPEX newsletter with news from all parliaments/chambers. Many suggestions were made by the national Correspondents which have to be evaluated and concretised with the help of Mr Ilhan IBRAM.

#### *Workshop 2: State of play: Activities in support of the NCs and NC's tasks*

Mr Calin-Mihai RACOTI gave an overview of the outcome of the workshop and thanked the national Correspondents for their active participation resulting in interesting discussions sharing information. Most of the participants had highlighted the teambuilding activities as the biggest success of this NCM. Overall, it was repeatedly mentioned that some sort of teambuilding or common activity would generally be welcome during the NCM in order to break the ice and allow the Correspondents to better know each other. Furthermore, the participants agreed with the idea of an improved cooperation allowing a better formal and informal exchange of information.

Besides that, the national Correspondents discussed how to enhance the quality of the transition from the departing national Correspondent to the newcomer Correspondent. Hereby best practices and experiences were exchanged as well as the challenges faced by the newcomer when taking up the torch. Finally, the discussion raised the importance of the recognition of the work of the national Correspondent as an added value and led further to the question of how to make their work easier and more efficient.

Ms Ilse VAN DEN DRIESSCHE praised the new format of this NCM with the inclusion of a teambuilding activity but also the panel discussion during the plenary meeting and the moderation all along by Ms Heather WOKUSCH. She reported that it was highly appreciated by the national Correspondents and thought that it would be a good source of inspiration for the next NCM, which would be combined with the User Conference in Helsinki.

#### Closing remarks

Ms Katharina STOURZH concluded the meeting by warmly thanking all the participants for their engagement and interesting contributions during the two days as well as Ms Heather WOKUSCH for her professionalism and support which helped to make the meeting a success. She also pointed out some topics that had been discussed by the national Correspondents such as the workload, the awareness of their function and work in their parliaments, the newsletter, the ECPRD cooperation, the social media projects and launching of the new twitter account for IPEX (@IPEXEU, #IPEXEU), promising that these subjects would be reflected in the annual report to be submitted to the Secretaries General. Finally, she highlighted the financing of the new IPEX website by the European Parliament thus easing the work of the national Correspondents in many ways.