

Conclusions of the IPEX Correspondents Meeting, Ljubljana 25 November 2011

Working group I: How to Promote IPEX and how to Improve Reliability of IPEX. Mr Bengt Eriksson and Mr Richard Mongin Forrest, IPEX Central Support

Working group I discussed and identified various challenges and obstacles facing IPEX with regard to the increased use and promotion of the website. The following summary identifies the obstacles based on the feedback from the Correspondents during the workshop.

1.1 The Correspondent

- Many Correspondents do not have IPEX mentioned in their job descriptions.
- For those with IPEX Job descriptions, they do not always address the most important issues relating to IPEX.
- Often the position of Correspondent is "inherited" from someone, and thus adequate time is not allocated to train new correspondents.

1.2 Resources

- Time spent on IPEX can vary from 10-20 mins per week up to 20 hours per week depending on the Chamber/Parliament.
- The IPEX Chair could address the Sec Gen meeting and explain the need for additional resources.

1.3 Language

- Correspondents agreed that there is a real need for more information in other languages.

1.4 Different Political systems

- The perceived lack of information on IPEX can in fact reflect a difference in the way that the political system in the country works. Users do not necessarily understand what information should be published on IPEX from each chamber.
- Reducing the number of symbols might be looked into. Perhaps we are creating a false sense of accuracy (or the contrary: a false sense of inaccuracy).

1.5 What can the Board and Central Support do?

- "Roadshow" where IPEX is introduced to each chamber should be looked into.
- Clarifying IPEX features, e.g. the subscription mechanism.
- Taking note of Correspondents that are less active than others and ask if that is a consequence of the political system or if they need help.

1.6 Technical issues

- More information on which parliaments use XML should be available.
- The Italian XML-editor should be promoted.
- Chambers should try to produce documents as PDF/OCR, thereby making it possible to use Google translate or similar tools.

Working group II: Languages and Symbols

Ms Maria João Costa and Ms Raissa Teodori, IPEX Central Support

Working group II discussed the use of symbols and language on IPEX. The following summary of their deliberations reflects the conclusions of the Correspondents.

2.1 IPEX Symbols

2.1.1 Symbols indicating General Scrutiny Status

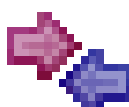


There was a certain shared understanding of the use of these symbols, however some Correspondents still are unsure as to the difference between general scrutiny and the subsidiarity check and the political dialog.

This confusion was one reason that there is uncertainty with regard to the moment in which the scrutiny is considered completed.

The difference between the procedure followed by parliaments /chambers should be taken into account when considering the differences in the approach to these symbols.

2.1.2 Alert symbols



A significant uncertainty around the use of this symbol was noted.

- 1) when the meaning/use of the symbol is not clear
 - a. it is generally confused with the envelope symbol (the two arrows are used as "important information to exchange")
 - b. it is not clear whether it has to be used only if there are real concerns or even just to indicate that the scrutiny is in progress and discussion is ongoing
- 2) when the meaning/use of the symbol is clear, some correspondents tend however **not** to use it because
 - a. they do not feel allowed (or mandated to?) to publicly reveal a political concern of their parliament until it is officially raised by the political body through an official document
 - b. they think it useless and time losing to add a symbol that needs to be removed anyway at the end of the scrutiny

There was a commonly agreed proposal to delete this symbol from the list and to use only the scrutiny status bar until scrutiny is completed and then add, if necessary, one of the "outcome" symbols, R or envelope (ore else, if no significant position was taken, leave as so).



This symbol (Reasoned Opinion) seems to be commonly understood by correspondents. However in a few cases, confusion with the envelope symbol was noted (see below).

Doubt was raised on which date we should refer to: the date of adoption or the date of transmission?



Correspondents do not use this symbol, and generally think it is not part of their job. Some think it is loaded automatically, some relate it to the work of the IPEX Information officer.

However there was no specific shared position on what to do with regard on when to use it (load it).



This symbol has not been used yet (except by mistake) and no confusion has been registered concerning its practical use, even if some correspondents have shown that they didn't understand the legal concept behind it.

There was, however, no in depth discussion on this issue. Some correspondents stated that they would use it in the instances where article 48/7 or 81/3 is cited.



As outlined above, in the section concerning the two arrows, confusion between these two symbols is one of the main problems with regard to the application of symbols.

Additional confusion was noted by a few correspondents, between the envelope and the R symbol, regarding the distinction between pointing out subsidiarity issues and/or other concerns.

As and additional consequence, some do not have a clear understanding if the two symbols can be used independently or together.

2.2 Languages

2.2.1 Translation of documents

Several correspondents translate documents on their own, due to limited (staff or budget) resources for translation services.

The proposal of the European Parliament to make available the translations they provide on the documents received from National Parliaments was discussed but no specific opinion was issued.

A few Correspondents raised the problem of the translations not being official. A shared position was to indicate them as "courtesy translations".

2.2.2 Description of scrutiny process in English and/or French

This was presented as even more important than the translation of the document itself, as it is feasible and allows anyone to have an idea on the stage and outcome of scrutiny in other parliaments.

The creation of few simple standard sentences in English and/or French, to be selected and repeated depending on the scrutiny process/outcome was considered as an "easy to implement" best practice to be followed.

Working group III: Features: Calendar, News, Forums, National Parliaments in IPEX and XML

Mr Uwe Jaensch and Mr Gérard Hilbert, IPEX Central Support

Working group III discussed the use of the special features on IPEX. The following summary of their deliberations reflects the conclusions of the Correspondents.

3.1 News in IPEX

3.1.1 Definition:

- featuring news – topics - headlines on interesting European affairs subjects from national or European level.
- source of information regarding parliamentary life and interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union.

3.1.2 General rules and guiding principles:

- politically independent information.
- clearly relevant for the IPEX site.
- suitable for the likely audience.
- regularly updated and refreshed
- factually accurate.
- drafted in the English/French language and when not available, providing an abstract in English/French.
- identifiable in terms of their source – e.g. who wrote the news item (who is responsible).

3.1.3 IPEX should respect K.I.S.S.

Keep It Short and Simple

- No formatting
- Add links to detailed articles

3.1.4 Three target groups:

- (**General public**) in the public section, News can have a central role in informing the public about events taking place in the national parliaments and in the European Parliament.
- (**Registered National Parliament users**) can news targeted specifically to them.
- (**IPEX correspondents**) News topics published through the IPEX Correspondent's network and Information Officer's selection, targeted to transmit messages for the community of IPEX Correspondents.

3.1.5 Sources of information:

- the national Parliaments and their respective parliamentary life, with events and topics relevant to the interparliamentary cooperation and EU affairs.
- the European Parliament and their respective parliamentary life, with events and topics relevant to the interparliamentary cooperation and EU affairs.

- EU institutions official specialised outlets and edited to suit the needs and purposes of the IPEX website.
- Information related to the functioning of the IPEX system and network, edited by the IPEX Information Officer.

3.1.6 The Correspondents agreed on the following

The correspondents:

- strongly supported the News section on IPEX;
- stated that they will contribute with news items from their Parliaments/Chambers;
- agreed that (some) information from the Monday morning meetings of the Permanent Representatives could be shared in the Correspondents News section (in agreement with the Perm Reps);
- underlined that the section should contain news about topics such as nominations, results of elections, important decisions in European affairs, bilateral and transnational meetings and cross linking to relevant Calendar events;
- decided that news may/shall contain links to other relevant pages (in IPEX or on other sites) which will give readers more detailed information on the item/topic.

3.2 Calendar in IPEX

3.2.1. Sources of information

- The Official EP Calendar of Interparliamentary activities with national Parliaments, as endorsed by its Conference of Presidents.
- The program of interparliamentary meetings organised by the Parliament of the Member State holding the EU Presidency.
- European Speakers Conference, COSAC, IPEX events as set/scheduled in the relevant documents.
- Other official sources of information on the EU - EC, Council and other EU institutions and bodies.
- Other events organised by national parliaments, transmitted through the IPEX Correspondents and/or the Permanent Representatives.
- Websites/official working program of other Parliamentary Assemblies - e.g. Council of Europe.

3.2.2 Type of information

- Meeting type
- Title/Description
- Start/ End date
- Place
- Documents or links

3.2.3 The Correspondents agreed on the following

The Correspondents:

- agreed what should be published on the calendar and are motivated to contribute to it by delivering appropriate information to the IPEX Information officer;

- agreed which sources of information which should be used (see above), mentioning also the importance of transnational meetings concerning regional issues (Baltic region, Balkan region, etc.);
- were aware that if event specific sites exist, links must be provided;
- asked to share best practices by using official sources of information (e.g. from the press office of their chamber) in order to avoid uncertainties about what to publish;
- suggested a modification of the presentation of search results;
- stated that an overload of information should be avoided;
- agreed to publish meetings conclusions etc. on the Calendar.

3.3 Forums in IPEX

3.3.1 Definition:

- A Forum is a discussion space with specific access rights where national parliaments and the European Parliament can share their views and discuss important documents, decisions and topics of mutual interest.
- A Forum is a platform to an ever expanding network of specialists interested in sectorial and cross-sectorial policies within the European Union, connecting relevant institutions, bodies and persons.

3.3.2 General rules when using a forum:

- The content should be clearly relevant to the content of the IPEX site.
- The content should be suitable for the audience most likely to use it.
- The contribution should be published in English.
- The contribution should be identifiable in terms of its source.
- The contribution must not include any content that can be offensive or inflammatory for third parties.

3.3.3 Different types of forums:

- Regular forums attached to every legislative or non-legislative dossier.
- Non-Dossier based forums, set up at the request of an Parliament, member of the IPEX network (national Parliament or the European Parliament).

3.3.4 Possibilities:

- To post explanatory texts (containing a subject and description):
- To add files and/or links;
- To reply to existing entries made by other users.
- List of favorite forums (subscribe)
- Search full text on contributions

3.3.5 The Correspondents agreed on the following:

The correspondents:

- welcomed the technical capacity of IPEX to offer the possibility to contribute to dossier- and non-dossier-related forums;

- expressed their willingness to contribute to forums considering that - due to limited resources – it is necessary to upload firstly information to the IPEX legislative database, news and calendar;
- underlined that users should be aware of the informal character of information which is generally posted on forums.