



IPEX – Report and proposals to the meeting of the Secretaries General

Copenhagen 9-10 February 2006

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Summary

The Steering Group of IPEX is hereby submitting a final report on the IPEX project.

This document is in two parts:

Part I contains the report on the work with the project.

Part II contains a proposal for guidelines for IPEX and a proposal for the composition of the future IPEX Board.

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Part I – Report

Background

The remit of IPEX

In a memorandum adopted by the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments 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 between the Secretaries General of these parliaments, a working group was set up and was given the task to look into ways to promote closer links between European Union parliaments.

Objectives

The objective of IPEX is stated in the guidelines for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the EU, which were agreed upon by the Conference of Speakers in The Hague in 2004.

Section II – Framework:

IPEX

”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 including a calendar of meetings and forums for exchange of views on subsidiarity 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.

Realisation

In the spring of 2002, a questionnaire was sent to all parliaments involved. The questionnaire dealt among other things with how the parliaments looked upon various aspects of the gathering and sharing of parliamentary information, and also what the respective parliaments' views were on various technical solutions that could facilitate such gathering and sharing. The responses were very positive.

First step – a provisional web site

A provisional web site, containing links to EU-related pages on the web sites of national parliaments of the European Union involved in the IPEX network was introduced in the beginning of 2004. This was to be seen as a first step in establishing a more versatile web site, offering more information and – perhaps more importantly - more structured information.

Second step – a dynamic and active web site

The second step is a web site that is dynamically fed with legislative proposals and information mainly from the European Commission. This information will be kept up-to-date with the help of the Central Support Function and amended with information from each country through the efforts of the respective IPEX Correspondents. 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 track of the standpoint of other countries.

There is a need for more intensified contacts with the Commission and the Council. Initiatives to promote the cooperation will be taken. It should also be pointed out that the Central Support Function is essential for the smooth running of IPEX.

National parliaments are responsible for that function and the Steering Group encourages parliaments to consider future contributions to the Central Support.

Current organisation of IPEX

The IPEX Steering Group (STG)

The Steering Group was formally established following the meeting of the Secretaries General in Stockholm in 2001. Now the group consists of representatives from the parliaments of Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Hungary¹ and the European Parliament. The ECPRD and COSAC are invited as associate members. The group is chaired by the Secretary General of the Swedish Parliament, Mr Anders Forsberg.

The group – and other parts of the current “infrastructure” of IPEX – will continue its work until the EU Speakers' Conference on 29-30 June 2006 in Copenhagen, when the web site will be officially launched. This will mean that the project as such is concluded, and IPEX will move into an implementation phase. See also “Proposed future administration of IPEX”, page 5.

The IPEX Technical Working Group (TWG)

A working group, consisting of staff from Denmark, Italy, Sweden and the European Parliament/ECPRD carries out the practical and concrete aspects of the work. The group acquired its present structure at the Steering Group meeting in London on 10-11 June 2004.

¹ Because Hungary was hosting the Speakers' Conference in 2005, representatives from the Hungarian Parliament was invited to join the Steering group meeting in November 2004, and Hungary has taken part in the work of the Steering Group since then.

Technical cooperation with the European Parliament

The TWG has been working in close and fruitful cooperation with the IT Department of the European Parliament, also known as the “DIT” who has been cooperating with the company “Agile Partner” to do the concrete web programming and the construction of the web pages and the database.

IPEX correspondents

In order to realise the tasks given to IPEX, each parliament has appointed an IPEX correspondent. The function of the correspondent is to be responsible for the updating and the accuracy of the information of that country’s data on the IPEX web site and to liaise between the national parliament in question and the IPEX Central Support Function (please see section “Future administration of IPEX”) Each parliament decides of course on its own internal organisation.

Not only countries belonging to the European Union are involved in IPEX. Candidate countries too have been invited to appoint a correspondent. As a result, all countries, or “chambers” in the case of countries with bicameral parliaments, have appointed an IPEX Correspondent, resulting in a correspondents’ network comprising 40 people from 31 countries (January 2006).

A meeting with the IPEX correspondents took place 2 February in Brussels. A questionnaire on the IPEX organisation in each parliament and views on the new website was submitted during the meeting.

Commitment from the national parliaments and from the IPEX correspondents will of course be crucial for IPEX to be a success story or not.

Future administration of IPEX

Guidelines

The current Steering Group has created a proposal for guidelines for IPEX for its continued work in the implementation phase. The proposed guidelines are being submitted to this meeting for approval. Please refer to page 9.

The intention is that these guidelines, when approved, should come into force as of the Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments, 29-30 June 2006.

The Board

The proposed guidelines suggest a new IPEX Board, in practice the successor to the current Steering Group, of up to eight members. Of these eight, three come from the countries hosting the previous, current and next Conference of Speakers, and the rest from other Parliaments in the Union (including the European Parliament).

It is suggested that COSAC and the ECPRD should be on the board as associate members.

Amongst its tasks, the board is responsible for relations with the European Commission and other EU institutions. The board also appoints the chair and other members of the Central Support Function.

The Central Support Function

According to the proposed guidelines, the Central Support Function “manages all tasks that are relevant to the IPEX web site, editorial as well as technical”. That means that it will function as a “helpdesk” and as such, it will deal with technical questions and with questions relating to the decision-making process in the Union. It will also help the IPEX Correspondents with questions about how the process in their national parliament

relates to that of the Union and how systems for the automatic update of the database could be used by the correspondent.

Calendar

The Central Support Function will also be responsible for maintaining a calendar of EU Interparliamentary conferences and other important events.

Bulletin Board

Provisions have been made for the introduction of a bulletin board within the web site. In view of the relatively tight time constraints, this particular item has got a lower priority, but will perhaps be implemented in a later phase of the IPEX work. It will not be included in the official launch.

Information Strategy

The Steering Group has decided that there is a need for an information strategy for IPEX and the Danish Parliament has assumed the responsibility for the formulation of it. This strategy will be realised in various forms as shown below. Some of these are ready now, and it is expected that the whole series will be completed during the first half of 2006, when IPEX moves into its implementation phase.

Fact Sheets

1. IPEX – a Presentation
2. The National Correspondent
3. IPEX – A tool for General Scrutiny
4. How to upload documents
5. A User's Guide to IPEX
6. General Features
7. The IPEX Bulletin Board
8. Questions and Answers about IPEX

Manuals and Quick Guides

1. Updating the IPEX Website – A Quick Guide for IPEX Correspondents
2. The IPEX Website – A Guide for Users
3. A Technical Guide to the IPEX database and website
4. IPEX Training Sessions and Seminars

Flash Animation

1. Navigating IPEX – A virtual tour
2. How to upload and update IPEX – A demonstration

Training sessions

The European Parliament in collaboration with the Technical Group/Central Support Function will offer training sessions (also in French) in Brussels for the Correspondents, starting in the second quarter of 2006.

TRAINING SESSIONS ON-SITE FOR IPEX USERS IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

The Central Support will also carry out on-site training sessions in the National Parliaments upon request, when and where possible

The Board and the Central Support Function

Composition after June 2006

In the submitted proposal for Guidelines, it is suggested that the Board consists of representatives from

- a) The National Parliaments hosting the previous, current and upcoming Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments (three)
- b) Other National Parliaments (up to four)
- c) The European Parliament (one)

COSAC and the ECPRD participate as associate members.

In my letter from 20 January 2005 on behalf of the Steering Group, I lined out our proposals regarding the continued work of IPEX, and I also asked which National Parliaments (Chambers) were interested in taking part in the future Board and in the Central Support. This question was also raised in my letter to you from 10 October 2005.

The Board

Based on answers to the above mentioned letters and on informal talks with representatives from national parliaments, we now have eight candidates to the Board, four of which are ex officio members (Denmark, Hungary, The Slovak Republic and the European Parliament) and four other parliaments willing to take part in the work (France, Italy, The United Kingdom and Finland). The parliaments participating in the Board also takes on responsibility for the Central Support Function.

Part II – Proposals

A: Proposed guidelines for IPEX

Preamble

IPEX, the InterParliamentary EU information eXchange, was created following recommendations and agreements by the Conference of European Union Speakers in Rome in 2000² and in The Hague in 2004³.

Objectives

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, a calendar of Interparliamentary meetings and forums for the exchange of views.

Composition

IPEX is open to National Parliaments (Chambers) in the member states and candidate countries of the European Union and to the European Parliament. COSAC and the ECPRD are invited to join IPEX on an associate basis.

1 Organisation

1.1 The Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments

The Conference of European Union Speakers lays down the objectives of IPEX.

² In a memorandum adopted by the Conference 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 into the matter in more detail.

³ Guidelines for Interparliamentary Cooperation in the EU as agreed upon by the Conference in The Hague, 2004.

1.2 Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments

The Secretaries General⁴ of European Union Parliaments

- oversee IPEX
- agree on the guidelines and on major changes to the IPEX system
- appoint members of the IPEX Board
- appoint the chairman of the IPEX Board among the ranks of the Secretaries General from Parliaments on the IPEX Board

1.3 The IPEX Board

The IPEX Board is appointed for a one-year period, running from one Speakers' Conference to the next.

1.3.1 Tasks

The Board

- ensures the ongoing and effective management and maintenance of the IPEX system
- monitors the IPEX web site
- oversees the Central Support Function
- meets once a year with the IPEX Correspondents
- is responsible for relations with the European Commission, other EU institutions and bodies outside the European Union
- submits an annual report to the Secretaries General about the current status of IPEX
- appoints the members and chair of the Central Support Function

1.3.2 Composition of the Board

The Board consists of up to eight members representing

- The National Parliaments hosting the previous, current and upcoming Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments (three)⁵
- Other National Parliaments (up to four)
- The European Parliament (one)

COSAC and the ECPRD participate as associate members.

1.4 The Central Support Function

The Central Support Function manages all tasks that are relevant to the IPEX web site, editorial as well as technical.

1.4.1 Tasks

- Daily maintenance of the IPEX web site

⁴ Whenever "Secretary General" is mentioned in this text, this shall include "other equivalent senior official appointed by the Speaker to represent the parliament/chamber in meetings of the Secretaries General"

⁵ In the case of bicameral systems, it is up to each parliament to decide on the representation

- Overall management of users
- Assistance to the IPEX Correspondents
- Technical and editorial changes and developments
- May upon the request of the parliament hosting the Speakers' Conference assist in the updating and maintenance of the calendar of Interparliamentary cooperation
- Other tasks, assigned by the IPEX Board

1.4.2 Composition of the Central Support Function

The Central Support Function comprises four members from national parliaments represented on the Board and one from the European Parliament. Other national parliaments may assist in the functioning of the Central Support.

1.5 The IPEX Correspondents

The IPEX Correspondents are appointed by the Secretary General of each parliament/chamber taking part in IPEX.

1.5.1 Tasks - responsibilities

The IPEX Correspondents are responsible for the contributions from their parliament/chamber to the IPEX system. This includes responsibility for

- organising the input to the databases etc from their parliament/chamber
- the correctness of the links and other items of information about their parliament/chamber on the national part of the IPEX web site
- the management of users in their parliament/chamber
- IPEX information and support in their administration
- the exchange of best practices

2 Revision of the guidelines

The revision of these guidelines is the responsibility of the Secretaries General of the European Union parliaments.

3 Organisation

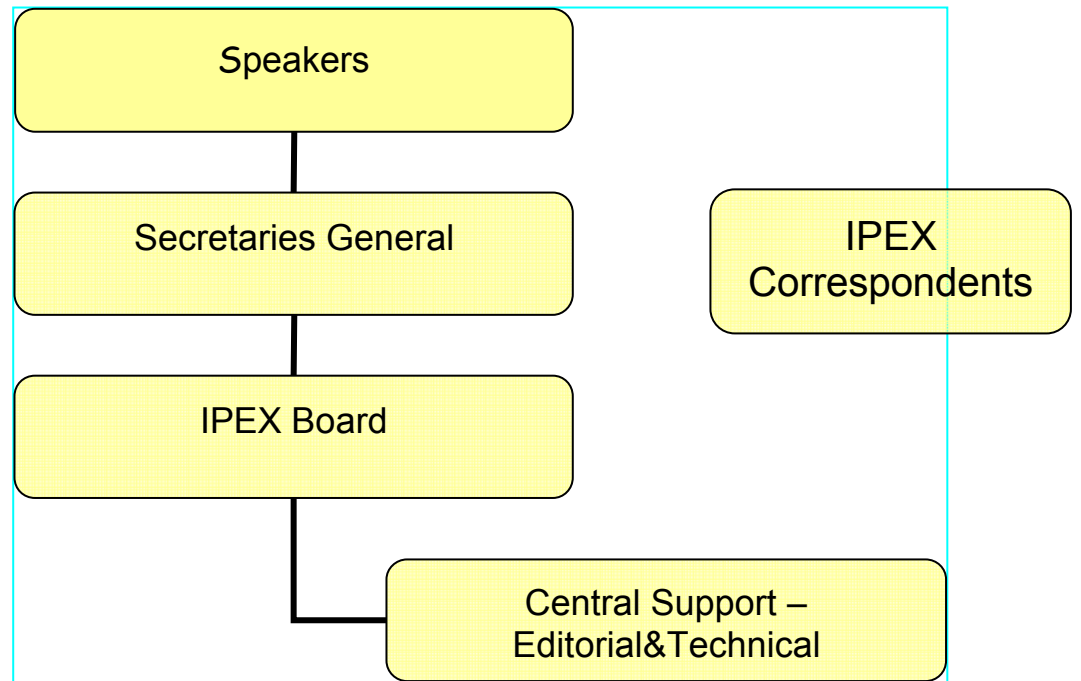


Chart 1 IPEX organisation model

B: Proposed composition of the Board

Proposed composition of the Board from June 2006 until the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments in 2007

Denmark

Hungary

The Slovak Republic

The European Parliament

France

The United Kingdom

Italy

Finland

Chair: Denmark