

IPEX Annual Report

Report by the Chair of the IPEX Board to the Secretaries General of the national Parliaments and the European Parliament

Mr Harro Semmler
Secretary General of the German Bundestag

**Meeting of the Secretaries General of the Parliaments
of the Member States of the European Union
6 February 2012 in Warsaw**

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the national Parliaments and the European Parliament**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Esteemed colleagues,

From the Chair's perspective, 2011 was an eventful and successful year for IPEX. The members of the Board and the Central Support played a very large part in that. I would like to thank the colleagues involved for our close and productive cooperation!

The biggest success was undoubtedly the launch of the new IPEX 2.0 website on 1 July 2011. This was the culmination of three years of intensive preparatory work by a working group set up by the Board. The representatives of the national Parliaments of Denmark, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Parliament, worked closely with experienced IPEX Correspondents to accomplish this. The extensive personnel and technical support provided by the European Parliament's IT department was invaluable in this context.

IPEX 2.0 is not just a database of documents. It is also a portal for wide-ranging interparliamentary dialogue, including on questions of subsidiarity and propor-

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tionality. It has a News section, where the national Parliaments can share information relating to European affairs. Other new features include a calendar of interparliamentary cooperation and private forums where information can be shared without it being immediately available to all internet users. The new website is user-friendly, loads quickly, features a modern design and allows users to navigate in any official EU language.

But of course the quality of a website or database stands and falls on whether it provides up-to-date and comprehensive information, data and documents. IPEX contains the draft legislative acts and information documents from the European institutions or the Member States which are forwarded to the national Parliaments under the Treaty of Lisbon. On this basis, IPEX offers national Parliaments a quick and simple means of making their opinions available to the other national Parliaments, first and foremost, as well as to the European institutions. We must work together in future to make IPEX even more coherent, even more reliable and an even richer source of information! Only in this way can we fulfil the commitment to greater interparliamentary cooperation enshrined in Article 12 of the Treaty on European Union.

As the Secretaries General of your parliaments, you support this work via your IPEX Correspondents. But they need the proper resources and clear parameters. They need to know what information they should upload to IPEX or retrieve from it. I would like to draw your attention again, if I may, to COSAC's reminder that IPEX has a responsibility to serve as a tool for interparliamentary exchange of information. In its conclusions of 4 October 2011, COSAC calls for the rapid and coherent provision of information, first and foremost to facilitate the work of the Members of our national Parliaments. The IPEX Board supports this call.

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On 25 January 2012 I wrote to you and sent you the Action Plan adopted by the IPEX Board, in which we outline the future requirements for the provision and sharing of information via IPEX. Attached to the Action Plan were the conclusions of the Correspondents meeting in Ljubljana. I would therefore like to ask you to examine whether, in view of the European challenges, your Correspondents have the personnel, technical and information resources they need. I would also like to raise the issue of the Correspondents' qualifications. IPEX needs a network of staff who are versed in European policy matters and truly see themselves as correspondents for their parliaments. In this, they need support from the political and parliamentary level, and from you personally, ladies and gentlemen. The usefulness of the new IPEX website will be determined by the extent to which it can provide rapid, clear and up-to-date information about the deliberations on EU affairs in the national Parliaments. That is what will determine the level of acceptance of and interest in the database and the IPEX website as a whole. With this in mind, I would be very grateful if you would assign support for IPEX in your parliamentary administrations an even higher priority in future.

I also wish to underline the importance of the role played by the IPEX Information Officer in Brussels in facilitating cooperation between the Correspondents. As webmaster and editor, he is responsible for managing the new website and is the first point of contact in case of any problems. In April 2011, a new Information Officer was appointed for an initial two-year period, following an intensive recruitment process and the process of obtaining the necessary permits, managed by the IPEX Board. The Information Officer's office is in a European Parliament building, meaning he is based close to the representatives of the national Parliaments in Brussels. This closeness facilitates the cooperation between the national representatives and IPEX. It allows constructive use to be made of all personnel and technical resources available for interparliamentary dialogue, and helps to

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prevent duplication of effort. The importance of the IPEX Information Officer is also underlined by the fact that the position is mentioned in the IPEX Guidelines for the first time. In view of this, I would like to ask you to give your approval for the new IPEX Board to complete all the preparatory work relating to the employment of the IPEX Information Officer beyond 2012.

The German Bundestag is willing, incidentally, to continue both to serve on the IPEX Board and – if confirmed as Chair – to serve as the contractual employer of the IPEX Information Officer for a further two years after 2012, on the basis of the current job description. The question of funding will arise anew after 2012 in the sense that the salary will have to be met in full from the contributions of the national Parliaments. This would mean an increase in the current national contribution of about 1000 euros. I would like to emphasise, however, that this will represent a return to the funding system which applied prior to 2011.

Returning to the IPEX Guidelines: we have been working on their revision for a year. A working group on the subject set up by the Board met in Warsaw in the summer of 2011. The aim was to adapt the guidelines to take into account the modern requirements regarding interparliamentary cooperation, the ever closer cooperation with the European Commission and further steps towards institutionalised cooperation with the Council. In addition, the duties of the IPEX Correspondents were set out in detail in view of their increased responsibilities and the national Parliaments' increased responsibility for IPEX. I therefore ask you to approve the new version of the IPEX Guidelines.

A highlight of 2011 was the conference of the IPEX Correspondents in Ljubljana on 25 November 2011. I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the Slovenian National Assembly for its hospitality and the extremely well-organised

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meeting. All the results of the IPEX Correspondents meeting have been published on the IPEX website. Despite the financial constraints which the Member States of the European Union continue to face in 2012, I would appreciate it if a national Parliament would again volunteer to host the annual meeting of the IPEX Correspondents in 2012.

As I have already said, the German Bundestag is again willing to serve on the Board in 2012 and to take on the Chair's duties. I hope you will consider voting in favour! I would also be pleased to welcome the other representatives of your parliamentary administrations to the Board once again.

If the Bundestag is confirmed as Chair of the Board, I can assure you already that – building on the experiences of the past year, and equipped with a modern and user-friendly IPEX website as our most important shared tool for everyday inter-parliamentary dialogue on EU matters – we will work to strengthen IPEX's institutional framework and will seek to cooperate closely with you in this.

Let's work together to make IPEX an even more reliable and vital tool in our co-operation!

Thank you!