

IPEX Annual Report 2013/2014

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

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Vilnius

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Report of the Chair of the IPEX Board to the Secretaries-General of the national parliaments and the European Parliament and on the appointment of a new IPEX Board

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Colleagues,

In 2000, several national Parliaments presented the Speakers with a proposal. Their initiative provided for the development of a common platform for exchanges of information amongst national parliaments as well as between national parliaments and the European Parliament. The platform was to be known by the acronym IPEX, standing for Interparliamentary Exchange.

Protocol No 9 to the Treaty of Amsterdam having already formulated the general aim of encouraging greater involvement of national parliaments in the activities of the European Union, the Constitutional Treaty broke new ground by granting the right to national parliaments for the first time in the history of the EU to be specially notified of draft legislative acts of the EU and to deliver their opinion on these drafts. This marked the birth of political dialogue and the early warning system, which were subsequently incorporated into the Treaty of Lisbon that was ratified by all Member States of the EU. In February 2010, after four successful years' work on the part of the Danish chair, the German Bundestag was elected to become IPEX chair. The Treaty of Lisbon had entered into force only three months

previously. The IPEX Board drew up a work programme for itself in the form of the IPEX Priorities, which were confirmed by the Conference of Speakers at its meeting in Belgium in 2011 and which still apply today.

In my remarks, I shall refer to these priorities and assess what has been achieved to date.

The priorities of the Board included ***developing IPEX as a suitable and important platform for the exchange of EU-related information between the national parliaments.***

Along with COSAC, the interparliamentary meetings and conferences and the liaison offices of the national parliaments in Brussels, IPEX has become one of the main pillars of interparliamentary communication within the EU. In 2011, the new version 2.0 of the IPEX platform was launched, with its modern design, offering many new functions in a highly user-friendly format with impressively rapid response times.

The documents section provides national parliaments with various options for exchanging information on different dossiers, with the focus on European legislative proposals. There is a set of standardised symbols with which the course and outcome of deliberations can be conveyed. These may be used, for example, in connection with the adoption of a reasoned opinion, engagement in political dialogue with the Commission or issuing a mandate to the national government for

negotiations in the Council. At the heart of this communication, of course, are exchanges of information and documents on the legislative proposals of the Commission subject to subsidiarity checks. A large number of parliaments, for example, recently criticised the Proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (Document COM(2013) 534 final) for breaching the subsidiarity principle. The objections were displayed on the IPEX site in a timely manner. This makes IPEX the only Europe-wide portal which displays all subsidiarity opinions issued by the national parliaments and also provides dynamic links to the dossiers of the European institutions.

IPEX's role as an effective tool for interparliamentary cooperation was also mentioned positively in the 20th COSAC Bi-annual Report produced in October 2013. It is thus fair to say that IPEX has now become established.

Within the Board, regular discussions have taken place as to how IPEX should develop in the future. Is IPEX a **platform for the exchange of information between the national parliaments**, as originally intended, or is it becoming a **platform used by the national parliaments** in their dealings with the European Union institutions.

In the document database, which forms the core of IPEX, the national parliaments can also post information in the form of free texts and links, as well as upload documents. In 2013, the national parliaments of the EU Member States uploaded a total of 4111 pieces of data on

1008 proposals by the European institutions, including all the 92 reasoned opinions that the national parliaments delivered to the Commission. One criticism which can be made, however, is that national parliaments are making insufficient use of the password-protected forums within the dossiers. I therefore encourage you to allow your correspondents to increasingly make informal information available to other parliaments in the password-protected forums, in order to support the activities of the national parliamentary representatives in Brussels.

The 'news' section of IPEX is being used more and more frequently. Around half of all national parliaments have now used it to disseminate news about day-to-day European parliamentary affairs via IPEX.

Secondly, the Board set itself the goal of **contributing to a strengthening of the national parliaments' rights to receive information and participatory rights vis-à-vis their governments.**

From the outset, IPEX 2.0 was designed to give national parliaments an area in which they could present the national legal and administrative procedures governing their information and participation rights in matters relating to the European Union. This concerns both their right to participate in decision-making processes of the European institutions and the relationship between national parliaments and their respective governments. All the national parliaments are making extensive use of this forum. Mention should

be made in this context, by way of example, of overviews showing when, how and by whom aspects of subsidiarity and proportionality are examined in national parliaments and where responsibility lies. It no longer comes as a surprise, then, to learn that IPEX is increasingly being consulted by academic circles in connection with research into the impact of national parliaments on European politics.

In this context, I should also like to mention the development over the past few years of an extremely cooperative working relationship with the Commission, which is reflected amongst other things by the fact that not only the Commission, but also the Council are now explicitly invited in the new 2012 version of the IPEX guidelines to contribute to the work of the Board. This cooperation has taken on concrete form in Brussels, where the IPEX information officer and representatives of the Commission are in contact with each other on a day-to-day basis. The status of the information officer has been enhanced by the enshrinement of his function in the IPEX guidelines in 2012. His primary duties are to guarantee the integrity of the IPEX website and, above all, to be available to national correspondents as a permanent contact.

The third aim was to **make more frequent use of the European Commission's offer of political dialogue and to intensify working contacts between the national parliaments' representatives at the European Parliament and between the IPEX correspondents.**

As well as conducting subsidiarity checks, national parliaments are also explicitly invited, in the framework of political dialogue, to express their views to the European Commission on substantive aspects of European legislative proposals. The idea is that information services of national parliaments, regular meetings of correspondents and contacts with parliamentary staff dealing with European affairs should be used to enhance the exchange of EU-related information between national parliaments. Within the IPEX Board and together with the IPEX correspondents, deliberations were conducted in 2012 with a view to identifying the tasks that correspondents should perform and analysing whether they would actually be able to perform them in the framework of their respective parliamentary administrations. In this respect a good deal of concerted effort still lies ahead of us, but we are on the right track. The meeting of the IPEX correspondents on 7 and 8 November 2013 in Brussels confirmed that the correspondents' working conditions have now improved significantly in terms of the resources made available to them. I think that this is to a large extent down to you as Secretaries-General! And should you see any further reserves which have not been used, please do get together with the leading staff in your parliaments responsible for EU affairs and with your IPEX correspondents and discuss how they can feed into IPEX even better information on the treatment of EU matters in their parliaments, but also draw from IPEX better information and communicate it within their parliaments. The development of IPEX depends entirely on how the correspondents are networked in their own parliaments, how familiar they are with EU

procedures and the extent to which the information they gain is passed on.

In order to intensify the exchange of experience at the annual meetings of the correspondents, which have taken place over the last four years in Berlin, Ljubljana, The Hague and Brussels, and provide a more permanent framework for contacts, a new initiative was launched in 2013 – the Partnership Project Groups. These are smaller groups of correspondents from different countries who form networks on the basis of common geographical and organisational features and exchange best practice. Greater continuity amongst the correspondents would be desirable in this context, however. These groups are organised and led by members of the IPEX Central Support. In December 2013, the IPEX Board evaluated initial experiences with these Partnership Groups and decided to propose to the Secretaries-General that they be continued in 2014.

Cooperation with the European Parliament in the IPEX framework is rooted in firm mutual trust and relations to the European Parliament which have become highly institutionalised. Contact is firmly in place both to the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments and the IT directorate. The Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments plays an active role in the IPEX bodies and provides the IPEX Information Officer with good working conditions. The IT directorate provides valuable technical support and is responsible for the IPEX domain.

Fourthly, we wanted to **improve the transparency of parliamentary activities and make more reliable information available.**

Great importance attaches to the reliability of data and the speed of its retrieval. Rapid search results can be achieved with the aid of simple search options based on standardised symbols. This presupposes, however, that there is a common understanding among national parliaments in general and among IPEX correspondents in particular of the way in which the symbols available in IPEX are to be used. This is a point which is frequently stressed at the annual training sessions for correspondents, in the IPEX manual and in the regular contacts between the IPEX information officer and the correspondents, for the information value of statistical information depends on their being used correctly. Some of the criticisms made of IPEX are, therefore, not necessarily due to a lack of information but to incomplete search results because of the incorrect use of symbols.

A further aspect of parliaments' work on European affairs are the interparliamentary meetings. The dates of all events in the field of interparliamentary exchange are posted in the IPEX diary, of which other European institutions are now making good use too. With regard to the Conference of Speakers, I should add that it has its own sub-page on the IPEX website. The parliamentary speakers also agreed at their last meeting that exchanges of information and documentation regarding the new interparliamentary conferences on the common foreign and security policy and the common security and defence policy and on Article 13 of the Fiscal Compact would be conducted

through the IPEX platform. In the long run, this means that the IPEX site will come to serve as an institutional memory bank, because the discussions and outcomes of all interparliamentary conferences will be retraceable there, even when the corresponding national web pages have long been shut down.

The fifth task we set ourselves was to **make data more up-to-date and reliable via the data transfer language xml.**

Earlier in my remarks, I indicated that the Secretaries-General of the national parliaments had recognised the need to make sufficient human, technical and financial resources available to IPEX in order for it to function as a reliable instrument of interparliamentary exchange. On the other hand, all national parliaments could save resources and avoid errors when transmitting information to the IPEX documentary database if they were to use the xml data transfer language for that purpose. About 20 national parliaments and parliamentary chambers have already addressed this matter and are now using xml.

The Secretaries-General also lent their support to IPEX's participation in the development of open-document standards within the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliaments network.

And, finally, we aimed to **establish IPEX more strongly as a service providing information about interparliamentary action for European citizens.**

The IPEX website is not just a platform for the participating parliaments; IPEX is also a public Internet portal which, since the new launch in 2011, can be navigated in all EU languages, including Croatian, the language of the most recent Member State of the European Union. I am also pleased to note that all reasoned opinions, as well as the contributions of national parliaments to the political dialogue with the Commission, are made available in full on the IPEX site, at least in English, in a timely fashion. This is partly thanks to the fact that the Secretaries-General have made available the necessary resources.

Moreover, there are now Wikipedia articles on IPEX in a number of EU languages, such as English, French, Italian, German, Romanian, Czech and Slovakian, while national parliamentary databases, as well as the databases of the European Parliament and the Commission, contain links to IPEX.

Finally, I would like to stress the constructive nature of cooperation within the Board. This has been the case even though it has not always been easy to achieve a consensus on the issues under discussion. As you know, interparliamentary cooperation is only possible where a large degree of mutual understanding and the will to find a consensus exist. On behalf of the German Bundestag, I should

like to stress that this was the principle by which we were guided in making our contribution as both a member of and chair of the Board. The German Bundestag is happy to carry on working within the Board and play a significant role in the revision of the IPEX Guidelines currently being discussed within it.

After our four years as chair we would, however, now like to pass on this function to a new chair. I thus have the pleasure to propose to you, on behalf of the IPEX Board, that this role be assigned to the Lithuanian parliament for 2014.

And, last but not least, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you warmly for the excellent cooperation in an atmosphere of trust which was always present in your dealings with the Bundestag. I very much hope that this will continue for our Lithuanian colleagues and I can promise them the Bundestag's full support in carrying out the role of chair.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention.