



FEDERAL PARLIAMENT OF BELGIUM

## **Conference of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU Brussels, 4 – 5 April 2011**

### **Topic : Parliament, public opinion and media**

#### **A. Fundamental assumptions:**

The relationship between parliamentary circles and the general public needs to be improved.

At present, communication occurs almost exclusively via the media.

How can the flow of information be improved? Should a direct channel be considered between the citizen and parliament?

Today's media have been changed radically by the spread of the Internet, mobile phones and social networks. Now users generate content and information. They can become influential and it is not only the media that generate news and interpret it.  
So journalists are no longer the only analysts of parliamentary news.

The prime objective is to explain the work of parliament to the people, in a comprehensive way, explain the issues, the jargon and political tactics.

The participatory spirit of the web could have benefits for parliamentary work and vice versa.

This process of communication to be established therefore needs to be considered as an education in citizenship, and must also aim to raise awareness among young people, and open their minds to politics.

#### **B. Proposals to make parliamentary information accessible to citizens**

##### **1/ CREATION OF TOOLS ON TELEVISION, RADIO AND IN THE PRESS**

- Creation of media sessions (web tv of the Parliament, radio stations, public-service TV)
  - A 30 minute-magazine programme: '*The major parliamentary issues*', to allow the initiator of a parliamentary bill to speak, and feature experts concerned by the subject, etc.  
Exchange of sequences with the parliaments of the 27.
  - Programme: '*News-session*', about the issues debated in plenary session, major questions, the progress of a parliamentary bill. MPs explain the whys and wherefores of an issue to the citizens, and the expectations on the subject.  
References to dossiers, public consultations and polls.

- Sunday programme: '*The week in parliament*', to summarise the work (extracts, mini-reports, ...)  
On radio: open platform discussion. An MP has 3-5 minutes to defend a viewpoint.
  - Programme once a week: '*Right of follow-up*', on the follow-up of issues or questions asked
- Newspapers: introduction of a parliamentary supplement, to deal with issues in the plenary session and the major policy questions (financing from public funds, production by professionals)
  - Reflection on the system of party political broadcasts
  - 'Governmental' communications: the Speakers of parliament could speak on TV and radio 3-4 times per year to update people on what is happening in parliament

## **2/ MAXIMISATION OF THE TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION**

- A website with Web-TV and linked features (with a selection bar for the 27 parliaments)
- Use of new media for rapid dissemination of information (Twitter, Facebook or others). Henceforth, the individual may produce his information and disseminate it via the media, usually via Internet or mobile communication. Recent events in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain or Morocco show the importance of these new media, which should not be overlooked. But they should not be over-estimated either: starting out from the assumption that parliamentary work must be simplified, adapting the schedule to that of the media, or 'tweeting' every item of work in committee. If parliaments must adapt to the media, and politicians to various means of dissemination of information, it is above all to understand it thoroughly and make use of it, as well as to pick up information about them, and the coverage given to their work on these platforms.
- A parliamentary database for the 27 countries of the EU (for the exchange of information on the means of communication used by parliaments).
- Weeks of parliamentary immersion for journalists on editorial teams, with the collaboration of political groups.
- A newsletter (see European Parliament)
- Setting-up a discussion forum on the parliament site.

## **3/ CHANGES AT THE PARLIAMENT**

- Introducing a format of plenary sessions, as is done at the European Parliament and other parliaments: i.e. strictly and rigorously limit speaking time.  
Advantages: lively debate. For speakers: concision, focus on the essential, better knowledge of the subject.
- A system for interruption, as in the Lower House in the Netherlands.  
Advantage: increasing the role of the Speaker in the running of debates.

#### **4/ AVENUES FOR REFLECTION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL**

- Carrying out a study of media coverage of parliaments in their national sphere, as well as throughout Europe, would enable a tangible review to be used to assess the importance of each medium, as well as each channel/title.
- Creation of a Media Agency of European Parliaments to create a 'European Media Area'. This would reinforce the symbolism while coordinating the policies and common messages addressed to the citizens of 27 Member States with observance of the subsidiarity principle.