UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

ASSOCIATION DES SECRÉTAIRES GÉNÉRAUX DES PARLEMENTS
ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

CONSTITUTIONAL AND PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION

General debate:
The Impact off New Technology on the Work of Parliaments
Geneva,
Wednesday September 25th 2002

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INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Aims

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, whose international statute is outlined in a headquarters Agreements drawn up with the Swiss federal authorities, is the only worldwide organization of Parliaments.

The aim of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is to promote personal contacts between members of all parliaments and to unite them in common action to secure and maintain the full participation of their respective States in the firm establishment and development of representative institutions and in the Advancement of the work of international Peace and co-operation, particularly by supporting the objectives of the United Nations.

In pursuance of this objective, the Union makes known its -views on all international problems suitable for settlements by parliamentary action and puts forward suggestions for the development parliamentary assemblies so as to improve the working of those institutions and increase their prestige.

Membership of the Union (April 2003)

Please refer to IPU site: http://www.ipu.org

Structure

The organs of Union are:

1. The *IPU Assembly* (formerly known as the Inter-Parliamentary Conference), which meets twice a year.

2. The *Inter-Parliamentary Council* composed of two members from each affiliated Group. President Mr. Sergio Páez Verdugo (Chile).

3. The *Executive Committee*, composed of twelve members elected by the Conference, as well as of the Council President acting as ex officio President.

4. *Secretariat of the Union*, which is the international secretariat of the Organisation, the headquarters being located at:
5. chemin du Pommier
Case postale 330
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Switzerland

Secretary general: Mr. Anders Johnsson

Official publication

The Union's official organ is the Inter-Parliamentary Bulletin, which appears quarterly in both English and French. This publication is indispensable in keeping posted on the activities of the Organisation. Subscription can be placed with the Union's Secretariat in Geneva.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION

Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments

No. 184 / second half year 2002

Fifty-second year

Contents

Editors' Note

The contents of this volume are the product of the first general debate organized by the Association, following modernisation of its Rules and Working Practices agreed in Marrakech in 2002. The debate was the most important business of the meeting in Geneva in Autumn 2002 and we have deliberately made this issue concentrate solely on this topic, as the contributions within the debate are a significant statement of the progress made with information technology in parliaments throughout the world.

It is hoped that further general debates will be the main (or as in this case the only) matter in future issues of the CPI.

Franck Boulin
Roger Phillips

Joint Secretaries
of the ASGP

Wednesday September 25th 2002, Geneva

Day's Debate on the Impact of New Technology on the Work of Parliaments

FIRST ROUND TABLE: Availability of information

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, called Mr Paul HAYTER of the House of Lords (United Kingdom) to speak as main speaker on the first subject for that day which was the availability of information.

Mr Paul HAYTER (United Kingdom) said that he was the Clerk Assistant of the House of Lords but that he had some responsibility for information technology for both Houses of the British Parliament.

He noted the differences between the various parliaments,, particularly relating to the economic development of the different countries and that this had a direct consequence on the level of access to information. He had just come back from a meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Namibia. He said that the parliament of that huge country which was mainly one with a subsistence economy had just established a mobile education unit for new technology which travelled across the nation. This exercise aimed to use new technology to increase voter participation in public life and to make access to information easier.

In a country like the United Kingdom, for example, the situation was completely different because access to information technology was taken to be a n end in itself.

He said that he would start by talking about different uses of the Internet, which was a technology that asked some fundamental questions, and then he would talk about management issues.

A recent report of the Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons noted that most parliaments felt cut off from the electorate. This was particularly true among young people in whose view members of parliament were shut off in their own world and those in political life disconnected from the rest of society. These observations raised questions about access to parliament, in particular by electronic means.

What were the new ways of accessing information? It had evolved as being based on writing and books. That method of access to knowledge and understanding was formidable, but static, expensive and sometimes unavailable, notwithstanding the use of libraries and bookshops.

In the world of the Internet, things were now different. Nowadays children no longer asked adults who were close to them for information, but searched for what they wanted on the Internet and

found it. This was a direct action without any intermediaries. This idea of direct action related to everybody including Members Of Parliament and us.

Information was more and more available which in itself created a growth in need. People needed information whatever the source might be. This might, from now on, be less trustworthy, indeed completely unverifiable.

Within parliament, there was a tendency to regard information as something it produced. But in an electronic form, it was not necessarily so and parliament needed to adapt. Electronic information was dynamic and changing. It was easily published. It could be shared and made up in itself a new source of information. The interactive character of electronic information was essential.

There were some people in developed countries, which did not trust the new electronic tools and feared that they might well be put out of work. If interaction between parliaments and electors, between parliaments and pressure groups was made easier what need was there for managing information. The competition provided by electronic means of communication was noteworthy. Parliaments could publish directly to the public minutes of evidence or of committees or reports and soon.

If profit-making organisations or commercial companies set up a system of providing information about parliament which officials could not give, then members of parliament would criticise us as officials, so we, as officials, were under pressure to improve the service that we give.

Taking into account the potential offered by the Internet and information technology, it was impossible to say where the evolution that was taking place at present would stop. Officials could not do everything. They had to identify expectations and what efforts could be made to live up to them. Therefore it was necessary to define a strategy and to fix from the start very strict rules.

Therefore it was necessary to establish compatible systems which could be adapted, a common language, in particular between the two chambers of the same parliament, so that a structure could be set up which was indispensable if parliaments were not to be cut off from the wider public. The question of consultants was also important. There were certain ideas about this that were unacceptable so priorities would have to be identified.

There was already a considerable quantity of information that was available but it was often difficult to find. Without a good search engine much effort may be in vain.

In an attempt to modernise access to information, we had to look at how money should be spent which was available to us. Most of us had no experience of the professional management of projects. All information technology projects had a high visibility. If they turned out badly this would be immediately reported in the press. If we wished to keep hold of our good reputation, we had to make sure that everything turns out well and the risks are limited.

It was necessary to take account of the kind of expenditure, which would be made as well as watching over the competence of people who were in charge of it. A system had to be installed as a long-term exercise so it was better not to give such tasks to people who were only temporary. Such matters should be given to permanent colleagues. In the House of Lords, courses were

offered to anybody who was involved in projects dealing with information access. This should be something available to co-workers at all levels.

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, thanked Mr Paul HAYTER for his presentation. He invited participants to intervene or ask questions.

Mr W.H. DE BEAUFORT (Netherlands) said that sometimes Senates were more advanced in the area of new technology than lower chambers. The United Kingdom was a good example of this. The main speaker had underlined that the user was more important than the producer. Nonetheless, there were many problems, particularly those linked to the existence of structures. There was also sometimes confusion between the two chambers or between the government and parliament. In the Netherlands, an effort had been made to standardise the constitutional language. It was because of that standardisation that the same language was used in common speech and in writing.

He said he was opposed to the idea expressed by Mr Paul HAYTER that the parliamentary service should be able to be in charge of all the structures and means of giving out information. He noted that in the United States, a private institution, "The Congressional Quarterly", provided members of Congress with very precise and useful information. Such private organisations could make available information and commentary that was very pertinent and that would not always be possible to be done by parliamentary services. Members of parliament paid between 2,000 and 3,000 dollars a year to subscribe to the service. Further, in the Netherlands, there was a private business, which provided biographies of various people. It was necessary to accept that parliamentary services should not be responsible for all information.

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Mr Arie HAHN (Israel) said that the Internet that had been set up in the Knesset in 1996 had started slowly. Nonetheless, the Israeli Parliament had a sophisticated website and almost everybody in the assembly had a connection and an e-mail address. The first services to be connected were to the library and to the document service. The site was accessible in Hebrew, Arab and English. The information provided was of all kinds, political, institutional, historical, educational and so on. The pages, which were consulted most often, were the orders of the day of the plenary sitting and documents relating to the work of committees and information on members. An external organisation managed the site and the security levels were variable according to who was using the site and what pages were being consulted.

The Intranet in a strict sense was very limited. The Knesset had an electronic information system and a sophisticated search engine. Every section or department was connected to all those with which it had working relations. There was a detailed index of archives, which included reports of sessions from 1981 and draft public and private bills from 1986. As far as information on members was concerned, there was information about all the electronic votes in which they had taken part.

Mr Anders FORSBERG (Sweden) thought that the effects of information technology in parliament and on its work were a complex subject. He agreed with those who thought that specialists should be hired for managing large projects, but there was a difficult balance to be found between using external consultants and internal experts. Technological changes were an important evolution for members of parliament and for the public. It also represented an important means of exchanging information between parliaments. A move in this direction had already been decided between the

parliaments of the European Union. He said that he was responsible for the platform, which was charged with developing new technology in managing draft bills.

Mrs Claudia Lyra (Brazil) underlined the great disparity in development that existed in her own country. In Brazil, in the developed parts, there was large recourse to the Internet for looking at the budget, parliamentary proceedings, debates, speeches and so on. There was even an electronic virtual library. Printing of parliamentary documents was computerised.

Institutional communication was largely used for civic education and this was done by means of radio, television and even over the telephone using a free number. By this means, parliament also kept in contact with municipal assemblies of which there were about 7,000. Nonetheless, although much information was provided about Parliament, it was much more difficult in return to find out what the situation was at the level of such municipal assemblies and their 70,000 municipal councillors.

Mrs Isabel CORTE-REAL (Portugal) praised the work, which had been carried out by Mme Adeline SÁ CARVALHO, her predecessor at the Assembly of the Republic, within the Association. Referring to the intervention from Mr Anders FORSBERG, she thought that as far as the domain of new information technology was concerned, as in other matters, Secretaries General should be decision makers rather than technicians.

She wanted to make two initial remarks. Adelina SA CARVALHO had presented in Marrakech the system for computerisation of parliamentary debates, which had been developed in the Assembly of the Republic in collaboration with the computer department of the University of Aveiro. That project was continuing as planned. She had also drawn attention to the computerisation of parliament in other areas. This had given a good view of the systematic and gradual work done in this area of growing importance within the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal since 1988.

Acquisition of new areas affected by information technology had always been considered as a priority within the framework of modernisation of the services of the Portuguese Parliament. So much so that at present, the new parliamentary organisation was ready to accept new challenges and demands. At the moment it was a priority to encourage the use of new materials with a view to increasing efficiency.

Among the various initiatives, which had been set up, she mentioned the five following:

1. The new version of the Internet site of the Assembly of the Republic
2. The creation of a site which had taken the name Forum Europe
3. The creation of a new Internet gateway
4. The establishment of a parliament channel which was broadcast nationally over cable
5. The Development of an ASGP site in the Portuguese language.

These areas represented future development as well as political lines within the institution of the Portuguese Parliament. In fact, within that current Parliament, the institution was giving priority to all activity or initiatives which reinforced the links between parliament, society and citizens and which gave information about parliamentary activity and which supported prestige of the parliamentary institution.

Mr Moses NDJARANKANA (Namibia) said that the Parliament in his country had only been in existence for about twelve years. In that time, great effort had been made to make progress in the area of democracy and to make democracy accessible to everyone. It had been necessary to approach all citizens by visits throughout the country in order to respond to the needs of the population that had little information available to it. An Internet site had been created but the wider public hardly knew about it. This initiative had been followed by the creation of cyber cafes in various areas of his country. The regional authorities had set these up. Information was put out on the texts of bills and the site allowed citizens to make their views known.

Namibia had a problem with the multiplicity of languages in the country. Even if English were the official language, a majority of citizens did not understand it. Nonetheless the authorities hoped that they could encourage debate at national level and that government and parliament would be able to put information into the public domain with as many of the languages used in the country as possible. Namibia was still on a learning curve.

Mr W. KULISIEWICZ (Poland) said that in the course of recent years, there had been a revolutionary development which was without precedent in technologies which were employed to collect, transmit and broadcast information. The Americans said "close your eyes for a moment and you will certainly miss something". It was not surprising therefore that this speed of development and its impact on society had become an object of interest for the European Community, which had taken quite a few important measures to advance the availability of information among the public. Candidate members of the European Union had been asked to liberalise their telecommunication markets to develop online business and to permit electronic access to big institutions as well as to guarantee that their populations could have access to the Internet, and therefore access to all information at a reasonable price.

Unfortunately, the nature of public access to information was still badly understood and this complicated an assessment of the possibilities that it offered. Nonetheless, some progress had been made with this subject.

Information had become a priceless product. Its quantity had increased at the same time as its quality had improved considerably. Now access to information was universal and new methods of transmission and treatment of information had revolutionised working practices and management. Some scientific commentators considered that a good use of information technology could significantly reduce the costs of many services.

The need for new technology in parliamentary work had been recognised for many years in Poland. A presentation on information technology that was used by the Polish Senate in the course of the conference held in the town of Pultusk in 1994 on "information technology in parliaments" showed that the authorities of our chamber had understood the necessity for putting into effect work on these new tools. Since then the Senate had accomplished a great deal in this area.

The object of his intervention was not to set out a list of new technologies, which had improved the work of the Polish Parliament, but to concentrate on the impact, which certain working practices had on the work of parliament and society in general.

Any information system or telecommunications installed in parliament had to be ready to change and to correspond with the expectations of users and to take maximum advantage of new technologies to create efficiency in parliamentary working practices. This referred, for example, to computerisation of the legislative process, technical control of that process and establishment of an advanced system of electronic voting, a system of research and transmission of information within and between parliaments and to communication with electors.

With databases that specialised in giving quick access to bills and laws on the basis of a good search engine, parliament could legislate better and reduce the number of errors. Systems of artificial intelligence would be able to take over certain types of legislative work. Exchange of information on an individual basis required by parliamentary work between members as well as their staff in real time over long distances was permitted by the very popular e-mail, which was also used as a means of transmitting documents.

The Senate turned towards new technology in its working practices once it realised that it could access sources of information throughout the world in a number of disciplines. This had an obvious impact on the quality of the work of preparing laws based on reliable knowledge. All the officials in the Senate in Poland who were in charge of legislative work had a limitless access to whatever sources are available to government, parliament, non-governmental organisations, scientific centres and libraries, as well as all international sources including the documents of the European Union, which had been so useful in the process of integration. Nonetheless, there was a great deal of information, which was not correctly treated or adapted to the needs of parliament. For this reason, the parliamentary authorities did everything in their power to guarantee the efficiency of new technologies used in the parliamentary process. New software, new processors and new systems of publication were used to produce documents of the highest quality. Multi-media communications were creating new possibilities of organising work. Network software connecting various people working in particular subject areas had been developed, including methods of sending documents without error.

Another stage in the improvement of parliamentary work had relied on the development of mobile computer workstations and means of communication (laptop computers, organisers, etc.), which allow worked to be carried out anywhere. As a result members of parliament could be contacted and could work wherever they might be.

Registration of documents, classification and archiving was a part of the legislative process. Digital imaging and techniques of registration of text and sound used by the Senate showed that it was possible to reduce the required space for collecting and archiving information. Improved means of maintaining support for information that were more durable were used, and therefore these permitted the transmission of information to those who needed it with a lower risk of corruption. Furthermore, documents in formats such as scanned photographs or CD-ROM could be in a form, which could be kept forever.

New technologies used in parliamentary work also improved the service to citizens who had become more and more interested in parliamentary information and its documents, such as legislative acts, reports of meetings, etc. This allowed them to take part on a virtual basis in the preparation of laws and to follow debates on the Internet. This had been enshrined as one of the

elements in the law on access to public information, which had been effective since January 2002, and which represented a stage towards the democratic functioning of the State.

Another important part of parliamentary work consisted of contacts between parliamentary officials, ministers, and officials in the ministries. Exchange of information between officials was more and more done by electronic means. In this way, use of the Internet and its derivatives might be considered in a simplistic way, perhaps as a form of government.. Parliamentary procedures and government actions could be conducted electronically and decisions could be made immediately accessible to the public. Furthermore, citizens could contact government institutions and parliament through electronic means.

It was also necessary to keep in mind that as far as preparation of legislation was concerned, parliament must not only take into account existing technology but must also have an eye towards trends in the development of such technology in the foreseeable future. If this were not done, new legislation would be rapidly obsolete or ineffective. The law on telecommunications did not take into account advanced technologies. For example, the use of electronic signatures and the matter of rights of authorship of matters on the Internet were not covered. Sometimes such delays in developing the law were because of the absence of any decisions about the rules made by the government or guidance on application of the rules.

Poland did not wish to be behind the rest of Europe in this area. In 2000, the Sejm agreed a resolution on the creation of a society based on information. The Committee on Scientific Research produced a document on the objectives and directions of development in a society based on information, which described the most important questions to deal with in this area, notably universal access to the Internet, adaptation of law to the electronic economy, education and the development of an electronic information infrastructure. In response, the Ministry of Communications had prepared a programme called "Poland - An Action Plan for Developing a Society based on Information (2001-2006)" which was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 11 September 2001. This programme was to be put into effect each year. The programme was in the course of being worked on by the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Use of new technology in the Polish Parliament was not a closed subject. Many scientists thought that a new vision of the development of a society was linked to the notion of a mobile society. Therefore fixed computers would be progressively replaced by portable ones, by organisers and calculators. These developments would completely change the way in which parliamentary work was organised. The new age was coming in quickly and was making its presence felt, but we could not as yet entirely foresee the consequences of its arrival.

Mr Seppo THTINEN (Finland) agreed with the remarks of Mr Paul HAYTER. He underlined the importance of making information rapidly available and this required a change in working practices. He said that the Internet site of the Parliament of Finland contained all the required elements for information. The reports of sittings were available the following day. Nonetheless, citizens complained that there was too much information, which created difficulty in finding what they actually wanted. For this reason it was necessary to organise the way information is made available, to adapt it and to personalise the way it was presented, taking into account particular target groups.

He said that the media had its own interest in this area. Some areas of the media were asking themselves what their role would be if Parliament was directly contacting the public. The response to this question, made by some, was that the press should explain, to draw attention to things, analyse, open the debate on certain issues. As for Parliament, the information that it provided on its Internet site was aimed at putting basic elements of information at the disposal of citizens for their own use.

Citizens wanted to use the Internet also as a means of contacting their members of parliament. E-democracy was a far off objective but which raised interesting thoughts. Nonetheless, it was necessary to bear in mind that the principle of representative democracy had to be respected.

In many cases, searching for information on the Internet was difficult because of the flow of information. He also noted that in many cases the trustworthiness of information provided was doubtful.

Dr Yogenda NARAIN (India) presented the following intervention:

"Today, we are living in an information society where information has become a critical resource and basic input to progress and development. Information, in other words, has become synonymous with power. The world is witnessing, what may be described as information explosion - the release of a formidable volume of information by the official and non-official organisations, both nationally and internationally. It is both the cause and effect of the path breaking changes in the arena of information and communication technologies. Fusion of the split second computing and faster communication especially through the Internet has heralded an era of global-information-networking. It has cut down heavily on the cost, time and distance. These technologies, in fact, have changed conventional and hitherto followed methods of information storage, retrieval and dissemination. Adoption of such innovative technologies in a wide variety of fields has also enhanced the expectations of users, beneficiaries and even the public in general for better and effective results. This calls for an urgent need to grasp the immense opportunities offered by the widespread use of these modern technologies especially in legislatures for providing speedy and efficient access to relevant information for the benefit of Presiding Officers, Members of Parliament and the officers of the legislature secretariats. Since Parliament is one of the fountainheads of information, such technologies are of extraordinary significance to disseminate such information among the people. The large-scale use of these new technologies for interaction between Parliament and people has the potentiality of making democracy more meaningful for the citizens.

Members of Parliament also need to have latest and relevant information, without which they will perhaps find it difficult to discharge their responsibilities effectively. It will not be possible for them to assess, review, appreciate or scrutinise the governmental activities, as people's representatives. Without a proper exchange of information between the government and Members of Parliament and the vice versa, people's aspirations can hardly be met. This calls for sharing of information amongst legislature Library and Research services in India and abroad. Sharing and exchange of information, ideas, experiences, etc. by legislature libraries would certainly enable them to cope with the recent challenges which the legislatures and their Members have come to face in the wake of globalisation, liberalisation, etc. In this exchange of information, networking facilitates communication through electronic mail, bulletin board, file transfer, etc. Computer/audio/video

conferencing may also play an important role in more quick and effective exchange of views and information. The ultimate aim of these technologies is to avoid duplication of efforts in acquiring information from various sources and passing these off to the legislators through a well articulated information networking of the legislature libraries.

The rapid strides in communication and information technologies and convergence of various such disciplines have opened up newer vistas of information sharing. It has made access to data easier and enabled our legislators to remain better informed. At the same time, the information explosion that we are experiencing, makes the process of information management for legislators more challenging given the fact that they need objective, up-to-date and authentic information.

Position in the Rajya Sabha

The idea of introducing automation services in the Indian Parliament was conceived way back in 1982 and a computer based information retrieval system called PARLIS (Parliament Library and Information System) was set up in 1985 with the help of the National Informatics Centre (NIC). PARLIS is linked with the NIC's satellite based network called NICNET which is linked with the capitals of all the States of India and also with all district headquarters enabling faster exchange of information with State Legislatures and district headquarters through e-mail. The Rajya Sabha Secretariat had set up a Computer Cell in 1997 to deal with various issues arising out of the adoption of new information and communication technologies for the use of Members of Parliament and its officers.

In an effort to increase information availability to Members and also to the public, the Rajya Sabha Website was augmented in 1999. It provides up-to-date information about the business before the House and its proceedings including legislative and other business transacted every day. Session-wise Resume of the work done and Session-wise Journal are also available on the Internet.

Further, to use the Internet for research purposes and access information lying in the World Wide Web, the Rajya Sabha Webpage provides links to several important search engines. Other useful links on the Rajya Sabha Webpage allow users to get access to the websites of different newspapers, Election Commission of India, States and U.T.s, State Legislatures, Parliaments of other countries, International Parliamentary Union and other such bodies.

The overall emphasis has been to use the Internet for disseminating essential information about the Rajya Sabha to the world at large and at the same time provide easy access to Members to all the information available on the World Wide Web. It also enhances the institution's image both nationally and internationally by providing a flexible access to information in this age of globalisation. Our long-term aim is to facilitate automation so that paper use in the office is reduced and information retrieval from different sections and sources is speeded up. Towards this end, all the services within the Secretariat are being computerised and put on a Local Area Network (LAN) for easy electronic transfer of official information and other related matters.

Another significant area in making use of the information technology has been the wider use of e-mail facility. Each Member of the Rajya Sabha has been provided with an e-mail address and parliamentary information is regularly mailed to him or her on that particular address. In fact, with a view to making information available to Members as quickly as possible, the Secretariat sends the

daily List of Business and Parliamentary Bulletins Part I and Part II, through e-mail to Members of the Rajya Sabha both in English and Hindi. This is done in addition to the normal distribution of printed material.

Effective functioning of democracy demands effective communication between the citizens and their representatives. The new technologies make possible instant linkages between the electorate and the representatives paving the way for making the representative democracy more meaningful and responsive. Information regarding Members is also made available through the 'Members' Home Page' which provides *inter alia* links to their detailed bio data, the questions asked by them on the floor of the House, answers given by the government to such questions in each session, their membership of different committees, etc. as also information regarding the allocation of funds and its utilisation, under the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). Moreover, the details about the officers and sections of the Rajya Sabha Secretariat with their respective responsibilities and e-mail addresses are also available on the web page for direct sharing of information, quicker contact and effective response.

Archival photos of Parliament House with important information are put in the photo album giving the viewer a sense of history. The statues, busts and paintings of noted freedom fighters, which adorn the Parliament House and its precincts, have been made available through these new technologies. The corridors of Parliament House boast several panels of mural paintings by noted artists. These have been incorporated in the Rajya Sabha Webpage in the form of a Photo Gallery. Virtual visit to Parliament House at the click of a mouse has thus become more informative."

Mme Hélène PONCEAU (France) underlined the importance of the development of the Intranet and the Internet in the administration of parliaments. In France, the Senate used the Internet more and more for personnel management. The Intranet was an essential means of communication for management of human resources and intervened in almost all the aspects of the collective life of the administration. The site included, for example, information on recruitment competitions etc.

The Intranet was used for information on status, the rules, plans for reform, descriptions of jobs, competitions for promotion, education and the yearly reports on staff, and professional elections. It also served as a permanent address book.

As far as the use of internal management or external providers was concerned, the Senate mainly used the latter for providing applications. Nonetheless internal staff assured continuity in provision.

Mr Jean-Claude BECANE (France) invited participants to read the online documentation on the subject on the French Senate's Internet site, at the address: www.senat.fr. He said that the Senate had interested itself in information technology at an early stage. The first applications dated from the start of the 1970s. Important developments had been made since then. The Internet site had been set up in 1995. Now every Senator had a personal computer and the 800 officials had over 1,000 computers between them. The Internet site had 12,000 subscribers, who were able to access 2,000 reports online. The legislative part of the site gave access to reports of debates, to drafts of public and private legislation, to opinions and reports, as well as the legislative dossiers.

Apart from the Senate's actual Internet site, there was a network of special groups, which were aimed at particular participants whom the Senate had a vocation to represent in the parliamentary sphere. Therefore there was a site designed for businessmen and women, which was aimed at innovation. The Senate had also opened up a site aimed at young people aged between 8 and 12 years old, as part of its commitment to educate the public. There was also a site on the institution of second parliamentary chambers within Europe.

He referred also to his presentation on the management of amendments online (AMELI), which he had presented at the last conference in Marrakech in March 2002.

Dr Mohammad AL-MASALHA (Jordan) said that new technology had a great impact on all aspects of life and work. Parliaments were no exception to this. Nonetheless, the impact of new technology varied between countries and, of course, from one parliament to another.

He outlined how this affected the Jordanian Parliament, by listing services which were either accessible or which would soon be accessible in the Jordanian Parliament, which was in the final phases of modernisation of its information network and its access to the Internet.

New technology permitted a collection and easy search of information with the minimum effort, cost, space and personnel, relating to the great volume of information which Parliament dealt with, and this included information on debates in plenary session, activities of committees, information linked to government institutions or non-government institutions, as well as regional and international organisations. This required work with the minimum of routine. For this reason, databases and databanks achieved these objectives with the greatest of efficiency.

The Jordanian Parliament used new technology for the following aspects of its work:

- Management of documents and archives
- Its payment system
- Its staff records
- Supplies
- Expenditure
- Budget
- Reports of debates
- Petitions
- Law and drafts of government or private members' laws
- Management of correspondence (both in and out trays)
- Official Journal
- Library records
- Studies and various other documentation

The Website of the Jordanian Parliament could be described as a window of international contact, which reinforced the image of Parliament. Furthermore, it could be used to transmit messages to members; a special page permits them to see their diary and facilitates their work.

Thus, members of parliament can obtain information relating to the legislative orders of the day or other matters, and this makes the service of members of parliaments that they give to the population much more efficient, not least because they can compare information on similar types of legislation in other countries. The objective of reinforcing representative democracy was one of the basic objectives of Parliament.

Mr Panayotis TZORTZOPOULOS (Greece) said that the Greek Parliament had started using information technology in 1988 with the installation of electronic equipment and the recruitment of specialist personnel. A great deal of effort since then had been devoted towards two principal aims:

(a) automatisation of the working of Parliament and its services, and
(b) the support to members of parliament for the use of new technology in their work.

In the course of 2001 and after an appeal for international support, the development of an integrated system of information had begun. A private company had been chosen for this work. It was collaborating with the parliamentary service in the relevant areas to develop this system. The budget for the project was about 10 million Euros and it was hoped that the whole project would be finished at the end of 2003.

As far as access to information was concerned, the Greek Parliament had created its Website in 1996. Since then various improvements had been made and now the user could obtain a great quantity of information. Most of it was also available in English. It related to work in the plenary session, in committees, the agenda of parliamentary work and control exercised by Parliament, and so forth. The Website also gave out information on the country's Constitution, the constitutional history of Greece and biographies of members of parliament. A link also allowed people to follow sittings in the Chamber. Each member had their own site, as well as an e-mail address. An Intranet was also in the course of being set up.

Management of new technologies relating to information about the Greek Parliament was split up into four sections. Each head of section was responsible for management of the part of that section in the integrated system of information. Co-ordination of the project was the responsibility of a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of Parliament, who specialised in new technology and information. There was a special committee, chaired by the Secretary General, which had management of the whole system.

The sittings chamber as well as the committee rooms were equipped with an electronic voting system and a system of microphones. Their sittings were recorded both by video and by audio. The plenary sittings were broadcast both on the Internet and on a satellite television channel.

Mr Everhard VOSS (Germany) asked Mr HAYTER how he thought information technology could free itself from certain restraints to concentrate better on the essential areas of the legislative work. He also wanted to know how it would be possible to manage the attempts of various people. Was standardisation desirable? Was it possible? How was it possible to find solutions to the current problems?

Mr G.C. MALHOTRA (India) said that the day's debate reflected the importance of new technology in the parliaments of today. He said there was a certain division between the three themes in which the day had been divided. He did not wish to repeat the remarks of his colleague from the Rajya Sabha and he said that he would limit himself to those matters, which were specific to the lower chamber of India. First of all he said that neither of the two chambers could go against the interests of its members.

The development of new technology depended on knowledge and power. It also depended on the level of wealth of each country. The level of use of information technology was directly proportional to the resources of each country. India being a country with rather a low income, the development of information technology in Parliament's work was also at a correspondingly low level. It had used experts in information technology and in legislative procedure in order to co-ordinate both areas of knowledge. All services of the Lok Sabha had benefited from information technology. Today there were 584 PC computers, 27 servers, and 328 printers: all members were equipped with information technology equipment. There was also a scanner, an Internet connection, LAN connectability and a satellite link. The library of the Lok Sabha was partly digitised and had a connection with other libraries throughout the world.

Nonetheless, simply the number of machines did not measure the evaluation of the use of information technology, but also on how it was used and from that point of view the Lok Sabha could be quite satisfied.

Mr Paul HAYTER replied to the various participants.

He underlined the fact that many countries with an Internet site for their parliament had put their information on this site in various languages. It was in fact very important to think more about who would connect to the site in a parliament than who was going to produce it. As far as this was concerned, it was essential that the staff of an assembly should think about what its members expected of the Internet site attached to their chamber. In this respect, the United Kingdom had some way to go.

If the Parliament was bicameral, those reading the material on the site did not always know which House they were looking for information, or in which assembly a draft was being debated. For that reason it was important that the staff of both Houses should co-operate.

There was some disagreement about the way in which internal experts and external consultants might be used. It was necessary that information should pass in a satisfactory way and that information should not be aimed only at those on the inside. A balance had to be found. It was also necessary to have internal experts who were qualified to deal with information technology. The balance was very difficult to strike in this area, because the needs and possibilities of relating to information technology changed so much from one year to the next. For this reason it was not possible to avoid having recourse to outside consultants, but at the same time they had to ensure that the permanent staff of an assembly were properly trained. It was not possible to rely only on internal staff because everyone knew how difficult it was for those who were not properly trained to understand the language of computers. In the House of Lords, a group of senior staff were working in co-operation with internal experts and external consultants. In this way it was possible to explain to the specialists, both internal and external, aims and expectations.

In order to manage expectations from a day-to-day basis, there were three indispensable considerations: explanation, examination and control. As far as work to do with explanation was concerned, it was necessary that a group should be set up within an assembly in order to find an appropriate solution. It was necessary that that should be accepted by the lower levels in a comprehensible language. Furthermore, in a bicameral parliament, explanations should not be aimed only at one of the Houses.

Control was equally necessary. In the Lords, this was achieved by the central procurement service. This was a good thing and the organisation assured that there was a moderating effect, at the same time as it guaranteed a compatibility in equipment and use, which avoided disparity in working. Information technology systems were everything.

In Portugal, debates in the Assembly of the Republic were permanently accessible on a digital television channel. This system was possible because Parliament is unicameral. This would not be possible in the United Kingdom where the debates in the Lords are not broadcast except when the House of Commons is not sitting.

As far as contacts with local municipalities and councils was concerned, the United Kingdom was not in a geographical sense very large. Nonetheless, the United Kingdom had just started up decentralised parliaments. In the Lords, there was no geographical link or constituency arrangement. Nonetheless, a great deal of contacts had been established with the decentralised parliaments.

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, suggested that that was time to stop the debate on the first round table subject.

SECOND ROUND TABLE: Impact of new technologies on procedural matters

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President welcomed members to the second session. He reminded them that that morning they had decided to start the session of the afternoon with the subject which was the impact of new technology on procedural matters.

He called Mme Marie-Andrée LAJOIE of the House of Commons of Canada to speak on the PRISM project, which was the technological project in the House of Commons, in the name of Audrey O'BRIEN, Deputy Clerk of the House.

Mme Marie-Andrée LAJOIE gave the following presentation:

"The publishing of parliamentary documents began years ago and has evolved with different technologies including pen and paper, typewriters, word processors, computers, off set printers, laser printers, and now the Internet. Legislatures are now looking to technology for more sophisticated means of managing and disseminating their information. Recent technological advances and the emergence of standards that enable the re-use and exchange of information in many different formats have made it possible to rethink the entire process for capturing and organizing information found in the parliamentary documents, while continuing to provide the traditional paper publications. At the House of Commons, the result has been creation of a new integrated technology system called Prism to replace nine stand-alone systems. Prism creates a shared database environment that allows employees to capture information once, at the source, eliminating duplicate data entry and increasing the consistency and integrity of the information across parliamentary publications. This article describes the launch of the Prism Project in September 2001.

On September 17, 2001, Hansard staff sat down in front of their computer screens and formally signed onto the Prism system for the first time. As each Member of Parliament rose to speak, the time along with the details about who was speaking and what item of business was under consideration was entered into the new system. Using this log of the day's events as a series of electronic hooks, staff in the Parliamentary Publications Directorate of Information Services and the Translation Bureau at Public Works and Government Services Canada created Hansard and its translation by attaching pieces of text to the skeleton data.

The launch faced the added challenge of a late-night sitting since the House decided to hold a special evening debate on terrorism. Yet despite the midnight adjournment, the first Prism edition of Hansard rolled off the House of Commons presses before the House met again the next morning. To the Members who found copies of Hansard awaiting them when they returned to work the next day, there was little immediate evidence of the change. But Prism will eventually yield some exciting improvements in the way that both Members and the public access and retrieve information about what goes on in the House and in Committees.

Prism is not an acronym, but a name meant to evoke the image of a spectrum of information - information about Members, about the House and its committees, about their debates and decisions. It is also the name for the sophisticated environment that has been built to sustain well

into the 21st century the record-keeping activities of the Commons and its committees. To date, this new environment is supporting the work of approximately 300 employees and is the primary means of producing not only the daily Hansard, but also the Journals, the Order and Notice Paper, and all committee evidence. In the year ahead, more committee publications will be added to the list of Prism products and the total number of users will exceed 500.

The concept of linking all the information associated with a Member's participation in debate, from the moment he or she rises to speak, is at the heart of Prism.

The new environment will create an indispensable archive of structured information that will allow users to find and retrieve the details of debate and decision-making in the House and in committee. Whereas in the past, the House's record-keeping systems were designed primarily around the demands of publishing, Prism generates the traditional documents as by-products of a database that is focussed on capturing information at the most granular level possible so that it can be presented in many different ways and so respond to the full range of needs of those who follow parliament.

Prism tracks a bill's progress through the legislative process as a series of events: it begins with the submission of a notice for the Notice Paper; continues through first and second readings cataloguing the speeches in the House and testimony and interventions in committee; the tabling of the committee's report; debate at the report stage, if any, and eventually the passage of the bill at third reading. In the future, a list of these events can be published to a web page for each bill, with links to the relevant extracts of the publications, giving users a huge advantage over the present scenario whereby they themselves must take the time to find and follow the applicable entries in the various publications.

Similarly, users will be able to find all events associated with a particular Member of Parliament, creating a comprehensive index of all his or her interventions in Commons and committee proceedings.

The launch of Prism is an important milestone in meeting the House of Commons commitment to improving information resources for Members. In June 2000, the Board of Internal Economy agreed to spend almost $9 million on the Prism program over a two-year period. The program's primary goal for those two years was to replace the aging technology that supported the publishing of the parliamentary documents. Prism increases the House's ability to integrate emerging technologies in the areas of voice and video, data exchange, the web and information management.

Due to the mission-critical nature of the systems being replaced, it was necessary to provide assurances to Members that the ability to deliver the publications and other services would not be put at risk during this move forward. The program's commitment was therefore to make the development and deployment as invisible as possible. It was agreed that the first priority was the creation of a solid and reliable foundation for the future, and that more visible improvements to the information management environment at the House would be made as part of a second phase of the program.

The first phase of Prism has been a major project for the House of Commons. The application had to be designed and built to meet the operational needs of more than 15 groups of employees, each of which plays a distinct and crucial role in supporting the work of the House of Commons. Extensive testing and training had to be conducted during breaks in the parliamentary calendar, so as not to interfere with regular production schedules.

The launch of Prism was not, however, the first time that the House has embarked on an ambitious project. The publication of House of Commons Procedure and Practice 2000 in February was the culmination of another massive project that required combing through decades of records and documents to reconstruct from primary sources the events of the past in order that their significance could be substantiated and set down as a guide for the future. The editors of House of Commons Procedure and Practice - Robert Marleau and Camille Montpetit - retired shortly after the book's publication, leaving a significant portion of the institution's collective memory safely stored between its covers.

By investing in Prism, the House has sought to ensure that as it moves forward, the institution is able to capture and classify more key parliamentary information at its source. Not only will this serve the day-to-day needs of Members of Parliament and other users of the parliamentary websites, but also when it comes time to prepare a second edition of Marleau-Montpetit, Prism will provide an exhaustive catalogue of all the business of the Chamber and its committees.

The development of Prism has also provided an extraordinary opportunity for procedural clerks to capture the intricacies of the unique classification systems they use to record procedural events, as well as the standards of phrasing and terminology adhered to in preparing entries for the Journals and the Order Paper and Notice Paper. By creating an application that has the capacity to store this type of information, as well as the flexibility to adapt as parliamentary procedure continues to evolve, the House of Commons has dramatically reduced the risk that this knowledge could be lost and has ensured that each new generation of clerks is well-equipped to do their work.

Prism has a great potential for safeguarding the raw material of the organization's institutional memory. The knowledge and experience that the House of Commons staff draws on every day to support the work of the Members of Parliament constitute assets that cannot be valued or replaced.

Members of Parliament in Canada, like their counterparts around the world, are examining the ways that technology and electronic communications can enhance the role of elected representatives, improve their working methods, and encourage more productive interaction between elected assemblies and their electorates. The Prism program puts the House of Commons at the forefront of legislative assemblies around the world in the way it manages, publishes and disseminates its core information.

Discussions about the relationships between parliaments and other institutions (whether government, NGO or civil society) often raise expectations around concepts of e-democracy and e-parliament. No one can predict where the evolution of parliamentary government will take us or what the term citizen engagement will eventually come to mean. In the meantime, however, the Canadian House of Commons hopes that the Prism program will provide the foundation that will allow it to respond strategically to these new imperatives."

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, thanked the speaker and invited the second principal speaker, Mr Robert MYTTENAERE of the House of Representatives of Belgium, to speak on management of the legislative process in the House of Representatives of Belgium: "the electronic legislative dossier".

Mr Robert MYTTENAERE (Belgium) said that in the past few years, various factors have heightened the awareness that information technology must be used more effectively in the management of the legislative process. He gave the following presentation:

"The federal and regional parliamentary assemblies of Belgium have recently examined the question of the integration of electronic communication into the parliamentary work. Among other things, the following observations have been formulated:

- in each assembly, legislative documents are put on the net shortly after the distribution of the printed text;

- at federal level: draft bills are only admissible if they are signed and dated. In practice, the ministerial offices always, so to speak, supply a version containing the printed text on floppy disk.

The project of the Prime Minister's Chancellery, which aims at the complete computerization of the legislative process, holds that:

- the government should pass on the draft bill to the House of Representatives by means of an electronic medium ;
- this draft bill should be printed as such (an order to be printed is no longer required);
- all the possible mistakes should be examined by the Parliament in amendment of erratum form.

In the House of Representatives, the College of Quaestors (i.e. the Board of Administrators) proposes to adapt the Rules of Procedure of the House in order that a report should be considered as distributed as soon as it is available on the website of the House (Remark: this also implies an adjustment of the law of 6 April 1995 organizing the parliamentary committee which co-ordinates the activities of the House and the Senate).

A pilot project will be launched in order to make it possible to table private member's bills, amendments, questions and interpellations via electronic medium on standardized forms.

The awareness of the use of electronics, has also led to the constitution of a study group during the last session, composed of representatives from the legislative chambers; Chancellery (of the Prime Minister); the Council of State; and the Official Journal. They have developed a project called 'Electronic legislative dossier,' which is currently in the testing phase.

Although the original plan was modest - to deliver electronic texts to the Belgian official journal - the study group quickly concluded that one must be able to have a reliable, 'official' electronic version of the text concerned in *each* phase of the legislative process.

Therefore, the study group also devised a structure with four electronic phases or 'bulletin boards':
- the 'bill introduction' bulletin board;
- the 'transmission' bulletin board;
- the 'draft' bulletin board;
- and the official journal's bulletin board.

The fundamental principle is that, at the end of each phase, an authorised individual posts a text on the bulletin board, which can only be accessed by another authorised individual. This accessed text is then the (official) starting point for the next phase.

On the **'bill introduction' bulletin board,** the minister who is introducing the bill completes the electronic bill with the place and date of signing by the King. Then, he creates a directory [abbreviated name of the bill + place and date of signing] and puts the files in their original format into the directory (these must be 'suitable for printing' versions; typos and so forth can no longer be corrected on the printer's proof, but must be rectified during the parliamentary deliberations). When forwarding the paper version of the bill, the minister notes the directory in which the electronic version of the documents may be found, including the date and time of creation.

As soon as a new directory has been posted on the bulletin board, House .and Senate are automatically notified by email and they download the files. (To prevent several versions of a document being circulated, each document can be downloaded only one time, and the person posting the file is notified automatically by email that the bill has been downloaded.)

The printer of the House or the Senate for printing the parliamentary paper uses this official electronic version. So, in the future, the person introducing the bill will no longer receive a paper proof copy.

After discussion and adoption of the bill, the House or the Senate creates a directory on the **'transmission' bulletin board** [number of the parliamentary document + date of adoption]. In the cover letter of the hardcopy version of the adopted bill, the House / the Senate notes the directory in which the electronic version of the documents may be found, including the date and time of creation. The receiving assembly is automatically notified by email and downloads the files; the transmitting assembly is automatically notified by email that the text has been downloaded.

After the text has been adopted at the Parliamentary level, the House or the Senate (depending on the situation) creates a directory on the **'draft' bulletin board** [number of the parliamentary paper + date of adoption]. The House / the Senate puts the files into the directory and notes in the cover letter to the minister who has introduced the bill, the directory in which the electronic version of the documents may be found, including the date and time of creation.

The minister introducing the bill is notified automatically by email and downloads the files; the transmitting assembly is notified automatically by email that the text has been downloaded.

In the final phase, the text - having received royal assent and promulgation by the King - shall be posted on the **'Belgian Official Journal's bulletin board** (not yet developed).

All of the bulletin boards are accessible via Fedenet (the network of the federal government), which is separate from the Internet. They are protected by a user name and password. The user sees only the bulletin board of which he is a member, and has wider or narrower privileges according to the situation.

At the moment, the system described above is **still being tested.** In the meantime, the trial run has demonstrated that it is very difficult to get all the departments introducing bills to line up and comply with the same procedure.

Meanwhile, one of the attractive aspects of the system described above is that the persons introducing bills will be impelled to exercise a lot more care. At present, it happens all too often that a bill is introduced when it is not yet finished. In the future, the bulletin board system will make that impossible: whatever is introduced is printed, and a printed error can only be rectified via an amendment.

Another attractive side of the project is that, although it was indeed originally developed for introducing government bills, without much effort it can be applied to private member's bills.

Still, a number of critical considerations need to be made concerning the project described above:

- First of all, the last bulletin board (publication in the 'Belgian official journal') is not yet operational, while it is in precisely this phase that a lot of errors slip into the texts;
- « secondly, it is still not at all clear how this project will be connected to databases in which the current legislation - in an unofficially co-ordinated form - is gathered;
- and thirdly, the project is almost exclusively focused on electronic version management of adopted texts, which means that (for example) in the course of the parliamentary deliberations one will still be confronted with amendments that are not available in electronic form.

Moreover, tabling amendments via electronic medium is one thing, having them on paper for discussion is another one (the electronic tabling of amendments can lead to noticing, as a kind of surprise, that a great many amendments have been tabled via electronic medium before the end of the general discussion). Therefore, rules about the deadlines for tabling amendments must be defined in the framework of the Rules of Procedures of the House. Should these deadlines be exceeded, only the technical amendments and/of these resulting from the discussion would still be allowed to be tabled.

Therefore, the 'Electronic legislative dossier' project is a modest but none the less meritorious initiative that shows clearly that government and Parliament can work together efficiently to make concrete improvements in the legislative process.

Meanwhile, however, new applications are already coming forward that will perhaps supersede the 'Electronic legislative dossier.' In this respect, the Regedoc database of the Federal Government Chancellery - the database containing all documents that have been discussed in the Cabinet - must be ready in a following phase (2003/2004) to automate the calling up and forwarding of

dossiers (including government bills and private member's bills) among various databases. That could be done, for example, with the aid of a 'bridge'-database that contains a list of cross-references to various other databases.

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, thanked Mr Robert MYTTENAERE for his presentation. He invited Mr Hans Peter GERSCHWILER, Deputy Secretary General of the Federation Assembly of Switzerland, to speak on the use of its Parliament of the VERBALIX system.

Mr Hans Peter GERSCHWILER (Switzerland) said that despite the very different needs of users of the big system of 'Verbalix', nowadays known as 'Enterprise Verbalix', a great part of the technology and knowledge of the engineers who set it up had been able to be re-used for 'Portable Verbalix'.

The portable Verbalix was much more than a simple replacement of the former tape-recorders. It was an integral system of editing in which audio recording and the corresponding text were intimately linked.

Therefore it was possible to find instantly any passage that had'been audio recorded on the basis of recognised marks, which were made by the operator during the recording.

The use of standard formats for storage of data (XML for text, MP3 for sound) has greatly facilitated integration of portable Verbalix in the current management system, particularly for publication of records of debates in various formats and for archiving data. This system allowed not only speedy publication on the Internet of sessions of the Federal Chambers, but also supplied all the needs of the service of the Official Bulletin.

The introduction of an easily transportable system designed to produce complete records of sittings of committees of the Parliament had started in 2001 with an analysis of the needs and preparation of the first prototype.

As one would expect, the requirements for preparation of records of plenary sessions were very different from those relating to committees. Speed of publication is not as important. The Internet was not required because of the confidentiality of speeches and it was necessary to have a portable system, which could be put into action very quickly.

The development of the software part of the portable Verbalix system was coming to an end and now the introductory phase was starting for the entirety of the editors attached to committees.

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President invited Mme Marie-Frangoise PUCETTI (Gabon) to speak on the introduction of an Internet site by the National Assembly of Gabon

Mme Marie-Frangoise PUCETTI (Gabon) said that the National Assembly of Gabon had stepped into the era of information technology and communication since 7 April 2000. This was the fruit of a project started by the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of French Speaking Parliaments in July 1999 at Ottawa. This project related to the creation of websites in all the parliamentary assemblies in French speaking countries, so that they could exchange information between sites

within the framework of the French speaking union, and also to allow members of parliament to obtain an instrument, which allowed them to work and communicate.

She thanked the APF for this generosity in initiating this, which had allowed the Gabonese Assembly to move away from its former system of work and to get access to modern technology.

The Embassy of the United States, as well as other outside organisations, were furthermore involved in the purchase of a certain number of computer equipment.

How the Internet site worked?

The use of the Internet in the Assembly was for:

- looking for information
- sending electronic mail
- exchanging information between Gabonese members of parliament and those in other countries

The site was a considerable source of information, which was grouped in site areas. The site area which related to presentation and composition of the site, allowed everybody to understand how the site was set up and how it worked.

The site area dealing with legislative activity provided access for information on the various procedures for agreeing the law and meetings of groups as well as the different calendar of activities and work and reports of meetings.

Use of the Internet in legislative work

The Internet was nowadays a universal source of information, an invention in which the whole world took part. The National Assembly had a database through the Internet, which was limitless and covered all areas.

It was also possible to communicate easily to those surfing the net and more particularly to those in other parliaments all data relating to progress of work in committees. For example, the account of the work at the administration of parliament established at the end of every session can be consulted on the website, or for example details of the blockage which had been avoided when the Gabonese Parliament, in carrying out the difficult task of bicameralism, did not agree between the two chambers on a proposed amendment to the Constitution which had been put forward by the Government in 1997.

As far as the organisation of work was concerned, members of parliament and their administrations were able to access the methods of work of committees in other parliaments. They could learn about the procedures and how things were done, either to inform themselves or to inform others within the framework of their own work.

Now it was possible within the framework of committee work to carry out a quick comparative study between various legislative plans so that not only the text before the committees but also the evidential basis on which they had been prepared could be examined. The Member of Parliament was therefore better informed and could harmonise better his work with the work of his colleagues throughout the entire world. As an example of this, there was a recent examination of two bills relating to the law covering mining and the law covering forestry in the Gabonese Republic. The Committee that was in charge of this work took account of the political background of mining and forestry in Europe and in many other countries in Africa.

Nonetheless, although there were many benefits it was necessary to take account of the possible downside of using new technology. It was necessary to have computers which could store information and which could defend against the disadvantages of technology. Most computers used by committees had either to have ZIP readers or CD monitors which could allow the administration to conserve data in the most trustworthy and durable way.

Perspectives of the National Assembly

The Assembly had taken some time to open itself to new technology and this was essentially due to the rather long period between 1990 and 2001, in which it had been in provisional buildings.

With the opening of the fixed seat of the Assembly on 25 May 2001, certain preparations had been made relating to the installation of the Intranet. Cabling and other material support had been planned from the moment of the construction of the assembly building.

A large number of computers had been obtained with scanners relating to the legislative service so that a rapid scanning of texts and preparation of copying and printing could be set in train. The information network would allow everybody in the assembly service to have access to the Internet from their office.

It was also planned to establish in a large room, twenty machines that would allow members to connect to the Internet, as they required and also for students to do research work. An annexe was being constructed which would house information services and the printers.

Mr Arie HAHN (Israel) said that the electronic voting system used in the Knesset had certain particular characteristics. The Secretary General could, at any time, modify the orders of the day or the speakers' list during the public sitting, thanks to the Internet. Most of the committees used information technology in an indirect way, for example, publication of work, use of the database of the Assembly, etc. It was planned to extend the use of information technology in committees, for example by allowing the public to take part in meetings. Until now, what a member of parliament said was put directly on the Internet in the text, which was typed up. The contributions of the public would be projected or on screens in real time in the committee room. This would allow members of parliament to react to public opinion. Until now, however, only one Member of Parliament had found this system useful.

As far as the press was concerned, instead of a press review in agreement with the main daily papers, the newspapers would put their main articles on the website of the Knesset from 8.00 am. In this way the Member of Parliament was able, once he had typed in a code, to have a review of

the press, which was created for him or her relating to what the Israeli press thought of that member.

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, thanked the contributors to the second round table.

THIRD ROUND TABLE: Impact of new technologies on management and administration

Mr Ian HARRIS, Vice-President, invited Mr Georg POSCH of the Nationalrat of Austria, who was the main speaker in the next round table that was devoted to management and administration, to address the meeting.

Mr Georg POSCH (Austria) spoke as follows:

"1. Introduction

In 1999 the first talks concerning a reform of the production of legal texts were held in Austria. In early February 2000 the Federal Chancellery prepared a discussion paper according to which, primarily for the purpose of cost-cutting, the texts of legislation drawn up by ministries were to be given a uniform layout and were to be prepared on the same electronic text basis from draft to publication in the Federal Law Gazette.

The E-RECHT ("Electronic Law") project aims at creating one continuous electronic production channel from the invitation to comment on legislation to promulgation (on the Internet). As a result, it will only be required to enter amendments to the text during the legislative stages (for example by a committee, or in the plenary of the Nationalrat). In the future, texts of law on paper are to be replaced by electronic texts, that is to say, printed government bills, committee reports and other parliamentary printed matter will cease to exist. Technology will make it possible to draw up texts, which can be queried electronically while all stages can be tracked in a fully transparent process.

Shifting the layout of the text to an earlier stage in law making facilitates the editing of the Federal Law Gazette in the Federal Chancellery but leads to a considerable additional workload in Parliament. The introduction of a continuous electronic channel also changes requirements on the database because it must be possible to query legally authentic texts at an early point of time.

The re-design of the legislative procedure for the ministries was formally adopted by resolution of the Austrian federal government of 6 June 2001. The Conference of Presidents of the Nationalrat also advocated the implementation of the E-RECHT project in 2001. However, at the same time the Presidents called for better EDP equipment for the members of parliament.
To translate E-RECHT into reality, two projects were launched by the Administration of Parliament in view of the complex task on hand and the brief period available by decision of the federal government (trial operations were to start as early as on 1 September 2001):

- the "Implementing E-RECHT" project (in April 2001) to ensure one continuous electronic channel for the legislative procedure in the Nationalrat and the Bundesrat, as well as
- the "Roll-out Plan for laptops to be used by members of parliament" (in December 2002).

I would like to emphasise that performing these changeover tasks in the form of projects has proven to be an excellent solution.

2. Objectives to be met by Parliament
The objectives to be met in the reform of the legislative process were defined as follows:

1. building up on existing databases
2. ensuring that the high quality requirements for parliamentary materials will be fulfilled
3. taking the separation of powers applying to government and parliament into account
4. considering the principle of true costs (no passing on of costs or tasks from the government to parliament)
5. minimisation of the total costs of parliamentary materials
6. considering the special working conditions of parliament.

3. Tasks to be fulfilled in the Course of the "Implementing E-RECHT" Project

The most significant tasks to be fulfilled in the course of the "Implementing E-RECHT" project can be summarised as follows:

- a comparison of previous work processes with electronic processes, identifying the changes (studying the impact of the electronic process)
- an analysis of the high quality status of legislative bills (quality criteria also include the time factor, the possibility to track changes made, the complexity of changes to be put in, and quality management by dual control)
- an analysis of printing and layout costs (it turned out that the electronic communication of government bills saves costs as the pre-printing stage is no longer required, and that foregoing the printing and reproduction of materials also comes with a potential for cost-cutting)
- technical quality management (this included issues such as: What kind of technical quality management is up to current quality assurance requirements? How can undesired changes and damage to files be prevented? Is a higher level of technical security required when the electronic signature is introduced?)
- international comparisons (in this context, studying the model of computer-assisted legislative processes in place with the Swiss Federal Chancellery and the Swiss Federal Assembly showed that
    - the needs of parliament and government are so different that different EDP solutions are required and that there can be no workflow between government and parliament without any interface;
    - in view of the large number of possible error sources in drafting and formatting texts, quality control instances must be introduced at various stages of the procedure
    - it seems useful to convert Word documents into XML for several reasons (for example data security, automatic compilation of texts, creation of knowledge portals)
- a detailed analysis of the impact which the entire development has on procedures under the Standing Orders
- a concept for the EDP solution
- proposals

- for the amendments to the Federal Constitutional Act and the Standing Orders of the Nationalrat and the Bundesrat required to implement the change-over, and
- the user-friendly implementation of the layout guidelines, as well as
- organisational supporting measures and training.

4. The Technical and Organisational Solution

The technical and organisational solution chosen is characterised by a high degree of user-friendliness as

- the Austrian parliament builds up on existing databases (that is to say, the new process is integrated into parliamentary materials)
- an independent workflow has been established to account for the special features of parliamentary procedure and the separation of powers.

The exchange of documents with the federal administration, where a separate workflow is in place, is based on compatible formats and an independent interface, and detailed procedures have been developed for the exchange of data between parliament and government.

The EDP users of Parliament support parliamentary processes; in this context, it has to be mentioned that a special upload mask was created for members of parliament to enter the electronic versions of adopted motions into the system.

In a competence centre specially established in Parliament, which has meanwhile successfully taken up co-operation with the Federal Chancellery, staff supports the rapporteurs of the committees in the preparation of committee reports and the execution of resolutions adopted by the Nationalrat, and is in charge of know-how transfer from the State Printing Office, quality management and the layout of legislative bills as well as covering the need for additional labour in peak times.

The electronic exchange of data between government and parliament takes concrete shape as follows: the Federal Chancellery sends government bills to Parliament, Parliament returns the consolidated electronic version of the resolution adopted by the Nationalrat once parliamentary procedures have been completed.

5. Change-over Requirements: Laptops for Members of Parliament

The decision in favour of an electronic law-making procedure lent special weight to a wish many members of parliament had already voiced a long time ago: to be equipped with laptops. After agreement had been reached in the Conference of Presidents, the Administration of Parliament was asked in the spring of 2001 to make laptops available to all members of the Nationalrat and the Bundesrat, a total of 247 persons. In the framework of that major project it was not only required to procure the necessary hardware and software but also to create an infrastructure for handout, computer configuration and integration, support and training. One thing that needs to be stressed about this project was that the Administration of Parliament would offer a completely novel service directly addressed to the members of parliament, contrary to services hitherto provided via the parliamentary factions.

After an EU-wide invitation to tender for the procurement of the laptops, a separate project was established to plan the hand-out of laptops to the members of parliament. The task was to prepare a list of measures to be taken concomitant with hand-out and an appropriate time-schedule:

The tasks connected with the handout of the laptops fell into six groups:

1. organising the laptop hand-out
2. configuration and network link-up
3. training measures

4. support measures
5. legal issues
6. acceptance-related and supporting measures.

In this context, one could safely assume that, given the standard-setting nature of the project, E; RECHT would be the final touch on the larger "E-Parliament" project whereby as much non-binding or less binding information as possible is to be made available electronically to stop the much decried "paper deluge".

The acceptance-related measures accompanying the "Mobile Computing" project were required in view of the inhomogeneous target group. Very high quality and versatility of the notebooks, a user-friendly and simple configuration (for example, a feature allowing for automatic updates when logging into the Parlinkom network as the mechanisms of the existing download system are used), accompanying training measures and appropriate support are to ensure that the members of parliament accept the notebooks.

The notebooks allow for access to data of the Administration of Parliament via the Internet and intranet from within the House of Parliament and from outside. The notebooks are equipped with a wireless LAN so that data access within the building is possible without requiring cabling in the plenary meeting rooms and committee rooms.

The following applications are available on the laptops:

- access to the Intranet services offered by the Administration of Parliament via Internet Explorer
- an office communication environment
- a mailing environment including access to the exchange server of the Administration of Parliament
- a security structure consisting of maintained virus protection, data encryption and authentication components.

The installation of a two-partition system is of decisive importance for the practical use of the laptops. Thus, a notebook system maintained by the Administration of Parliament is made available to members of parliament, who only have limited access to the administrator level. The second partition, which is not maintained by the Administration of Parliament, can be used for applications installed by the individual members of parliament themselves. That way it can be ensured that members of parliament use a uniform notebook; that is to say, a uniform configuration for "E-Parliament" is in place (specially for parliament-related documents) while members of parliament do not need a second notebook for other purposes.

The following schedule was prepared for the handout of the laptops and accessories:

Early April:	start-up of internal trial operations
Late April:	extended trial operations involving 20 members of parliament (friendly users), launch of support and training
Late May:	beginning of handout process
Autumn 2002:	ending of handout process
Subsequently:	start-up of trial stage

In retrospect, the time schedule turned out to be realistic; no major time buffers had been foreseen from the start, anyway.

The reason for the long hand-out stage was that the workload for support staff was to be spread over time as evenly as possible, As it was expected that users would require an over-proportional amount of support immediately after handout, the timeframe for handing out the computers had to be extended. In this context, it had to be borne in mind that the number of workstations requiring support from the Administration of Parliament would rise from 450 to 700 in a very short time, while practical experience had shown that the support required for laptop workstations was twice to three times as much as the support required for a desktop.

Training for members of parliament has been organised at four levels:

- users are given brief written documentation and brief practical instructions upon hand-out of the computer
- training documentation is available in printed form and on the Intranet
- e-learning (ECDL) is available on the laptops
- classroom training is restricted to parliamentary specifics.

Support is a central criterion for the success of the "Mobile Computing" project. For this reason, a special helpdesk was created in the Administration of Parliament; it is staffed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday and until sittings close on plenary or committee days. An integrated remote support system, which can be activated and de-activated by the members of parliament themselves, also aims at providing the most efficient support possible.

The notebooks do not become the property of the members of parliament, they only borrow them, and it is not possible for them to buy the computers later on. The hand-over agreement that the members of parliament sign when they receive the computer is as brief as possible, governing, amongst other things, the borrowers' liability in case of damage to or loss of the computer.

6. Change-over Costs and Savings Potential

The costs of changeover have been estimated at approximately 1.94 million D (roughly 0 710,000 per year). The savings potential of an annual 60 tonnes of paper which are no longer needed due to the full-scale use of electronics amounts to more than 1 million D.

However, it will only be possible actually to attain these savings if the parliamentary groups (clubs) waive the delivery of documents on paper. For this purpose the Standing Orders will have to be amended accordingly.

At this point, it is not possible to say whether the projects will also lead to potential personnel savings due to a decrease in distribution needs.

7. Experience Gained in Trial Operations

During the period from January 1 to June 21, 2002 the federal government sent 105 government submissions to the Nationalrat, 58 were government bills, 47 were state treaties. Out of the 58 government bills, 9 were sent to parliament in electronic form as "e-law" documents, and 6 of these (10% of the government bills) were suited for further processing. One resolution of the Nationalrat

has left parliament via the "e-law" channel so far. One private members' bill submitted by members of the Nationalrat has been dealt with using the "e-law" system.

8. Summary

Even though the reform of legal text production has only progressed to the point where about 10% of government bills reach parliament as "e-law" documents, we can still say that, all things considered, the E-RECHT project has developed positively so far.

However, we still have a long way to go until we have fully switched from paper to electronics so as to eventually arrive at "E-Parliament".

On the one hand, the secure transfer of data outside the internal workflow from one office to the other will require electronic signatures.

On the other hand, the legal basis has to be created to lend legal authenticity to the electronic transfer of government bills and resolutions of the Nationalrat as well as the electronic reproduction and distribution of parliamentary materials.

The legal authenticity of electronic promulgation, the introduction of which has been scheduled for January 2003 by the federal government, also needs to be set forth in an amendment to the Federal Act on the Federal Law Gazette; in view of the wording of article 49 of the Federal Constitutional Act, an amendment of the Austrian constitution will be necessary, which requires a two-third majority in the Nationalrat and the Bundesrat."

Mme Hélène PONCEAU (France) thanked the Vice-President and **Mr POSCH** for an exhaustive account of information technology in the Austrian Parliament. She noted that the French Senate equipped members much on the same lines as the Austrian Parliament and had done since 1995. A lump sum was given to senators for each three years, partly because one third of the Senate was renewed every three years and partly because three years was more or less the life of a computer. Senators were free to choose their own equipment although they usually tried to get the electronics department to purchase goods for them. Purchase in bulk usually ensured a better rate but senators were free to choose their own equipment. The National Assembly in France had earlier that year decided to give all members their own computer and a lump sum. The Senate was putting a large amount of investment into speeding up communication links. She referred to her paper on Management Applications. Outside service providers were called on but there were also in-house experts. IT was important for managing public procurement. Applications were now used to follow purchases. Calls for tenders were required for all purchases above a certain financial limit. Programmes especially devoted to this were available. It was possible to check whether the threshold for a call to tender had been exceeded and then the tender procedure was started automatically. This was a very recent introduction and the system was connected to a major application, which was essentially a bookkeeping application. There was a premises management database.

Mrs Claudia Lyra (Brazil) said that there was an exchange of documents between the Executive and the Legislative in Brazil. There were no rules yet relating to electronic signatures, so two versions had to be used. An archive for amending documents was being developed. As far as

procurement was concerned, e-competition would be introduced next year. Purchases would be opened up by electronic means and all firms would know how much other firms were bidding.

Mr Arie HAHN (Israel) said there were three computers in each Member of Parliament's office, one of which was based in Parliament. There were plans for providing MPs with laptops in the Chamber so that they could access their offices from the Chamber. As far as project management was concerned, there was a large computer department until 1999 within Parliament. After 1999, most services were provided externally. There were now very few employed staff handling information technology. Programmes were developed either in-house or by outsiders. Projects might be individually started or be started for universal use. If a member wanted an individual project, he had to ask the Director who would vet it. A tender might be issued. A decision would be made on major projects after an experiment. The decision was made at the highest level. The Speaker took a personal interest in information technology, as he was a computer buff.

Mr Paul HAYTER (United Kingdom) had three thoughts relating to the distribution of laptops. First of all, giving out laptops rather than cash was a non-threatening way of obtaining convergence. The second point was to do with support in-house or externally. Members liked to feel they knew those who provided support and this suggested that an in-house solution was better. The third point related to the reduction of paper. In fact this was less than might have been thought. Messages were speeded up but this raised the question of how information could be stored when equipment was changed or improved. Paper was still the best means of keeping records. Careful thought would have to be given to records management.

Mr Horst RISSE (Germany) referred to the Bundesrat documents. He wished to emphasise a few points. The Bundesrat could now organise its work very well and an electronic form was much more important now than paper. Hard copy was essentially thrown away. There was current work continuing in two areas:

- creating a new Internet home page;
- the working relationship between the Bundestag and the Bundesrat.

The Government gave the Bundesrat most of its business. Up to now this had not been done electronically.

Mr POSCH (Austria) replying to the debate, said that from the start of the project about 10% of bills were prepared electronically. It was more complicated for the government to organise electronic co-operation between ministries. There was large cultural resistance to this. The government was also under parliamentary pressure. If a bill was not sent electronically, however, it was a blow to the government's prestige. The proportion of electronically submitted bills was likely to increase.

He noted the three important points underlined by Mr HAYTER. If some laptops were handed out then some members gained power. There was a financial benefit in centralising the issue of equipment. The system was more concentrated but there was a risk element because if the equipment failed everything would fail. As far as support was concerned, the parliament had chosen the middle way - the use of outside objective advisers as well as in-house staff. The point about the reduction of paper was a well taken one. There was a problem about to store

information. Non-paper media did not last. He had not said much about the staff and their computers because they did not have laptops. Any references to outsourcing tended to replicate the position in Austria. In parliament, there was an imbalance between in-house and outsourcing people. There were not enough people who were able to develop programmes and so necessarily external sources had to be used. He referred to Mrs NASCIMENTO of Brazil's remarks relating to draft bills and electronic signatures. There was a need to resolve the question of which document was the authentic copy. As far as member support was concerned, Mr POSCH said that in Austria the member chose where to get their support. This meant it was simple for the Assembly because it cut down on administration. The laptops were not the property of members but had to be returned at the end of the parliament.

The Vice-President thanked **Mr POSCH.**
He thanked the participants to this first day theme debate organised by the Association.

ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

Aims

The Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, constituted as a consultative body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, seeks to facilitate personal contacts between holders of the office of the Secretary General in any Parliamentary Assembly; whether such Assembly is a Member of the Union or not.

It is the task of the association to study the law, procedure, practice and working method of different Parliaments and to propose measures for improving those methods and for securing co-operation between the services of different Parliaments.

The association also assists the Inter-Parliamentary Union, when asked to do so, on subjects within the scope of the Association.

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