Senato della Repubblica Italiana

New ways of communications: online publishing of parliamentary texts

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In the general restructuring process of the parliamentary information system, started in the Senate about four years ago and based on the new informatics architectures and the new Internet technologies, a particular attention has been devoted to the production of parliamentary texts and to the report of Assembly discussions. The starting idea was to entrust the acquisition of information to the people who create it, instead of the data entry from printed paper bulletins, as was traditionally done . This aims at eliminating useless routine works, and granting the maximum updating speed .

The first step was to define a XML structure for parliamentary documents of interest, starting from the most important ones, i.e. the bills in their different phases (from the presentation text to the text dismissed from the Commission, until the so called "message" transmitted to the Camera dei deputati, or until the promulgation by the President of the Republic). Upon this tagging system (that has been subsequently extended to all the texts and documents of big importance for parliamentary works), we have activated two parallel non-mutually exclusive channels to supply the new GBT (General Bank of Texts): a channel coming from the typography that provides the Senate with some text in electronic format enriched with the defined XML tags; another channel, coming from various offices of the Senate, which, by means of specially designed applications, produces the same electronic XML format. For example, the bills are produced by the typography but the Assembly reports are directly created b y stenographers.

Once the texts are ready for the debate, the second step was to create a working environment for the reporters, i.e. a Word/VBA environment that automatically creates XML tags. Clearly, this environment is connected with relational DB of the information system in order to keep data about bills and about senators and government members, necessary to create all the links in the database and to create hypertextual links on the Internet site.

The project has been started last year, during the first days of January, with the publication (in a first time being only available on the Intranet, recently on the Internet site too) of an online report, that is a report made during the sitting. About every five

minutes, that is according to the stenographic working turns, the report increases with a new file of five minutes and, clearly, refreshes from the beginning.

Beside the stenographic report, a brief summary report is written and published on line; the report has been completed with the enclosures containing the texts under debate together with communications and announcements.

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A further and important extension of this project has been defined and recently approved by the "Collegio dei Questori": the "AulaNet" project.

The basic idea of AulaNet comes from the combination of two needs: the first one is to provide the senators, during Hall sittings, with some information services, mainly the basic documents which the Assembly discusses; the second one is the need of offices interested in the text treatment , i.e. the Assembly Secretary, Drafting, Reports , Commissions, all of which ask for informatic support to their job.

The core application for the Assembly work support is the text database. The texts of major interest for the current sitting - starting especially from the amendments to a bill - are obtained through the automatic processing of the XML file produced by the typography, as it was said before; this database will contain all the information , i.e. the identification code, the text, the authors, the result.

Clearly, one of the main purposes of the project is to give the senators the readability of normative texts directly presented in the Hall or modified during the discussion. The senator could read this text on his mobile computer. Off course, to this end, an operator in the Hall has to modify or insert the new text in the database through a mobile computer. The amendment result management could work in the same way. An operator (preferably the stenographer operating by the Presidency) would follow the voting with a mobile Pc, get access to the database and insert the result by every amendment.

If everything we said is technically feasible and even simple, its political and procedural opportunity is a different issue. Indeed, even if we warn from the beginning that everything that's pointed out during the sitting is only informative and unofficial, and a full formal validity may be attributed only to documents that are made at the end of sitting and that are printed, it could be risky to spread to senators, through real time input in the data base, a text that have been modified during Assembly works.