

**International Workshop
Technological Options for Capturing and Reporting Parliamentary Proceedings
Report of Fausto Ramondelli**

On July 14th-16th 2010, the Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy, European Parliament, the Office of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament organized in Brussels the International Workshop 'Technological Options for Capturing and Reporting Parliamentary Proceedings'. On behalf of Intersteno I attended the workshop and made a presentation in order to show the activity of our Federation, to contact colleagues of other parliaments for improving and enlarging the work of the IPRS, and to promote the mark of Intersteno on an international scenario. Simone Bardot (France) and Lida Horlings (Netherlands) attended the workshop too and put relevant questions and comments in the debate.

It can be useful to remind the background of this important meeting. More detailed information on the workshop are available at the Intersteno site www.intersteno.org.

Parliamentary documents such as committee reports and texts of debates and hearings are fundamental records of the legislature. These documents must be prepared quickly, efficiently and accurately. They must be distributed easily and then amended, revised and redistributed just as easily. And they must be archived effectively to ensure availability and long-term preservation.

Timely public availability of such legislative records is a key ingredient for a more open, transparent and accountable legislature, and therefore a cornerstone of healthy parliamentary democracies. Further it is a key criteria for assessing the level of e-parliament that a legislature can achieve, with those at the top levels more likely to have technological systems for managing all parliamentary records and making them available to citizens through multiple channels and in a timely manner.

A significant number of parliaments around the world have not developed yet such capabilities and are still struggling to produce accurate records within an acceptable time frame. Many of these parliaments have voiced their need for support in order to understand the technological options that could be available to legislatures and to implement them in their environment.

The work of parliamentary reporting - i.e. the recording of plenary and committee sessions and the production and publication of reports (Hansards) - has changed substantially over the years. Whereas in the past reporters relied mostly on shorthand and traditional stenography machines, over time technological developments started to offer a variety of new tools and instruments enabling easier production of transcripts and which provided parliaments the opportunity to establish a diverse set of reporting practices according to their needs and resources.

There is a lack of understanding regarding the range of technologies being used around the world for recording and publishing parliamentary proceedings; the benefits and drawbacks of each approach; which technology is more appropriate for a specific context, taking into account the income level disparities as well as language and cultural differences among countries; and what opportunities for bi-lateral or multi-lateral parliamentary cooperation exist, regardless of the development level of each parliament.

The Workshop was structured around four key steps in the work flow – capturing, processing, managing and publishing - and on some of the most commonly used technologies for recording and publication of parliamentary proceedings, such as stenography, speech recognition and digital recording and transcription. The Workshop concluded with the identification of a possible course of action for future inter-parliamentary cooperation in this field.

The presentations made by the numerous staff who take part to the meeting dealt with the implementation of the technological environment of the Chambers and with the organization of reporting activity. The development of new and more powerful technical solutions led many parliaments to consider different ways of producing the report. The spreading of digital audio for capturing the speeches implies the possibility of transcribing the report with the skilled use of the PC keyboard. In some more developed environments the experiences in the use of speech recognition software by the reporters gave effective and accurate results. In some parliaments the proceeding for the production of the report is very complicated and time consuming and there is the need to upgrade the work organization along with the awareness of the importance of the report for the transparency of the legislatures and for the democracy. A special mention deserve the involvements of countries where the non Latin alphabets or even signs (Morocco, Algeria, Viet Nam, Cambodia) are used. Some attenders from such countries expressed the intention to take part to the Intersteno Internet keyboarding competition as far as this is made possible by a close cooperation in next months: I anticipated that Intersteno is willing to accept this new challenge. Furthermore, we had the impression that the important role of parliamentary reporters, as experts of the publicity of political debates through different devices, is not yet fully understood in all countries.

Next step is to agree on a document where the guidelines for an effective organization of the parliamentary reporting proceeding are laid down, so that reporting services can follow a plan for achieving relevant improvements in a faster way. Intersteno showed its availability to cooperate in writing such a document in next months.

The presentation of the Intersteno activity concentrated on the aims of the Statute and on next meetings, the Council in Budapest (October 2010), where also the IPRS will have an important session, and the Intersteno Congress in Paris on July 2011. During the workshop we pointed out that Intersteno can be an essential partner for the aims of the group and can provide its long term experience and world wide mentality while pursuing common goals. During the meeting many attenders expressed their interests for a larger cooperation and for receiving information on the Intersteno activity. The special role of the IPRS was stressed too, as a forum for exchanging information and resources for the reporting activity in the Chambers.

As far as the IPRS is concerned, I suggest to the IPRS consider that two main proposals for next term activity are considered. The first one is to re-launch a reporters exchange program among the parliamentary reporting services of Parliaments: the idea was put forward in former time when the IPRS was founded; at this stage it seems a valid tool for allowing colleagues of less developed countries to get acquainted about the solutions adopted in other countries for the production of report.

The second proposal consists in organizing local workshop on special issues of the reporting activity where colleagues from various countries can receive relevant information for their work. A program of meeting could be supported both by

parliaments themselves and by the international agencies that organized the Brussels workshop.

I think that the workshop in Brussels was an important opportunity for Intersteno for popping out on the international scene, where more goals can be achieved thanks to a renewed vision of the role of the Federation. It is highly recommendable that the Council, the Board and the IPRS make all possible efforts to follow up the cooperation with international agencies in the reporting field.

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