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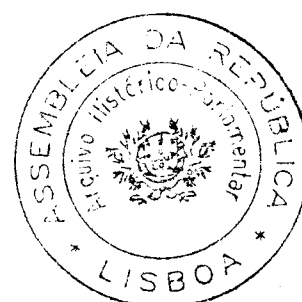
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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN SPEAKERS

REPORT BY THE SECRETARIES-GENERAL

ON

COOPERATION BETWEEN PARLIAMENTS IN THE FIELD OF DATA PROCESSING

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN SPEAKERS

Lisbon, 6-7 June 1986

Report by the Secrecretaries-General
on cooperation between parliaments
in the field of data processing

In accordance with the decision taken by the Conference of the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Member States and the Community and the European Parliament (paragraph 14 of the final communiqué of Paris of 8 June 1985), the Working Party on Data Processing of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation met in Rome on 29 and 31 October 1985 with representatives of 22 chambers. The complete record of this meeting of the working party is attached to this report.

At its meeting of 9 April 1986 the Secretaries-General noted with approval the report and proposals made by the working party.

They wish to draw the attention of the presidents above all to the fact that

- the Data Processing Working Party considers a large number of current issues wich are relevant to the parliaments.

- the appointment of rapporteurs ensures that work continues and at the same time provides for the active participation of various parliaments/chambers.

- cooperation between parliaments with an intensive exchange of data will only be possible if officials are able to use the data banks in other parliaments: exchanges and training of officials should therefore continue to be promoted as described in section II (a), and (b) of the report of the working party.

- over the next few years the parliaments will be giving more and more attention to developing videotex systems and office automation. The proposals made in the report by the working party (II (c) and (d) should be noted. The working party should also continue its activities in this field.

Report by the Secretaries-General to the Conference of the Presidents
of the parliamentary assemblies of the Member States of the European Community
and of the European Parliament

(Data processing)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Conference of Presidents of the Parliaments of the Member States
of the Community and of the European Parliament, meeting in Paris on
7 and 8 June 1985 took note of the report presented by the
Secretaries-General on activities concerning mutual access by
parliaments to computerized parliamentary data bases and, more
generally, on the development of data processing and office
automation in the various parliaments.

It warmly encouraged the European Centre for Parliamentary Research
and Documentation (ECPRD) to continue its work in this field.

B. This was the background to the meeting held in Rome from 29 to
31 October 1985 of the working party on data processing at which 22
Chambers were represented. The meeting was opened by Mrs IOTTI, the
President of the Camera dei Deputati, who whished to demonstrate in
this way the interest taken by this House and by herself in the role
of data processing both as a means of obtaining better control of
government activity and as a reflection in political life of the
changes which have been engendered in economic life.

II. OUTCOME OF THE WORKING MEETING

The working party carefully examined the reports and statements made by
the rapporteurs appointed at the meeting in London in October 1984. The
appointment of rapporteurs allowed the work to be spread over officials
from different institutions. The contacts which took place as a result
with colleagues in other assemblies have strengthened links between the
various administrations, thus encouraging direct cooperation between
parliaments.

The conclusions reached by the working party on the six reports were as follows :

A. **Exchange of officials in the field of data processing** (French National Assembly)

In accordance with the conclusions of the Secretaries-General adopted by the Conference of Presidents in Copenhagen in June 1984, training courses have been organized for officials to facilitate the reciprocal interrogation of computerized parliamentary data bases.

At the same time, contacts between the computerized documentary services of the parliaments have been developed.

On the basis of one year's experience, the working party noted that, apart from limguistic problems, various difficulties existed, some of which had been foreseen from the outset and which were caused by :

1. The need to train officials in the institutions and law of the various countries as well as the various methods of interrogating and using data processing in the documentary fietd.

2. The problems of organizing training courses in certain parliaments where the data processing or computerized services are currently overloaded by the development of internal data processing.

3. The lack of common standards, particularly in videotex systems, despite the decisions of principle taken by ministers within the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations.

Throughout 1985 some ten courses were organized, mainly in countries which were already advanced in the field of computerized documentary systems. Although limited, the results obtained hitherto have been positive which led the working party to believe that the difficulties encountered could be overcome and would gradually be resolved.

As a result it recommended that these courses should continue and be expanded to the benefit of all parliaments, particularly those which are in the process of developing their computerized documentary services, in accordance with the recommendation of the Conference of Presidents in Paris in June 1985.

The working party expressed the wish that the parliaments and Secretaries-General would provide the necessary support for staff training.

B. **Standardized interrogation manual (European Parliament)**

After studying a first edition of a standardized interrogation manual, the working party noted the usefulness of such an experiment, the first of its kind, and concluded that :

1. The common basic structure adopted by the rapporteurs was well worth retaining.

2. The standardized manual should be seen as a complement to reciprocal exchanges of officials and was chiefly intended for occasional users.

3. The manual should be rounded off with an introduction to each of the data bases covered. This introduction should include a brief description of the documents in the base and information on the structure of documents. The introduction should be translated into the three working languages of the Centre.

4. The standardized manual should be regularly updated to take account as quickly as possible of changes and additions to the data bases in the various institutions. The rapporteurs expressed their willingness to act as coordinators in this respect.

5. The question of a common interrogation language (CCL) was discussed at length. In the light of the complexity of this issue it was decided to appoint a rapporteur to consider the question in detail.

C. **Videotex** (French Senate)

1. The working party noted the general interest shown by the European parliaments in the developement of videotex systems and the progress reached with integration into general data processing methods.

2. It emphasized the important advantages for parliaments of using videotex, particularly in access for members to practical informations related to parliamentary activities, consulting data bases and providing information to the public.

3. They recommended that the existing parliamentary data bases should be accessible via videotex with a view to simplifying interrogation and editing while recognizing that videotex interrogation by the very nature of its format could not replace the standard interrogation procedure when it was a question of obtaining comprehensive and large-scale information.

   It was also recommended that the videotex formats of the parliamentary bases should be included in the standardized interrogation manual.

4. The working party regretted the lack of standardisation in European videotex systems which was an obstacle to exchanges of information between parliaments and reiterated its earlier recommendations on this subject.

D. **Office automation** (Italian Senate)

After having noted the different experiments currently being undertaken, the working party expressed its conviction that the use of office automation would considerably improve the efficiency of parliamentary services.

The following areas were now partly or entirely included :

- document drafting,
- processing and transmission of written material,
- automatic printing,
- documentary archiving.

In order that the parliaments can enter the age of office automation as effectively as possible, the working party proposed that particular attention should be paid to the following :

1. Strict compatibility or interoperability for all office automation systems.

2. Greatest possible integration in existing or proposed data processing systems.

3. Recognition of the possibilities offered by office automation in the general organization of services.

The working party therefore recommended that :

1. Data processing services should provide support for all office automation projects.

2. The requirements, constraints and overall prospects should be clearly analysed before any purchase of hardware, even on a small scale.

3. The rapporteur should continue work by conducting a survey amongst parliaments to provide members with information based on their experiences.

E. **Access to governement data bases** (Swiss Federal Assembly)

The working party endorsed the views of a report favouring equal access by governments and parliaments to the information held by administrations.

It noted that, subject to the traditional constitutional and legal restrictions which chiefly concerned state security, the organization of powers or individual rights, there was no direct prohibition relating to parliamentary bodies and services.

Those examples which existed of access to computerized data showed that the use of data processing had created a new technical situation (rapid access to updated data, use of computers, etc.) justifying the interest shown by the working party in this matter.

The working party therefore asked its rapporteur to continue to analyse the present situation and the current developments in order to establish to what extent general access by members to computerized administration data would be likely, having regard to national situations, to provide a technical solution to some of the present difficulties.

F. Information and advice on data processing

As the rapporteur was indisposed, the working party studied a note which he had drawn up and of which the main feature was the various possible areas of study. It was suggested that rather than to have recapitulatory summaries such as already appeared in a report by the Interparliamentary Union, it would be more useful to produce a summary of current trends in data processing in parliaments so as to provide a better overview of current trends and the possible lessons to be learned.

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After hearing the rapporteurs, the working party went on to consider other subjects which had already been brought up at earlier meetings or subjects of interest to the various parliaments.

It noted :

1. With regard to the CELEX system (Community legislation)

- changes taking place in the method of distribution, which would be the direct responsibility of the Commission from 1 January 1986,

- progress made in other language versions (Dutch, and, shortly, Italian in addition to French, English and German),

- the probability of being able to include by the end of 1985 data concerning national implementation of Community law.

2. **With regard to the INSIS project** (Interinstitutional Information System)

- the need for an exchange of information between the INSIS Committee and the ECPRD working party on data processing.

3. **With regard to the integrated base currently being established in the European Parliament**

- the interest among European parliaments in the creation of this base to which they should be able to have access and which will cover the process of consultation on legislation of the European Parliament, parliamentary questions and the library catalogue.

4. **With regard to access to econometric models**

- the general interest shown by some of the delegations in the use of such models by parliaments,

- the possibility for members of certain parliaments to have access to government models ; sensible results could only be achieved however if parliaments had staff qualified to explore alternative hypotheses.

The working party :

- regretted the fact that the Commission took the view that its own models were not sufficiently well established to allow external access,

- noted the general wish for access to an independent European model but believed that this would only be feasible if sufficient resources were made available.

The working party decided :

- to set up a subcommittee to study the present situation as regards
  the use of econometric models in parliaments and to consider the
  possibility of securing the services of experts or of acquiring
  models of an international nature for the use of parliaments,

- to instruct the subcommittee to consider the possibility of
  including such research in the more general framework of the INSIS
  project,

- that the subcommittee should present its conclusions at the next
  meeting.

5. Data processing as an aid in legislation

The working party noted :

- the interest shown by certain delegations as regards the
  possibilities offered by data processing for improving the
  legislative process (codification of amended text, documentation of
  references and referrals etc.),

- it therefore decided to include consideration of this matter in its
  next agenda.