A social media strategy for IPEX – background note

Background

The IPEX Digital Strategy, adopted by the Secretaries-General following a proposal from the IPEX Board at their meeting of 20-21 February in Tallinn, aims at identifying "*the relevant actions for the promotion of IPEX and present possibilities for further development of communication*" (point 3 f) of the Digital Strategy. Furthermore, this Strategy clearly defines IPEX as a "digital platform and a network" and that "mutually beneficial interaction and cooperation with other platforms, forums and networks should be considered and fostered by the Board whenever necessary and when this feeds into the evolving needs of the target IPEX audience".

Moreover, the IPEX Work Programme 2017-2020, adopted in Bratislava by the IPEX Board on 19 May 2017, sets out as a component of its priority objective 2: strengthening the promotion of IPEX the need to enhance the use and visibility of IPEX.
Finally, during the Conference of IPEX Users held in Stockholm on 2 March 2018, and in the context of the workshop dedicated to the promotion of IPEX, "*The need of promoting IPEX on social media was also discussed. It was suggested that IPEX should have a social media strategy, be available on sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook and that automatic updates should be made from IPEX to social media.*"

In this context, at the IPEX Board Meetings held in Tallinn on 25 May 2018 and in Brussels on 11 October, it was decided to include two workshops on this topic at the Correspondents Meeting.

A few preliminary remarks

A social media strategy for IPEX should be motivated by an assessment made by the Board on the need to develop this strategy as a **feature of the toolkit at IPEX' disposal with the objective of enhancing its visibility and further developing its promotion**. The setting up of a social media strategy for IPEX corresponds to an effort towards increasing **a certain "*brand awareness*" regarding IPEX and its work, and also as an initiative designed to meet the wishes expressed by users at the Conference in Stockholm (March 2018).**

Whereas some parliaments are already quite active on social media, and where staff are already ascribed a certain role therein, other parliaments are not and have internal guidelines which restrict the use of social media by staff. Therefore, any social media strategy for IPEX should balance this and have a voluntary nature, not binding any parliament or its staff to be active in this field should they wish not to.

Best practice among parliaments which are already active on social media should be collected. Correspondents should be involved in this task, and a brief questionnaire was drafted and circulated in the Correspondents' Network to gather this input prior to the meeting.

The development of a social media strategy for IPEX should build on the work carried out by the working groups already in place, namely in search of accurate replies to the following questions:

i) Who is the target audience (3.1 of the Digital Strategy)?
ii) What content should we promote via social media?

There is a set of fundamental questions that IPEX (Board, correspondents, users) should analyse:

a) Where do we stand at present on social media?
b) Will a social media strategy maximise our potential to communicate IPEX and its visibility?
c) Who are our stakeholders?
d) What are our strengths and weaknesses in developing a social media strategy?
e) How to move forward?

Purpose and goals/aims

- Promoting IPEX and its visibility;
- Raising awareness about the national parliaments' role in EU decision-making, for example subsidiarity checks and important policy dossiers with a clear connection to the "Hot topics section" on the IPEX homepage;
- Making visible the activities of national parliaments in EU affairs, with a direct link to the "news section" on the IPEX homepage;
- Reaching out to members of parliament and users of social media, encouraging them to engage with IPEX-related content;
- Allowing MPs to share information about their activities and participation in EU decision-making with a clear connection to the information available on IPEX (e.g. rapporteurs);
- Creating platforms where MPs and/or national parliaments can connect activities to concrete proposals and discussion on EU matters;
- Raising awareness and sharing information about interparliamentary conferences and meetings (EU Speakers Conferences, COSAC and JPSG on EUROPOL, as well as other interparliamentary conferences).

There is no lack of information on IPEX ready to be shared and disseminated in an effective and encompassing manner via social media. Point 3.2 of the Digital Strategy identifies in a detailed fashion all the types of information that IPEX, "as a network of people and as a multifunctional platform" shall provide.

IPEX should be able to identify new approaches for the defined objective of improving the utility, usability and quality of this platform by developing promotional tools, identifying new channels and approaches.

In this context, a careful assessment of the appropriate social media platforms (Twitter? LinkedIn? Other?) should be carried out in order to match the message with the target audience and its users. This assessment should be ambitious and forward-looking, but realistic in its short-term achievements, since social media for a platform such as IPEX cannot be imported from any pre-defined handbook but instead tailor-made for its specific needs. Issues such as the role of the IPEX officer and/or the IPEX Correspondents' administrative and editorial guidelines should be addressed by defining a <u>common set of core principles</u> on how to deal with social media (objectivity, impartiality, discretion, etc).

What can be done in practice

At present, it should be noted that it is already possible to <u>upload links from IPEX to social media channels.</u>
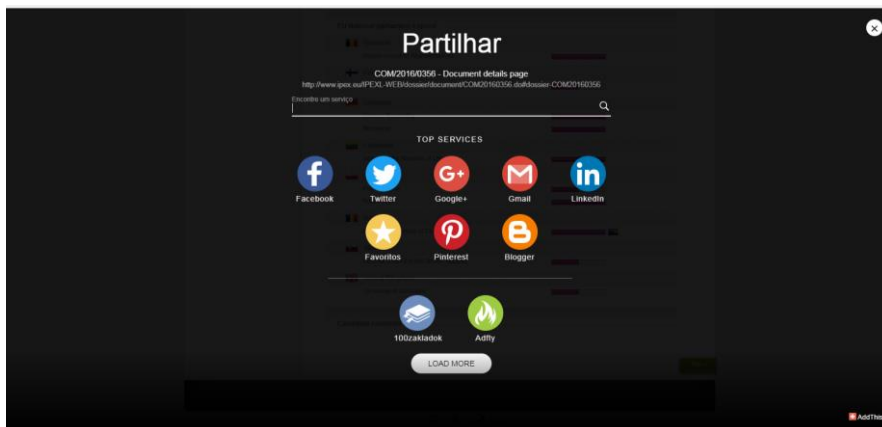
This is a tool about which a high number of IPEX users are apparently unaware, so a first step would be to raise awareness of this tool and of the areas of the website where it is available/more visible. The upcoming Correspondents Meeting in November could already address this issue in one of the discussion panels.

Secondly, other screens where this tool would be useful should be identified (e.g. news section, calendar of events, glossary of terms, documents and information from national parliaments, etc.) and the feature made available, or more visible.

Thirdly, an assessment of the need to establish IPEX social media accounts on certain platforms should be carried out. This assessment should examine the most suitable platforms for sharing information in an objective, multiplied and far-reaching way (e.g. Twitter with certain hashtags such as #ipex or #subsidiarity, or LinkedIn for a more structured approach, with contact details, redirection to certain sections on the IPEX website such as the calendar, news section, dedicated pages to national parliaments, etc.) without burdening the administrative task of managing such

accounts. From an IT perspective, uploading of documents or news in the appropriate sections could also by default be shared on social media (e.g. when the Contribution of COSAC or any other IPC is adopted, it could be immediately shared) so as to automatise as much as possible the process.

This effort should be accompanied by some **evaluation tools** in order to help modulate the effort invested and look for the best strategies to spread the trend and/or content.
A trial period could form the basis of an early evaluation based on criteria such as[1]:
1. Number of followers
2. Number of likes and/or tags
3. Number of shares and/or retweets (by national parliaments, MEPs etc.)
4. Number of visitors to the IPEX website.

Finally, a more dynamic and proactive approach should be analysed as an option for the near future, namely a shift towards an active involvement in social media by defining policies aiming at boosting the visibility of IPEX, by sharing content and reaching out to the general public in a bolder way.

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[1] To illustrate: amongst others, but not only, for Facebook: *Page insights* (can be seen by all the admins of a page and can help track the number of active users to better understand page performance) or *Organic reach* (the total number of unique people who were shown a post through unpaid distribution vs. paid reach, the total number of unique people who were shown a post as a result of ads) and for Twitter: *Engagement, Impressions, Engagement rate, Followers, Mention, Retweet, etc.*