

# Parliamentary Assembly Assemblée parlementaire



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## **INFORMATION REPORT**

**on parliaments and media**

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### *Summary*

By their very nature, parliamentary activities are public activities and as such are subject to the citizens' scrutiny and assessment. It is all the more necessary to inform them since parliament holds a central position in the functioning of pluralist democracy.

One must admit that, generally speaking, citizens only have an approximative or vague knowledge of parliamentary work. Such a situation is not healthy for democracy. Hence the questions addressed in this report: why is the situation of parliamentary information unsatisfactory in Europe? What are the solutions implemented by parliaments in order to improve it?

Referring to the first question, the author particularly takes account of the space given to parliamentary work by the media, the role of which is of primary importance in the information of the public. As for the second question, the author reviews the initiatives taken by national parliaments for a better information of the public, either directly or through the media. This report will serve as a basis for further reflecting by the Parliamentary Assembly in the field concerned.

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#### **A. Introduction**

1. By their very nature, parliamentary activities are public activities and as such are subject to the citizens' scrutiny and assessment. Information about parliamentary proceedings is therefore essential in democratic systems.
2. The mass media play a central role in the flow of information from parliaments to citizens.
3. Parliamentary proceedings are publicised in various ways, depending on the role of the legislature in the different political systems, by means peculiar to each country.
4. The general picture reflects a progressive slackening in relations between the state, society and citizens. At the same time, "rivalry" between parliament and the executive is becoming more marked. The latter is much better able to organise publicity campaigns and make forceful approaches to the press and television networks.
5. The problem of relations between parliaments and public opinion also resides in the primary need of the representative body to make itself known and draw attention to its existence in order to show itself to be active and therefore a representative body. Given the problem, as relations between parliaments and citizens become increasingly complex and difficult, ongoing detailed, comprehensive information will be all the more necessary. It must be backed up by adequate resources, tools and techniques in order to educate public opinion, which realises that information about the institutions is needed in order to understand and assess political events more effectively.
6. Parliament is the seat not only of legislative activity but also of political life; a place where conflicts develop and are settled and agreements are reached.
7. Parliamentary information is linked to political information, which now prevails over the former. In other words, there is a tendency to talk about parliament more from the political than from the institutional point of view.
8. Today there is a danger that parliaments, which no longer correspond fully with the definition of the term, will become increasingly remote from the public if representative institutions are not entrusted with the task of forcefully disseminating objective information about their powers and activities in terms which are not bureaucratic but comprehensible or, in other words, simple and direct.

9. We propose to see what the situation of parliamentary information is at the present time, the reasons why it is not satisfactory and the possible solutions to improve the situation.

## **B. Systems in European parliaments for informing the public**

### *I. Identifying the problem*

10. Parliamentary information is very important in modern European constitutional systems. Undoubtedly, all (or almost all) European parliamentary assemblies are now tending to forge their own relations with the outside world and, in particular, to step up efforts to provide the public with more information about their work.

11. This report is therefore designed to take stock of these issues in an attempt to identify the specific features of the provision of information in the different national parliaments. It also sets out to summarise the various European communication systems dealing with parliamentary activities.

12. To that end a questionnaire was sent to the parliamentary delegations of the member states of the Council of Europe and the ECPRD correspondents in those countries. The survey was developed further on the basis of supplementary information provided by members of the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations and of a number of specific publications concerning parliamentary information.

13. The main distinctive finding to emerge from the survey is that, generally speaking, parliamentary information is conveyed by two essential means: on the one hand, parliaments tend to use the mass media (for example, television, radio, newspapers); on the other, they increasingly seek to promote direct contact with the public by means of informative publications or their own radio and television programmes.

### *II. Radio and television information*

14. It must be emphasised that nowadays all European parliaments broadcast (or permit the broadcasting of) their proceedings. Although it is only in France and Sweden (and, to some extent, in Italy) that audio and video broadcasts are made independently during parliamentary sessions by an internal information service, which arranges for links with radio and television companies, in all the other parliaments, radio and television networks are allowed to record and broadcast parliamentary proceedings.

#### *a. Broadcasting of parliamentary debates*

15. The countries which allow only state television to broadcast parliamentary proceedings are Denmark (the Danish Broadcasting Corporation has its own television studio in the parliament building), Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway and Turkey. All the other countries (and, obviously, the European Parliament, the Assembly of the Council of Europe and the WEU Assembly) allow broadcasts by both public channels and private networks. Certain specific features are to be found in the system of concessions in Iceland, where parliament offers technical assistance with broadcasts to a private television company, and in the European Parliament, where the audiovisual department makes plenary session proceedings available to journalists. In Slovenia, the parliament may decide, for the sake of public interest, to hold closed sittings. In this case the competent department organises briefings for the media or provides them with official information. In Lithuania, the same decision can be taken at the request of the President of the Republic, of the Speaker of the parliament or of the prime minister. In theory, all the radio and tv channels can broadcast directly the Assembly debates. In practice, only the public channels have the means to do so. The private channels can record the sessions.

16. It may be useful here to mention those parliaments which inform the public direct by means of their own broadcasts or by other means.

17. In Austria, the questions-and-answers session and the "current events hour" are recorded in full the same day. Moreover, television produces a special programme entitled "Hohes Haus" every fortnight, as well as a programme twice or three times a year on all debates, on subjects of particular interest to the public.

18. For example, in Belgium, since December 1992, a private company has, in conjunction with the technical services of the Senate, already recorded eight debates, using standard television cameras, for distribution to the various networks. Moreover, for some years now, the lower House has permitted a private television company to film sittings devoted to the weekly "question time" (the recording is then distributed to the four main Belgian networks).

19. In France since April 1994, the National Assembly has released live or recorded broadcasts of its plenary sessions on most cable networks (about 600,000 subscribers). Senate plenary sessions are open to journalists of all media, including the public and private television channels, who are provided with a special gallery and a fully equipped press room adjacent to the chamber.

20. Although the terms of their franchises require the public channels to "broadcast the chief parliamentary debates", broadcasting centres on those of greatest political significance. However, at least one of the four current affairs sittings held each month by the Government while in ordinary session is regularly broadcast on a public

channel ("France 3").

21. Furthermore, the Senate has been producing a weekly programme in conjunction with one of the public channels, covering all aspects of parliamentary affairs (sittings, working parties, missions, localised action, etc). These various broadcasts have an audience ranging from 350,000 to 2 million viewers.

22. It is to be emphasised that in France the obligation for television broadcasts produced by the houses of parliament to ensure political pluralism "with due regard to the representativeness of the groups and formations sitting in each assembly" is stipulated by law.

23. In Slovenia, public television or other televisions may record the debates, with exception of the cases mentioned in paragraph 15. Moreover they draw up information programmes on parliamentary work which are included in the television news. Furthermore the parliament plans to make its own recordings.

24. In Turkey, state television, in conjunction with parliament, produces a daily television and radio programme, which broadcasts a "daily bulletin" of parliamentary proceedings.

25. In Italy there is a special broadcast of parliamentary proceedings produced by the state television networks, called *Oggi al Parlamento* (Today in parliament). Moreover, a radio station "Radio Radicale" provides a regular information service on parliamentary debates and proceedings which has been receiving governmental financial support since last year.

26. In Luxembourg, the radio attends all the public sessions, whereas the television limits itself to the recording of less important debates and declarations. This information is completed by communiqués when necessary.

27. In Norway, the Storting owns all of the technical recording TV/Radio equipment installed in the parliament building, while the Norwegian Broadcasting Systems, NRK (state television), is responsible for operation and maintenance of the recording equipment. All plenary session proceedings are recorded for the benefit of the parliament's internal TV/Radio system and for broadcasting both by NRK and private networks with a valid licence. There are both television and radio studios in the parliament.

28. In Switzerland, debates of the quarterly sessions of the Federal Assembly are reported daily by the Union of journalists accredited to the Federal Parliament. In addition, interviews are given by members of parliament on specific or very important subjects or matters relating directly to their constituency. These questions can also be discussed in special radio and television programmes in the four national languages.

*b.* Broadcasting of the meetings of parliamentary committees

29. In most of the parliaments approached, committee meetings are generally held behind closed doors. Radio and television broadcasts of proceedings in committee are not allowed. In the following countries, the situations vary:

30. In Switzerland, since the parliamentary reform of 1991, committees decided that hearings of experts or representatives of interest groups may be held in public. National radio and television companies report on press conferences on specific topics, given by parliamentary committee chairpersons at the request of the Committee of the Union of Journalists accredited to the federal parliament.

31. In Belgium and Lithuania, a committee chairman can grant permission for radio and television coverage of important occasions.

32. In Turkey, radio and television may broadcast the debates most likely to interest the public, with the consent of the parliamentary Speaker.

33. In the French National Assembly, public committee meetings are recorded in a video production studio and released on a number of cable networks. Since 1990 the Senate, as well as publishing press communiques after every important session or meeting, has given the press (television included) access to committee proceedings by decision of the Chairman of the committee concerned.

34. Certain proceedings of special importance have even been summarised on video cassette (the Schengen Agreements assignment, for instance).

35. Where commissions of enquiry are concerned, the law now lays down the principle that, unless expressly decided otherwise, their proceedings and hearings are public as is the report routinely summarising their proceedings at the conclusion of each short-term assignment.

36. In Slovenia, the committee's work is public. However, they may decide that a meeting may be partly and completely closed if a two-thirds majority is in favour of it. At the end of the meeting the President can inform the public. The hearings are also public and can be broadcasted.

37. In the United Kingdom, standing committees of the House of Commons and select committees of both Houses hold public meetings which have been broadcasted on television since 1990, when it was decided to broadcast house of parliament sessions. The standing committees have never used the prerogative allowing them to meet in private. Since 1979 it has been common practice for select committees to carry out their investigations in public; private meetings are occasionally held for confidential matters and deliberations on reports. Once a week a half-hour programme summarises proceedings in the committee. The entire sitting of the House of Commons is filmed each day and extracts are used in more general reporting on parliamentary proceedings. Similar arrangements exist for the House of Lords.

### III. *Direct information (bulletins and publications) issued by parliaments*

#### a. Parliamentary proceedings

38. Naturally, parliamentary information is not exclusively a matter for the major radio and television networks in any of the European parliaments but is also conveyed by reviews, newspapers and other publications which emanate directly from the parliaments themselves and are designed to provide more or less detailed coverage of parliamentary proceedings.

39. In addition to the normal reports, almost all parliaments produce bulletins or periodical publications which seek to offer the public more direct and less technical information about official texts. These publications differ considerably from parliament to parliament. In Poland, Turkey and Norway the parliaments produce "traditional" bulletins summarising parliamentary proceedings; in other countries the parliaments publish various kinds of newsletters. Iceland and Denmark are the only countries which have no bulletins or periodical publications which report on parliamentary proceedings.

40. In Austria, the press service publishes a year-book called *Osterreichisches Jahrbuch* where initial chapters deal with the work of the *Nationalrat* and the *Bundesrat*, together with their international activities.

41. In Belgium, there is a publication entitled "Parliamentary Information", which provides information on the activities of the lower House, but not of the Senate.

42. In France, verbatim records of parliamentary proceedings are published in the "National Assembly Debates" and "Senate Debates" sections of the Official Gazette, together with more concise analytical reports. The editions of "Parliamentary Debates" have a very wide national circulation.

43. The External Information Service of the French National Assembly publishes a weekly "Bulletin of the Assembly", sent free of charge to some 6 000 subscribers, while the Senate publishes an "Annual Bulletin" which reports on the activities of the Senate during the year (the bulletin is sent to 14 000 subscribers). In addition a fourteen-minute information video was produced in 1990.

44. Likewise, Senate proceedings are recapitulated in a weekly "Newsflash Bulletin" sent free of charge to some 6,000 subscribers. It contains the references of all parliamentary documents published by the Senate and thus enables readers (academics, elected representatives and others) to order the texts they need (as many as 25,000 copies per year).

45. A new half-yearly magazine presenting the work of the Senate in a more journalistic style is now issued to all local representatives, the press and leading figures in economic and community affairs.

46. In addition, the two houses have a full range of books and brochures describing their operation and structure in a manner suiting the various types of public. A short film has been produced as an introduction for visitors but is also distributed outside the Senate.

47. Lastly, the public can use a "minitel" (videotext) service to access a database which gives a review of the Senate's proceedings (agenda, committee activities, state of legislative procedures and voting, parliamentary questions, etc.).

48. In Germany there is a publication for the press entitled "Today in the *Bundestag*", which gives a comprehensive picture of work in all the bodies of the *Bundestag* (on a daily basis). A similar publication summing up the week's activities (entitled "The week in the *Bundestag*") is then produced. The *Bundestag* also produces an insert on parliamentary proceedings in the form of an article by a well-known journalist, which is offered to a few selected newspapers. Other editorial offices receive a simplified text, containing a summary of parliamentary proceedings. Lastly, there is a general publication containing a timetable of parliamentary proceedings as well as parliamentary decisions and speeches by the Speaker. In the *Bundesrat*, the press department publishes information concerning parliamentary proceedings as well as speeches and debates of outstanding importance. It also provides video cassettes on the workings of parliament.

49. In Luxembourg, the reports on Assembly debates are sent to all the families. Moreover a leaflet on the international activities of the parliament is added

periodically to the reports together with a French summary of the draft laws adopted by the chamber. Regarding public relations, the Luxembourg parliament publishes a book on the parliamentary institutions and the organisation of youth parliaments in the chamber.

50. In the Slovenian and Lithuanian Parliaments, a specific department provides media with information material on parliamentary activities and working facilities. The Lithuanian Parliament publishes twice a week draft or adopted laws in the "State's News" the distribution of which amounts to 15 000 copies. The minutes of closed sittings are not published.

51. Sweden produces press releases as well as statistical documentation on parliamentary proceedings and annual video cassettes on the parliament's work. There is also a parliament "yearbook" as well as a "social guide" containing detailed information on activities of the houses of parliament concerning social affairs. Lastly, the *Riksdag*

produces a weekly journal (about 30 000 subscribers) containing parliament news and providing the public with ongoing information about legislative proceedings.

52. Swiss parliamentary publications include an information document entitled "Perspective" presenting the main themes on the agenda of the relevant session, and another document entitled "Retrospective" which reports on themes already discussed. Voting details are recorded in the official bulletin of the federal parliament. Related themes and decisions can also be found in a summary of the deliberations of the federal parliament.

53. Particular attention should be drawn to a press office which has been created within the parliamentary administrative departments in order to provide adequate information to the press and the public. In addition, various publications, video cassettes and case studies give information on the institutional aspects of the parliament. During quarterly sessions of the federal councils, debates are reported daily by press agencies.

54. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe publishes bulletins and periodical publications (including "Forum" magazine). There are also news agencies and, on occasion, the Assembly produces radio and television feature items.

55. The WEU Assembly regularly sends press releases to the media and publishes an insert entitled "Letter of the WEU Assembly", circulated to some 6 000 subscribers. In addition provision is made for the "on-line" dissemination by electronic means of all Assembly documents through the INTERNET world circuit, by means of the NATODATA system (some 6 000 recipients).

56. In the European Parliament, material produced by a "central division" is available to accredited journalists. This material is also included in a booklet containing highlights of the session. Lastly, mention should be made of the Community data bank circuit, to which the public has access through the normal EURONET links.

57. As can be seen, the various European parliaments use different methods to inform the public of parliamentary proceedings, although almost all the means whereby the parliaments provide direct information conform, to some extent, to a single "standard" model. The only real differences are to be found in the frequency with which the parliaments choose audiovisual media rather than the printed word.

#### *b.* Committee proceedings

58. The Lithuanian Parliament publishes information bulletins on committee proceedings.

59. In Luxembourg, information leaflets completing the dispatch of the minutes to the families also cover the committees' works.

60. In Switzerland, committee chairmen draw up press communiques following committee sessions. The press uses these press releases in its articles and often adds comments.

### **C. Media monitoring systems**

61. The problem of monitoring and supervising radio and television news bodies, as well as the press, is a very open and topical one. In a number of countries this issue is now one of the major subjects of public interest.

62. The information which I was able to obtain provides an extremely interesting overall picture. Situations range from those in Britain, Belgium and Denmark, where the parliaments have made no provision for a body responsible for monitoring information, to those in Italy, Poland, Finland and the Czech Republic, where the media are subjected to greater supervision.

63. In Belgium, radio and television are answerable solely to the linguistic communities. The Board of Directors of the RTBF and the BRTN (where every political

formation is represented) has exclusive responsibility for programming. The community parliament is called on only to vote the relevant funding.

64. In France both houses of parliament are represented on the governing boards of the two public television channels, the public radio networks and the National Audiovisual Communication Institute. Parliamentarians also sit on the board supervising publications for children and young people and the "advisory committee on audiovisual court records".

65. The French Parliament is indirectly involved in enforcing the rules of professional conduct established by law for the audiovisual sector, in that the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Speaker of the Senate each appoint three of the nine members of the relevant body.

66. In Italy there is a special bicameral committee which supervises the radio and television service. It has extensive powers in areas concerning access to state television and political information.

67. The Polish Parliament has not set up a supervisory committee, but, since 1993, there has been a special "independent authority" (known as the Radio and Television Council), whose members are appointed by the houses of parliament and the President of the Republic. The council is responsible for ensuring that information on a number of topics is impartial.

68. In Iceland, the state radio and television corporation is governed by a committee elected by parliament, but comprising "non-parliamentary technical experts". It ensures that public information is impartial and open to all shades of opinion in the country.

69. In the Czech Republic, the parliament appoints a special council on radio and TV broadcasting which primarily decides on broadcasting licences on free frequencies and subsequently supervises how the broadcasters comply with the Radio and TV Broadcasting Act as well as other conditions specified in a particular licence. To supervise public broadcasters living on public money, the parliament appoints the Czech TV Council and the Czech Radio Council. These bodies representing the interests of listeners and viewers do not interfere directly into broadcasting schemes and programmes, in practice they only appoint the Director of the particular medium. Similarly, a Council is appointed for the Czech Press Agency (CTK). These bodies are not made up of members of parliament. A parliamentary committee on the media was set up in the Chamber of Deputies to monitor the enforcement of information laws. It is competent to draft legislation governing these areas.

70. The Romanian radio and television companies are, according to the new law adopted in April, monitored by the parliament.

71. In Turkey the Constitution was amended in 1993 to legalise the private radio and TV broadcasting. A law giving birth to a Council on Radio and Television was passed in the parliament to monitor them (April 1994). Its members are appointed within the parliamentarians.

72. In Slovakia, a Television and Radio Council started functioning as an independent body fourteen months ago. Its tasks are stated by law. It must inter alia see to it that TV and Radio programmes are in conformity with legal norms and it must help developing independence, pluralism of the media and original production in both fields: TV and radio. It also deals with request of licences from private radio or TV companies. At the present time there are twenty-three private radio stations and the privatisation of the second TV channel is being prepared. Its activity is monitored by parliament and not by government, but it must co-operate with ministries in the fulfilment of their tasks.

73. In short, though information is not exhaustive, it is possible to say that, although parliaments are confident about the impartial and correct use of the freedom of the press, there is an increasing need to secure the respect of ethical considerations and balanced handling of information. That is all the more necessary because of the increasing influence which the latter can have on institutional activities and, in particular, on the proceedings of national parliaments.

#### **D. Space given by the media to parliamentary information**

74. As stated in paragraph 6, parliament is not just the seat of legislative activity; it is, above all, a public forum in which problems of public interest are debated and decisions taken. Parliament is the expression of the people's will. The public is entitled to take up matters with its representatives, not just in order to convey to them its needs and aspirations, but also in order to supervise parliament's activity. To do so, it must be well informed about this activity.

75. Clearly, the resources available to parliaments are not sufficient for information on their proceedings to be disseminated widely. The public therefore depends on the media for its information.

76. Section B details the methods used by parliaments to provide information to the public, either directly or indirectly via the media.

77. One can only conclude that in the vast majority of countries the amount of space devoted by newspapers and televisions to parliamentary proceedings is limited and often somewhat insufficient. A distinction should be drawn between information on the preparation of legislation and the positions actually adopted by political

parties in connection with this legislation, and statements by political leaders on subjects which are topical in parliament. In fact, the first type of information often tends to receive limited media coverage. There are a few exceptions where impartial reports and analyses of parliamentary debates are to be found in the quality press.

78. Regarding radio and television broadcasts on parliamentary proceedings, we saw in section B.II that these exist in a minority of countries, and generally on state channels though also in certain cases on private channels. Direct information initiatives and radio or television broadcasts — where these exist — are not sufficient to make parliament the focal point of public participation in political life. Any analysis of the reasons for this situation should take account of the primary importance of television as a means of informing the public about parliamentary proceedings.

79. Among the reasons for the media's relative indifference, which are well known, we would like to highlight the following: the complexity and the often specialist nature of problems examined which, in addition, are presented in texts drafted in legal/administrative style; most journalists monitoring parliamentary proceedings are not specialists in the subjects concerned. The necessity of informing the public as quickly as possible is difficult to reconcile with parliamentary organisation and the fact that committee work is carried out behind closed doors. In the case of television, the difficulties are even greater: political facts are presented in a way which reflects the constraints of the "art" of communication, which does not always serve the cause of quality information. This art is conditioned by the constraints of the equipment used and the need to achieve good ratings.

80. Viewers are thus encouraged to behave as consumers of information rather than critical observers and active protagonists in the political developments which concern them.

81. Moreover, it is clear that daily newspapers devoting significant space to parliamentary proceedings tend to be followed by relatively small readerships.

## **E. Solutions**

82. The observations contained in the previous paragraphs should provide a basis for finding solutions whose key objective is to inform the public on parliamentary proceedings and which must make the crucial distinction between the parliamentary information system on the one hand and the public and private information system on the other.

83. Parliaments should ensure that in addition to their information work they undertake communication work to make their proceedings more intelligible to newspaper and television journalists, most of whom are not specialists.

84. This communication work should also comprise greater transparency, particularly as regards access to committee proceedings.

85. Debates broadcast on radio or television, whether they take place in parliament or are organised by the media, should be governed by rules designed to ensure that the public is given quality information and to maintain the dignity of parliament.

86. The solutions proposed below are incomplete because as yet we do not have conclusive analyses of current experiments, such as question time, televised debates, the use made of information provided directly by parliament, etc.

### *a. Principles*

87. Parliamentary public relations will depend on the impact and quality of parliamentary policy in the individual countries. Moreover, it is the task of the mass media to devote as much attention to parliamentary policy as is paid to administrative and government policies.

88. Parliamentary sessions can only be followed by a very restricted group of citizens and are inaccessible to the public at large. Parliaments must therefore ensure that parliamentary proceedings are publicised and made known to public opinion. The differing requirements of journalism and of the workings of politics and parliament may create difficulties and contradictions. In order to help overcome such contradictions and foster more comprehensive information, parliaments must endeavour to ensure that the work of parliamentary committees receives effective publicity.

89. Parliamentary information must be based on democratic values in accordance with a number of general principles. Information must be:

- objective and impartial: description of political and institutional arguments should be stated without internal assessments;—
- as extensive as possible: there should be enough outlets to reach the greatest possible number of citizens;—

—ba lanced and fair-minded: coverage should be given to a comprehensive set of parliamentary arguments and debates and to the various parliamentary activities, with due respect for the different political leanings in parliament;—

—co mprehensible and integrated: news items should be presented in plain language, in the general context of democracy, in order to promote active citizen participation and enable the public to exercise their critical faculties. b.

b. *Means*

90. The individual parliaments use many information channels. It might be useful to list them at this stage:

— General information for the public at large:

- publication of booklets illustrating parliamentary procedures, powers and activities;
  - publication of leaflets dealing with individual topics;
- production of information material for distribution on the occasion of public events;

— Specific information for journalists, news agencies, etc.:

- drawing up and dissemination of notes explaining parliamentary sessions;
  - publication of bulletins concerning the work of parliamentary committees;
  - drawing up of press releases and documentation files on specific topics;
- setting up of a telephone and telematics service providing daily information on parliamentary activities;

— Press room and facilities:

- running of the press room in such a way as to ensure permanent accreditation of parliamentary journalists;

— Television:

- provision of television equipment for parliamentary broadcasts, with the technical assistance of television operators and journalists;

— Radio:

- provision of radio equipment for producing and broadcasting radio programmes for interested stations.

These proposals should be integrated into a communication policy distinguishing between specifically targeted measures and generally applicable measures.

i. Action targeted to recipients

91. Recipients include:

—jo urnalists: to assist them in their tasks, some parliaments hold press conferences and publish analyses and summaries of proceedings. These methods are worth applying more generally;—

—ci vil service departments, which should receive information relevant to their spheres of interest;—

—no n-governmental organisations and public or private enterprises, which should be allowed broader access to parliamentary services without complex procedures;—

—sc hools: pupils in all countries are already able to visit their parliaments. Ideally, they should be supplied with documentation suited to their level of understanding. The syllabus should also include civic education courses highlighting the role of parliament, the various phases of its work, etc. Educational action is crucially important for the future of democracy; parliaments should exert pressure on their governments accordingly.ii

## ii. Action of general scope

92. New initiatives taken by the French Parliament (National Assembly and Senate) and the German Parliament (*Bundestag*) have considerable value in enhancing the status of parliament as an institution; these involve organisation of travelling exhibitions and participation in events.

93. There are even more ambitious schemes in Germany, the United Kingdom and Portugal, for the creation of TV channels specifically covering parliamentary proceedings and managed by parliamentary services, which are to have their own staff trained in communication techniques. In France since 2 October 1993, National Assembly debates have been cable broadcast, either live or recorded, to some 160,000 subscribers to "Canal Assemblée Nationale" transmitting from 7 am to 7 pm. In the Senate, a rather different scheme which is due to begin operating will broadcast not only debates at the Palais du Luxembourg but also various programmes conducive to the "civic education" of the general public.

## F. Conclusions

94. In the light of all the issues addressed above, we can conclude that parliaments should gradually give broader scope to their work in the realm of relations with the mass media. Political and institutional decisions and communication strategies are interdependent.

95. If we take the development of information services (institutional structures offering a service to those who ask for it and therefore those who have an interest in a particular field and want to know more about it) and compare this with communication policies designed to engage people's attention and arouse their interest, it is above all in the latter field that parliaments must make improvements.

96. More than ever before the topic of the involvement of people in democratic life is at the heart of the complex relations between parliament and the media. Information on parliamentary business and proceedings will have to be broadcast more widely through more effective use of both the public and private communication systems.

97. Ultimately, it can be said that communication is part and parcel of the political and institutional process. The means of social communication should be used in a more balanced way, with due regard for the freedom and pluralism which are necessary for social, civic and democratic progress in Europe. Any danger of manipulating public opinion should be avoided and scope should be given for criticism, comparison and the possibility for individuals to form personal convictions based on close study of the various choices open to them.

Reporting committee: Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations.

Budgetary implications for the Assembly: none.

Reference: [Doc. 7086](#) and Reference No. 1945 of 18 May 1994.

Report approved by the committee on 3 June 1994.

Members of the committee: MM. Colombo (*Chairman*) (*Alternate: Caldaro*), Roman, Mrs Ragnarsdóttir (*Vice-Chairmen*), MM. Amaral, Attard Monalto, Bachna, Bobelis, Mrs Brenden, MM. Büchler, Bugli, Colombier (*Alternate: Masseret*), Columberg, Dicks, Eversdijk, Golu, Gotzev, Mrs Grzeskowiak, Mr Gül, Mrs Hawlicek, MM. Hjortnaes, Hughes, Mrs Jaani, MM. Kitt, Korahais, *Kuriscak*, Laakso, Laverge (*Alternate: Seeuws*), Lummer, Proriot, *Pukl*, Regenwetter, Robles Fraga, Mrs Saint Cyr, MM. Tabladini, (*Alternate: Ferrarini*), Ternak.

*N.B. The names of those members who were present at the meeting are printed in italics.*

Secretary to the committee: Mr Roberto La Porta.