

PM 2 March, 2010

New technologies and communication – challenges for parliaments

Proposal

New technologies and communication – challenges for parliamentary work is a proposed theme for the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments on 14-15 May 2010. It is proposed that the theme could be introduced by an external opening speaker who has conducted research on the subject. The objective is to discuss possible problems and put the issue in a democratic context in order to provide inspiration for the following discussion. The theoretic part could be supplemented with a more practical overview of ongoing developments in the EU parliaments, based on a questionnaire.

Background

Public confidence in parliaments and traditional political work in political parties is falling, as are election turnouts, as evidenced at the most recent elections to the European Parliament. This, in turn, is leading to weakened legitimacy for our representative assemblies. This discussion is not new. In the debate on ways in which to vitalise democracy, the concept of discursive democracy or deliberative democracy is becoming common.

Increased participation and commitment can be facilitated by technical developments. These can help politicians and citizens to communicate in new ways. Traditional e-mail has been supplemented with Facebook, blogs and Twitter – for those who are willing and able to use them. And the importance of social media was of course demonstrated in connection with the latest presidential elections in the USA.

These developments also mean that new arenas are emerging for political work and expressions of opinion. People with an interest may, for example, start a proclamation on the Internet on a specific issue and thus be able to influence decision-makers. Demonstrations have moved in from the street and onto the Internet. This also means that skilful representatives of special interests can shape opinion and gain an influence.

The question of new media and their impact on parliaments is common to all of us, irrespective of constitutional system. It would therefore be of value to exchange experience – and thoughts – on this in the EU circle.

Possible questions to address

- What measures have legislative assemblies taken to make use of new means of communication and how does this work in concrete terms?
- What approach can/should parliaments as institutions take to the increased use of social media?
- Are any elements of discursive democracy needed in our representative political systems?
- How is representative democracy affected by increased elements of direct democracy?
- How can new technology/social media be used in the work of parliament?
- What technical support should individual parliamentarians be offered?
- Is this a task for the parliaments (parliamentary administrations) or for the political parties/politicians themselves?
 - Do new media create expectations regarding influence and feedback among citizens that cannot be met?

- Other questions?