

**Meeting of the Secretaries General of the national Parliaments
of the Member States of the European Union
11 February 2013 in Nicosia**

IPEX Annual Report

**Report by the Chair of the IPEX Board to the Secretaries General of
the national Parliaments and the European Parliament**

Mr Horst Risze
Secretary General of the German Bundestag

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Agenda item

'IPEX-related issues'

**Report of the Chair of the IPEX Board to the Secretaries General of
the national Parliaments and on the appointment of a new IPEX
Board**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Colleagues,

As acting Chair of the IPEX Board I am reporting to you today on the past IPEX year, 2012. I am taking over from the former Secretary General of the German Bundestag, Harro Semmler, who chaired the IPEX Board meetings for more than two years and reported regularly on all IPEX matters over the past years. When Secretary General Semmler took his well-deserved retirement in January 2013, this task passed on to me as the new Secretary General of the German Bundestag. Let me begin my thanking you warmly for the friendly reception I have received here from my fellow Secretaries General of the national Parliaments and of the European Parliament. Regardless of this change of personnel, I am happy to ensure continuity in terms of our substantive work. The German Bundestag is prepared to chair

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the IPEX Board this year too and to continue to work in the cause of interparliamentary exchange and strengthening IPEX.

Let me begin by specifically thanking those national Parliaments that were prepared in 2012 to serve on the Board in a voluntary capacity, on the basis of the IPEX Guidelines and in other ways too. They were the parliaments of Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the National Assembly of Slovenia and the UK House of Commons. The European Parliament also took an active part in the work of the IPEX bodies.

Some of these chambers and parliaments have already declared that they are prepared to continue serving on the Board. To date they are Cyprus, Lithuania, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, France, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the UK House of Commons and the European Parliament. Perhaps other chambers and parliaments will decide today to participate on a voluntary basis on the Board and the Central Support as a preparatory working group for the coming term of office.

I want to offer special thanks to the National Assembly of Slovenia, which played an active part on the Board for more than two years and is now standing down voluntarily.

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From the Chair's point of view, 2012 was an eventful and successful year for IPEX. That was partly thanks to the above-mentioned members of the Board and the parliaments that were also prepared to work in the Central Support. In its third year of office, the Chair was always able to rely on good cooperation on their part. My warm thanks go to all colleagues involved!

With the start-up of the new IPEX 2.0 website in summer 2011, the Correspondents had two opportunities, during their meetings in Ljubljana in 2011 and in The Hague in 2012 – and here I want to thank my Dutch colleague, Ms Biesheuvel-Vermeijden – to exchange the experience they had gained from working with this new website.

In the margins of our meeting today, I learned that the Belgian parliament has said that it would be willing to organise the 2013 meeting of the Correspondents in Brussels. Thank you very much for this initiative!

The Board based its activities on the IPEX priorities adopted in 2010 and the Action Plan confirmed in 2012, and devoted particular attention to the IPEX database. As we all know, a database is only good and reliable to the extent to which it can provide up-to-date and comprehensive information, data and documents. Its acceptance by

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users depends largely on how reliable and up-to-date it is. That is the only way to ensure that IPEX is also used more widely.

In February 2012 you, as Secretaries General, declared in Warsaw that you were prepared to make the necessary personnel, financial and technical resources available to IPEX in your chambers and parliaments. On the other hand, it became apparent, especially after the various Correspondents meetings, that the Correspondents' tasks in regard to implementing the IPEX Guidelines need to be described in more detail in order to determine the scale of necessary personnel, financial and technical resources more accurately. On the basis of the experience of previous Correspondents meetings, the Board concluded that there was a gap here between what the national Parliaments needed to know and what they in fact knew about the tasks that national Correspondents should actually carry out. On the basis of those findings, it was decided to draft a description of the Correspondents' tasks, which was sent to you by post in November 2012 and was discussed at the most recent Correspondents meeting in The Hague. It was to be included in the conclusions of the Secretaries General on IPEX. Let me emphasise here that this is a description in the form of a recommendation and that it is in no way intended to impinge on the sovereign power of decision within the national Parliaments. The many letters I have received from you, which all

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without exception approved of the definition of the Correspondents' tasks, show that many other Secretaries General take the same view.

Since the start-up of the new IPEX website on 1 July 2011, the database has been developed further in accordance with Correspondents' wishes. The written part of the report documents all the developments initiated in 2012. Here I want to give particular thanks to the European Parliament's IT team, which, together with the IPEX information officer, put the findings into practice. One of the most important developments concerned the use of symbols in IPEX. Here it is as important to reach a common understanding of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon – to mention only the definition of a 'reasoned opinion' in Article 7(2) of Protocol 2 – as to ensure mutual knowledge of national procedures for evaluating and debating European legislative proposals. Coherent data, which can serve as proof of the reliability of a database, can only be obtained on the basis of harmonised criteria for using the IPEX symbols. In that connection, I must also mention the cooperation we have had with the European Commission, which runs its own website of reasoned opinions and political dialogue.

A few statistics for the year 2012 show that we are on the right track here. For example, IPEX managed to reproduce, promptly and in full, all the opinions of the national parliaments on the Proposal for a

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Council Regulation on the exercise of the right to take collective measures within the context of the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services (COM (2012) 130 final), known as the Monti II Regulation. The R symbol assigned to a reasoned opinion was used correctly. For the first time since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the required number of 18 votes for a formal subsidiarity objection was attained. As you know, the Commission thereupon withdrew its proposal.

In general it can be said that the quality of the set of data in the IPEX database was improved considerably in 2012.

Other IPEX sections were also upgraded substantially. A growing number of chambers and parliaments are using the ‘news’ section to report from their parliaments on topical issues of European policy – an aspect that could become even more important in future. Alongside editorial contributions drafted by the IPEX information officer, the parliaments of Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland and the United Kingdom stood out particularly in terms of their publication of news. As the Chair of IPEX, the German Bundestag naturally set a good example. The content of IPEX was further enhanced by the national Parliaments’ descriptions of their working procedures in relation to checking aspects of subsidiarity and proportionality. A standardised table used in this connection,

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proposed and developed by the Slovenian National Assembly, allows working procedures to be compared. Finally, the ‘Speakers’ Conference’ website became much more informative by publishing the outcome of earlier conferences. That means that IPEX is also beginning to assume the function of an archive.

Allow me to make a few comments on the 16th, 17th and 18th Bi-annual Reports of COSAC and on the European Parliament’s resolution on the Commission’s 18th report on better legislation, which contain statements relating to IPEX. In the reports, IPEX is described as an important medium of interparliamentary exchange and one that has established itself. Major progress was made with, for example, the transmission to IPEX of summaries of important national parliamentary decisions in English and/or French. With this generally positive portrayal, however, also comes the obligation to do even better. In that regard it was found unanimously that the level of knowledge about IPEX in the national Parliaments differs widely. One of the tasks of the national IPEX Correspondents and their superiors should be to make the website better known in their chambers and parliaments. Good examples here are the Swedish Parliament, the House of Lords and the European Parliament, where the Correspondents, working together with the IPEX information officer, organised the appropriate information events and widened the circle of Correspondents within the parliaments. The partnership project

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recently set up is also a means of exchanging best practice and promoting IPEX. The purpose of this partnership project is to establish quite small networks of IPEX Correspondents, with the help also of existing IPEX forums and through more intensive personal contacts, in order to improve the exchange of best practice. The Board supports that project and will make its first assessment of whether it has proved its worth at the end of 2013.

On the basis of its Guidelines, the IPEX Board sees itself as a body that should respond rapidly and appropriately to the topical requirements of interparliamentary cooperation. Good examples in terms of content could be the debates on the development of Economic and Monetary Union or on parliamentary scrutiny of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In that context, the Board also discussed the question of the extent to which password-protected IPEX forums, which are already technically available, can be used for the exchange of informal information. Here IPEX certainly does not regard itself as competing with the permanent representatives of the national Parliaments in Brussels. The Board hopes that widening the circle of forum users will ensure that greater and better use is also made of this means of interparliamentary exchange. With this, the Board is also doing what the presidents of the parliaments called for in their conclusions in Brussels in 2011 and in Warsaw in 2012.

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At its most recent meeting in December 2012, the Board also considered the question whether in future IPEX could also house the websites of other permanent interparliamentary meetings – as is already the case with the Speakers Conference subsite in IPEX. This was discussed with reference to the Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy as an example. It would also be worth considering including other conferences such as the one on economic and monetary union to be set up under Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, or on justice and home affairs. Following several requests by the national parliaments to do so, the IPEX Board checked whether IPEX could serve as this kind of information platform for permanent interparliamentary conferences. It came to the conclusion that, acting in coordination with the respective presidency, IPEX could publish their conclusions, reports of proceedings and meetings documents on its website. The Speakers had already taken this view in the conclusions they adopted in Bratislava in 2007. I would ask you to propose to the Speakers that they carry out the interparliamentary exchange of information on the subject matter of those permanent conferences via IPEX. If IPEX expanded its provision of services in this way, eventually this could also engender more publicity about these conferences and more information on them.

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Let me point out that IPEX cooperated with the Commission and the Council on a continuous basis last year too and that its contacts with the Commission have already become highly professionalised and consolidated.

In relation to cooperation with the Commission, the IPEX Board also discussed the question whether the Commission could make the complete range of its COM documents available to the national parliaments via IPEX. That applies in particular to COM documents that the college of Commissioners adopted and that the Commission forwards only to the Council. To date, those documents have not been reproduced in IPEX. Since, however, it is the duty of the national parliaments to monitor their governments' activities in the Council, it would be extremely helpful to the national parliaments if they could obtain those documents too. The Chair is aware that this requires the political assent of the Commission, which is why it is asking the Secretaries General to put a request to this effect to the Commission via the Speakers.

From a technical point of view, with regard to the reliable and prompt transmission of data and documents, IPEX is hoping to see a substantial improvement with the introduction by the Commission of the e-TrustEx communication platform. Its expected introduction should not, however, in any way discourage the national Parliaments

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from using automated communication via xml for the reliable and prompt transmission of data and documents. Using the xml data transfer language also helps save resources in the national parliaments. Moreover, its use helps relieve the Correspondents from routine activities so that they can focus more on placing news in IPEX or on the forums. During the Correspondents meeting in The Hague, the parliaments of Finland and Sweden and the Czech Senate showed in exemplary fashion how they already use xml. The German Bundestag has also begun to transmit information from internal parliamentary databases to IPEX via xml. The Italian parliamentary chambers can provide particular help with the introduction of xml as they have developed their own ‘xml kit’. This consists of a set of instruments for the automated but targeted transfer of data to IPEX. This kit is also directly available to all other parliaments in IPEX. For that they deserve my thanks.

During this reporting period, the interest of researchers and of European citizens in IPEX has continued to grow. That is thanks also to the completion of the IPEX website, which has made it possible to navigate the websites in all the EU official languages.

Over the past year, the IPEX information officer in Brussels once again had a particularly important role to play. He is the main point of contact for Correspondents in the event of technical problems and as

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webmaster is responsible for management in IPEX. When the IPEX information officer appointed in 2011 – this is our Romanian colleague Calin Racoti, who is very highly regarded by the Correspondents and the IPEX bodies – reached the end of his term in December 2012, you, as Secretaries General, ensured that this highly important post could be filled again by signing the new Letters of Intent that are once again valid for two years. Thanks to your commitment to ensuring that the post is funded entirely by the national Parliaments, we are returning to normality in this respect, and here the German Bundestag has also undertaken to act as contractor for the years 2013 and 2014. In the next few days you will receive letters in which I will be asking you to transfer the actual contribution towards funding the post for the year 2013. As you will remember, the Chair had asked you to agree by 31 January 2013 to the funding for the years 2013 and 2014 in the form of the above Letters of Intent.

To date we have received the assent of the parliaments of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom. Towards the end of 2013 I will be asking you again on the basis of an actual invoice to transfer the national contribution due for 2014. It is to be expected that the entire amount will then be shared not just between 27 Member State

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parliaments but, following Croatia's accession to the EU, between the parliaments of 28 Member States. In this connection I also want to thank the European Parliament for enabling the IPEX information officer to continue to use its infrastructure. That means this officer will be in close contact with the representatives of the national Parliaments in Brussels.

As I have already said, the German Bundestag is also prepared to take part on the Board for the 2013/2014 term and to take on the duties of Chair. May I ask you to vote for this! I would also be happy to welcome the other representatives of your parliamentary administrations to the Board again.

Finally, I would ask you to approve the Conclusions on IPEX.

Thank you for your attention!