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## **IPEX Annual Report 2021**

(Draft approved by the IPEX Board on 10 January 2022)

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### **Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments**

24 January 2022, Ljubljana (Video conference)

Presented by the Chairs of the IPEX Board

Dr Lorenz Müller  
Secretary General of the German Bundestag

Dr Ute Rettler  
Secretary General of the Bundesrat



## Foreword

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that the contribution of national parliaments and interparliamentary cooperation are central to the further development of the European Union (EU), while at the same time posing challenges for it. As a forum for information exchange and as a network, IPEX plays a crucial role in interparliamentary cooperation in the EU. The year 2021 was a decisive year for IPEX: The IPEX Board adopted a three-year Rolling Working Programme in March 2021 and the new IPEX website went online in July 2021 - and was officially launched at the National Correspondents Meeting in October 2021.

The German Chairmanship has focused on the launch of IPEX v3 as well as on pushing forward and implementing the Work Programme. Additionally, the Chairmanship has tried to deepen the exchange with researchers who use the IPEX database for scientific purposes in order to increase outside use of IPEX. The IPEX website offers excellent opportunities for studying (inter-)parliamentary activities in the EU. It is therefore highly important that the information uploaded to IPEX is up-to date and reliable. A discussion on the practices of how information is provided in IPEX was therefore started under the German Chairmanship. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic created challenges for the IPEX network, new impetus was provided by the Annual Correspondents Meeting 2021 and the introduction of a new digital format, IPEX Now. The launch of the new website offered the opportunity to reflect upon the wider role of IPEX. Finally, the IPEX network has taken a step forward in terms of its relationship with interparliamentary conferences in the EU.

The German Chairmanship is looking forward to fulfilling the last third of its term in office before handing over the rotating Chairmanship to our Slovenian colleagues.

### 1. Meetings under the German Chairmanship

During the German Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, the following meetings have taken place so far:

- Three IPEX Board meetings on 1 July 2021, 14 October 2021 and 10 January 2022, held as video conferences
- The Annual IPEX Correspondents Meeting on 28 and 29 October 2021, held as a hybrid meeting
- One IPEX Now meeting on 14 December 2021, held as a video conference
- Working group meetings, held as video conferences

The following four working groups have been active during the German Chairmanship:

1. Working Group on Content, chaired by Ms Maria Schininá
2. Working Group on Training, chaired by Ms Livia Spada
3. Working Group on Promotion and Social Media, chaired by Ms Tuula Zettermann and Mr Yiannis Tsagadopoulos
4. Working Group on Launching IPEX v3, chaired by Ms Daniela Kroll and Mr Michael Hoessl

In addition, the Task Force on Uploading Contents by non-EU Member States, chaired by Ms Daniela Kroll and Mr Michael Hoessl, met.



## 2. Composition of the IPEX Board

Following the appointment of the Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments at their meeting on 29 March 2021, the IPEX Board consisted of the following members in 2021 / 2022 under the German Chairmanship:

- Ex officio members:
  - o Germany (Bundestag, Bundesrat), Chair of the IPEX Board after the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union Member States on 10 and 11 May 2021
  - o Slovenia (National Assembly, National Council)
  - o Czech Republic (Chamber of Deputies, Senate)
  - o Portugal (Assembleia da República)
  - o European Parliament
- National parliaments willing to contribute to the Board and its activities:
  - o Austria (National Council, Federal Council)
  - o Belgium (House of Representatives)
  - o Bulgaria (National Assembly)
  - o Denmark (Danish Parliament)
  - o France (Senate)
  - o Greece (Hellenic Parliament)
  - o Hungary (National Assembly)
  - o Italy (Chamber of Deputies, Senate)
  - o Luxembourg (Chamber of Deputies)
  - o Poland (Sejm, Senate)
  - o Romania (Chamber of Deputies, Senate)
  - o Slovakia (National Council)
  - o Sweden (Swedish Riksdag)
  - o The Netherlands (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal)

According to the IPEX Guidelines, the IPEX Information Officer, COSAC, the ECPRD, the European Commission and the Council all also participate in and contribute to IPEX Board meetings.

## 3. Launch of the new website IPEX v3

Launching and implementing the new website, IPEX v3, was a matter of high priority for the IPEX Board under the German Chairmanship in 2021. At the IPEX Board meeting on 1 July 2021, the Board gave a conditional green light for the roll out of the website. After successful functionality and performance tests of IPEX v3, the roll-out was later confirmed by the Board members from the European Parliament (EP), the IPEX Information Officer and the Chairs of the IPEX Board. IPEX v3 went online on 24 July 2021 after several years of development. Because of the central role of the IPEX Correspondents in developing and maintaining the website, IPEX v3 was officially launched at the National Correspondents Meeting on 28 October 2021. It is greatly appreciated that the European Parliament has borne the overall responsibility for the IT development and the costs of the new website. Furthermore, the IPEX Information Officer played a key role in the development process. The Working Groups devoted a large part of their time to preparing the website launch. The Working Group on Content described the new sections on IPEX v3 in a guide for the



IPEX Correspondents and added explanatory texts to make the website more user-friendly. The Working Group on Training prepared training material that was used during seminars to familiarize the IPEX Correspondents with the new website. The Correspondents were offered online training sessions by the IPEX Information Officer, which were held in small groups. The Working Group on Promotion and Social Media produced new promotional material, including an IPEX brochure, videos and a Twitter campaign, to advertise the arrival of IPEX v3. The IPEX brochure and the videos that are uploaded on the IPEX website and on Youtube were adopted by the IPEX Board at its meeting on 14 October 2021. Since IPEX v3 has gone online in July 2021, several immediate versions have been released to adapt the new website. The latest version, IPEX v3.7, was released on 7 December 2021.

#### **4. Exchange between IPEX and the Scientific Community**

The new website offers the opportunity to open up IPEX to the outside world to an even greater extent. Researchers examining (inter-)parliamentary EU activities have become a core user group of IPEX. Hence, intensifying the exchange between IPEX and science was a main priority of the German Chairmanship. Against this backdrop the IPEX Board held a panel discussion with an academic researcher and a representative of the European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) on the current and future use of IPEX in research on 1 July 2021. The dialogue was continued with a second panel discussion at the National Correspondents Meeting on 29 October 2021 with two representatives from the academic sphere. Overall, the IPEX Board and the representatives of the scientific community agreed that the exchange between IPEX and Science brings mutual benefits and should thus be deepened in future. Further cooperation between IPEX and science for the years 2022 and 2023 is already planned. The Working Group on Content, for example, intends to draft a survey for academics to increase the use of IPEX in research papers and to work on the follow-up of the IPEX Baseline study with academic support. The Working Group on Promotion and Social Media aims to promote IPEX to a greater extent within the scientific community.

#### **5. Cooperation with COSAC**

IPEX has become the one-stop shop for interparliamentary cooperation in the EU over time, according to the request made by the Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments in 2019. Today, it hosts information on the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments (EUSC), the meetings of the Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) and three other interparliamentary EU conferences. Information on all conference formats were updated after the launch of the new website. On 14 October 2021, the IPEX Board and the permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat held a first exchange of views on how the existing cooperation between IPEX and COSAC could be improved and potentially deepened. The decision was made to continue the dialogue in future to determine whether any changes are desired and required, and to prepare formal amendments, where necessary.



## **6. Exchange with the Conference on the Future of Europe**

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) that started on 9 May 2021 aims to debate the future of the Union bringing the EU closer to the citizens' priorities. As a link between the national and the European level, national parliaments play an essential role. The IPEX website can be used to promote the exchange of information between national parliaments and to make the CoFE more transparent. Based on thorough preparation by the Working Group on Content, the IPEX Board agreed to add a specific subsection on the CoFE on the IPEX website at its July meeting. The main objective of the subsection is to offer a central point of information on activities of national parliaments in the context of the CoFE. Following the development of the CoFE the content of the subsection was updated at the IPEX Board meeting on 14 October 2021. Moreover, the IPEX Board held a discussion with the Co-Head of the Common Secretariat on the Conference on the Future of Europe, Mr Guillaume McLaughlin, at its October meeting in order to strengthen the exchange between IPEX and the CoFE as well as to promote the use of IPEX for the CoFE.

## **7. Revision of the IPEX Guidelines**

Following the call by Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments directed towards the IPEX Board to assess the need for amending the IPEX Guidelines in March 2021, the Board discussed the need for such revision several times. The launch of IPEX v3 with its new technical possibilities has shown that the current Guidelines, adopted by the Secretaries General of the EU Parliaments in March 2015, no longer necessarily reflect the state of play and the working methods of the National Correspondents. The Board therefore recommends to the Secretaries General that a revision of the Guidelines seems to be appropriate. However, the process of the revision - including the question of which parts of the IPEX guidelines will be amended – still needs to be determined. The incoming Slovenian Chairmanship will keep the topic on its agenda.

## **8. Annual National Correspondents Meeting**

The Annual National Correspondents Meeting was held in a hybrid format on 28 and 29 October 2021. While 31 participants joined the two-day meeting in the premises of the Bundesrat, 36 people participated remotely. As decided by the IPEX Board on 14 October 2021, the new IPEX website was officially launched at the beginning of the NCM. After the description of the development process and the current state of play of the new website, new important functions, e.g. the list of keywords, were explained. In the second session, the new sections of the website and the available promotional material on IPEX v3 were presented. The second day of the NCM focused on the questions of what information is provided in IPEX, and how. Two academic researchers discussed their experiences of using IPEX for scientific purposes with the participants. The discussion was followed by an exchange amongst the participants on how they currently upload information in IPEX. It showed the wide range of different practices and highlighted the need to upload information in a timely manner, to up-date information regularly, to publish information on parliamentary debates that do not lead to formal decisions and to provide - at least - English summaries. A more detailed overview of the NCM is published in the Report that is uploaded on the IPEX website.



## 9. IPEX Now

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for expanding the digitalisation of (inter-)parliamentary activities. Although there is no substitute for face-to-face interparliamentary meetings, video conferencing offers an opportunity to complement these. To intensify the exchange within the IPEX network, a new digital format – called “IPEX Now” – was introduced under the German Chairmanship. In this format National Correspondents and Board members were given the opportunity to report on their work in an informal manner. IPEX Now was held on 14 December 2021 as a remote meeting. The meeting focused on experiences with the new website. It was attended by 34 participants. At the meeting they discussed the issue of the double dossiers and their work with two new sections of the website, namely the section on the “Conference on the Future of Europe” and the section on the “Democracy Support Network”. The participants agreed that this new discussion format should be continued in the future in order to deepen the exchange within the IPEX network.

## 10. Future of IPEX

The launch of the new IPEX website with a modern design and many additional, useful features marks a turning point for IPEX. However, work on IPEX v3 is not yet finished. To use the full potential of IPEX v3, the new website has to be promoted and content has to be added, particularly in the new sections of the website. Furthermore, the website may need to be adjusted to new circumstances in the future. The further development of IPEX v3 should therefore be a key priority of the IPEX Board in the forthcoming years. Moreover, an evaluation of the website should be carried out in good time after an adequate initial real-world trial. The performance of IPEX v3 should be centrally monitored by a specific Working Group to maintain continuity in the development of the new website.

The ability to make adjustments to the website offers the opportunity to take into account user expectations to a greater extent. As a first step, the expectations of the different user groups should be identified. The upcoming User Analysis is likely to make a major contribution to this. The exchange with the academic community as a core user group should be continued. In order to engage in a more intensive and direct dialogue with users, the User Conference should be revived. The last User Conference was held in Stockholm in 2018. Since the experiences of the users are closely linked to the work of the Correspondents, a common meeting between users and Correspondents should be taken into consideration by future chairmanships in the IPEX Board.

The implementation of IPEX’s three-year Work Programme (2021 – 2023) that was adopted in March 2021 should be continued. The Action Plans of the Working Groups that were approved by the Board describe the future activities in detail. At the same time, the review of the Work Programme and the resulting necessary adaptations should be continued.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact on IPEX in the year 2021. All IPEX Board meetings had to be organized as video conferences, while the NCM was held in a hybrid format. The IPEX Board adapted quickly to the virtual working method. While recognizing the advantages of personal meetings for interparliamentary networking,



remote meetings may be used as an alternative format continuously, whenever they prove to be useful. Furthermore, digital formats, such as the discussion forum “IPEX Now” that was initiated under the German Chairmanship, could be used to complement formal meetings and to strengthen the exchange within the IPEX network.