



Approved by the Secretaries General on 28 January 2019

Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments 27-28 January 2019, Vienna

IPEX ANNUAL REPORT 2018

Foreword

The contribution of national Parliaments to the European Union's (EU) democratic legitimacy is related to the extent of how much national Parliaments communicate the EU affairs to the public. Hence, we should put IPEX into the wider context and see IPEX not only as a genuine website for inter-parliamentary information exchange at the disposal of parliaments, but also as the window through which the EU citizens can keep an eye on the work of the parliamentarians on the EU matters. The IPEX website offers excellent opportunities for making evaluations and comparisons with other parliaments and encourages to think why some parliaments are so active in raising subsidiarity concerns and others are rather silent. In this light, it is highly important that the information uploaded to the IPEX is up-to date and reliable. Over time, IPEX should evolve into a more user-friendly platform and become a "one-stop shop" for parliamentary information. It has to develop from a webpage with mainly static information into a database containing different types of information: news, reports, videos, pictures and information to share. In recent years, the IPEX Board has been working in this direction while taking into the consideration the goals set out in the Digital Strategy for IPEX and IPEX Work Programme 2017–2020.

1. Meetings under the Estonian Chairmanship

During the Estonian Chairmanship of the IPEX Board, the following meetings took place:

- Three **IPEX Board meetings**, two of them were held in Tallinn on 25 May 2018 and on 18 January 2019 and third was held in Brussels on 11 October 2018.
- The **annual IPEX Correspondents Meeting** took place on 22–23 November 2018 in Tallinn.
- Eleven **working group meetings** and one joint meeting between all three working groups in Brussels. Each working group organised its meeting before Board meetings as well as before the Correspondents Meeting. Besides that, working groups had "virtual" meetings via e-mail and/or video conference.

Overall, four working groups have been active during the Estonian Chairmanship:

- 1) Working Group on Enhancing the IPEX Network, chaired by Mr Mongin Forrest;
- 2) Working Group on Strengthening the Promotion of the IPEX Network, chaired by Ms Birgit von Pflug;
- 3) Working Group on Improving the IPEX Digital System, chaired by Mr Hilbert Gerard;

- 4) Working Group on the Organisation of the IPEX National Correspondents Meeting, chaired by Ms Teele Taklaja.

2. Composition of the IPEX Board

The composition of the IPEX Board in 2019/2020 is following:

- Chair of the Board: Estonia (ex officio) – until the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union Member States on 8–9 April 2019 in Vienna;
- Ex officio members of the Board: Austria (after the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union Member States – acting chair), Romania (both chambers), Finland and the European Parliament;
- Members willing to contribute to the Board and its activities: Belgium (both chambers), Bulgaria, Denmark, France (both chambers), Germany (only the Bundestag), Greece, Italy (both chambers), Luxembourg, Poland (both chambers), Portugal, the Netherlands (both chambers), Slovakia and Sweden.

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

The order of the presidencies foresees that Austria will take over the Chairmanship of IPEX from the Estonian Parliament at the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the European Union Member States, which will take place in Vienna on 8–9 April 2019.

3. IPEX Work Programme 2017–2020

In 2018, the IPEX Board, under the Estonian chairmanship, mainly focused on the priorities of the Work Programme 2017–2020. Pursuant to Article 7 of the IPEX Guidelines, and Work Programme, the working groups on enhancing the IPEX network and strengthening the promotion of IPEX submitted their conclusions in the form of action plans. Overall, all working groups have used bottom-up approach to sort out the actions/initiatives.

3.1 Strengthening the promotion of IPEX

At the IPEX Board meeting in May 2018, the Action Plan on strengthening the promotion of IPEX was adopted. The Action Plan reflects the ideas of the Correspondents, the users, and the members of the working group. The Action Plan includes seven activities – how-to-use IPEX tutorial videos; how-to-use IPEX printed handout; IPEX overview video; “information to share” frame on the website; improving visibility in search engines; paper with best practices, and proposals for promotional activities. These activities have different implementation deadlines and some are also closely related to the activities of other working groups as well as to the improvements of the IPEX website. The paper on best practices was adopted already at the Board meeting in October 2018 and introduced to Correspondents in November at the annual Correspondents Meeting in Tallinn. The making of videos is also in process. The working group on promoting IPEX continues its work under the leadership of Ms Birgit von Pflug from German Bundestag.

3.2 Enhancing the IPEX network

The IPEX Board also adopted the Action Plan on enhancing the IPEX network. The activities are divided into three categories – (i) initiatives which will be developed and implemented during the current Working Programme; (ii) studies which should give a basis for the second Work Programme, and (iii) recommendations to Working Group on Improving the IPEX Digital System. The initiatives include improving the translations, enhancing the work of IPEX Correspondents, modifying the duties of the Information Officer, launching a study programme in cooperation with EIPA and

enhancing cooperation with COSAC and JPSG on Europol. At the Board meeting on 18 January 2019, the Board approved more detailed activities to carry out those initiatives. Cooperation with COSAC, JPSG on Europol as well as the study programme with EIPA has already been implemented (the course should start in the coming years). The studies are related to subsidiarity scrutiny and the scrutiny systems of each national Parliament and hopefully will be launched in cooperation with COSAC through Bi-Annual report. Recommendations to the Working Group on Digital System have been submitted, and dealt with improving the notification system and modifications of news section. Furthermore, in order to improve the usability of the website, the working group is conducting a test with a survey among users, and the results will be forwarded to corresponding working group. The working group on enhancing the IPEX network continues its work under the leadership of Mr Mongin Forrest from the Danish Parliament.

3.3 Improving the IPEX digital system

On 18 January 2019, the report on improvements proposed by the Working Group on Improving the IPEX Digital System received an initial approval from the IPEX Board. The document was submitted to the Board for a first approval to go on with in-depth technical impact analyses and an estimation of the related costs. The WG has organised various workshops to collect input at the IPEX Correspondents Meeting 2017 in Bratislava and the IPEX Users Conference 2018 in Stockholm. It has also closely followed up the work done by the other two working groups when their proposals have required technical changes. WG's own meetings were organised in connection with the Board meetings, as well as by video conference. In 2018, a survey on the use and expectations for the IPEX Digital System was conducted among IPEX Correspondents and users. Its findings allowed to clarify the ideas and their respective relevance. Hence, the improvements proposed in this report are based on the findings of a detailed survey, the input of all three IPEX working groups, as well as many other sources. Ideas were categorised by five subject areas, each under the lead of WG members: Content; Search; Conferences; Ergonomics; Technical aspects. The structure of the said report follows a corresponding classification. The purpose of including new content is to make the website a comprehensive source of information about EU-related parliamentary activities. As a result of the improvements, the IPEX website will become more attractive, have clear and logical navigation, and be easier to use on mobile devices. The working group on improving the IPEX digital system continues its work under the leadership of Mr Gerard Hilbert from the European Parliament.

4. Cooperation with COSAC and JPSG on Europol

Following the letter of the Chairman of the Estonian EU Affairs Committee concerning the interconnectivity of the COSAC webpage and the IPEX platform as well as the COSAC Conclusions adopted during the Bulgarian Presidency, several meetings between COSAC Secretariat and IPEX Information Officer took place. As a result, COSAC has its subpage on the IPEX website since 19 July 2018. Uploading of the COSAC documents is in process, and as of January 2019, there are materials until the 2009 Swedish Presidency (starting from the most recent ones). At the Plenary Meeting of the LX COSAC in Vienna on 18–20 November 2018, conclusions were adopted which stated that uploading the COSAC documents on IPEX website should take place as soon as possible and the COSAC website should be fully integrated into IPEX by the LXI COSAC plenary meeting in Bucharest. In order to achieve that, the COSAC Secretariat submitted the schedule of transfer operations to the COSAC Chairpersons in Bucharest.

The IPEX Board also received a letter from the Chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and from the Head of the Bulgarian Delegation to the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group (JPSG) on Europol, which stated that they support the idea of hosting the JPSG website within the framework of the IPEX platform. In May 2018, the IPEX Board confirmed its support for cooperation, and preparations started at the level of officials. The cooperation has been successful as the subpage on IPEX website has been created and related documents have been uploaded. With those two projects, the interparliamentary cooperation is much more user-friendly and efficient as everything is available in one single website.

5. Annual IPEX Correspondents Meeting and Users Conference

On 22–23 November 2018, the annual IPEX Correspondents Meeting was held in Tallinn. In total, the meeting was attended by 57 participants from 25 Member States, the European Parliament and one Candidate Country (Albania).

Traditionally, the first day of the meeting was dedicated to the trainings organised by the IPEX Information Officer. The first training was for the newcomers and the second for the more experienced Correspondents. The second day started with the plenary meeting, keynote speaker was Dr Katrin Auel from the Institute of Advanced Studies in Vienna. Dr Auel introduced her recent study “Europeanisation of National Parliaments in European Union Member States: Experiences and Best Practices”, it gives an overview of the changes that have taken place in national Parliaments since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. The presentation was followed by discussion with Correspondents. After the plenary, all participants were split up into three workshops and there were two time slots, hence everybody had a chance to participate in two different workshops. Two workshops were organised by the Working Group on Enhancing the IPEX Network and focused on information exchange between Correspondents and on supporting as well as promoting their work. The third workshop dealt with future ideas on social media. The annual Correspondents meeting ended with the plenary meeting, where the chairs of workshops gave an overview of their discussions and the chairs of the working groups also briefed about their activities. Also, the paper “Promotion of IPEX: Best practice and proposals” was presented to Correspondents.

The more in-depth overview of the Tallinn Annual IPEX Correspondents Meeting is published on the IPEX website¹.

On 2 March 2018, the Swedish Parliament hosted the second IPEX Users Conference in Stockholm. It was attended by 76 participants from the Member States and the European Parliament. The objective of the conference was to contribute towards meeting the objectives of the IPEX Work Programme 2017–2020 and the Digital Strategy by gaining direct valuable input from users. The Conference had both plenary sessions and workshops. The plenary focused on the importance of the IPEX in interparliamentary cooperation, experiences of the users and the views of politicians on IPEX. Workshops were organised by working groups and focused on the priorities stated in the Working Program. The Conference was very well organised, with active participation by users in both plenary meeting as well as in workshops. Detailed report on the IPEX Users Conference is available at the IPEX website².

¹ [http://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-
WEB/calendarEventDetail.do?calendarEventId=082dbcc55f4b77c7015f4d2aa39500f3](http://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-
WEB/calendarEventDetail.do?calendarEventId=082dbcc55f4b77c7015f4d2aa39500f3)

² [http://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-
WEB/calendarEventDetail.do?calendarEventId=082dbcc55f4b77c7015f4d260ab900e9](http://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-
WEB/calendarEventDetail.do?calendarEventId=082dbcc55f4b77c7015f4d260ab900e9)

6. Financing the IPEX Information Officer

In May 2018, the Presidency sent out a letter of intent asking the national Parliaments/Chambers for their commitment in participating in the co-financing of the IPEX Information Officer. It was decided by the IPEX Board to increase the maximum amount to 80,000 euro per year for the period 2019–2020, because of the new responsibilities of the IPEX Information Officer and increased travel expenses. Based on Article 10 of the IPEX Guidelines, the cost is shared in equal parts according to the number of participating national Parliaments. The Belgian Senate received letters of intent from all national Parliaments/Chambers, who indicated that they would join the co-financing scheme for the period 2019–2020. The United Kingdom will only contribute in 2019. The bills will be sent out by the Belgian Senate at the beginning of each year and the contributions will be paid retrospectively.

At the Board meeting on 25 May 2018, the Board also decided to continue the contract with the current IPEX Information Officer Mr Calin-Mihai Racoti. The Belgian Senate will continue administrating the post of the information officer, including auditing the expenditures according to the rules applicable to the Belgian Senate.

7. Future of IPEX

In the coming years, new challenges and activities are still mostly related to the Work Programme 2017–2020 to achieve the stated priorities based on the Action Plans approved by the Board. However, in 2018 the IPEX Board started the discussion on IPEX Social Media Strategy as on many occasions the users and correspondents have raised this topic. Ms Tuula Zetterman from the Swedish Parliament and Mr Bruno Dias Pinheiro from the Portuguese Parliament have already analysed the current possibilities and proposed some future opportunities. The topic was under discussion at every Board meeting, and also with Correspondents. However, the social media is a multifaceted topic and associated with a number of challenges, therefore the discussion should continue, and hopefully lead to specific actions during the next Work Program. To achieve the full potential of the website and ensure its active use, the Board has to act according to the changing needs and environment.

Last Users Conference in Stockholm showed its added value to both the users as well as to the Board members to reflect and improve their ideas. However, the users' experiences are closely related to the work of Correspondents, and therefore common meetings between the correspondents and the users should be under consideration in the future.

Furthermore, the cooperation with ECPRD could become more active, especially at Correspondents' level. The awareness about the interparliamentary networks has to be raised inside national Parliaments. The people dealing with the European matters should know each other inside as well as outside the national Parliaments. Enhanced cooperation with ECPRD – the network that celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2017 – would open new opportunities in interparliamentary cooperation.

Last but not least, in order to ensure the protection of personal data on the IPEX website, it is highly important to implement the General Data Protection Regulation as soon as possible and in line with the guidelines of the European Parliament.

IPEX has gone through many developments since its start in 2000, it has become one-stop-shop in interparliamentary cooperation and hopefully the future presidencies continue with improvements and have an innovative mind-set.