Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1142 (1997)[1]

Parliaments and media

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly is aware of the difficulties that the parliamentary institution faces in preserving its position as the cornerstone of democracy. The citizens in most European countries do not feel involved enough, or at all, in the ongoing debates in their parliaments and are not aware of their agendas or activities.

2. Communication is vital for bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens. Parliaments should therefore promote better co-operation with the media, in order to enhance public dialogue with the citizens.

3. However, for reasons of profitability, most mass media follow certain criteria, driven, for example, by the need to entertain or to focus on spectacular events, which makes it difficult for parliamentary activities to gain media coverage.

4. Moreover, the lesser ability of parliaments in numerous European countries to take the initiative and make policy decisions as compared with governments causes the media to neglect parliaments in favour of governments, resulting in a loss of credibility for those parliaments.

5. By the very nature of their work, parliaments cannot react to events with the same promptness as governments. Nor are the lengthy parliamentary procedures, which are essential for the careful scrutiny of bills, in keeping with the faster dissemination of news through modern communications technologies.

6. The role of parliaments as central political fora for debates has been weakened in recent years. This is because the media promote short and unconventional debates and comments.

7. The media landscape is highly complex. Alongside the sensationalist media which jeopardise the development of a constructive public dialogue, quality newspapers and magazines and serious public radio and television services continue objectively to cover a wide range of news, including parliamentary news. They ensure that high standards are maintained by meeting, as best they can, the basic aims of the media: to inform, to comment, to provide a means of communication between different social groups, to give the public the means with which to develop critical judgement.

8. However, their emphasis on quality can be undermined by market forces, and media diversity, so necessary to the proper functioning of democracy, finds itself challenged. Parliaments should therefore consider measures aimed at preserving the role of quality media.

9. Without adaptation to modern communication methods, parliaments could easily see their activity overtaken by other mediators using new means of expression for the will of the people. Therefore, parliaments need to keep up with the realities of a global communication society.

10. Extensive use of the new information technologies should therefore be considered as an important "ingredient" of the policy pursued by parliamentary communication services in the interests of public debate. This requires, however, high levels of investment that cannot immediately be borne by all parliaments.

---

1. See Doc. 7905Doc. 7905, report of the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations, rapporteur: Mr Lekberg. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 7 November 1997.

11. The Assembly invites national parliaments to urgently consider measures aimed at:

11.1. ensuring greater openness of parliamentary work, including committee meetings, and to consider this question not only as a matter of communication policy but also as an important political priority with direct implications for the functioning of democracy;

11.2. making better use of classic communication methods and new information technologies, in particular:

a. by providing the best possible working conditions for the media and especially for parliamentary correspondents;

b. by ensuring the speedy dissemination of information about debates, inter alia, by rapidly publishing the minutes and verbatim reports of proceedings;

c. by creating on-line services for direct electronic communication with the public and with journalists;

d. by providing full access to parliamentary documents, so that public debate can be encouraged before the vote on a bill;

11.3. taking advantage of the advice of experts in communication;

11.4. making legal texts more accessible to non-specialist readers;

11.5. taking the necessary steps to place themselves more in focus for political debate identifying, for instance, areas in which procedures can be streamlined to speed up decision making;

11.6. encouraging, within information and communication services, the assembly of information packs presenting laws and describing their specific features for the journalistic and professional circles most closely concerned;

11.7. organising seminars for journalists on parliamentary work with a view to familiarising them with legislative procedures and parliamentary proceedings and to improving their knowledge on relations between parliaments and international institutions. Journalists from local and regional newspapers and magazines should receive special attention;

11.8. creating communication networks on the Internet, enabling citizens to communicate interactively with both parliamentarians and parliamentary information services;

11.9. devising means of encouraging the creation of independent television channels devoted to parliamentary work, as is the case in several European countries, in the United States and in Canada;

11.10. assisting, through fiscal or other means, those media which strive to provide high-quality news on a fully independent basis and which are threatened with extinction by market forces.