



Meeting of the Secretaries General of Parliament Friday 21 March 2025

Mr Despina Chatzivassiliou, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, welcomed the Secretaries General of Parliament to the European Conference of Presidents of the Parliament in Strasbourg. It was a great honour for her to host this meeting in Strasbourg, six years after the last one held at the Council of Europe, with, in the meantime, the opportunity to meet in Athens and Dublin. She was pleased to see so many delegations in attendance, with 58 delegations from 43 countries and 19 parliamentary assemblies. It was important that Secretaries General had this space to share experiences and learn from the best practices of parliamentary colleagues.

1. DRAFT AGENDA

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. MINUTES

The draft minutes of the meeting held in Dublin on 29 September 2023 were approved.

3. ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION (ECPRD), 2023-2024

Ms Sannaleena Lepola-Honig, Director General of Parliamentary Democracy Partnerships of the European Parliament, replacing, the Co-Director of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) for the European Parliament, thanked Ms Chatzivassiliou and passed the greetings from the Secretary General of the European Parliament, Mr Alessandro Chiocchetti, who could not be present. She presented the Activity Report of the ECPRD for the period 2023-2024 that had been prepared by the Executive Committee and was submitted to the Secretaries General for their approval. The ECPRD continued to play a crucial role in fostering co-operation among European parliaments. It provides a unique platform for exchanging information, best practices and expertise, helping parliamentary administrations to meet the evolving challenges of our time. Over the past two years, the ECPRD had remained highly active, with nearly 700 comparative requests, generating close to 20,000 responses. This exchange of knowledge allowed parliaments to learn from each other efficiently, without bureaucratic hurdles, and to respond to the concrete needs of members and parliamentary staff on topics such as artificial intelligence, transparency, security, environmental protection, and social policies. Those had been at the heart of interactions, demonstrating the network's responsiveness to emerging challenges.

Beyond the comparative requests, the ECPRD had also maintained its seminar program, which was a key pillar to its activities. These events provided an invaluable opportunity for parliamentary staff to meet, share expertise, and strengthen professional and personal ties. Nearly 900 staff members had participated in ECPRD seminars in 2023 and 2024; while these virtual meetings remained a useful tool, the in-person engagement in these events was irreplaceable and allowed participants to build lasting professional connections. The ECPRD success would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of ECPRD correspondents in national parliaments. Their professionalism and commitment were the driving force behind this network. Their respective administrations should be thanked for their full support in their work. At the same time, ensuring continued support and commitment to the ECPRD from national parliaments was a continuous and growing challenge. She issued a strong appeal to all Secretaries General to consider hosting ECPRD events in their parliaments, emphasising both the collective benefit and the shared responsibility. Their support was crucial to ensuring the continued success of inter-parliamentary co-operation through the network.

4. ECPRD PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMME FOR 2025-2026

Ms Valerie Clamer, Head of the Table Office, Information Management and Events Department of PACE and Co-Director of the ECPRD, presented the ECPRD Priorities and Programme for the period 2025-2026. The ECPRD's 127 correspondents and deputy correspondents from 63 parliamentary chambers in 53 countries formed the backbone of the network. The ECPRD was an incredible library of legal data compiled from more than 6,000 requests for information filed by national parliaments, the European Parliament and

PACE, which had been available online on the internet site of the ECPRD over the last 25 years. The Centre's work was highly relevant because it anticipated future topics for national parliaments. The discussion theme chosen for this meeting – the opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence technologies for parliaments – was a perfect illustration of that, because the ECPRD platform started collating information in this area some four or five years and offered detailed, permanently updated information that national parliaments could use.

The ECPRD Priorities and Programme for the period 2025-2026 were very much in line with previous initiatives and fully aligned with the issues of interest to the national parliaments. The network was trying to keep up the rhythm of six seminars per year in physical presence of participants, in addition to webinars. The themes chosen focussed on artificial intelligence and digital innovation, data structuring, information management, documentary research and access to archives, and the legislative procedure that had to be modernised.

The ECPRD priorities were related to optimising its activities. The first priority was to encourage active participation of all ECPRD correspondents in its activities, in particular the development of the exchange of information, but also the support for the organisation of seminars. Second priority, to strengthen the accessibility of information and optimise its use, through the ongoing modernisation of the ECPRD website, the development of thematic pages on the site, but also to increase the availability to national parliaments of final summaries of responses received to the questionnaires, so that better use could be made of these responses. Third priority, to encourage parliamentary staff to get as much as possible out of the opportunities offered by the network, in particular by organising seminars for the needs of parliamentary staff on the basis of proposals from national parliaments. Fourth priority of the Centre was the development of contacts with other parliamentary exchange networks, such as IPEX, IFLA, IPU Parline, CIP, with a view not only to avoid duplication of activities, but also to identify possible areas of synergies.

She concluded by thanking the Secretaries General for their support, in particular by inviting their parliament to host a thematic meeting or seminar, with special mention for the Swiss Parliament, which would host the ECPRD Annual Conference next Autumn, after the Irish Parliament in 2024, the British Parliament in 2023, and the Armenian Parliament in 2022.

The Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recalled that Speakers and Presidents of Parliament should take note of the approval of both documents submitted by the ECPRD at the opening of the Conference this morning.

5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGIES FOR PARLIAMENTS

Mr Fabrizio Castaldi, Secretary General of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, informed the meeting of new AI projects being developed in the Chamber. Technology was profoundly changing everyone's lives and redefining relationships, including those between parliaments and citizens. Following a fact-finding investigation, in the previous year the Chamber of Deputies had launched a call for ideas to better organise parliamentary documentation and support citizen knowledge. Three projects were selected:

- **NORMA**: an AI assistant supporting the activities of legislative observatories, automatically generating reports for staff and citizens, and writing amendments according to standards; it could transform amendments and explain them in natural language;
- **GenAI4Lex**: a generative AI tool designed to support members of parliament and advance the digitalisation of the legislative process. It assisted MPs in drafting amendments, enabled intelligent search and querying of research dossiers and consultation reports related to draft laws;
- **DepuCHAT**: a tool that would allow citizens to know the activities of the MPs.

Successful use of generative AI depended on having well-structured data and a reliable knowledge base. The projects were designed to be model-agnostic, allowing different Large Language Models (LLMs) to be tested and selected based on performance and cost. Development focused both on building prototypes with existing models and on training a long-term chosen model. Because AI technology was still immature and evolving quickly, rigorous testing and compliance checks were essential before any parliamentary AI solutions could be released to the public.

Replying to a question by **Ms Uršula Zore Tavčar, Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia**, asking if the Italian Parliament was open to co-operation in order to get more specific information on the projects, **Mr Fabrizio Castaldi** expressed his parliaments' openness to bilateral collaboration.

Mr Bodo Bahr, Secretary general of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, inquired about the costs associated with the project. **Mr Fabrizio Castaldi** explained that, over the last four years, the Chamber had conducted a major recruitment process and now boasted many young experts. Collaboration with public universities helped reduce costs, and a mix of internal resources with private and public sector co-operation helped foster an interinstitutional approach.

Mr Antero Habicht, Secretary General of the Estonian Parliament, described how Secretaries General were constantly exploring ways to improve efficiency, and stated that AI was already used in the Estonian Parliament to write minutes of plenary sittings, with increasing numbers of committees adopting the tool and plans for AI to write short conclusions as well. Multiple departments contributed to the development of a fully functioning search tool tailored to the Estonian system, helping MPs by summarising laws and rules. AI was also connected to the Rules of Procedure, allowing MPs to query the tool about them. While AI tools made work easier and were not limited to IT departments, they must complement human expertise and not replace it. The challenge now was to balance the potential of AI with security and ethical concerns.

Ms Uršula Zore Tavčar, Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, pointed out that Slovenia was not a frontrunner in the use of AI. Initially, parliament was hesitant, viewing AI as a dangerous tool, but the situation had changed, and now there was a desire to incorporate AI in daily work. She highlighted the ethical challenges posed by AI and the necessity of education for all users. She noted that ChatGPT had been introduced a few years earlier and that some MPs had even declared that their speeches were generated by AI. She underscored the importance of learning to use AI responsibly and for one's advantage, as ultimately, the user was responsible for the generated data.

She described two tools in use in the Slovenian Parliament: a speech recogniser, now used for immediate stenography of minutes, including speaker recognition; and "Parlamer", developed with NGOs, providing information analytics (such as duration of speeches, as well as support for gender equality issues). While AI fostered opportunities for interparliamentary co-operation and joint databases, it also brought risks. She concluded by recalling that core democratic principles, including the will of the people, must not be sacrificed for technology: democracy must continually be safeguarded.

Mr Lorenzo Mannelli, Director General for Information Technologies and Cybersecurity of the European Parliament, described AI not solely as a technological tool, but as a profound enabler of progress. To date, around 70 different use-cases were recorded at varying stages of maturity, many of them still experimental. He underlined the importance of aligning all AI activities under a coherent strategy built on six guiding principles: ethical responsibility, a human-centric approach, data security and privacy, sustainability, continuous innovation, and collaborative governance. Governance included an AI governance board, an inter-DG steering group, and an AI centre of competence for technical development. Regarding the modernisation of the ECPRD website, he highlighted the need to redesign the website maintained by the EU, with completion expected by November 2025.

Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou outlined recent improvements in the transcription process of plenary sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, with technology accelerating the process by 90% and bringing 75% greater consistency, resulting in a saving of 340,000 euro (around 5% of the budget). She explained that the need for human verification remained: in a recent trial, 100 texts summarised by AI were checked by an external consultant, showing that AI could help point out issues but still required human oversight. She also noted pilot projects using AI for summaries of adopted texts and the adoption of a proof-of-concept approach.

Mr Bodo Bahr confirmed that AI played an immense role in parliamentary work. He acknowledged existing risks associated with the technology but argued that non-engagement was not an option. His position was that AI was neither a magic solution nor a threat, but a tool to be deployed thoughtfully.

Mr Alessandro Goracci, Deputy Secretary General of the Italian Senate, explained AI applications within the Senate, including AI-assisted minute production, automatic speech recognition, automatic translation, monitoring of sources, and policy analysis and evaluation. AI could also be employed for forecasting and predictive analysis. In the Senate, the discussion focused on three points: the irreplaceable role of workers (ethics), data security and manipulation risks (including the need for investment to prevent data intrusion), and the organisational aspect, the importance of assigning competences to AI in a clear manner. He proposed sharing governance models and knowledge, even suggesting such exchanges be conducted in Strasbourg.

Ms Silke Albin, Deputy Secretary General of the German Parliament, reported the use of the OpenAI tool Whisper to transcribe meetings. They observed an impact on employees' job satisfaction and described the

work of their AI coordination centre within the IT division, which organised workshops and shared news internally. She highlighted that the use of the chatbot "Deepseek" from China was expressly prohibited in the Bundestag administration.

Ms Jacqueline Kucera, speaking on behalf of Mr Philippe Schwabe, Secretary General of **the Swiss Federal Assembly**, indicated the challenge of information overload and growing parliamentary demands, underlining the need for tools to assist staff. She praised the value of ECPRD seminars on AI and called for closer European collaboration, particularly on the creation of common tools, whilst underscoring the centrality of human judgement and democracy.

Mr Simon Burton, Clerk of the House of Lords, speaking on behalf of both chambers, pointed out the importance of parliament's commitment to truth, citing steering groups composed of both IT and procedural staff members. Guidance had been issued for members, with staff balancing the development of in-house tools and the use of Microsoft systems. He stressed the value of strategic engagement among Secretaries General, noting the opportunity to learn from and support each other.

Mr Kyrre Grimstad, Secretary General of the Norwegian Parliament, described Norway's approach as not that of a frontrunner, but emphasised the gradual, step-by-step integration of AI technologies. Current uses included document classification and speech recognition. They were launching a digital system for the parliamentary process, incorporating some AI, particularly streamlining law proposal texts between government and parliament, improving efficiency. He highlighted the limitations of Large Language Models (LLMs) for the Norwegian language as these models were mainly trained on English-language data, affecting accuracy. In response, they were working with other organisations and universities to develop a language model trained specifically on high-quality Norwegian data. This should enhance document drafting, inquiry handling, and overall accuracy of AI tools in parliament, and serve Norwegian society more widely.

Ms Kristina Hafoss, Secretary General of the Nordic Council, remarked on the rapid development of AI and highlighted the risks of misuse and the need for international regulation. She applauded the fast adaptation of parliaments and informed the meeting of the establishment of a Nordic AI centre, aimed at developing guidelines and sharing knowledge. She stressed the importance of bringing technical staff together to maximise learning.

Mr Eric Tavernier, Secretary General of the French Senate, explained developments in minute writing, the setting up of an in-house system for handling text and minutes, prioritising data security and ownership. He pointed out difficulties with AI's inability to capture nuances such as irony and humour, causing potential misunderstandings. However, classification of amendments was performing well. The French Senate was working on an AI charter and was taking a restrictive approach by prohibiting any AI application unless specifically authorised.

Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou concluded the meeting by emphasising the vital need for ongoing, multi-tiered collaboration between European parliamentary IT and AI experts. She highlighted the Council of Europe's pioneering role in launching the first international Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, dedicated to safeguarding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. She also underscored the significance of member states ratifying this Convention, which was designed to ensure that human beings remained at the heart of AI developments.