

The challenge of **broadcasting** parliamentary proceedings

The importance of providing more information on and increasing coverage of parliamentary activities was underscored by some 200 participants from 80 countries at the Conference on Broadcasting of Parliamentary Business through Dedicated TV Channels and Public Broadcasting Systems, which was convened in Geneva on 19 October 2006 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP).



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Introduction

The need to close the gap between the people and parliament and the role of public broadcasters

The Conference on Broadcasting of Parliamentary Business through Dedicated TV Channels and Public Broadcasting Systems, the first of its kind, was attended by some 180 members of parliament and representatives of parliamentary channels and public broadcasters from 80 countries. It underscored the need to create a direct link between citizens and the media and to narrow the gap between the people and their elected representatives in parliament.

The people must be kept informed and parliaments must reach out to them, but how willing are the latter to do this without interference? In any democracy, public institutions must be transparent and accountable to the people, two characteristics that public broadcasts of parliamentary proceedings can help foster. The Conference provided some useful insight into the matter.

The debates were moderated by Mr. Luis Rivas, Euronews Director of News and Programmes, and Mrs. Esther Mamarbachi, anchorwoman at the Swiss French-language television station, TSR. They pointed to the need to follow up the Conference, so as to give greater visibility to parliaments and to their world organization, the IPU.

Mr. Peter Vickers, EBU Head of Marketing and Business Management, Eurovision Operations Department, suggested that a forum be established where parliamentary channels could

exchange content on a reciprocal, copyright-free basis. Eurovision would provide the platform for delivering the content, either live or in edited form, so that people worldwide could follow parliamentary activities anywhere.

Many questions were asked and several proposals were made. The IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, his EBU counterpart, Mr. Jean Réveillon, and the ASGP President, Mr. Anders

Forbserg, met in December 2006 to discuss the follow-up to the Conference. As the feedback they received from many participants confirms, three major needs were identified: the need to foster the free exchange of material between parliamentary channels; the need to promote the establishment of parliamentary channels and provide advisory services to those who want to develop broadcasting services; and, last but not least, the need to develop a website function that would allow parliaments to compare their broadcasting rules.

As soon as they receive the responses to the questionnaires sent out by the three institutions to their respective members, they will make tangible proposals to take this unique initiative further, into a new era for parliaments, television channels and broadcasters.

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From left to right: Mr. Fritz Pleitgen (EBU), Mr. Giacomo Mazzone (EBU), Mr. Anders B. Johnsson (IPU) and Mr. Anders Forsberg (ASGP)

Messages

Mr. **Anders B. Johnsson**,
IPU Secretary General:

The relationship between
parliament, citizens and
broadcasters is of growing
importance

When the EBU came to the IPU and the ASGP and suggested we should explore cooperation in the area of parliamentary TV channels, we embraced the idea enthusiastically. The relationship between parliament and the people is an issue of growing importance everywhere.

Many parliaments are working to open themselves to greater involvement by individuals and organizations that have a contribution to make to their work. They also want people to be better informed about what parliament is doing. As part of these efforts, parliaments are keen to have some of their proceedings broadcast to a wider public.

The relationship between parliament and public broadcasters is a complex one. Media outlets are independent institutions that exercise editorial control over the content of their broadcasts. Parliaments are institutions that have a legitimate interest in allowing broadcasters to inform the public about their work, an interest that needs to be respected.

The Geneva Conference was the start of a larger process. It explored the relationship between parliaments and parliamentary channels and public broadcasters and tried to identify good practices that may serve as inspiration for others, in particular as concerns the sharing of experiences and materials. The participants' questions and comments showed that some form of follow-up was needed.



Mr. **Anders B. Forsberg**, ASGP President:

There is only one way forward
for democracies:
to work for greater openness
and transparency

If we want to be part of a modern society we need to use every means available to open up parliaments to the public. There is only one way for democracies to go about this, and that is to work for greater openness and transparency.

The basic idea of transmission via the Internet is to give the public free and full access to debates and other activities in parliament. In working towards this, we show that we respect the citizens' right to see for themselves what is going on inside parliament.

When reaching out to a broader audience, we must be ready to concede that this will not necessarily lead to a better understanding of or greater public interest in politics. Confidence in politicians is not built solely on the debate in the chamber; it depends first and foremost on politics from a wider perspective, and also on the individual parliamentarian. Online broadcasting will nevertheless certainly enable more people to watch and listen, allowing them to form their own opinions without media interference. In this context, this is an advantage.



Mr. **Jean Réveillon**, EBU Secretary General:

Parliamentary business is at the “core” of the public service mission

EBU, with its 74 TV and radio members, is the oldest world community of broadcasters. Our Members – mainly public service broadcasters – cover 55 countries whose widely varying national customs and cultures means that have very few things in common. One thing they share is the attention they pay to national parliaments and their activities.

Public service broadcasting is at the service of the citizen. Its mission is to

build and strengthen each national community. This is what we do by providing our institutions with “accurate mediation”, aimed at facilitating discussion, mutual understanding and integration. Most of the messages from governments, parliaments and institutions to the citizens of Europe go through TV and radio stations that are EBU members. The digital era we are entering is opening new opportunities. Thanks to digital terrestrial broadcasting, broadband Internet and new media, the dearth of frequencies that had so far prevented parliaments from being more present on the air is no longer a problem. Drawing the attention of viewers/citizens is not a matter of technology, however, but of time constraints and “savoir faire”. As public broadcasters we know what to do; our participation in the Geneva Conference will help us learn to do it even better.

Mr. Jean Réveillon, EBU Secretary General, welcomes representatives of parliaments and public broadcasters who visited EBU Headquarters during the Conference.



The role of public broadcasters

What the keynote speakers had to say

Mr. Fritz Pleitgen,
EBU President, WRD Director
General and Founder of the
German channel Phoenix

“Given the omnipresence of the media and its insatiable hunger for instantaneous, short-lived information, virtually every thought, idea or statement emanating from parliament or any other political forum is subject to immediate publication. In fact, it has become virtually impossible for parliamentarians to resist this ‘law of nature’, assuming of course that they wish to do so in the first place”.

Mr. Dan Landau,
former Head of
the Knesset Network

“The fact is that parliaments find it difficult to convey any parliamentary message, because it is considered boring by the media, especially the commercial media. It just doesn’t sell. Parliament suffers from the poor image of its members, but politicians will never miss a chance to get some free TV time. So count them in to begin with. Politicians tend to see things in political terms: left versus right, minority versus majority, coalition versus opposition; this is what parliament is all about. So before you know it, you might find that your nice little new television channel is becoming a pawn in the political game”.



Mr. Dan Landau and Mr. Luis Rivas

Mr. Boris Bergant,
EBU Vice-President

“There are four main characteristics of public service broadcasting in the true sense of the term. The first prerequisite is that it should be independent of politics, economic interests and any lobbies, but at the same time open to all of them. The second is pluralism. We should be plural in presenting our cultures: modern, classical, mass and elite. We should be open to all minorities, which is one of the main tasks of public service broadcasting. The third prerequisite is credibility. But credibility can be established only if we produce quality programmes. The fourth prerequisite for public broadcasters is accountability. This also entails transparency, including in the financial sense. Because we are financed by the public, we are accountable to the public.”

Mr. Peter Knowles,
Controller, BBC Parliament

“Offering parliamentary debate and related journalism on a consistent basis is extremely important. We run programmes in strips across the week: four, five or seven days a week, in the same place, at the same time. This is extremely important in terms of helping digital viewers moving between hundreds of different channels find what they are looking for. I would urge all people concerned with running parliamentary channels to think very hard about what kind of cooperation agreement could be made with networks to get that kind of trailing. One characteristic of a successful parliamentary channel is distribution. Distribution patterns vary in every country and over time. In

the United Kingdom, for example, we started with terrestrial television, and moved to a period when cable started to come to the fore. Satellite became a very important platform, but we are now moving to a very rapid increase in the audience with digital terrestrial. In Britain we are now moving towards full broadcast on digital terrestrial. This is going to make a huge difference to our audience.”



Mr. Boris Bergant



Mr. Peter Knowles

A particularly timely Conference

Mr. Carlos Hoffmann,
Secretary General of the
Chilean Senate

Mr. Joe Phaweni,
Head of the Policy
Management Unit at the
South African Parliament

“The majority of South Africans live in rural areas. They are poor and unemployed. Electricity and its benefits are new developments for many of them. Owning a television set is a luxury that most people in rural areas cannot afford. Therefore, at this stage of our development, as a new democracy, we cannot talk of a parliamentary television channel if the intention is to reach the people in those far-flung areas. Parliamentary activities affect the lives of citizens; the public should therefore engage and actively participate in parliamentary processes.”

“The core issue is how to effectively ensure the right and aspirations of citizens to contact and interact with the authorities and their legislators. The Conference is taking place at a particularly sensitive socio-historical moment characterized by an obvious crisis of political legitimacy at the global level and, according to numerous studies conducted throughout the world, the relative dissatisfaction, disenchantment and apathy citizens felt towards politics. I believe that as the true interpreter of the power of the State exerting the role of representation, a parliamentary channel should respect the concept expressed by Alasdair Milne, the former Director General of the BBC, who stated once that such a channel should see to it that what is popular becomes a value and what is a value be made popular”.



Mr. Joe Phaweni and Mr. Carlos Hoffmann

Examples of different channels

C-SPAN: A pioneer

Mr. Terry Murphy, C-SPAN Vice-President of Programming and Executive Producer, explained that C-SPAN is unique among parliamentary channels. "We are a private, not-for-profit, non-commercial, non-governmental network. All of our money comes from the telecommunication companies that carry us. They pay us about 4.5 cents per subscriber, our budget is between US\$ 35 and 40 million a year, and we have approximately 260 employees. It took us a long time to get this far. All our employees are based in Washington, D.C., and we now have three television

channels, a radio station that can be heard throughout the United States and up to twelve Internet sites on which we broadcast on a daily basis. Our coverage of parliament, or Congress, only accounts for about twenty per cent of our programming. The rest is devoted to congressional meetings. On any given day, there are about forty congressional meetings taking place in Washington and we can only cover about four or five of them. We decide which four or five to cover. Since we are a private company, that decision is ours."



*Mr. Terry Murphy,
C-SPAN Vice-President of
Programming and
Executive Producer*

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Interview: **Brian Lamb**,
Founder of C-SPAN

"We have an economic base from our subscribers"

Before the Geneva Conference, the IPU interviewed Mr. Brian Lamb, the founder of C-SPAN, in Washington.

Q: Who are C-SPAN's viewers?

Brian Lamb: About four per cent of the American people say they watch us on a daily basis. In a country of 300 million that amounts to 12 million people. In our country, only 50 per cent of the people vote in presidential elections and when we elect our Congress, only 35 per cent of the people vote. So, our audience is going to be those who watch, vote, participate, or give money to campaigns. I know that other surveys go into greater depth: Fifty-six per cent of our viewers are under the age of 50, which is pretty good because the average age of people who watch the evening news in the United States is over 60. That's a very old audience. I am in that category. A lot of young people don't watch the evening news anymore. They go on the Internet.

Q: Who finances C-SPAN?

BL: From a journalistic standpoint, we are probably the most fortunate in the world, because we have an economic base from our subscribers and we don't have to turn to the government for money or worry about our funding. We can put any programming on and we do not have to worry that someone, an advertiser or a government official, is going to order it off. We are very free in what we decide to program and that is very important. We are not looking for trouble i.e. we are not investigative reporters, but we consider ourselves very much journalists; we are not part of the government. Our on-air personnel

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Brian Lamb, Founder of C-SPAN



do not give our own views on the air. I have been with C-SPAN since 1979 and I host one of the shows. We have a three-hour show every morning and I do the one on Friday. We work very hard not to create stars. No one is paid their salary here just to be on television.

You have to get up really early, at 3 in the morning, come in here and do the show that starts at 7 a.m. I do it because it's fun, and very rewarding. We know the voice of the public out there, before anybody else does, because we hear from both sides, Democrats and Republicans. Most of the talk radio shows in this country now only listen to one side, as you may know.

Q: Who first came up with the idea in 1979?

BL: I was the one that suggested it. I thought the broadcast news networks had too much power and I wanted to do something about it but I didn't have any money or standing in society. A couple of people in the cable business liked the idea and they helped to start it. We got different individuals to raise money. We set up a fee schedule – if you have a cable system and broadcast our programmes, you pay us according to how many subscribers you have. If you have 10,000 subscribers and you pay us 5 cents a home per month – that amounts to US\$ 5,000 per month. Our programmes are now broadcast to close to 90 million subscribers – so that makes a difference in giving us a large enough financial base in which to operate. Today it wouldn't be as easy. We started C-SPAN in the days when there were only a few private networks and now there are about 260. If you tried to start C-SPAN today, you couldn't. There wouldn't be room for it on cable systems; cable companies wouldn't want it and they wouldn't pay for it. When we came along, it was all luck: Cable was new and they were looking for new ideas, and we had an idea that didn't cost much. That is the one other thing that's been important to our success: we always kept our costs down. If you spend too much money on a programming service like this you won't be around long. In some countries they may not enjoy the freedoms to operate that we have had for all these years. We want

Small can be useful

to keep an eye on the government. We had better keep an eye on the government.

Q: You say what you do is more important now because of the present situation?

BL: I never said we were important.

Q: But you are important and you know that.

BL: I don't think about it. I am very careful not to say that. There is nothing people resent more. We just try to cover what goes on. The fact is that all kinds of people are involved in running governments and are influential at various levels. About ten per cent of the people in our country would be in that category. Those are the people who watch C-SPAN. Our viewers can be anyone from the President to members of Congress, or an everyday citizen who's interested in an issue. That is where our base of interest comes from. Any country that wants to have an open system of government has to go public with its governmental functions. The politicians often go public kicking and screaming. They don't want to be in the spotlight unless they can control it. One day, our politicians decided to televise their proceedings in the House of Representatives. Then, when the Senate saw that the House was getting all the attention, it decided to follow suit. Once they got televised proceedings, they wanted to control them. It is the natural thing to do, to want to control the image, their images.

Q: Do you have the feeling that someone would like to control you somehow?

BL: Once in a while, if they were given the opportunity, some politician would like to influence what we televise. But we made it clear from the beginning that it was not going to happen. Once in a while you get a lot of pressure to cover certain events, but so what?

Mr. Dawood Kuttab, Director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al Quds University in Ramallah, believes that sometimes, being a small outfit can be very useful.

"Most Palestinians didn't even know what their members of parliament looked like. Putting them on television was very exciting for us and just the opposite of what we had heard all along; that parliament is very boring. It gave us a chance to know what people looked like and who they were. When I wanted to broadcast from the Palestinian Parliament, I had three arguments with the Speaker. He wanted to control the broadcasts, but I knew that if he controlled them, they would become a kind of propaganda and would not be what the public wanted. He wanted to broadcast at night – although sessions are usually held in the day – and I said that the broadcasts had to be live. The third problem was that he wanted the broadcasts to be edited and I said that they had to be unedited gavel to gavel. These are the three principles I stuck to, because I felt that unless we got that, the public would not be getting the service it required".

Chile

One country, two parliamentary channels

Mr. Carlos Hoffman, Secretary General of the Chilean Senate, explained that Chile has two completely separate channels.

"We in the Senate pay for our channel and the Lower House pays for its channel. We are very different. The Chamber of Deputies broadcasts its debates live and that could well give a bad impression because people are going to see MPs reading and yawning, and not many people in attendance. In our case we edit what we are going to broadcast. Costs are an issue. We have solved the problem in a fairly economical way. We rent all the equipment from a company and we have a contract with a team of journalists responsible for programming and interviews. This is not the same as owning our own channel one hundred percent, but it works well."



Mr. Dawood Kuttab and Mrs. Esther Mamarbachi (TSR)

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The French experience

La Chaîne parlementaire

Mrs. Eve-Lise Blanc-Deleuze, Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Channel of the French National Assembly, explained the French experience, which is quite special. "A distinction needs to be made between communication and information. Communicating means making available data concerning parliament. We have a channel that records the proceedings of certain committees, and these images are distributed to all the media, including ours. No editorial work is done, this is mere communication. Besides these data, there is information. I make a distinction between the two because of the editorial question. When you provide information you have a group of journalists, with an editor-in-chief who chooses the subjects to be dealt with. These choices have to be made independently by *Public Sénat* and *La Chaîne Parlementaire*; they have to do the editorial work".

Mrs. Blanc-Deleuze added that twenty per cent of *La Chaîne Parlementaire's* broadcasting time "is dedicated to direct or delayed broadcasting of the work being carried out in the committees and eighty per cent is really shows, televised programmes, documentaries, talk shows, that go into greater detail on specific topics being dealt with by parliament. How do you protect the editorial independence without which no TV channel is credible? Through the legal constitution of the channel. *Public Sénat* is financed by the Senate and *La Chaîne parlementaire* by the Assembly. Their Board of Directors are made up of senators and of parliamentarians.

We have one representative for every parliamentary group. This means that whatever the majority in the House, no matter who is in power, everyone is represented. Our Board of Directors is neutral and impartial. The number of seats is not proportional to the number of seats in the Senate and in the National Assembly. This allows for full autonomy. Our TV channel is available on cable TV, on satellite and on digital TV. We reach 65 per cent of households in France. We are quite independent financially. We have different systems. The channels that cover the National Assembly and the Senate are political information channels. We work 24 hours a day providing parliamentary news. We also communicate by working in partnership with the group *France Télévision*, which is the equivalent of the BBC in the United Kingdom. France Télévision deals with government issues on Wednesday afternoons and broadcasts a résumé of the week's parliamentary activities in the evening. We transmit it to them and they broadcast it."

She concluded by saying that "it is very expensive to have a real parliamentary channel. The budgets of *Public Sénat* and *La Chaîne Parlementaire* are practically 11 million euros each, so between 22 and 25 million euros together, with an audience of about 75 per cent of French households. They provide round-the-clock communication and information. They are expensive, and we realize that this is something that not all countries can afford."

Public Sénat

Mr. Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, President and General Manager of France's *Public Sénat* and one of the scheduled panellists, was not able to attend at the last minute because his plane was unable to take off. He sent the following message.

"We are saddened and furious not to be with you this afternoon. I am particularly angry because we were looking forward to the Conference. I have been the head of *Public Sénat* for six years now, and I was looking forward to sharing our experience, particularly since we really have become a key mover of political debate in France. We know that we are definitely here to stay. Our friends from C-SPAN told us it was not going to be easy. Things have indeed been difficult, but not quite as hard as we had feared. We have managed to further the debate on topics such as justice and secularism in France, and are now gearing up for the 2007 presidential campaign.

Public Sénat was created as a result, not of a public initiative, but rather of a draft law promulgated by the presidents of both houses of parliament on 30 December 1999. *Public Sénat* is different because of its history: it was spawned and nurtured by politics, and it lives on politics.

From the outset, *Public Sénat* was conceived as a free and independent channel. This is why, after the law had been promulgated, the president of the Senate opted to appoint a duly accredited journalist as its head, this being the best guarantee of the channel's independence. That is how I became president and general manager of *Public Sénat*. The channel's independence is also guaranteed by its status. It is a private limited company that complies with the rules of independence characteristic of the private sector. It

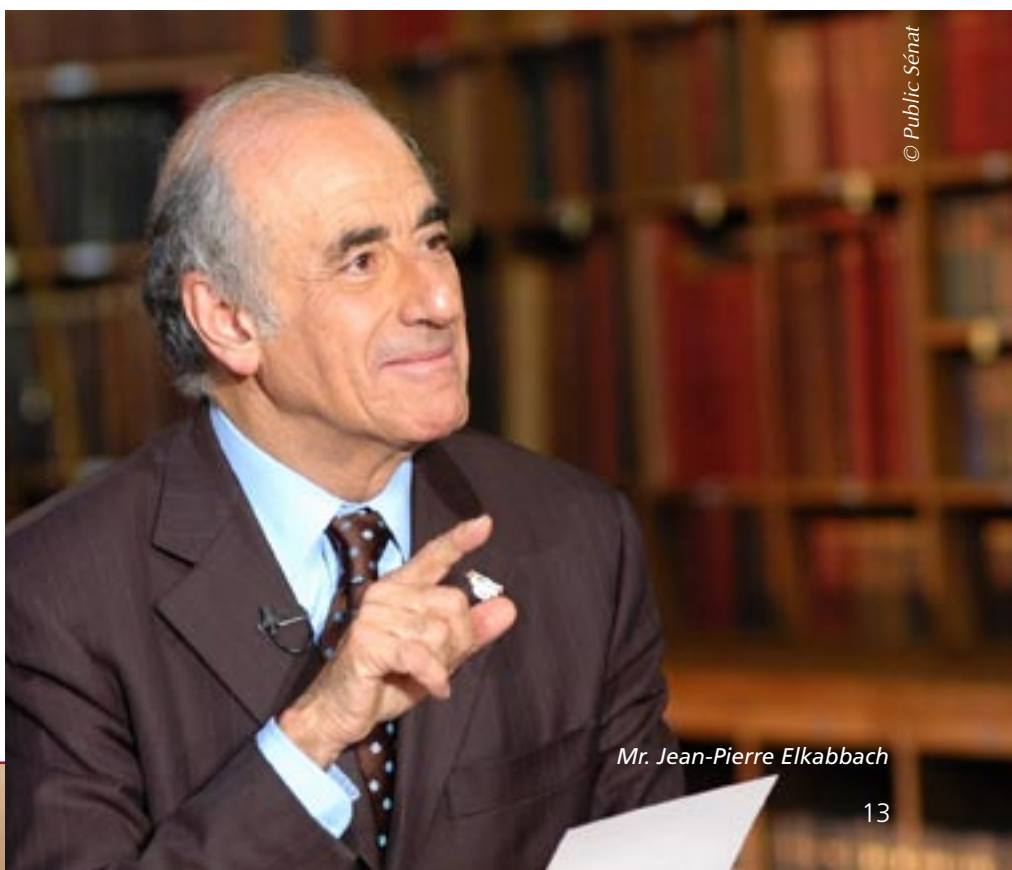
receives no instructions: I report, in person and after the fact, to the Senate Bureau, on which all political groups are represented and which receives me twice a year, and to the Board of Directors, which I chair. The Board is pluralistic: its members come from the six political groups represented in the Senate and from civil society; they include an economist, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, and a philosopher, Olivier Mongin.

Before *Public Sénat's* inception, parliament had *Canal Assemblées*, which retransmitted the public deliberations of both houses with no commentary. With *Public Sénat*, the aim is to provide journalistic added value, to decode the proceedings and explain the underlying political issues; that's what the French public wants; it was not interested in the "stream of debate" broadcast by *Canal Assemblées*.

Public Sénat's wide range of programmes enables it to fulfil its objective of narrowing the gap between the

people and their institutions. It goes further. Its goal – and it is an ambitious one – is to use television to give people a ticket to the places in which public debate takes place and which were hitherto closed to them. Unedited live coverage is our way of not misleading the viewer with sound bites, those short sentences picked up by the newscasts of major television broadcasters, but which are no reflection of the depth and true meaning of the public debate. Our slogan is: reserve your seat in all democratic institutions, from the local council to the United Nations.

We must underscore that *Public Sénat* has one big advantage. It has the good fortune not to be subject to the dictates of ratings and the mirage of advertising. Its strength is time, which it does not have to count. Every year it broadcasts an average 150 special reports that may be global or local, on French or Israeli elections, debates between Merkel and Schroeder or Berlusconi and Prodi. It also follows senators on their travels abroad, in their friendship groups.



Mr. Jean-Pierre Elkabbach

“Parliamentary channels are key to democracy and the full exercise of citizens’ rights”

Before the Geneva Conference,
Mr. Pier Vincenzo Porcacchia, Head of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Communication Office, explained the role of the Italian parliamentary channel, *Canale Satellitare*. Interview with the IPU.

Q: How did *Canale Satellitare* come about?

Pier Vincenzo Porcacchia: As its name indicates, *Canale Satellitare* is broadcast by satellite throughout much of Europe and in all northern Mediterranean countries. We are also looking into terrestrial digital broadcasts. The idea originally was to have an internal broadcasting system allowing Parliament’s various services to follow the deliberations in the Chamber of Deputies. Later, we thought it would be important to use the channel as a means of engaging in dialogue with the people in order to enhance their understanding of how the Chamber functions. This first step has been taken, and we would now like *Canale Satellitare* to stir greater interest.

Q: How will you go about this?

PVP: Studies have been made and we have taken account of the experience of other European countries, the United States and Canada. We have also researched the work of our parliamentary committee on communication and information and spoken with the main leaders in the sector, in order to develop *Canale Satellitare*’s

programming. At first we faced huge technical problems because we wanted to cover not only the Chamber of Deputies but all the deliberations of parliamentary committees. We also produce documentaries on topics ranging from the history of the Palazzo Montecitorio [where the Chamber of Deputies meets] to visits by groups of students who are not just tourists but have the possibility to engage in debate with their representatives. We have also produced documentaries on the issues at stake in the European elections and reported on other political and cultural events that have taken place in the Palazzo. Some examples are an exhibition on the French Impressionists, the visit by Pope John Paul II to the Chamber, and the Conference of Women Parliamentarians. We also covered the meeting of Presidents of African Parliaments, during which the main problems affecting Africa were discussed.

Q: How many people watch *Canale Satellitare*?

PVP: We have no viewer figures, and so we cannot gauge audience numbers. A limited number of people watch our channel, but the aim is to make *Canale Satellitare* a thematic channel that is governed by institutional criteria and impartially directed. It is also important to ensure the continuity of our programmes in order to establish viewer loyalty. This does not mean we have to broadcast around the clock, but that our programmes have to be relatively coherent, like those of the European Parliament.

Q: What does *Canale Satellitare* broadcast live as a priority?

PVP: The deliberations in the Chamber have priority for live broadcasts. Those of the committees are taped, or broadcast live if the Chamber is not in session.

Q: Can parliamentary channels enhance the people’s understanding of parliamentary life and politics, and do they influence society?

PVP: Today, almost all democracies have a problem making the concept of citizenship a part of the democratic process, and this is also linked to developments in communication. Parliamentary channels are therefore key to democracy and the full exercise of citizens’ rights. The dilemma is: is there too much information or not enough?



Mr. Pier Vincenzo Porcaccia

The Canadian experience

Before the Conference, the IPU interviewed **Mrs. Colette Watson**, President and General Manager of Canada's Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

Q: What is the CPAC?

Colette Watson: The CPAC is a private, not-for-profit channel. It is owned by the cable industry in Canada. The CPAC has six owners. We have an understanding with the House of Commons and the Senate for broadcasts of their programmes. Our understanding with the House of Commons requires us to broadcast the debates live when the House is in session. We are overseen by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), as are all radio and television broadcasters in Canada. The Speaker of the House of Commons refers to us as a parliamentary channel, and fifty percent of Canadians believe that the CPAC is owned by the government or parliament, but in fact we are what is referred to as the "three P" channel: in English, parliament, politics and public affairs, and in French, *parlement*, *politique* and *affaires publiques*. Our development plan centres on the Canadian Parliament, on what happens in the House of Commons, in the committee meetings and during ceremonies such as the Speech from the Throne [Queen Elizabeth II is Canada's titular head of State] and parades involving the Governor General. We report on everything related to parliamentary tradition.

Q: How do you work with the House of Commons?

CW: We work with the House of Commons, which has its own broadcasting company. That company is supervised by the Clerk and is in charge of broadcasting the debates, production, positioning the cameras and cameramen, deciding which committee's work is to be taped and broadcast. It employs about 100 people. The House of Commons gives us a technical link and sends images to our studios. The CPAC thus receives a product from the House of Commons. The Speaker therefore has an unfiltered product, without interference or analysis from journalists or private enterprises. We undertake to broadcast everything said. We are proud of this, because we believe that Canadians are able to form their own opinions on what is happening. When parliament is in session, there are more than 40 hours of debate each week. Not everyone has the time to watch and absorb all that, which is why channels like Radio-Canada play a key role in summing up what is happening in politics or parliament.

Q: How do you see your terms of reference?

CW: Two years ago I gave a speech in Washington in which I said the truth was always tainted by the political party or other entity concerned. We can provide serious information, but if we forget important details, people will form an opinion without knowing what we have forgotten or not included in our summary. There are two sides

to every coin. Our terms of reference are to present the facts and to leave it up to the viewer to decide. We take the statements made in the House and discuss them with everyone concerned in the studio. Then we invite the viewers to comment. When parliament is in session, the day starts at 10 a.m. and finishes between 6 and 7 p.m. We broadcast discussions with experts in French, then in English, and then go on to questions.

Q: What are your ratings?

CW: They are relatively low compared to other news networks, but some people consider it important to make this kind of information available. During election periods, we have about three million viewers per week; otherwise we have between 1.5 and two million viewers.

Q: Does the CPAC have any influence on Canadian politics?

CW: Yes, it has a huge influence. People stop listening to parliamentarians when they get into arguments. Our ratings shot up 100 per cent between July 2005 and July 2006, because of events in the Middle East, i.e. when war broke out. Canada has a large Lebanese community and a large Jewish community. Of course, we do not have the same budget as CNN to cover a war when it breaks out, but we can provide our viewers with everything the Prime Minister, government ministers and members of parliament, including in the opposition, have to say.



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Mrs. Colette Watson

Comments from the floor

Should a parliamentary channel be independent or part of parliament?

Delegate from India

The most important aspects are the channel's structure and funding, the quality of its programming and the content. In India we have not yet decided about the structure of the channel, whether it should be independent or part of the Secretariat of the House of People. My question to panellists is whether this channel should be controlled by the Secretariat of the House of the People, or whether it should be independent. The other question concerns programme quality. If a parliamentary channel is entirely controlled by parliament, how interesting can it be for the viewers?

Delegate from Kazakhstan

In recent years we have witnessed the transformation of the mass media, which have developed new functions and acquired a new dimension in public life. They have gone from information sharing towards greater politization of their activity. It is clear today that the political arena is characterized by a closer interrelation between politics, economics and mass media activities. In Kazakhstan, the mass media are an important component, not only of civil society, but also of the political system, and play a greater role providing information on civil society interests. In this context, the interrelation between the mass media and legislative bodies is of special importance. Mass media and parliament act in the same direction, but express and defend their own positions. Their interrelations, to a large extent, determine the parameters for the democratization of our society, since open discussions in parliament reflect public interest. The interpretation by the mass media of proposals, criticisms and opinions raised in parliament is also a means of implementing the voters' interests.

Delegate from Viet Nam

How can we stimulate public interest in parliamentary business? We have a parliamentary channel, but the people are not interested in it. How do we deal with that? Funding for the broadcasting of parliamentary activities is a paramount question, because we in parliament allocate the budget for every activity. I seek the experience of other countries on this question. Also, how can we promote the active role of parliament, because when people see that parliament is doing something for them, they become more interested in parliamentary broadcasts. Otherwise, such broadcasts are pointless.

Delegate from Benin

In my country, we speak some fifty languages. We can't reach out to everybody, and when citizens do not see what is happening or how parliament is addressing their needs in a multilingual broadcast, we lack credibility. One of our struggles in Benin is to improve our image, which is really poor. When MPs buy cars, the Executive says "parliamentarians all want to get cars, whereas all of you citizens are so poor". But when the Executive misuses billions nothing is said. It is important





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for us to receive assistance, so that our emerging democracy can ensure that a democratic culture prevails and that our citizens have access to our proceedings.

Delegate from Egypt

I am member of the Information University in Egypt. In my country we don't have a dedicated parliamentary channel. We do have 35 to 40 minutes devoted to parliamentary debates, particularly when elections are taking place. We have recently tried to have a longer broadcast at key times, and this has been very popular because when there are elections, for instance, we have provided information on how to vote and on the issues. We are advocating a parliamentary channel that takes account of different needs.

Delegate from Greece

I agree with Mr. Landau that the structure of the parliamentary channel is very different in each country and has to be adapted to each country's specific situation and political system. We have a parliamentary channel broadcasting live, the only one, I think, that broadcasts not only via satellite and cable but also on various frequencies. We reach almost seventy per cent of the population. We did a couple of things to attract Greek viewers. Our broadcasts cover more than parliamentary sessions and sub-committees, and include many documentaries on world history and culture. A few months ago, one of our viewers called to say he found the documentary very interesting but was bored by the parliament proceedings. His comment was: "Why do you have the parliamentary channel? Take it out, we only want the documentary!" I replied that parliament was the reason for our existence, but he said that it was boring! Greek viewers are more interested in politics and members of parliament want the channel to reach their own voters. So we had pressure from the legislators, too.

Delegate from Luxembourg

Parliamentary channels that are successful and attractive to viewers are those that are absolutely independent from the journalistic point of view. They can make choices and edit the content. Our parliamentary channel's role is to inform the public at large of the work being done in parliament. In order to be able to inform, you have to interest the public at large and to capture their interest, otherwise people will not be there to listen to the information. I notice that although this Conference has brought together many members of parliament, many of us find that parliamentary proceedings, debates and deliberations tend to be boring. If they are boring even to those who work in parliament, how could they not bore the general public? It might be useful for parliaments to start thinking about this.

Delegate from India

Our television channel is owned and operated by the Lower House of Parliament and is only two months old. We have a problem when we broadcast the proceedings of the House live. In India, the Lower House tends to be a rather lively place and occasionally the Speaker issues instructions saying that none of what has been said will be entered in the record. But in fact it has already been taped. When we produce our formal records – the recording of the proceedings of the House is a very formal affair – we edit out the bits the Speaker indicated should be left out. The point is that when we do a recap after each session, it is too early to get that formal edited piece, which comes from the table office. I wonder whether anyone faces the same dilemma about using excerpts which are to be struck from the record, but which are in fact available and which television journalists insist on using.

The question of parliamentary communication

Delegate from Senegal

I am a journalist by training and I teach communication at university. If there is a poor relation when it comes to parliamentary matters it is indeed communication. Here we have seen ways in which there are complementary services available but also disparities. One matter we have yet to touch on is the question of human resources. Some parliaments are well structured and have professionally managed communication services; others have nothing, not even a basic communication service. We need to be able to speak the same language, whether we are from the North or the South, audiovisual communication professionals or working within parliament. We need to ensure that our parliaments have well structured

professional communication services. We have a great deal to share within the IPU on that score. That is one reason why I would suggest that the question of parliamentary communication be taken up by the IPU, which could perhaps devote a seminar or session to it.

Delegate from Mali

I would like to touch upon something else, namely the things that would help promote the development of TV channels in our systems, particularly in our new democracies. Such channels would be a fantastic means of reinforcing the democratic approach in our country, perhaps a far better one than today's national TV channels. These are public service stations, but they represent the State more than the public service. In Mali, we don't have

a parliamentary channel, not because we are against the principle, but rather because of the cost. We do have a rather advanced radio service system for our parliament. We go through our national TV channel. Broadcasts are governed by the rules and regulations of the Assembly, which have to be approved by the Constitutional Court. Under these rules, questions asked of the members of government, the statements made with regard to general policy and so on, have to be broadcast. This is not enough and it's important for us to see what we could do, other than just setting up the radio station or saying that we should have specialized parliamentary channels. Recommendations should be made.

Like our friends from Senegal, we would ask that these recommendations include an appeal to regional parliaments to set up regional workshops for parliaments that have similar problems in broadcasting parliamentary proceedings.



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Questions & Answers

How important is it to have a parliamentary channel?

Q: Mr. John Clerc, Deputy Secretary General, Swiss Parliament

Public interest in parliament has changed over time. The Swiss Parliament published no record of its debates before 1891, for fear that people would stay in cafés and read them. Nowadays, all this is available on the Internet, but I am not sure that everyone has all that they need. I would agree with Mr. Knowles that the Internet is certainly the future and the best way of disseminating parliamentary work. Switzerland can indeed look in that direction. Parliamentary channels seem to be viewed as an inherently good thing. However, they do have one problem and that is that they may well find themselves in a ghetto. Those who are seriously interested in a subject may well watch the channel; as Terry Murphy of C-SPAN said, it is mostly people engaged in politics who watch. That's fine, but then you don't reach the people who abstain when there are elections in the United States. We have to see how one can target people during usual viewing hours. I am sure that the sixty or so French-speaking parliamentarians in Switzerland have probably been on most news or interview programmes. Why is there only half an hour of coverage of the European Parliament by BBC Parliament? Is that a reflection of British insularity or is there another explanation?

Q: Indonesian delegate

The question of public service broadcasting is very important. Parliament is not in a position to say what it thinks is important for the public. What are the benefits of having our own broadcasting channel or using public television channels?



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A: Mr. Peter Knowles, Controller, BBC Parliament

I am not saying that a parliamentary channel is a complete answer to how to convey what is happening in your parliament. It only reaches part of the target group. Parliamentary channels are becoming more important, but radio and the Internet also have an impact. Most people in the United Kingdom learn about what is happening in Westminster from the radio. Yesterday morning far more people listened to our Radio 4 parliamentary report than tuned into BBC Parliament. Another programme broadcast every night on radio reaches half a million listeners. Radio is not just a solution for the developing world, it is also really important in the developed world. Our live Internet broadcast of the first time that the new leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, faced Tony Blair at Prime Minister's Question Time got 75,000 hits against 150,000 viewers watching it on BBC Parliament.

It is quite true that in terms of minutes per week, our coverage of the European Parliament is tiny by comparison with what we do on Westminster. I would say we spend more money and effort on that half hour than just about anything else in our schedule and the reason for that is very simple. It is not feasible for us to give extensive coverage to unedited coverage of debates at the European Parliament. With our commitment to Westminster, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is not enough room left.

A: Mr. Terry Murphy, C-SPAN

You are right that we are interested in politically active people. It's not my job as a journalist to give advice to Congress, but I don't understand why they don't schedule their sessions differently. Congress convenes at 9 or 10 in the morning and deliberates all day. By prime time there is one member left to speak and nobody else is in the

chamber. I never understood why they don't plan their schedule around television viewing time, in prime time, and do the hearings in the morning.

A: Mrs. Anne-Margrete Wachtmeister, European Parliament

I am responsible for broadcasting from the European Parliament. We broadcast live. We broadcast free via satellite in all twenty official languages of the European Parliament. Any broadcaster can pick up our programmes, and many do. We also do summaries, but with no comment, of the daily plenary and that is also picked up by the EBU, which sometimes broadcasts our sessions live. Some of the proceedings are very attractive to broadcasters and appear on national, mostly public, service broadcasters.

A: Mrs. Barbara Long, Director, Parliamentary Broadcasting, British Parliament

I was going to make exactly the same point as our colleague from Senegal, which is that in a developing country, radio is often a source of opportunities. I would also like to point out that, as Peter Knowles and I know, there are benefits in having no parliamentary channel. I agree with him, I don't want to make any decisions about what is carried on the British parliamentary channel. Internet broadcasting does allow us to do some things ourselves, however, which would not be sustainable for an independent broadcaster, however well funded. We provide Internet coverage of every public sitting of every committee of the British Parliament. If a microphone is being used in a committee room, that sound is being carried on the Internet and anybody can listen to it. It's a very basic service, but it is a start and it is complementary to what the major broadcasters are doing. Even if the infrastructure in your country is not as advanced as ours, the time will come when you will all go straight onto the Internet. I urge you to consider it as a possibility.



Can journalists and commercial information services be trusted?

Q: Mr. Ayad Majid, Training Counsellor of the Iraqi Parliament

The visual information services provided by commercial media have licenses. Is that something we can trust? Do you think commercial broadcasters can be relied upon to show what is happening in parliament? Our Constitution makes some reference to these issues. We want to ensure that our audio-visual commission is an independent body, in particular in respect of the Executive in Iraq. It is funded out of the parliamentary budget in order to ensure that it can cover parliamentary activities, particularly during elections.

Q: Mr. Jacques St-Louis, Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies, Haiti

With respect to the parliamentary channel, should it be considered a propaganda channel seen as such? Should broadcasts be confined to parliamentary settings? Should the parliamentary channel compete with private sector channels for advertising revenues?

A: Mr. Dan Landau, former Head of the Knesset Network

Let me respond by mentioning three different models that involve commercial television in parliamentary television. The first one is the American model, which is not relevant financially for most countries, but is very interesting because it's not run by the House or the Senate. It is run and financed by the industry, and is a completely independent public service carried by all the cable networks and by some of the satellite companies. In this model, many commercial broadcasters come together in a commercial partnership to provide a public service, and no one claims that it's not independent.

The other model is the Canadian model, in which the whole Canadian broadcasting industry, which provides free services, works in partnership with cable and satellite, but parliament itself has its own budget and produces the actual footage of parliamentary debate in the chambers – House of Commons and the Senate – or in committee. This is a different kind of partnership involving parliament itself and the various networks. The third model is the Israeli model, which is quite unique and very successful, not because I established it, but because we went around the world learning before we established it. The Knesset channel is funded completely by the Knesset, but it is produced and run completely independently by one of the larger news broadcasters that won a public tender called not by the Knesset but by one of the regulatory authorities. On the one hand, you have complete independence; on the other, because it is financed by the Knesset, it is clear that it is a parliamentary channel. Again, finding the right solution for your country requires a fair bit of research, and involves not just comparing to other countries but trying to think what is best for your emerging democracy.

Q: Mr. Petr Kostka, Press Secretary of the Office of the Senate, Czech Republic.

I would like to ask colleagues from countries who operate public television how many people watch parliamentary TV.

A: Mr. Dan Landau, former Head of the Knesset Network

Every television expert will say: "That's not a question that you should ask because the parliamentary channel is not there to compete with commercial

television and if it does try to compete, then something is wrong. You cannot compete with a hundred-million-dollar television channel using your five-million-dollar parliamentary channel. It is not going to work. The parliamentary channel provides an alternative and needs to compete fairly with the other 150 channels you have. Ratings are important, but so is the number of people who have seen the programme or been exposed to the channel over a period of time. In Israel, when we were setting the relationship with other channels, we decided to let the whole industry rebroadcast the parliamentary channel's programmes. The same content was broadcast on five or six channels over the week. In the course of a month we reached many more viewers than if we had just broadcast on a single channel.

Q: Delegate from Venezuela

If parliaments are the site of national politics, if the role of parliament is to structure national political debate – and we consider politics to be the way in which societies live together – shouldn't parliamentary channels be political in the noblest sense of the word? Shouldn't they provide opportunities for in-depth debate of all issues relevant to the country in which they are broadcast? We have a useful channel that gives citizens the opportunity to participate, even to criticize parliament, to enter into contact with it and exchange views. This is how television can create a kind of virtual society and opportunities for debate. Can parliamentary channels launch social processes or different types of programmes in society? Would this be the role of a public broadcasting channel such as a parliamentary channel, or do parliamentary channels have a different role from commercial channels? Can parliamentary channels help citizens see and monitor what parliament is doing? Can the media really be impartial?

**A: Boris Bergant,
EBU Vice-President**

The fact that a journalist or media house is independent does not mean they are irresponsible. Independence and responsibility go hand in hand. I would doubt that a genuine public service broadcaster would operate only to criticize the government or parliament. That is not its role, even though it can be critical at times. In emerging democracies, not only in Indonesia but

also in Europe, parliamentarians might think the channel is against them. This should not be the case. Independence really means responsibility.

**A: Mr. Dan Landau, former Head of
the Knesset Network**

There can be no genuine dialogue between politicians or parliament and the public unless there is some criticism. There is always going to be some criticism. People, as opposed to

commercial television, are going to ask difficult questions. In some cases, it can really make a difference if you give parliamentarians or even government officials the chance to answer real questions. Let the public decide for itself. But I strongly disagree with the idea of someone editing or profiling the content so as to make it more positive. You have to have a completely transparent showcase and let the people decide for themselves, even if the outcome is negative.



Costs of a channel and new technologies

**Q: Mr. Babacar Gaye, National
Assembly Deputy, Senegal**

In terms of new technologies, we now need to invest in order to ensure that we have video conferencing and other modern technologies. We need our own broadcasting equipment. The key question, of course, is funding. Is it possible to have private sector funding for a parliamentary channel and if so, how? We are eager to have some information on this. Lastly, what

expertise is available within the IPU, the EBU or any other organization or broadcaster that might be interested in our situation?

**A: Mr. Peter Knowles, Controller,
BBC Parliament**

As concerns cost, it is very hard to see how you can run a parliamentary broadcasting channel on commercial funding. There is a very successful model in the United States, but if

you think in terms of the advertising revenue or the subscription revenue that is available, new parliamentary channels are entering an established broadcasting environment where most of those revenues are already taken. Moreover, they will not easily get the viewing figures that would drive commercial sales. This is why, in the great majority of cases, parliamentary channels are funded in one way or another by public funds. The British case is quite interesting. The parliamentary channel was originally paid for by the cable companies. When they ran out of money, public services broadcasters were invited or encouraged to step in.

Control or no control

Q: Mrs. Tahera Shairzay, Director of Information and Public Relations, Lower House, Afghan Parliament

The Afghan Parliament is very new, and I am very glad that the question of radio has come up. Radio is more accessible all over Afghanistan, not only in Kabul. My question is directed chiefly to Mr Kuttab. He said live broadcasts should show everything that goes on in parliament. I believe in transparency,

but I also believe that for a very young parliament set up after 30 years in which people have faced countless problems, a little bit of control is a good thing; people would quickly lose their faith in their representatives otherwise. What do you think?

A: Mr. Dawood Kuttab, Director of the Institute of Modern Media, Al Quds University, Ramallah

With respect to the whole question of freedom, much is expected of the media and it is hoped that we can do the same thing as parliament. Parliamentarians are the ones who are supposed to think about what they should or should not say in parliament. They should exercise a little self-control. We are often asked to do that for them. As a journalist I disagree. It is not our responsibility to decide what is made available and what is not broadcast. We must not fall into that trap, we must not play that role.

Has TV broadcasting improved the quality and work of legislators?



Q: Mr. Washington Abdala, Member of the House of Representatives, Uruguay

In Uruguay we have very strong feelings about politics. Three channels constantly broadcast what is basically general and political news. However, we do not have a parliamentary channel, and the advantages and disadvantages of having one are currently being hotly debated. I am very happy with all you have said, because it will help us to understand things better. Has TV broadcasting helped to improve the way parliamentarians are working? Has knowing that they are being watched perhaps made parliamentarians in the

United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere more concerned about what they are saying?

A: Mr. Peter Knowles, Controller, BBC Parliament

I am not going to give a proper answer, because there are other people here today who are in a better position to do so. You know whether your parliamentarians got better at speaking and making sense in a clear and concise way when the cameras arrived. Are people using this to launch media careers? Possibly. In the case of Westminster, the House rules of procedures are pretty strict and it is quite difficult for parliamentarians to do the wrong thing when they make statements. The Speaker interrupts them and says: "Answer the question, conform to the rules". The Speaker will cut them off, even if it's the Prime Minister who is speaking. The rules of the House make it much harder for somebody just to show off.

A: Mr. Terry Murphy, C-SPAN

It has helped members of Congress to see themselves on video. That is one of the advantages of television we have all experienced, but we also all have the same complaints. Everyone is afraid the sessions are going to change, and that people are going to speak to the cameras. A US study showed that the sessions were not significantly longer after television had been introduced. There are more red ties, white shirts and blue suits now than there were before. There are more charts. There are grandstanders; this is inevitable whenever there is a television camera. There are C-SPAN stars. They may not be the most politically astute people in the party, but they know how to use television. Some members are there every night, and they become stars. One of the reasons the Senate went on television was because the members of the House started to become stars.

A: Mr. Dawood Kuttab, Director of the Institute of Modern Media, Al Quds University, Ramallah

It also works the other way round. Some people have been hurt because they have not done very well on television; the impact can be positive or negative.

The role of the camera

**Comment: Mrs. Claressa Surtees,
Member of the House of
Representatives, Australia**

We have just celebrated the 60th anniversary of radio broadcasts of parliamentary sittings in Australia. The legislation introducing the broadcasts was debated in 1946. The comments made by Members of the Senate at the time were: "We are not sure this is a good idea, it might change the way people behave"; they thought they were taking a risk. They nevertheless went ahead with the broadcasts. And yes, their behaviour was a little bit different for a few days, but the observers at the time thought that it very quickly settled back into the usual debating routine. The same comments were made in 1990, when we started to televise parliamentary proceedings. Again, behaviour quickly returned to normal. We have rules about how people are filmed in parliament, and it is one of my responsibilities to provide advice about this. The basic rule is that the camera focuses on whoever is speaking. The camera operator is not to focus on events that are not directly related to the proceedings, such as a demonstration in the galleries or on the floor of the chamber, or somebody falling over, because they are unconnected to the business at hand.

**A: Mr. Dawood Kuttab,
Director of the Institute of Modern
Media, Al Quds University,
Ramallah**

Speaking as a journalist, I would say that the difficulty is to get people to watch these programmes. It is very boring to watch someone speaking non-stop for fifteen minutes, so it is important to cut away and show people listening and reacting, to film the session. If people are interested in preserving the dignity of parliament, they should act in a dignified manner; if they don't, that's

their problem. When we started filming in Palestine, people were reading newspapers in parliament. When they realized they were being filmed, they put away the newspapers and started dressing better.

**Q: Mr. Marc Bosc, Deputy Clerk,
House of Commons, Canada**

We shouldn't forget a fundamental principle of parliaments around the world, and that is that assemblies must be in a position to control their own proceedings and remain independent. If that control is relinquished by the

assembly, to whom does it go? Does it go to protesters in the gallery, does it go to irresponsible members of parliament who, by making a scene, get picked up by the television networks? By televising gavel to gavel and focusing on the member speaking, journalists are still free to cut and edit and put out a narrative story. There is nothing censoring the media at all. The only difference is that they don't have a picture. They are still free to do their work, they just don't have a picture.

**A: Mr. Dawood Kuttab,
Director of the Institute of Modern
Media, Al Quds University,
Ramallah**



The print journalists can see what is happening, so why should the television cameras be discriminated against? Print journalists can report on what is happening, so why should there not be live coverage? As a journalist, if I am given this coverage, I will take it. Parliament might decide not to give us the coverage, and it has the right to do so. But if I am given it, I would take advantage of it.

**A: Mr. Peter Knowles,
Controller, BBC Parliament**

This is a major issue. Westminster operates under very tight rules of control over what the cameras show and the core feed provided to all

broadcasters. The camera may only film the person speaking or cut away to the reaction of somebody named by that speaker; wide shots are allowed for editing purposes. We recently tried a much looser arrangement in the House of Lords, allowing the director to use a normal range of shots. We tried to get away from what I thought of as being a photo booth style of coverage, where you see a face in a box. There were no problems, and the same, more relaxed rules have now been tried out in the House of Commons. This raises some very interesting issues about protests and bad behaviour. My view on this is quite conservative. The new rules of coverage do not allow the cameras to

show protests in the public galleries, in the belief that were they allowed to do this, there would be no end of protests.

A: Mr. Terry Murphy, C-SPAN

In the United States Congress, the rule is that the cameras may only show who is speaking. They are not allowed to cut away. If there is a commotion in the gallery, the speaker will stop and everyone will stare at what is happening. The viewers see people staring up, but not what is happening, which is frustrating.

**Q: Mr John Scubledu, Director of
Public Affairs, Parliament of Ghana**

I come from a country which has seen a number of military interventions, and we have had an uninterrupted parliamentary system for 13 years only. This has left the population in the dark about parliament. I am glad we have shifted the focus to radio, because people in rural areas lack access to television stations. Parliament has tried to reach out to the people and is beginning to think about establishing a regular parliamentary station. We normally have three meetings in an annual session. There are two recess periods. When this happens, what happens to the radio stations? We have all the radio stations inviting members of parliament to participate in discussion programmes every morning.

**A: Mr. Dawood Kuttub,
Director of the Institute of Modern
Media, Al Quds University,
Ramallah**

When parliament is in recess, it's a good idea to have talk shows in which members of parliament can participate. I run a weekly radio programme when parliament is in recess. Things continue to happen in society and members of parliament, as elected representatives of the people, always have an opinion about what's happening in the world. Also, the committees are often working even when the plenary is not in session. We use the off-season to conduct many more interviews on current affairs.



EBU proposes programme exchanges

Mr. Peter Vickers,
EBU Head of Marketing
and Business Management,
Eurovision Operations
Department

We would like to suggest that we create a forum where you can freely exchange content with other parliamentary channels. For example, a vote of confidence in France might well be of interest to other parliamentary channels around the world. We are talking about a forum, a market place, where we exchange this kind of content. We suggest that it operate on a reciprocal, copyright-free basis so that no transaction is involved. Eurovision would be the platform delivering the content, either live or in edited form, and would also take care of providing background information to help journalists and producers create their finished report.

Q: Mrs. Claressa Surtees,
Member of the House of
Representatives, Australia

Would the project extend to every parliament throughout the world, or is it limited to Europe?

Peter Vickers

In my mind, the project is not restricted to Europe at all. There are some countries it would be very odd not to exchange content with. The project is open to all who wish to participate.

Q: Mr. Pier Vincenzo Porcaccia,
Head of the Communication Office,
Chamber of Deputies, Italy

Do you have any plans to deal with national parliamentary channels? In Italy, for instance, we have one for the Chamber of Deputies and one for the Senate. Do you have any plans to ask each channel to produce programmes with a view to exchanging them? It is not often that one has the opportunity to retransmit a parliamentary session that is considered to be of interest to

another country, but there might well be other sorts of programmes that could provide footage on the way parliaments work or on the constitutional system in a given country, and they might well be relevant for an exchange. Would you envisage that type of exchange?

Peter Vickers

Yes. The simplest thing to do is to transmit live and to share that live transmission with the other people in the exchange. Editing is the next level of complication, and what you describe – creating programmes for exchange – is an excellent idea. Whether in reality you would have the resources or desire to do that is something that I cannot answer for you. In the news exchanges we operate, it is rare for that third party of report to be made especially for the exchanges. It does happen, but it is rare.

Q: Mr. Aristide Obombe,
Head of the Communication
Department, Senate of Gabon

In the project that you have outlined, would the debate on censorship in Gabon be of interest to anyone in Belgium or Romania, for instance? I wonder whether what goes on in our parliament is of interest to Europe.

Peter Vickers

The answer is not clear. Some viewers would be interested in such a debate. I am not suggesting that we in Geneva make any value judgement on debates in your country, but simply that we identify an information flow from you to us and then cut out obviously domestic things. What is left is offered to participants, who then express an interest or not. We are not in the business of making editorial judgements on what you are doing.



Survey

How important is it to have a parliamentary channel?

People are clearly interested in political life, and parliamentary proceedings have airtime on the main TV networks in most countries. A survey on public broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings, carried out by the IPU late last year among 70 countries, indicates that 83 per cent regularly broadcast the activities of parliament and 70 per cent do so on a daily or weekly basis. One third (31%) reports on parliamentary proceedings during a fixed time slot, and one third (35%) goes live when the news warrants.

But how important is it for a parliament to have its own TV channel? Of the parliamentary chambers that participated in the survey, one in five (22%) has a TV channel, which it uses mainly to broadcast parliamentary proceedings. But many of those that do not have concluded broadcasting arrangements with other TV channels: 69 per cent with public broadcasters and 17 per cent with private TV networks.

TV transmissions are expensive, and three quarters (76%) of parliamentary channels are financed by public funds. It is therefore no surprise that most parliamentary TV channels are located in countries in the North, although the parliaments of Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and Trinidad and Tobago also have their own TV channels.

The survey results indicate that 67 per cent of the channels concerned broadcast their programmes via satellite, 81 per cent via cable, 73 per cent through the Internet, 13 per cent by analog terrestrial transmission and 31 per cent by digital terrestrial transmission.

Parliamentary proceedings tend to be considered boring, so it is important to encourage the public to “tune in”. Three quarters (77%) of all parliamentary channels publicize their programmes on a website, and over half (54%) advertise them in newspapers.

Editorial control is also important. How willing are parliaments not to interfere in broadcasts of their proceedings? Among the parliaments that responded, 74 per cent have established rules for parliamentary coverage, and 35 per cent involve television regulators, rather than parliamentary officials, in regulating broadcasts. In fact, one third gives news directors a role in the decision on whether to go live from parliament.

Like many surveys, this one elicited responses primarily from parliaments in the North. This leaves the situation with regard to broadcasting of parliamentary debates in developing countries unmapped. It is likely, however, that parliaments in the South make much more frequent use of broadcasting by radio. This is not the case in the North, where today, unlike many years ago, only one parliament in ten broadcasts by radio.



Conclusions

By the Rapporteur,
Mr. Erik Fichtelius,
Executive Producer and
Editor of SVT 24 Direct
(Sweden)

Conference on broadcasting
of parliamentary business
through dedicated TV
channels and public
broadcasting systems

organized jointly by the IPU,
the ASGP and EBU
Thursday 19 October 2006 –
CICG Geneva (Switzerland)

**“Public service is service
for citizens, with
independent, quality
programmes”**

During this conference many questions were raised, for example: is broadcasting of parliamentary activities in the public interest? The answer is definitely yes. Why should we broadcast from parliament? Because there is a need to create a direct link between citizens and media, and to close the gap between citizens and parliament. There is a need for citizens to be informed and for parliaments to reach out to the people. This should not be perceived as a threat to existing media outlets. Rather, it fosters the growth of news outlets and does not exclude news reporting. One colleague said today that “once it is live, nobody can take it away. Even if you try to take it away from the archives, it is still there and it is worth a lot”. Having said that, the quality of live broadcasting is also extremely important.

Are there problems? Yes, there are some problems which need to be solved, such as the ten-second sound bite discussed all over the world. This is a great background for C-SPAN operations. But today, in the USA, sound bites are only 7.2 seconds long, and the trend is for even shorter ones.

Parliamentary activities are boring, unattractive, and could be considered a “ghetto” segment. Our colleague from BBC Parliament said that parliamentary business is only watched by interested



persons. How do we make it interesting? There are ways of doing it and we should not be too worried about ratings. "Reach" is a far more important concept, and the experience of all broadcasters is that big news will always attract big audiences.

Dividing line

There is a dividing line between the participants as to what to do and how to do it, or who should decide what to broadcast. Should the broadcasting of parliamentary business be controlled by parliament or by independent media? I would advise all parliamentary officials to listen to the experience of the broadcasters present here. We unanimously believe in independent editorial decisions and that they are good for everybody.

But we still hear some remarks from colleagues, such as our Chilean counterpart, who say that parliamentarians should have the right to have at least one positive channel. It is an argument, but it may not be the best one.

When you want to make real human beings out of members of parliament, reflect on different opinions, have an open and fair forum, or project the image that MPs are honest and straight-talking, that might be considered as propaganda. You are then taking a big risk in terms of credibility. There are many who are against parliament-controlled activities. You will risk being the target of politicians and thus lose credibility.

If you broadcast from parliament, what happens to other political activities? The most successful parliamentary or political channels are the ones which cover the entire political process, such as Phoenix, C-SPAN, SVT 24 Direct, which is under my responsibility, or BBC Parliament. They give a much

better understanding of political life as a whole.

Parliaments are critical of the media. Members of parliament think that the press will project negative images. They feel they do not get positive attention, and that too much attention is given to scandals and political games, rather than to real issues. These complaints are voiced by politicians in all parts of the world.

Recommendations

My recommendation is that broadcasting of parliamentary activities should be done in an independent manner, with pluralism and free media – elements that lend credibility. Professional criteria can be identified as to what will and will not go on the air. News should be credible. The full political process and the goings-on outside the halls of the parliament can be reflected.

Crucial questions should be asked when we continue to venture into political broadcasting. Is full coverage of parliamentary activities recommended? Are we sometimes interested in sensationalism? Is public control of what is said somehow lost? Perhaps, but that is something that has to be accepted. Public service is a service for citizens, with independent, quality programmes. In Europe, we have a tradition of strong public service companies, and many of us have been inspired by the BBC. The Scandinavian countries have very strong public service corporations, which serve as a sound platform for this new undertaking into political channel broadcasting.

What is the difference between a political channel and a commercial channel? Can one really be impartial and promote social ideas? Considering the vast possibilities offered by new technologies, the time for action is now. There are currently one billion Internet

users and that figure is growing every day. Ten years ago, no frequencies were available, whereas today we have a range of frequencies to use. Internet provides wonderful opportunities and digital distribution on terrestrial transmitting stations and satellites expands the range of frequencies, which are opening up to markets and political or parliamentary broadcasters.

Broadcasting and webcasting are very much present, and if broadcasting and documentaries are combined on a single home page – as opted for by the Swedish and many other parliaments – we have an amazing political tool for citizens and a protocol for parliaments. Government – and opposition – generated documents, as well as background documents and MP voting records, could also be of great interest.

The Swedish model

Live streaming is now a possibility on the web. On my channel, SVT 24 Direct, we do live streaming of everything we come across, and we have a large audience on the web page. What about political activities, costs and edited material? Should they be handled in-house or externally from a technical point of view? What kind of agreement should be drawn up between broadcasters and parliaments? In Sweden, we have consciously avoided drawing up any agreement between ourselves and parliament, because, as a broadcaster, I think that would be problematic.

We are not all that organized. We choose what proceedings in parliament to broadcast and we do it in such a way that the Swedish Parliament provides the clean signal to the television tower and from there any media outlet in Sweden – be it commercial television, public service television or newspapers with webcasting capacity – can take the signal from parliament. The quality of

the television production is very good. The problem arises when parliament controls production. We risk not getting pictures when something extraordinary happens in the parliament, such as scenes of protesters, people dying, etc. In Sweden, we have solved this problem by making it possible for any media outlet, if it so wishes, to work on the basis of a "pooled" position, and we are able to take our own footage inside the parliament. On a normal day in parliament we are satisfied with the pictures we receive and we can make a good selection. But that remains our editorial decision.

How can we make it interesting? Television is the most popular medium, and the criteria for scheduling mentioned by Peter Knowles of BBC Parliament is extremely important. Broadcasting 24 hours a day is important because viewers can identify with the schedule over many years. The tools of professional journalism are important if we want to make it interesting. Phoenix provides some useful insights. Analysis and commentary are necessary to make programmes understandable. Combining these ingredients with documents on the web will give citizens an inside view of what is going on.

Another crucial question is who controls the cameras? As we have to deal with filming regulations and rules of engagement, should we broadcast everything? The experience of the British Parliament, where committee hearings are placed on the website, is to allow freedom of access to everything. My channel will broadcast only the things we find interesting from parliament. This is our freedom.

There is a reason why committee meetings in many parliaments are held *in camera*. Parliamentarians

must have the possibility of discussing issues before decisions are taken. Our experience in Sweden is that the most popular programmes are the open committee hearings. We also broadcast government press conferences, but the question remains: how can the opposition be heard? We have press conference rooms and four locations within the Swedish Parliament equipped with television cameras and available for the opposition to rebut and to be heard from parliament – which is the proper forum for rebuttal.

In terms of cooperation, as a broadcaster, I find the suggestion made by our EBU colleagues extremely interesting. I am not only a citizen of Sweden, but also a citizen of the European Union. How can I take part in the political debate in Europe? Television is one way. The European Parliament produces very good coverage of its proceedings and we get its transmissions with direct simultaneous translation into Swedish. Broadcasting is therefore not a problem, and many Swedes are more aware of the political issues in Europe affecting them, such as the debate about the new constitution of the European Union, climate change, Turkey's prospects of accession, or European views about the war in Iraq.

Establishing a mechanism such as the one proposed by the EBU to "organize the chaos" could facilitate citizens' understanding of what is going on. It is an extremely good idea.

The responsibility of parliament

One thing that has not been mentioned is the responsibility of the parliament itself. How can it modernize its procedures? The Swedish Parliament has introduced new rules and pro-

cedures to make the debates more understandable and interesting. For example, the debate starts with the majority explaining its proposals. The public can then understand what the opposition is debating. We have also introduced a new form of debate called "actual debate on current issues".

Independence is of paramount importance. We have a large audience, with two channels. We broadcast terrestrially and we usually have approximately one per cent of the population viewing all the time. When we have highlights, between four and five per cent of the population are watching, which shows that there is an interest.

As a broadcaster with 25 years of experience in radio before embarking on television, I must say that the comments made about radio are very interesting. In many countries, this is something which must be taken into consideration. You can have a good audience by combining radio, television and the Internet. That makes it truly possible to reach out to citizens. There is a new development in broadcasting and in political life: citizens are becoming much more involved in the political process.

A German study explains why people dislike politicians. Attitudes towards the way politicians were presented on television were tested, and it was found that, if a leading politician was allowed to speak in his own voice and with his own face, people would respect him much more. Under the political system that allows us to elect representatives, politicians are deserving of respect. As independent broadcasters, it would be a good thing for us to be a part of this overall scheme of things.



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