135TH IPU ASSEMBLY, GENEVA
SIDE EVENT ON "E-PARLIAMENT: ONLINE VOTING IN A PARLIAMENTARY CONTEXT"

TUESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2016 - FROM 2:30 TO 4:00 P.M.
Rooms 3 and 4, Level 0, CICG.
Languages of the meeting: English and French

The IPU has worked on issues relating to parliaments and technology since 2003, when the Assembly adopted a resolution on the contribution of information and communication technologies to good governance. In recent years, the IPU has focused on how parliaments are making use of technology to carry out their core functions, and to enhance communication with citizens. This work has seen the organization of seven World e-Parliament Conferences and the publication of four World e-Parliament Reports. The 2016 World e-Parliament Report was launched at the Chamber of Deputies of Chile in June 2016 (www.wepc2016.org).

The Twelve Plus Group highly appreciates this work and believes there should also be an opportunity for parliamentarians from all over the world to discuss e-Parliament issues at each IPU Assembly. The Twelve Plus Group suggests such a debate should become part and parcel of the ordinary programme of work of each Assembly.

During the 134th Assembly in Lusaka (Zambia), the Twelve Plus Group organized a special meeting on e-Parliament to discuss this proposal. At the Group's invitation, the meeting was attended by the President and the Secretary General of the IPU as well as several representatives of other geopolitical groups and of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians.

Following the meeting in Lusaka, the Twelve Plus Group has asked the IPU Executive Committee to take its proposal into consideration. It was also decided at the meeting that the Twelve Plus Group would organize a first meeting on a specific topic regarding e-Parliament at the next Assembly in Geneva, which would be open to all interested delegates. The topic chosen for this side event was: online (i.e. remote electronic) voting, both by citizens and parliamentarians.

The following questions will be discussed.

1. Can democracy benefit from the organization of online voting by citizens to take certain decisions? What are the advantages and risks for democracy of different kinds of online voting?

- online voting for the election of parliamentarians?

- online voting to propose the consideration of a bill by parliament?

- online voting for other political elections ?

2. In each case in which online voting is considered to be an asset, its implementation requires that a number of important political and technical issues are resolved:

- how to compensate for the digital divide resulting from the fact that part of the population has no access to the internet (for technical, financial or cultural reasons, and sometimes all of these reasons at once)?

- how to ensure that the legal and financial rules governing traditional campaigning are also respected in online electoral campaigns?

- how to verify the identity of the voter?

- how to guarantee the confidentiality of the registered electronic vote?

- how to maintain the freedom of each voter to vote as he sees fit against possible pressure from others around him or her (lack of an electronic equivalent of the polling booth)?

- should online voting be a complementary mode of voting (added to voting poll and postal vote) or is it intended to become a unique mode of voting?

3. Can democracy benefit from the organization of online voting by parliamentarians in their assembly? Again, online voting can be considered for different ballots :

- voting in committees

- voting in plenary

- other votes, for example in managing or governing bodies : conference of presidents, etc. ?

4. Online voting by parliamentarians in their assembly raises a number of important political and technical questions: can it be allowed and under what conditions?

- Online voting by parliamentarians affects the very foundation of representative democracy: can there be a remote or online form of collective deliberation, which used to be possible only by meeting in the same place?

- The remote form of the "debate" part of collective deliberation is already accepted in some cases. But can there also be remote collective deliberation for the voting part of the process?

- If remote voting is accepted in collective deliberation, should it remain exceptional and restricted to the final vote or specific topics, or simply become one possible form of voting, to be used on any subject?

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The purpose of the meeting in Geneva will be to provide an opportunity for direct and informal dialogue among parliamentarians on the benefits and drawbacks as well as the different forms of online voting, made possible by technological developments of the internet.

The moderator of the debate will be Mr Patrice Martin-Lalande, member of the French National Assembly.

By way of background information, a study undertaken in the ECPRD framework (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) on the use of online voting in elections and parliaments in the countries concerned is available online on the Twelve Plus website (http://12plus.net) in English, French and Spanish.