



Conférence européenne des **Présidentes et Présidents de Parlement**
European Conference of **Presidents of Parliament**

Athènes, 21-22 octobre 2021 / Athens, 21-22 October 2021



MEETING OF SECRETARIES GENERAL

Friday 22 October 2021 – 8.30 am to 10 am

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

For more than a year and a half, the Covid-19 pandemic has created an exceptional institutional situation and disrupted the order of parliamentary business. Between resilience and reactivity, parliaments around the world have modified their practices and procedures in order to continue their activities and ensure the permanence of their action.

The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) has been very active since March 2020 in promoting the exchange of information, experience and best practices on the impact of the pandemic on the way parliaments have operated and how they have been able to continue their work and pass all the legislation initiated by governments in response to the pandemic.

The challenge now for Secretaries General of Parliament is to provide food for thought for Speakers and members of their parliaments as to whether and to what extent the specific procedures envisaged in exceptional circumstances should or should not be retained once the pandemic is over.

Speakers are invited to share their reflections on the following guiding questions:

On a general level:

- Is your parliament currently engaged in a reflection process on possible parliamentary reform as a result of the provisional mode of operation put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What procedural changes introduced in the context of Covid-19 will be retained in your parliament once the pandemic is over?

Many parliaments have introduced, in various forms, a remote mode of operation - for committee meetings and even for plenary sessions - and have developed new digital applications:

- What adaptations in the organisation and functioning of plenary sessions and parliamentary meetings have helped to increase the efficiency of parliament and which do you think will be retained after the pandemic?
- How will plenary sessions and parliamentary meetings be organised in your parliament in the future? Is your parliament now considering the possibility for committees to hold their meetings remotely after the pandemic on a permanent basis, either fully online or partially, in a hybrid way?

Digitalisation and virtual parliamentary work: a decisive move towards mobility?

- What are the main lessons learned from the digitalisation of parliament?
- Did some of the derogatory ways of working during the pandemic period contribute to more interesting debates/sessions and increased participation?
- Does your parliament plan to maintain certain operations in digital form with regard to plenary debates, committee meetings, votes, parliamentary initiative?
- Are there any plans for a complete dematerialisation (paperless) of parliamentary operations?
- What possibilities are now offered to parliamentarians in terms of mobility for their parliamentary work during and outside sessions?

Clear principles have been applied to the setting-up of exceptional rules governing the organisation and conduct of debates and activities at a distance or in hybrid mode, with regard to the equal rights of members, the transparency and security of procedures and the development of "technology neutral" digital solutions. This applies in particular to the right to speak in plenary and in committees, the right to vote (introduction of a uniform voting system), the right of initiative (tabling of text proposals, amendments, etc.).

- To what extent could this strengthened framework impact on the traditional way of working of your parliament?
- Have any members challenged the breach of equal treatment?

With regard to *communication policy, relations with citizens* and the opening up of parliamentary work to civil society and the media:

- Is your parliament considering possible avenues for increasing the participation to and attractiveness of plenary debates, in the light of recent experience of remote or hybrid meetings and sittings?
- Does your parliament consider optimising digital applications to involve citizens more in its reflection through citizen consultation platforms?
- Does your parliament envisage a return to 'normal' with regard to the physical presence of visitors, journalists or lobbyists, or on the contrary to maintain remote modes of communication, which are deemed preferable to guarantee the serenity of parliamentary deliberations?

With regard to *parliamentary diplomacy*, do you think that the travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic have had a lasting impact on your parliament's international co-operation activities? For example, in terms of sending election observation missions?