

CONSTITUTIONAL AND PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION

—

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GENDER PARTNERSHIP IN THE PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE

Mr Ian HARRIS, President invited *Mrs Hélène PONCEAU* to open the debate on the partnership between men and women in the Parliamentary service.

Mme Hélène PONCEAU (France) said that the subject of the partnership between men and women had been at the centre of the thoughts and actions of the Inter-Parliamentary Union for several years.

The question of the role of women in the Parliamentary service raised wider questions which went beyond the Parliamentary service and included the place of women in public life, whether as elected officials or public servants.

The remarks which everyone could make about the current situation in their own country or Parliament had to be related to a wider process of evolution, because this was an area where considerable change had occurred in a very short time: apart from the force of public opinion, there had been international agreements — Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1948 (which proscribed discrimination based on sex at the same time as discrimination based on language, race, religion or opinion), Convention on the Political Rights of Women of 1953, The New York Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination with regard to Women of 1979 — and also European agreements — the Convention on the Council of Europe of 1950, the Charter of Rome of 1996 — and these agreements were being added to each day.

Nonetheless, there was a considerable problem in that the daily reality experienced by women was often very different from the principle of equality as set down in international agreements.

In the first instance, as far as public political life is concerned (that is to say equality between the sexes in elected office), as a general rule the situation appeared rather unfavourable. In France, the poor turnout had provoked change of ideas and laws: until quite recently only between 5% and 10% of Members of Parliament and about 8% of members in departmental assemblies had been women. Therefore, in France the question of the place of women had been the subject of lively debate around the idea of positive discrimination and the fixing of minimum quotas imposed on political parties for candidates. Such measures offended against constitutional principles which forbade any separation of electors into categories, whatever the elections might be. As a result, a distinction between candidates based only on their sex was only possible after an amendment of the Constitution, which happened in 1999 at the end of the process of over one year of strong debate. The French Constitution now affirmed that “the law

favours the equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elected office” and that “political parties contribute to the putting into action of this principle”.

As a result, laws had been made which imposed on the lists presented to the electorate a strict alternation between men and women, that was to say an equal number of people of both sexes by groups of candidate. Furthermore, public money given to political parties was adjusted in proportion to the efforts made to present an equal number of men and women for election.

It was undeniable that these measures had had an effect in France, even though there was still opposition in principle to the authoritarian character of these measures: the evidence showed that only such affirmative action in elections where they had been put into effect had been able to produce such convincing results.

In the second instance, as far as the place of women in public as service was concerned (that is to say equality at work) the principle of equal access to employment in France was demonstrated by the rule establishing competitions which were open equally to men and women. The principle of equal pay was based on the existence of salary scales, which were identical for everybody.

In same way as elected office, the position was shown by the numbers — namely the proportion of men of women in different sectors of the administration on the one hand and the proportion of women in posts with responsibility on the other. The two proportions often were inverse to each other, and this was the case in France where there was often a concomitant strong presence of women in certain sectors but a weaker presence of women in the higher administrative levels.

Access to public employment by competition and the existence of salary scales were the basis of professional equality, but by themselves they were not sufficient. As a result, legislation had been adopted to accelerate the rate at which women took on posts of responsibility, although the results of this legislation were yet to be seen, even though there had been some early progress, notably because of the law of the 9th May 2001 on professional equality (composition of appointment boards, establishment of long-term plans for harmonisation on the basis of types of employment, etc).

In the third instance (and finally) as far as women in Parliamentary administration were concerned, there was a noticeable difference in France between the Parliamentary administration and other areas of the public service. Although the Parliamentary assemblies had a lower proportion of women on their staff in comparison to the Government, nonetheless they had a far greater proportion of women in senior positions. The improvement of the position of women in the upper management in Parliament was explained by the determination of the political authorities who were interested in setting an example rather than any legal changes.

Mme Hélène PONCEAU (France) made the following presentation, entitled “*French Legislation on Parity Between Men and Women in Politics*”:

I. A LONG DELAYED REFORM

The French legislation on parity was preceded by a long debate which reached its climax in the middle of the 1990s.

There is unanimous agreement about the present situation:

- France is one of the least advanced countries regarding the position of women in public life, in particular in elected assemblies. The level of representation of women in the French parliament is lower than in all other European Union countries except one. Worldwide, according to *Men and women in politics: democracy still in the making*, an IPU report published in 1997, France ranks only 72nd in terms of the percentage of women deputies.
- Moreover, in no way do the available data support the optimistic notion that the situation is likely to improve with time.

While notable progress has been made, at the regional and local level only 22% of town councillors and 27% of regional councillors are women.

Meanwhile, in departmental councils the percentage of women councillors remains extremely low — at barely 8% — following the 1998 elections.

But nowhere are the persistence of inequality between women and men and the slow pace of progress more obvious than in Parliament.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Date of election	Women candidates to the National Assembly since 1945			Women elected to the National Assembly since 1945		
	Women	Men and women	% of women	Women	Men and women	% of women
21 October 1945 (*)	281	2,912	9.6	33	586	5.6
2 June 1946 (*)	331	2,762	12	30	586	5.1
10 November 1946 (*)	382	2,801	13.6	35	618	5.7
17 June 1951 (*)	384	3,962	9.7	22	627	3.5
2 January 1956 (*)	495	5,372	9.2	19	596	3.2
23/30 November 1958	65	2,809	2.3	9	586	1.5
18/25 November 1962	55	2,172	2.5	8	482	1.7
5/12 March 1967	70	2,190	3.2	10	487	2.1
23/30 June 1968	75	2,265	3.3	8	487	1.6
4/11 March 1973	200	3,023	6.6	8	490	1.6
12/19 March 1978	706	4,266	16.5	18	491	3.7
14/21 June 1981	323	2,715	11.9	26	491	5.3
16/23 March 1986 (*)	1,680	6,804	24.7	34	577	5.9
5/12 June 1988	336	2,896	11.6	33	577	5.7
21/28 March 1993	1,003	5,139	19.5	35	577	6.1
25 May/1 st June 1997	1,464	6,360	23	63	577	10.9

(*) Election by proportional representation. For later elections, at first-past-the-post system, the numbers refer to first-round candidates.

Source : Parité-Infos

SENATE

Date of election	Total number of Senators	Number of women Senators	Percentage of women
June 1947	314 Councillors of the Republic	22	7.0 %
May 1949	317	12	3.78 %
July 1952	317	9	2.84 %
July 1954	317	9	2.84 %
November 1956	317	9	2.84 %
July 1958	314	6	1.91 %
October 1960	307	5	1.63 %
December 1962	271	5	1.85 %
October 1964	273	5	1.83 %
October 1966	274	5	1.82 %
September 1968	283	5	1.77 %
September 1971	282	4	1.42 %
September 1974	283	7	2.47 %
September 1977	295	5	1.69 %
September 1980	304	7	2.30 %
September 1983	317	9	2.84 %
September 1986	319	9	2.82 %
September 1989	321	10	3.11 %
September 1992	321	16	4.98 %
September 1995	321	18	5.60 %
September 1998	321	19	5.92 %

Not only has progress been extremely slow — except, perhaps, in the 1997 legislative election, when the percentage of women elected rose from 6.1% to 10.9% — it has also been discontinuous: fewer women were elected to the National Assembly in 1968 and 1977 than in 1962 and 1967. As regards the Senate, the number of women elected dropped from 7% in 1947 to 1.42% in 1971, before slowly coming back up to 5.9% in 1998.

The great majority of political leaders and citizens agree that this under-representation of women is abnormal. But they differ on how to correct it.

Some expect change through the natural evolution of mindsets, arguing that the growing role played by women in municipal and regional councils is indicative of a “breeding ground” that will pave the way for future progress. They call for positive action from political parties, notably in terms of nominations, while ruling out any kind of positive discrimination. The concept of universalism in political representation, they argue, is too deeply rooted in the French psyche to allow any distinction among citizens, whether they are voters or candidates.

Others recommend positive discrimination, at least as a temporary step. Their number seems to be growing since France’s President, Jacques Chirac, created in 1995 the “Observatoire de la parité”, a body designed to monitor gender inequalities and report them to the Prime minister.

In June 1996, ten prominent women politicians from both sides of the political spectrum — all of them former government ministers — published a highly-publicised manifesto calling for 1)

determined action from the government and political parties, 2) a strict limit to the number of mandates that may be held concurrently by elected officials, and 3) positive discrimination. The signatories also said that the level of public financing awarded to political parties should reflect their record in terms of providing equal opportunities to both sexes.

In Parliament too, the issue of parity has been on the agenda. In early 1997 the Senate set up a fact-finding mission on the position and role of women in politics. In March of the same year, the National Assembly held a debate on this topic, which revealed a certain amount of agreement among all major political parties.

In particular, the party of Prime Minister Alain Juppé, the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR), which until then had held that the promotion of women in politics should result solely from voluntary action by political parties, decided to launch a “decade for parity” that would include binding regulations aimed at guaranteeing equal opportunities for women in public life.

This, however, required amending France’s constitution, since two previous attempts by lawmakers to impose greater parity had been rejected by the Constitutional Council. One was a 1982 bill stipulating that lists of candidates for municipal elections in towns of more than 3,500 should not “include more than 75% people of the same sex”.

The second attempt, aimed at imposing parity between men and women on lists of candidates for regional elections, was rejected by the Constitutional Council in 1999.

In June 1998, the Government therefore tabled a constitutional reform bill on equal rights for men and women. It took over a year of lively debate and three readings by the National Assembly and Senate before Parliament, convened in Congress (a joint session of the two chambers) passed the bill by a large majority. It was finally promulgated on July 9, 1999.

The revised French constitution formally declares that “statutes should promote equal access by women and men to elective office and elected positions”, and that political parties are “to contribute to the implementation of this principle”.

II. A SYSTEM THAT COMBINES INCENTIVE AND CONSTRAINT, WITH MIXED RESULTS

Once the constitutional hurdle was lifted, a new bill was passed on June 6, 2000, creating a system aimed at favouring equal access for women and men to nominations for election and elected positions. This system includes two mechanisms.

One makes men/women parity compulsory in all elections held by proportional representation, with the manner of implementation dependent on the kind of election:

- For elections to the Senate by proportional representation (this is the case in certain departments) and for European elections, lists of candidates must strictly alternate between men and women. A bill passed on April 12, 2000, sets the same rule for regional elections.
- For municipal elections in towns of more than 3,500 people, the system is more flexible: parity is ensured by dividing each list, from top to bottom, into blocks of six candidates of whom three must be women.

The second mechanism provides a financial incentive, by linking public financing for political parties to their record in nominating equal numbers of men and women as candidates for legislative elections. If a party exceeds by more than a set proportion the equal number of male over

female candidates, its public financing, which normally reflects its share of the vote, is reduced by a percentage equal to half the gap.

An early appraisal of this set of measures points to mixed results.

Compulsory alternating of men and women on lists of candidates turned out to be very effective in terms of promoting parity both times it was used.

In the first instance, in the March 11 and March 18, 2001 municipal elections, the percentage of women elected as town councillors in towns of more than 3,500 people rose to 47.4%, from 25.7% previously. The impact was similar in smaller municipalities, where parity was not compulsory: the proportion of women elected increased by nearly ten percentage points. Regarding executive positions, the proportion of female mayors also rose, albeit more modestly, to 10.9% from 7.5% in 1995.

An election held on September 23, 2001, to renew 102 of the Senate's members, or one-third of the total, confirmed the effectiveness of the new rules.

The number of women elected more than quadrupled, to 22 women senators compared with five in a previous poll in 1992. The overall proportion of women among senators almost doubled, to 10.9% from 5.92% in 1998.

Quite obviously, the positive impact of having to alternate men and women is much stronger in large departments than in smaller ones, where elected officials are sometimes tempted to draw up separate lists in order to avoid facing the consequences of this obligation.

On the contrary, the financial incentive, created by a bill passed on June 6, 2000, has yielded extremely disappointing results in terms of parity - although it has been applied only once so far.

In the legislative election held on June 6 and June 9, 2002, the two leading parties, the Union pour la majorité présidentielle (UMP) and the socialist party, made a significant effort compared with the previous election in 1997: the proportion of women candidates increased to 19.93% from 7.7% for the UMP and to 36.13% from 27.8% for the socialist party.

This, however, left both parties still falling far short of parity. Besides, because of party leaders' propensity to present women in the most difficult constituencies, the proportion of women elected was even lower than that of female candidates.

The big parties faced major financial penalties for their lack of enthusiasm in nominating women: the UMP forfeited 4.26 million euros as a result, and the socialist party 1.65 million euros.

Those political parties that did enforce parity between women and men were mostly small groups aware that they were likely to win few — if any — seats.

As a result, the number of women elected to the National Assembly did not increase significantly: out of 577 deputies elected in 2002, only 71 were women, compared with 63 in the previous chamber.

PARITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE SENATE ADMINISTRATION

The application of the principle of parity between men and women in the French administration displays certain characteristics when compared with the private sector. The issue of equality be-

tween women and men focuses on access to certain professions traditionally seen as either male or female, and access to senior positions, rather than on remuneration and salary levels.

In order to better understand the Senate's own situation, it is a good idea to start with an outline of the overall situation in the French administration.

I. APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE OF PARITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

It is often observed that, while women make up a large proportion of those employed by the French state, at the level of senior civil servants their number drops off steeply. Active steps have been taken recently to promote equal opportunities for men and women in the civil service.

A. A twofold situation

1. *A high proportion of women in the civil service*

The French administration is characterised by a high proportion of women employees, who make up 57% of the total workforce.

In some professions, the proportion of women is particularly high, and has been so for a long time (for instance in nursing); in other occupations (such as teaching) the dominance of women is more recent yet just as strong.

Moreover, many traditional male preserves are opening up: women now make up 12% of the workforce of the ministry of defence, compared with 6% in 1995; some women have been appointed prefects, now accounting for 5% of the total; an increasing number of women are joining the prison administration, where they now represent 13.3% of ranking staff and warders.

2. *Few women at senior levels*

Secondly, few women are appointed to the most senior positions in the civil service. Several statistics bear this out :

- women make up 53% of middle management (*cadres*) and the higher intellectual professions (38% excluding researchers and teachers). Yet they account for less than 15% of senior civil servants. Ministries responsible for social affairs traditionally employ the highest numbers of female senior civil servants;
- women constitute only 18% of the *grands corps de l'Etat* (the senior branches of the civil service)
- and 18% of the *grands corps* and in the body of territorial administrators;
- while the proportion of women among hospital directors is higher, at 30%, surveys have shown that they usually hold assistant director positions; only rarely are they in charge of the largest hospitals.

The medium term trend, however, is favourable to women: in 1998, women represented only 15.3% of the *grands corps*, compared with nearly 18% today.

In this context, the fact that women, while making up 57% of the total workforce, only account for 15% of senior civil servants, should be interpreted not so much as an instance of discrimina-

tion as an indication of a cultural evolution which is gradually encouraging women to pursue the same studies, and hence aim for the same carriers, as men.

B. Active steps to speed up the rise of women to senior positions

To speed up the ascent of women, active steps have been implemented:

- a steering committee to promote equal access to senior positions in the civil service for women and men was created (in November 2000); its role is to commission studies, to publish reports and to make recommendations;
- a bill on equal professional rights, some of whose provisions directly concern the civil service, was passed on January 9, 2001; this bill provides for greater representation of women on juries presiding over competitive entrance examinations as well as *organismes paritaires*, the bodies on which management and unions are equally represented (a decree set the minimum proportion of women at 30%); it also reinforces protection against sexual harassment and reaffirms the banning of any discrimination based on gender;
- an instruction from the Prime minister issued on March 6, 2002, announcing multi-year plans to increase the proportion of women in government departments and setting 3 to 5 year targets for each category of management and senior management positions;
- the ministry in charge of the civil service now breaks down by gender the data it publishes in order to improve follow-up;
- a network of coordinators in charge of promoting the position of women in the civil service has been set up in order to facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice.

II. THE APPLICATION OF THE PARITY PRINCIPLE IN THE SENATE ADMINISTRATION

The employees of the two houses of Parliament are civil servants; as such they are recruited through specific competitive examinations that are open to both men and women, whatever their category, in line with the general principle of French law that there should be equal access to State administrative positions, with no distinction other than knowledge and ability.

1. The number of women in the civil service is still low

Compared with the overall civil service, the Senate Administration includes traditionally fewer women: only 32% of all Senate staff are women. This figure however covers wide variations, since many professions at the Senate were traditionally staffed solely by men:

- some occupations are traditionally female: for instance, secretaries of departments, of whom 152 are women for only one man; similarly, only one of the laundry's eight staff is male;
- on the contrary, 100% of palace overseers are men, as are a majority of gardeners (95%), grounds overseers (94%), gardeners' helpers (93%) and agents (87%).

However, with each new wave of recruits, all fields of employment are increasingly opening up to both sexes:

- the proportion of women overall has risen from less than 25% in 1986 to 32% today;

- in recent years, the number of women has increased at almost all staff levels, sometimes very quickly: in 1986, 98% of agents were men, compared with only 87% today; at the last competitive examination to recruit general staff, 10 of the 35 successful candidates admitted on the principal and additional lists were women, making up nearly 30% of the total;
- the first female gardener was recruited in 1999, the first female grounds overseer in 2000;
- one staff category – assistant administrators – consists of a majority of women (more than 57%) although there is nothing about their duties that could be construed as “feminine”.

2. Women in senior positions

The proportion of women within the top ranks of the Senate’s staff is high. The many women holding senior positions include:

- 1 of 2 secretaries general (50%);
- 5 of 22 directors (23%);
- 3 of 6 heads of Committee secretarial staff (50%).

In total, 27% of the Senate’s management positions are held by women, or twice the overall percentage for the French civil service.

This percentage is due to rise even further since many women who have reached a rank sufficiently high to be eligible for the most senior positions: today, of 29 administrators eligible for appointment as directors (i.e. who have held the rank of councillor four years or longer), 14 are women, or 48% of the total. This means that the number of women holding senior administrative positions at the Senate is likely to rise even higher in the short term.

In the longer term, a growing number of the French Senate’s management positions should be held by women, since they make up an increasing proportion of the corps of administrators. Today, 67% of administrators are men. Yet in the competitive examinations held in 1997-1998, 1999-2000 and 2001-2002, respectively 60%, 43% and 43% of the successful candidates were women. (These rates are higher than those of the *Ecole nationale d’administration*, ENA, which recruits and trains senior civil servants working for the central government).

3. The presence of women in the Senate’s management/union bodies (*organismes paritaires*) and competitive examination juries

Women also play an important role in bodies where both management and union representatives are represented, sometimes beyond their actual weight within the Senate’s workforce (32%).

Women also sit on juries presiding over competitive entrance examinations for Senate posts. For instance, four of the nine members of the jury for a competitive exam now open to recruit gardeners are women, making up nearly 45% of the total. Predominantly male juries cannot be accused of discriminating against women: the all-male jury for the latest competitive examination for the post of verbatim records keeper for the Senate’s sittings nominated three women in the main and additional lists.

The proportion of women jurors in these examinations is also increasing. A survey of competitive examinations for Senate administrative staff held since 1964 shows that the first woman juror was appointed in 1974. Between 1974 and 1989, every other jury on average included one

woman. The number of women jurors then rose to three in the 1991-1992 exams, and to eight (out of 27 jurors) in 2001-2002.

4. Regulatory measures in favour of women

The French Senate has also adopted **many regulations** (as has the civil service overall) in order to improve the career prospects of women; these rules sometimes amount to positive discrimination:

- for women who are raising or have raised a child, the age limit for entering a competitive examination is 45 instead of the usual 35 (men, meanwhile, are granted at most one extra year for each dependent child);
- there is no age limit for mothers of three or more children, widows and divorced women who have not remarried, legally separated women, and for single women with at least one dependent child who need to work to support themselves. For men, the age limit is removed only if they are single with at least one dependent child and if they have to work to support themselves.

Women taking sports tests as part of competitive examinations for Senate posts are marked separately, and a lower height is required for those applying for agents, grounds overseer and palace overseer positions: 1.57 metre (5.15 foot), instead of 1.67 metre (5.48 foot) for men, according to article 34 of the Standing Rules.

To promote reverse parity, the Senate also offers paternity leave to men with new born children. Both men and women are entitled to adoption leave and parental leave in order to bring up children, and to work part time after the birth of a child.

It is also interesting to look at how the principle of parity is implemented within the Senate's pension fund and its system of social security for staff. Some legal changes have been made, in particular to reflect new legislation from the European Union.

The Senate's managing board has recently adopted two measures to ensure that its pension fund regulations conform with case law from the European Union's Court of Justice. The Court has laid down that pensions paid by civil service pension funds amount to remunerations, as defined in the Treaty of Rome; both sexes must therefore receive the same treatment.

The Senate has therefore aligned its survivors' pension scheme for widowers on its scheme for widows, which in the past had been more advantageous because widows were likely to have had no professional activity, and hence no resources.

The Senate's managing board also took advantage of a new pension reform bill passed on August 21, 2003, to significantly change its family benefits scheme.

In line with rules for the overall civil service scheme, both male and female Senate staff who have raised three children or more have always benefited from the same supplementary pension.

To implement the principle of equal treatment for men and women, the French Senate has decided to grant the same bonus for children to both men and women. Women receive an additional bonus for the period corresponding to child delivery, and for the periods when they stop working or work part time in order to bring up a child, up to a maximum of three years.

As regards social security, the removal in 1986 of the notion of "head of family" enables female staff to obtain benefits from the Senate's social security scheme for their children, even if their husbands come under a different scheme.

In conclusion, while women are still relatively few in what remains a traditionally more male-oriented administration, they are already acceding to senior positions on the same terms as men. Without any internal demands, a “natural” move towards greater parity in the Senate Administration has got under way — smoothly, and without any restrictive regulations.

PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Parliamentary delegations for women’s rights and for equal opportunities for men and women in both the Senate and the National Assembly were created by the July 12, 1999, bill.

This law, drafted from private bills tabled by Socialist and Communist senators and deputies, finds its origin in the following statement made during public debate: « *Equality before the law, established by the Constitution, has not sufficed to establish full equal opportunities between men and women* ». The legislator therefore decided to create a permanent delegation in each house of parliament to monitor the enforcement of equal rights in every field.

The **composition** of the delegations for women’s rights reflects the overall chamber’s political balance as well as its members’ diverse technical competences. Each delegation is made up of 36 parliamentarians, reflecting the respective weight of the political parties. The National Assembly’s delegation is appointed at the beginning of each term of office, while the Senate’s delegation is appointed every three years, after each partial renewal of its membership. Law-makers also wanted to ensure a variety of technical competences within the delegations. For this reason the different parliamentary committees must be “*represented in a balanced way*” within the delegations. Women too must be represented: for this reason, the Senate’s delegation today includes 16 men and 20 women, while the National Assembly’s delegation has 10 men and 26 women.

Each delegation has adopted Standing Rules, which, among other things, specify the make-up of its managing board, which is also expected to ensure the proportional representation of political parties.

The parliamentary delegations for women’s rights have the following distinct **missions**:

— First, they monitor bills tabled in Parliament.

The delegations monitor bills and private bills as well as EU legislation submitted to Parliament in line with Article 88-4 of the Constitution, looking at their impact on women’s rights and equal opportunities for men and women.

To this effect, the delegations may be asked to intervene by:

- the managing board of their respective chamber;
- any one of the chamber’s Committees, as long as the bill or private member’s bill falls under its sphere of competence;
- the delegation for the European Union, concerning EU legislation submitted to each house of parliament, in line with Article 88-4 of the Constitution .

When either of the two delegations wishes to be seized of a bill, its chairperson must send a request to that effect to the chairperson of the Committee competent for the bill or private bill's core issue, or to the chairperson of the delegation for the European Union.

This mission of monitoring legislation must be carried out “*without prejudice of the competences of standing committees or the delegations for the European Union*”.

Therefore the intervention of the delegations for women's rights and equal opportunities for men and women in no way modifies the current procedure for examining legislation, whether at Committee meetings or in a public session, but simply complements it. The delegations as such have no right to amend legislation: they simply make recommendations. The delegations' rapporteurs present their report and the recommendations therein to the Committee competent for the core issue at the opening of the committee sitting devoted to examining the bill at stake. Similarly, if the delegations' rapporteurs present their recommendations during a public session; they speak just after the rapporteurs of the competent Committee(s).

It should be noted, however, that if the delegations have no right of amendment, any one of their members is free to draft an amendment based on any of the delegations' recommendations and table it in his or her own name.

— Secondly, the delegations inform Parliament of the Government's action.

The delegations for women's rights and equal opportunities must also inform their respective chamber of the Government's policies in all fields related to women's rights and equal opportunities, including professional opportunities.

In order to fulfil this mission, the delegations may hear ministers and they receive all information likely to facilitate their mission.

Aside from reporting on any issues that have been referred to them, the delegations publish annual reports reviewing their action and including, if need be, proposals to improve legislation in their field of competence. In the Senate, it is the delegation's chairperson's responsibility to draw up this report. In the National Assembly, at the beginning of each ordinary session or each time its membership is renewed, the delegation appoints one of its members to draft the annual rapport.

The topics chosen by the National Assembly's delegation for women's rights since its inception for its annual report are: contraception, the enforcement of the law on the termination of pregnancy and the monitoring of the May 9, 2002, bill on equal professional rights. The topic chosen this year is part-time work.

The Senate delegation meanwhile has dealt with the following topics: public policy on prostitution, and implementation of programmes aimed at ensuring steady employment and equal pay for troubled youths through training and professional integration. The next report will be devoted to equal opportunities for both sexes in France today, particularly at school.”

Mr. Petr TKACHENKO (Russian Federation) presented the following contribution, entitled “*Gender Partnership in the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*”:

The main feature of the 21st century is the formation of the new social relationships based, *inter alia*, on the principles of gender partnership.

It is known that at the Millennium Summit the leaders of the countries of the world adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, wherein the equality of men and women is defined as simultaneously a goal in itself and a means to reach the aims that the world community has set for itself.

The theme of the gender partnership in the parliamentary activities is not new to the Council of Federation of Russia. Those issues more or less correspond to the field of competence of a whole number of the leading committees of the chamber, such as the committees on social policies, science, culture, public health, education and environmental protection, youth affairs and sports.

Presently the quality of the legislation to be passed, its systemic nature and its lack of intra-controversies is a matter of principle for the supreme law-making body of the country. One may dare to call its conformity to the principles of gender partnership a feature determining the quality of the legislation. To that end the gender-relevant examination of draft laws has been carried out at the Council of Federation. A significant work has been carried out to examine the labour and family legislation in a close contact with the women's non-governmental organisations.

The gender problems have become a directions of interaction between the civil society institutions and the Russian parliament. With an active support of non-governmental organisations the women parliamentarians have been rendering an active influence on the political process and the shaping up of the public opinion as regards the women's participation in the political life and the representative authority bodies.

The activities of the Public Commission to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women in Russia, created within the Council of Federation under the auspices of its Chairman, have become a real result of such interaction. The Commission has been joined by members of the Council of Federation, representatives of legislative bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation, scholars, experts, as well as leaders of non-governmental organisation. There is a growing awareness in Russia today of the necessity of a transition from simply ensuring women's rights toward a parity-based democracy, an understanding of the necessity to consider the gender asymmetry from the positions of interests of not solely women, but men as well.

As an important element of the national mechanism to promote human rights, the Public Commission carries out a wide negotiating and consultative process with women's non-governmental organisations and representatives of business circles and civil society institutions. In accordance to the division of the Russian Federation into the seven federal districts the Public Commission has established seven sections that hold their meetings and do their work directly in the federal districts, as well as at the regional parliaments. Following the example set by the Council of Federation many regional bodies of legislative authority create similar commissions.

The holding of large-scale events with the participation of representative delegations from all subjects of the Russian Federation, at which the theme of gender partnership is the priority, has become a remarkable phenomenon in the country's public life. Those have included the All-Russia Women's Forum dedicated to the Mother's Day, the "Russian Family" International Congress dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Family and a conference of the theme "Integration of the gender partnership policies into activities of the legislative authority bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation and the regional ombudsmen".

Following the strategy elaborated by the United Nations Organisation to promote women to all decision-making levels, the Russian parliament has been pursuing consistent policies to implement the gender equality.

Despite the fact that there are fewer women in the Russian parliament than we wish there were, they hold key positions in it and make substantial contribution to the work of both chambers.

A woman has been elected one of the three deputies to the Chairman of the chamber. Women preside over or are members of the ruling bodies of 4 committees and commissions of the Council of Federation.

Talking about the composition of the Administrative Staff of the Council of Federation in terms of the problem under the discussion, I feel entitled to say that as a result of balanced personnel policies we have managed to achieve optimal indices. Thus, the women working in the Administrative Staff of the Council of Federation account for 56% of the staff, with 81% of them having higher education diplomas and 10% having academic degrees and academic ranks. Given that, the women hold dominating positions in the leading departments of the apparatus, such as the Legal Department and the Analytical Department, wherein they account for 75% and 50% of the employees respectively. There is a high share of women among the chiefs and deputy chiefs of the administrative staff of the committees and commissions of the chamber, as well as among the chiefs and deputy chiefs of the divisions of the departments of the Administrative Staff of the Council of Federation.

Nowadays both Russia and the other countries, including those which have attained the greatest successes in the promotion of gender equality, have to admit that there is still a lot to be done on the path to equality, without which the full-fledged partnership is impossible.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has been elaborating new initiatives to enlarge the partnership. The Meetings of Women Parliamentarians have become a special institution within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The national parliaments keenly respond to the new ideas proposed by the world community. I wish to stress that in Russia all prerequisites have been created to realise the principle of gender equality in the majority of political institutions and the parliament has assumed the leading role in the promotion of that principle and putting it into practice.”

Mr Arie HAHN (Israël) said that Secretaries-General of Parliaments were all very careful to promote equality between the sexes within their services.

In the Knesset, women were in the majority and held down the most important jobs: most of the departments were directed by women, such as human resources, protocol, the stenographers, research et cetera. Therefore there was no particular policy necessary to favour equality.

Mr Hafnaoui AMRANI (Algeria) said that in Algeria a woman had presented herself as a candidate for head of state for the first time at the presidential election of 8th April 2004. It was symptomatic that all the candidates at the election had had a policy on equality between men and women.

In Parliament women were not well represented — there were only four women among the 144 members of the Council of the Nation — which was different from the administration where the proportions were much more equal — 44% of the staff were women.

Mrs Valeria AGOSTINI (Italy) presented the following contribution, entitled “Committees promoting equal opportunities in the Italian Parliament”:

In the past parliamentary term, each of the two Houses of the Italian Parliament established a committee on equal opportunities composed of MPs and parliamentary staff. Significantly, the date chosen to create the Senate Committee on Equal Opportunities was 8 March 1999 (i.e. Women’s Day).

In both Houses, membership of such bodies ensures representation of all political, administrative and union components. The Committee on Equal Opportunities of the Chamber of Deputies includes 4 women MPs, 4 female employees designated by the Secretary General, who acts as secretary to the committee and represents the Administration. The Committee on Equal Opportunities of the Senate is composed of 3 women Senators, 3 female employees and 1 female parliamentary official, appointed by the President of the Senate, who acts as secretary to the committee and represents the Senate Administration.

In order to promote and ensure equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace, the Committees of both Houses submit proposals and opinions to the respective Bureaux concerning work organisation, working hours, training programmes and support services. The Committee on Equal Opportunities of the Senate – I shall refer to it because I know it better – started its activity by sending a questionnaire to all female employees containing 25 questions on their work experience in the Senate. The questionnaire results were then assessed by the Senate Administration and Bureau.

Among the initiatives taken by the Committee during its first years of activity, one of the most significant has been a request to the Bureau to apply to the Senate Administration a law that came into force in Italy in 2000, entitled “New rules on the protection of parenthood” and concerning both fathers and mothers. Personally, I believe that this law is far more effective in promoting equal opportunities than previous measures specifically meant to women. It broadens existing legislation and extends some provisions on the protection of parenthood to working fathers. In particular, it established that fathers too may take parental leave, for limited periods, in order to take care of their children under 3 or 8 years of age, depending on circumstances.

Both parents are thus placed on an equal footing. On the one hand, fathers can – if they so wish – establish a stronger bond with their children during their early childhood; on the other, women are not necessarily the only ones whose career is affected by parental leaves. According to statistics, in Italy the female component of the labour force has strongly increased, but men still largely outnumber women in the most demanding jobs and in top positions. At the Senate, women employees account for 41% of total staff, but only 25% are senior officials.

Following the request addressed to the Bureau by the Committee on Equal Opportunities, the above-mentioned law on the protection of parenthood has been applied to the Senate Administration, with some modifications aimed at preserving the most favourable conditions, through an amendment to art. 39 of the consolidated text of Administration Rules on the Senate Staff.

It is worthwhile noting that since the introduction of the above amendment the number of male employees taking parental leave to look after their children has strongly increased. Their percentage, previously negligible, had already reached 20% in 2001 and has constantly grown, reaching 28% early this year.”

Mr Ian HARRIS, President thanked the speaker for her contribution and invited members to ask questions.

Mrs Marie-Andrée LAJOIE (Canada) said that in the House of Commons there were 55% men and 45% women among the non-political staff, that proportion being 60% 40% for managerial staff and 50% 50% at the level of secretary-general.

The policy followed was based on the law on equality at work, which was aimed also at protection minorities, disabled et cetera. The Parliamentary administration was not formally subject to that law, but it respected the spirit of it.

Ms Heather LANK (Canada) said that the Canadian Senate was not elected, but nominated by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. A policy of nomination in favour of women had been deliberately followed in the course of the last few years.

In terms of staff management, the administration tried to reconcile equality between men and women and the necessity to promote on the basis of merit. On this basis there were advantageous rules for parents, which allowed them to have up to 12 months parental leave on 93% of their salary, and therefore to have an easier family life.

Mrs I Gusti Ayu DARSINI (Indonesia) said that progress could only be said to have been made from the moment when proper strategies based on the partnership between men and women were put in place. The Indonesian election law reserved 30% of seats for women but that was not always put into application. In recruitment, no discrimination was possible in theory, but in fact inequality persisted.

Mr Emmanuel BAKWEGE (Uganda) said that in Uganda the strong inequality in favour of men had led to the adoption of vigorous measures, as for example the quotas for women in political elections. In civil service competitions, female candidates were deliberately given an advantage over men in the form of a bonus number of points.

At the current moment 40% of the parliamentary staff were women. It would be difficult to increase that proportion in the short term, because recruitment had to be based on ability and qualifications of candidates rather than their sex.

Mr Khondker Fazlur RAHMAN (Bangladesh) said that in Bangladesh equality between men and women was recognised by the Constitution, the law and in all spheres of public life. In 1973 15 seats in Parliament out of 315 were reserved for women, which had not at that time been acted upon; in 1986 32 women had been elected. In the near future the Constitution would be amended to reserve 45 seats for women, which would be near the 10% of seats reserved for women within the Government.

Mr Yogendra NARAIN (India) said that in India there were various constitutional provisions in favour of women, which applied to the parliamentary service. In particular, the Constitution allowed discrimination in favour of women, and also set down the principle of absence of any discrimination into terms of hiring or pay.

In 1990 a Parliamentary Committee on the Rights of Women had been established. In 1993 India had ratified the Convention prohibiting any discrimination against women, as well as other international agreements.

Mrs Lulu MATYOLO (South Africa) said that equality between men and women was laid down in the South African Constitution, and that within the framework of affirmative action it

was possible to put in place positive discrimination in favour of women. Nonetheless it was true that apart from the sex of the person who was a candidate for a job merit should be the criterion.

In Parliament, where the Council of Provinces was directed by women, every manager had to ensure the equality of men and women within his or her service and was checked on that point by an audit of who had been hired. Managers were also educated in the necessity of discouraging sexual harassment

The situation in South Africa showed that in addition to a simple headcount and a policy based on quotas, voluntary practices existed in favour of women and these were put into effect with determination.

Mr Anicet HABARUREMA (Rwanda) said that the approach to the question of equality was necessarily different in rich countries and developing countries. In developing countries difficulties frequently arose because of national culture, but also because of differences in education linked, among other things, to the colonial past.

Nonetheless, in Rwanda equality of men and women was a fact.

Mrs Panduleni SHIMUTWIKENI (Namibia) said that Article 10 of the Namibian Constitution laid down equality before the law, and that various laws had been agreed to which specifically dealt with these questions (the law on civil service, the law on employment et cetera). At the present moment a third of candidates at elections had to be women.

A Bill was being discussed on the problem of rape and the struggle against domestic violence.

She added that an entire section of the National Development Programme dealt with women and the struggle against illiteracy.

Mr Michael POWNALL (United Kingdom) said that in United Kingdom men remained in the majority in key posts. Nonetheless, the situation was rapidly changing thanks to a voluntary policy on recruitment of women.

One issue arose from spouses working together in the same office. Official guidance had been established to apply in these circumstances. Amongst other things, this would prevent situations arising in which a married couple or partners worked closely together or where an individual supervised and reported on his or her spouse or partner.

Mrs H el ene PONCEAU (France) summed up the debate by saying that three main points seem to have emerged:

- the first was the contribution of the law in the widest sense in bringing about change in political life (access to electoral mandates), as well as in professional life;
- the second was that parliamentary administrations seemed to be privileged areas; this was linked with a desire on the part of political authorities to show an example and go beyond the letter of the law;
- the third was the importance of public opinion in solving problems and the view of society on the role of women.

Mr Ian HARRIS, President, thanked Mme H el ene PONCEAU and all participants in the debate.

RELATIONS BETWEEN PARLIAMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Mr Ian HARRIS, President invited *Mr Prosper VOKOUMA, Secretary General of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso to open the debate.*

Mr Prosper VOKOUMA (Burkina Faso) *presented the following contribution, entitled “National Representation and public participation: What is the machinery for dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society? The experience of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso”*

In 1991 the Burkinabe authorities set up a process of planning and action in relation to a national policy on good governance. This planning led to the preparation and agreement in 1998 of a “national plan of good governance for Burkina Faso”.

Good governance relates to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of political affairs. It involves all the resources and mechanisms for optimising the performance of management of public affairs and for enabling the interests of the public to be expressed, for the exercise of their rights and duties, as well as settling any difficulties which might arise. Good governance aims in particular for political stability, public participation in the management of public affairs, the development of institutions of government and respect for human rights.

Good governance includes three dimensions: economic, political and administrative.

Good governance has various objectives, including:

- The establishment of an overarching State, which can effectively carry out its directional role carrying forward socio-economic development.
- Promotion of a civil society, which is able to influence the various political and economic decisions and to constitute social balance.
- Reinforcement of the organisational technical capacity of the legislative and consultative institutions with a view to their making a more effective contribution to the democratic process.

Good governance is justified not only because it implies modernisation of administration, but above all because of the extent to which it has as its ambition consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, as well as the promotion of lasting human development. It has the following basic principles:

- Participation of all citizens (men and women) in decision-making.
- Transparency, equity and responsibility in the conduct of public affairs.

The national plan for good governance has as its overall aim the establishment of mechanisms and methods which allow for efficient and transparent management of the affairs of the State, while giving effective opportunities for participation and oversight to all citizens, notably by way of strong participation by the private sector and civil society.

The national plan has been translated into programmes and the institutional and political resources for bringing this about include:

- The three constitutional Powers (executive, legislative and judicial);
- All the consultative organs (Social and Economic Council, Mediator of Faso, Superior Council for Information).
- Civil society, essentially non-governmental organisations, human rights organisations, trade unions, women's associations for the defence and promotion of women's rights, customary and religious communities, press and media organisations, etc.

All these institutions and organisations in civil society contribute in their own way to the process of introduction of good governance to Burkina Faso. Nonetheless, it is necessary to recognise that there are still limits to the execution of the national plan for good governance.

In order to play its part in this process the National Assembly has put into effect its own programme. Therefore it signed with the United Nations Programme for Development (UNDP) a cooperation project called "Project for the improvement of the capacity for dialogue in Parliament on strategies and policies for development." (Project BKF/03/001/MT).

As part of this project on the 7th August 2003 the National Assembly established a pilot study at Kaya (province of Sanmatenga) with the main objective of creating an area for dialogue and partnership between Members of Parliament and civil society. This would increase the efficiency and improve the performance of Members of Parliament in the exercise of their duties, taking into account the real and expressed aspirations of citizens.

The results of the pilot study (I), which was to set up a basis for formal or informal participation of people in the exercise of Parliamentary functions within a constructive dialogue, led to the holding of a national forum (III) including Members of Parliament and civil society. In advance of this forum, on 7th and 8th November 2003 at Ouagadougou, there was a conference of current and previous Members of Parliament (II) of Upper Volta and Burkina Faso on the theme: "National representation and public participation in Upper Volta and Burkina Faso: exchange of experience".

Before dealing in turn with these different results, it is important to remember the main objectives behind the project called "Project for the improvement of the capacity for dialogue in Parliament on strategies and policies for development".

As indicated above, project BKF/03/001/MT "Project for the improvement of the capacity for dialogue in Parliament on strategies and policies for development" is the fruit of a partnership between the National Assembly and the UNDP, with the aim of establishing a policy on dia-

logue with the population based on co-ordinated action. This is within the general framework of the programme for support for good governance in Burkina Faso, in which most of the multilateral and bilateral partners in the country have intervened.

This project has two main objectives:

- To strengthen the technical capacity for dialogue within Parliament and the Parliamentary administration with a view to increasing the efficiency of their involvement in development questions.
- To facilitate the creation of an area of dialogue and partnership between Members of Parliament and civil society. This would increase the efficiency and improve the performance of Members of Parliament in the exercise of their duties in connection with legislation and control of government action.

The pilot study was aimed at achieving the second objective of the project.

I. PILOT STUDY ON THE MECHANISMS FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

As part of the project mentioned above the pilot study was launched on 7th August 2003.

- The overall objective of the pilot study was to facilitate the creation of an area for dialogue and partnership between Members of Parliament and civil society;
- The particular objectives of the study were to collect data in order to construct a framework for a dialogue involving the process of valorisation of experience and ideas among the population. The information which was collected would allow the preparation of relevant proposals for:
 - improving the visibility of performance of duties and improving public opinion relating to the exercise of responsibilities by Members of Parliament;
 - Better identifying and promoting the participation of the public in Parliamentary work;
 - Better integration of questions relating to daily life and development in the work of Parliament;
 - Organisational interaction between Parliament and the public with a view to creating areas and mechanisms appropriate for dialogue with civil society;
 - Opening the National Assembly to the public more.

The report of the pilot study was presented under three main headings:

- The National Assembly and the demands of society;
- The conditions for a dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society on strategies and policies relating to development;
- Proposals for better management of the dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society.

A. The National Assembly and the demands of society

By the demands of society is meant public aspirations, expectations and needs (expressed or not) in relation to Members of Parliament.

The demands of society were addressed from two angles:

- The perception among Members of Parliament themselves of the duties and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament:

Members of Parliament perceive the National Assembly as a power - the legislative power - the National Representation, as well as the seat or the place of work of the representatives of the people. Members of Parliament think that they are misunderstood by the public, who do not understand their duties for various reasons. The Member of Parliament is seen as a branch of the social security system, as somebody who can do anything, build schools, dispensaries, maternity hospitals, distribute food, etc.

- The perception among members of the public of duties and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament

For the public, the Member of Parliament is the person whom they have elected by vote and who must deal with their region, transmit their complaints and take part in baptisms and funerals. He is to a greater or lesser extent known by his origins and his actions, but the public think that they are not familiar with their Members of Parliament, who are seen as VIPs sitting in the capital.

A good Member of Parliament is seen as one who helps with the development of his constituency.

B. The conditions for a dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society on strategies and policies relating to development

The study revealed that the dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society was undermined by difficulties and constraints arising from political, economic, social and cultural factors:

- In terms of politics, for example, among the public there is a widespread misunderstanding of the constitutional role of the National Assembly and duties of the Member of Parliament.
- In terms of society, the image of the Member of Parliament is not always that of an impartial elected official.

Among those factors which are favourable to a dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society, it is possible to note specifically that:

- In political terms:
 - Members of Parliament have a good understanding of their constitutional duties;
 - Members of Parliament are considered as privileged interlocutors in the search for solutions to daily problems;
 - Members of Parliament make the effort to appear as those taking direct action in relating relation to development.

- In terms of society: there are many occasions when Members of Parliament and public meet.

On the basis of these favourable and unfavourable factors, the consultants prepared proposals for better management of the dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society.

C. Proposals for better management of the dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society

The proposals made by the consultants for an improvement of the dialogue were as follows:

- The establishment of formal frameworks for dialogue, such as the convocation of a national forum which would meet concurrently with the legislature;
- The establishment of channels of communication;
- The opening up of the National Assembly to the public by:
 - An improvement in the flexibility of the conditions for public access;
 - The taking into account of national languages in Parliament;
 - Better publicity for the work of Parliament.

II. CONFERENCE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FROM UPPER VOLTA AND BURKINA FASO

The conference of Members of Parliament and former Members of Parliament from Upper Volta and Burkina Faso was held from 7th to 8th November 2003 at Ouagadougou on the theme: “National representation and public participation in Upper Volta and Burkina Faso: exchange of experience”.

This conference gathered together 242 members of Parliament and former members of Parliament under the project for support for dialogue within Parliament. It arose from the overwhelming need to understand better our Parliamentary history and to profit from its experience by establishing a common memory within the National Assembly.

The conference resulted in an exchange of experience and information between Members of Parliament and former Members of Parliament and enabled the collection of information and the establishment of photographic and audiovisual archives with a view to creating a gallery within the National Assembly.

In addition the conference served as the basis for planning and preparation of the forum which would unite the National Assembly and organisations from civil society.

The conference allowed the following people to bear witness to the experience within previous legislatures:

- Matthias SORGO: President of the Territorial Assembly from 1945 to 1957;
- Gerard Kango OUEDRAOGO: President of the National Assembly from 1978 to 1980;
- Bongnessan Arsene YE: President of the Assembly of People's Deputies from 1992 to 1997;
- Melegue TRAORE: President of the National Assembly from 1997 to 2002;

- Abdoulaye Abdoul Kader CISSE: President of the Chamber of Representatives from 1995 to 1998;
- Moussa SANOGO: president of the Chamber of Representatives from 1999 to 2002.

All the former Presidents made presentations relating to their experience in their legislatures and exhorted all the Members of Parliament to cultivate and promote dialogue and to be reference points for moral and intellectual probity.

Discussion of the basic document relating to the theme of the conference gave rise to enriching debates, which were evidence of the opportunity for a creation of a framework of action between former Members of Parliament.

Finally, the conference acted as a constituent General assembly for the Burkinabe Association of Former Members of Parliament, which had as its leader Madame Mary Madeleine OUEDRAOGO/COMPAORÉ, former vice president of the National Assembly (1992 to 1997). This association took as its aims the gathering together of former Members of Parliament of Burkina Faso, the reinforcement of solidarity and the mutual assistance between its members and, above all, the establishment of a permanent framework for common action and exchanges of view in order to place the knowledge and experience of former Members of Parliament in the service of democracy.

III. THE FORUM FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ORGANISATIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The Forum for the National Assembly and organisations of civil society was held on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th December 2003 at Ouagadougou on the theme “National Representation and public participation: what are the mechanisms for dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society?”

This was the culmination of the second part of the pilot study and the conference of Members of Parliament and former Members of Parliament within the framework of the project for improvement of the capacity for dialogue within Parliament.

Those who participated in the democratic system took as their starting point that after a decade of government by special measures, Burkina Faso had since 1991 renewed its following of the democratic ideal. Since the country was now in a consolidation phase in the democratic process, it was necessary to find ways of supporting and deepening its democratic experience.

For its part, the National Assembly decided to lead the thinking on the conditions for putting down roots for this democratic process within the establishment of a constructive dialogue with civil society.

A. The objectives of the Forum

The forum involved about 340 participants, mainly coming from civil society, political parties as observers, international organisations, and, of course, from the National Representation (former and current members of Parliament).

The context is the putting into action one of the objectives of the project to “facilitate the creation of areas for dialogue and partnership between Members of Parliament and civil society”. Through this forum, the National Assembly aims to have greater openness to the public and to

all the actors involved in development, since dialogue between the two entities is indispensable for the deepening of democracy in our country.

Seven objectives were given to the forum. They were:

- to facilitate participation and involvement of all citizens in the political and decision-making process;
- to reinforce the representative nature of the political institutions, in particular that of the National Assembly, by greater involvement of citizens in Parliament's work and the work of Members of Parliament as the legislative power;
- to assess all those mechanisms for dialogue which exist institutionally or under the constitution;
- to create a favourable climate of confidence between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society with a view to building a responsible and productive partnership;
- to encourage organisations in civil society to play to the full and with complete independence their role of permanent scrutiny and representation;
- to broaden the popular base of support for the National Assembly with a view to consolidating democracy;
- to construct new working practices for consultation, coordination and planning between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society with respect to the nature, the role and the mission of each of the parties represented in the dialogue.

B. The Work of the Forum

The work of the forum was carried out in two ways: Plenary sessions and Committees.

1. Plenary Sessions

After the opening ceremony, the first plenary session was devoted to introductory communications followed by debates, the second being the closing sitting.

a) Communications

Three important Communications were made. They were on the Presentation of Parliament, the Identification of Civil Society, and the results of the pilot study.

— Presentation of Parliament and Parliamentary work:

This Communication was delivered by the Member of Parliament Mr Mahama SAWADOGO on the constitutional powers, the organisation and functioning of the National Assembly, legislative procedure, and inter-parliamentary cooperation. The speaker also dealt with the history of the Parliamentary institution since colonial times.

In dealing with the constitutional powers of Parliament, the speaker opened by saying that the National Assembly was one of the seven institutions established by the Constitution. It was an institution which was characteristic of the democratic system and an essential

actor in political life. It voted laws, agreed to taxation and scrutinised government action. Each member of the National Assembly was a representative of the entire nation.

The current legislature included 111 members representing 13 parties or political groups.

— **The identity and missions of the organisations in civil society in Burkina Faso.**

This presentation was made by Professor Augustin Gervais LOADA, Executive Director of the Centre for Democratic Governments. The speaker began by defining civil society as “any form of organisation outside the family and the state, or any form of organisation between the domestic and public spheres.” He then described the classification of organisations in civil society and identified the essential criteria for recognising the most significant ones, which were that they should be apolitical and non-partisan and should be independent of public authority.

Turning to the role of civil society, he said that among other duties it was an active partner in development, cultivated peace and dialogue, defended minorities and disadvantaged populations and essentially supported the rule of law.

— **Communication on the results of the pilot study.**

The SAPAD research office gave the conference on account of the results of a pilot study. The Communication included a description of the objectives of the study, the information obtained and proposals for a better dialogue between now the National Assembly and civil society (see below).

b) *Debates*

After the Communications mentioned above, the debates focused on the following areas of interest:

- The organisation of Parliament: the conference discussed what possibilities might be available for representing views within the system of communication between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society, possibilities for the public to take part in open sessions, difficulties with using the system of petitions.
- Identification of civil society: during the debate it became apparent that it would be necessary to clarify the concept of civil society, in order to prevent it emerging as a general catch-all category.
- Pilot study: the debates mainly focused on the conceptual analyses of the studies.

2. Work in committee

At the end of the introductory plenary, the forum carried on its work within two committees:

- Committee 1: connection between the National Representatives and the general public;
- Committee 2: system for dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society.

a) *Connection between the National Representatives and the general public*

Those attending the conference first of all recognised that the constitutional duties of Members of Parliament were not well understood by the general public, for whom the Member of Parliament appeared as an agent for development, able to satisfy their needs. Electoral promises gave birth to expectations which were difficult for elected politicians to satisfy, a situation which created a sense of general frustration.

In order that members of the public should be able to understand the duties of Members of Parliament better, members of the committee proposed the following course of action:

- The establishment of civic instruction and education for all citizens in all establishments for education and training;
- The popularisation of the constitution by means of organisations in civil society;
- The creation of opportunities for meetings between Members of Parliament and the public;
- The organisation of education campaigns;
- Reinforcement of the use of ICT by the National Assembly to popularise its work and to make itself accessible to the greatest number of people (a web site of the National Assembly, electronic addresses for members of Parliament ...);
- The establishment of a system for giving and receiving information, notably by:
 - The use of existing media (transmission of Parliamentary debates on the national radio).
 - Better use of Parliamentary groups
 - Establishment of a radio station with in Parliament.

To put these suggestions into action the committee suggested:

- better grass-roots scrutiny of government action and cooperation among Members of Parliament in all parties;
- the permanent search for efficient information systems;
- continued promotion of a culture of tolerance in all political action.

b) *System for dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society*

This theme was examined by the second committee, concentrating on the areas listed below: inventory of the means of dialogue laid down by law; inventory of the means of dialogue engaged by civil society; use of the system of dialogue laid down by law.

- **when examining the inventory of the means of dialogue laid down by law the committee set out the formal and informal systems:**
 - formal systems: right to petition laid down in the Constitution in articles 30, 98 and 161, as well as by the rules of the National Assembly; The public nature of the plenary sittings of the National Assembly laid down by article 80 of the Constitution; The frameworks for communal, departmental or provincial cooperation laid down by laws on decentralisation.

- among the various informal systems are principally the following: The ability of the general committee of the National Assembly to hear from the component part of civil society within the examination of the draft bill; The ability of the National Assembly to establish ad hoc committees to look into topics of national interest.

— **inventory of the means of dialogue engaged by civil society:**

Although there is no rule which formally organises a system of specific dialogue between the National Assembly and civil society, participants were able to identify in the law and practice areas and tools which authorise such a dialogue:

- Women's organisations prepared and introduced into the National Assembly a dossier on the rights of women;
- Trade unions were heard in evidence by Members of Parliament during the revision of the Code on Labour law;
- A collective of organisations within civil society laid before the National Assembly report on the framework of the revision of the Code on Elections;

Generally, whenever there are meetings on particular topics, organisations from civil society are invited to give evidence.

c) **use of the system of dialogue laid down by law**

Participants of the conference deplored the weak use of these systems. They cited the example of the Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights and Persons, which had started a petition on the revision of the Code on Information, but that petition had never been completed.

d) **proposals relating to the system of dialogue between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society**

With a view to setting up a permanent dialogue between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society, the committee formulated the following proposals:

- The permanent continuation of the forum between the National Assembly and organisations of civil society;
- The creation of areas of dialogue with organisations in civil society through the intermediary of the Parliamentary network or general committees of the National Assembly;
- The establishment of open days in the National Assembly;
- The creation of a suggestions box with a view to allowing all citizens to make proposals to the national representatives;
- The use of traditional means of intercommunity dialogue;
- Improvement of the means of communication of the National Assembly.

Finally, the forum was told of the establishment on the 8th November 2003 of the Burkinabe Association of Former Members of Parliament (ABHP), which would act as the privileged interlocutor for dialogue between the National Assembly and organisations of civil society.

The participants noted with satisfaction that the forum had allowed them to get to know each other, which was an important step towards driving forward dialogue between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society.

As a conclusion, the participants in this forum noted that the new partnership between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society was useful and necessary for the consolidation of democracy. A certain number of conditions had to be met, however, if successful action was to be taken, namely:

- Strict respect for the rule of law;
- The establishment of a climate of confidence between political society and civil society by a better and mutual understanding between those involved;
- The respect for the roles, duties, tasks and powers of each of the partners.

In order to put into effect institutional mechanisms for setting up a fruitful dialogue between the National Assembly and organisations in civil society the forum participants recommended, on the one part, that civil society should be organised to play its role to the full as interface between the National Assembly and the citizen, and, on the other part, that the National Assembly should listen more to organisations in civil society in the accomplishment of its Parliamentary work.

The experiment which I have just described continues. It has not yet finished producing results. Some questions remain to be settled, since there are some disagreements about legitimacy between the Parliamentary side and leaders in civil society and associations within the community. In the National Assembly it was thought that, notwithstanding this, the experiment was worthwhile and agreement was being sought for fixing the regular timetable for meetings between elected members and representatives of civil society. The overall aim, of course, is consolidation of democracy in Burkina Faso.

Mr Anders FORSBERG (Sweden) *presented the following contribution, entitled “Parliamentary activities with regard to current issues affecting society”:*

Confidence in the Swedish parliament — the Riksdag — as an institution has increased in recent years, admittedly not very dramatically, but nonetheless creating a welcome change of trend. There may of course be many explanations for this, but it would seem to be a not too uncommon international phenomenon in the wake of the terrorist acts we have seen in recent years. After a low of 18% (great or quite a lot confidence) in 1996 we have now climbed back to 31%. In 1988 the confidence level was 50%. It is perhaps not much to boast about, but at the same time there are studies showing that citizens in general are satisfied with democracy in Sweden (71%). And in studies ranking levels of confidence in various social institutions the Riksdag comes in ninth place – after the royal family, the universities and the courts, for instance, but before the Government, the defence forces, big business and the daily press.

It is interesting to note that levels of confidence are considerably higher in election years. During election years political campaigns are conducted, political representatives travel around meeting citizens, and the mass media focus on politicians and politics.

Generally speaking, it also seems to be the case that confidence in the Riksdag is greater when citizens have had contact with a Member of Parliament. There is also good reason to view confidence in the Riksdag in the light of how the Riksdag is seen to be handling different tasks.

From this it might be possible to draw the conclusion that confidence might increase if we created a broader interface between voters and politicians, if we can show what the Riksdag does, and if we get better in areas where voters do not think we have done enough.

Confidence in the Riksdag has proved to be strongly correlated to assessments of how the Riksdag deals with its democratic tasks. It is not independent of institutional rules of the game and institutional shortcomings in parliamentary work. The design and execution of the functions of democracy are significant factors in the confidence assessments people make.

In Sweden we have for many years carried out political surveys showing the importance attached by MPs and voters to the work of the Riksdag in different respects and the extent to which they think the Riksdag succeeds in meeting their expectations. These can show us in which areas we might improve our performance.

Given that the Riksdag has certain constitutionally determined tasks and in addition to this other tasks which are related to the Riksdag's position as the foremost democratic state body, researchers have defined seven principal tasks for the Riksdag.

- The decision-making function: making decisions that are crucial to the development of society
- The control function: scrutinizing the work of government
- The representative function: reflecting the distribution of opinions among voters
- The initiative function: taking the initiative in matters not taken up by the Government
- The opinion-moulding function: being a central arena for public debate
- The quality function: foreseeing future problems before they become acute
- Monitoring the development of the EU.

Members of the Riksdag and citizens use similar criteria to rank how well these tasks have been performed. There is for instance agreement about the two tasks the Riksdag handles best – making crucial decisions and scrutinizing the Government. There is also agreement that the Riksdag is worst at foreseeing problems of the future. It must be said, however, that in most cases members of the Riksdag are considerably more positive than ordinary citizens.

However, it is interesting to note that citizens and members make different assessments of the most important tasks for the Riksdag. Citizens consider it most important to foresee future problems before they become acute (the quality function) and to make decisions that are crucial to social development (the decision-making function) while members consider the decision-making and control functions to be the most important.

Can these studies help us in our task of developing the Riksdag's working procedures? I believe so. We have a special committee chaired by the Speaker and comprising all the leaders of the party groups that is focused on developing our working procedures. The committee has already achieved a lot, but we also have a good deal of work ahead of us. We have now reached a point where we are reporting on various studies including the one I have just referred to, and where we are initiating fresh studies. This is in order to obtain a broader and deeper knowledge of the relevant problems and the need for change.

I would now like to turn my attention to the subject mentioned in the title of this address. *Parliamentary activities with regard to current issues affecting society*. These activities can of

course be seen as being an element of all the tasks facing the Riksdag but I should like to limit myself to the quality and opinion-moulding functions. Our MPs do not consider that the Riksdag carries them out in the best way, while citizens consider that the Riksdag is worst at foreseeing future problems. So here there is room for improvement. And why not also take into account other studies showing that confidence increases with increasing contact between citizens and their political representatives?

Today it is common knowledge that much of the current debate on the problems facing us now and in the future takes place in the mass media – newspapers and TV. We also know that what the mass media choose to deal with can be a little fortuitous -- there are many other matters that perhaps also deserve attention.

We should ensure that the general public debate finds expression in the work of the Riksdag. The Riksdag should be a national forum for debating current and long-term issues. Sometimes we tend to drown in day-to-day work and not have the energy to deal with either long-term perspectives or urgent matters that suddenly crop up.

We are currently discussing ways of better handling issues involving research and the future. The Riksdag committees have also been given the responsibility of following up and evaluating decisions and following up EU matters within their particular spheres of responsibility. Here I can say that we are at the beginning of a process for which I feel a good deal of optimism. Follow-up and evaluation provide a basis for the assessment of the future. Only when the Riksdag is included early in the decision-making process is it possible to have real influence — and this applies to matters involving EU and other international cooperation and the whole of the legislative and budgetary process.

New procedures are being developed with regard to the new requirements. We will be having more open hearings, and more research will be conducted at the Riksdag itself. Interparliamentary cooperation is becoming broader and deeper. This will all contribute to a higher level of competence in parliamentary work. We are not in the same extent as earlier only dependent on information we are given by the Government.

We also endeavour to make the work of the Riksdag more widely known by using active measures — the mass media should not be the only link between political representatives and their constituents. In this work we aim for the greatest possible transparency, openness and accessibility. All the debates in the Chamber and many hearings are broadcast by the Riksdag webcast service. Some are also broadcast on TV, but we have no control over the work of TV companies. In cooperation with public libraries we have recently opened parliamentary “infoslots” at a number of locations throughout Sweden. The idea is that these should provide access to everything relating to the Riksdag and have knowledgeable staff. They are also intended to provide a meeting point for citizens and their MPs.

For it is the MPs themselves who are the most important bearers of the democratic message. Our contribution as an administration is to create high-quality conditions for MPs and parties to carry out their work. This covers practical and technological preconditions, sound information, high quality briefing materials, and institutional reforms that promote and develop this work.

Good long-term planning of the work of the Riksdag makes it possible for MPs to plan their own work and provides them with the opportunity to be in touch with their constituents. Wherever possible we keep one week a month free of plenary meetings. We also have fixed voting times, and more or less fixed times for Chamber and committee meetings.

Good planning should also allow for opportunities to raise matters of urgent current concern. We have an oral question and answer session with the Government each week. Once a month the Prime Minister himself takes these sessions, while in other weeks five government ministers attend them. The Government is able to provide information to the Chamber on various current issues, and respond to members' questions and comments. The party groups can request debates on matters of current interest and special (non-voting) debates that can be arranged at short notice. And the parties are in fact requesting more and more such debates. They are regularly broadcast on digital TV and often on the major TV channels too.

MPs may also put written questions to the Government and receive written answers. They can also initiate interpellation debates with Government ministers. Last year we had almost 1,400 written questions for the Government and 420 interpellation debates. The number has increased very dramatically. Many questions, especially written ones, concern local matters. The interpellations often deal more with questions of principle in relation to part of a policy area. This question and answer institution is a way for MPs to get issues on the agenda and to look out for various constituency interests.

The results of the studies carried out so far indicate that the public's assessment of the way the Riksdag handles its principal tasks as a whole helps explain the confidence shown in the Riksdag. It is clear that public perception of the way in which the Riksdag carries out a number of different tasks is a significant factor in relation to the degree of confidence it enjoys. In addition, the studies show that perceptions of the way the Riksdag handles certain tasks have a greater effect on public confidence than assessments regarding the performance of other tasks. The single most important criterion for public confidence in the Riksdag is its success or failure in making crucial decisions affecting society. And this constitutes our greatest challenge.

Mr Francesco POSTERARO (Italy) made the following contribution, entitled "*Parliament and Civil Society*":

Any Parliament draws its legitimacy from the community it represents. The more it enjoys the consensus of that society, the more its legislative, guidance and monitoring efforts will be effective.

Historically speaking, in the 19th century such consensus in European parliaments was negotiated by the elite and in the 20th century by political parties. The new century, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and subsequent weakening of ideological reference points, has directly deposited responsibility for legitimising the parliamentary system with citizens.

The parliaments of the 21st century will thus be parliaments of the civil society. This is the new frontier of democratic representation, which, nevertheless, requires a great capacity for innovation in the parliamentary world in order to avert the risk of exclusion deriving, on the one hand, from the global financial circuit and, on the other, from pressure by lobbies.

It is, therefore, necessary to view communication channels between the parliament and the civil society from a more modern point of view, since these are the undeniable means by which today's politics are legitimised. It could be useful then to examine the following aspects:

- the information reaching the parliament from the civil society;
- the communication of parliamentary activity to the civil society;

— the symbolic function of parliamentary institutions and buildings.

The first aspect – and perhaps the most easily associated with tradition – regards a parliament’s need to obtain certain indispensable data from the civil society in order to carry out its legislative activity.

To this end the Italian Parliament has boosted the frequency of what are known as “preliminary fact-finding activity at committee level” consisting of hearings of civil society organisations concerned with issues under discussion. These take place on a regular basis for every legislative bill, but can be done on a broader basis in the context of fact-finding inquiries.

An institution that could perhaps be reactivated is that of the direct petitioning of Parliament by citizens. The European Parliament, with its Committee on Petitions, has had quite a positive experience in this regard.

The second aspect is that in which the greatest progress has been made, owing also to the technological and computer revolution. It can be said that the goal of transparency in parliamentary sessions has, for the most part, been achieved, at least in terms of the means of communication made available. Access to these sessions in the past – apart from parliamentary proceedings – was only through the reportage of journalists, the level of which varied widely from nation to nation.

Today’s dedicated Internet sites and TV channels follow parliamentary proceedings in real time. The activities of individual Parliament Members – including how they vote on major issues – can be consulted instantaneously on-line. The two Houses of the Italian Parliament have also set up information centres in Rome and periodically participate in the country’s major trade fairs in the sector of public communications. Further developments can be seen in the form of peripheral information networks inter-connecting regional administrative offices or itinerant information initiatives (e.g. the German Bundestag’s parliamentary van). Nevertheless, the most widespread instrument – especially in areas where computer literacy is still only partial – remains the broadcast of the principle parliamentary debates (“question time”) over national television networks.

The third aspect is also associated with considerable success since citizen demand for access to the parliament is on the rise, and not so much for the customary opportunity of observing the sessions (since television now carries them live) as for a sort of physical re-appropriation of that place in which popular sovereignty is exercised. Thus particular relevance is restored to the historic parliament building in the service of national identity, for which purposes its importance goes beyond that of a museum, even though tours often tend to dwell on its artistic and architectural aspects.

In this regard, the Italian Parliament building is a regular destination for school trips and other group tours. It often hosts exhibitions featuring artistic expressions, but there are also those on great historic moments or figures, or else on themes concerning national and international life. Recently the Chamber of Deputies hosted a documentary exhibition commemorating the 40th anniversary of the death of J.F. Kennedy, which was met with great interest on the part of the public. An overall idea of visitor frequency to the Chamber can be seen in its 362,000 admissions in 2003, which represents an approximate increase of 20% over the previous year.

The Parliament provides the preferred setting for solemn ceremonies in the presence of the Head of State or annual reports by the Authorities, as well as for addresses by eminent international personages. The Italian Parliament’s most significant experience in this regard was the November 2002 visit by Pope John Paul II, which was obviously broadcast live on television.

Noteworthy also is the design to create a National Museum on the History of the Italian Parliament, which will be a highly useful resource to school groups and visiting foreigners. In the same context it should be recalled that the Chamber's Library and Historic Archives were opened to the public in the late 1980s, with the Senate following suit shortly thereafter.

The Parliament's opening up toward the civil society has naturally presented new and important organisational requirements to parliamentary administrations, which, in the process of confronting them, could certainly benefit from an exchange of experience at the international level.

I would point out, in particular, the crucial nature of questions regarding the security of both parliament buildings as well as computer networks, on which a study seminar was arranged by the Chamber of Deputies in 2003 in the context of the parliamentary aspect of the G8. Other important considerations include:

- the boosting of services and offices concerned with relations with the public;
- the training of personnel in contact with citizens;
- cooperation with the parliamentary press and the media;
- the use of specialised consultants.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the political meaning underlying these initiatives, which could otherwise be simplistically interpreted as the image-building efforts of an institution in search of a role. Now that they are becoming aware that participation is no longer a question of simply casting their vote as if it were a blank check, citizens are interested in understanding parliamentary life from the inside. Thus there is an "added value" to be gained in terms of democracy from parliamentary institutions if citizens are able to perceive its importance and, once and for all, leave behind the residual mysteries of power."

Mr Aleksandar NOVAKOSKI (Macedonia) *made the following contribution, entitled "Relations between Parliament and Civil Society":*

The initiatives and the demands for the opening of the institutions of the state to the citizens and the non-governmental sector, i.e. for active participation of this sector in the decision-making processes are becoming more and more frequent and more loudly expressed. The goal of these initiatives and demands is to make a greater contribution to the development of a democratic structure of government and of the civil society. To that aim various projects for greater co-operation of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia with the organizations of the civil society have been initiated.

Based on the realised activities, it could be said that the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia is open towards the non-governmental sector, not only in the acceptance of the initiatives coming from the non-governmental organizations, but also through the co-operation with them in drafting of legislation.

The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia in the present parliamentary composition is concentrated on the adoption of laws in three areas of priority: economic development, security and fight against corruption and organised crime. Care is taken for consistent implementation of the provisions of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, as well as for the harmonisation of the legislation with that of the European Union and to the approximation to the NATO standards. Concern-

ing these issues we have a consensus among the political players in the country, since they are the foundation for stability and continuous democratic and economic development.

The Macedonian Parliament dedicates a lot of attention to the promotion of the human rights in their widest sense. The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, whose provisions are incorporated in the Constitution of the country, will provide a lasting solution for the questions concerning the rights of the ethnic minorities. We also work very intensely on the harmonisation of the national legislation with that of the European Union in the field of gender equality and providing equal opportunities for the marginalised groups, especially for the persons with special needs. These are also the areas of interest and work of a large number of non-governmental organizations.

An especially big step forward was made in the field of gender equality. Namely, the Macedonian Women's Lobby was formed with the support of the Working Group on Gender Equality, the so-called Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact. The Lobby is a forum that is dedicated to including more women in the public life, as well as to improving the situation of the women in the society. This proved to be a big success during the latest parliamentary elections held in 2002, and now the number of women parliamentarians is above the European average. This was the foundation for the establishment of the Women Parliamentarians' Club, as a regional project of the Stability Pact, which secured co-operation among the women parliamentarians from Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

Another step forward was made in the field of the respect of the rights of the persons with special needs: the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia established the Inter-Parliamentary Lobby Group that works on the promotion of the rights of the people with disabilities and their faster and more efficient incorporation in the overall life in the Republic of Macedonia. The Parliament is constantly open to and receives representatives of the non-governmental organizations and association of persons with various disabilities, who can directly express their demands and remarks concerning the adoption of the legislation in the fields of their interest.

Both initiatives are implemented in close co-operation with the non-governmental sector as an important partner, but also as a corrector of the work of the authorities. On the other hand, in these lobby groups we have successful co-operation of the parliamentarians of different political orientation, which speaks of the cohesion forces of the society and of the readiness for overcoming the political, ethnic and religious differences in the interest of the needs of the citizens of the state.

Worth mentioning is also the co-operation between the Assembly and the non-governmental sector, initiated by a large number of non-governmental organizations with the aim of overcoming the problems caused by the denomination of the Republic of Macedonia with a name different than the constitutional name.

Consequently, the campaign "Don't you FYROM me, say Macedonia" united all the political and non-political structures – i.e. the non-governmental organizations, primarily because an acceptable model of expressing the interest of the citizens was formulated. This campaign could find its place in all the organizations and structures, including the UN and the IPU and their affiliations. Namely, the Republic of Macedonia doesn't have difficulties with regard to its relations with the international community, i.e. with the international organizations where it is an active member for a decade under the reference "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". This problem is artificial and forced upon Macedonia. But the fact is that there is no alternative except to use the constitutional name of the country – the Republic of Macedonia, which was

clearly expressed through the enormous support for the campaign by the citizens and by the Macedonian Parliament.

We should also mention the formation of the Coalition of the non-governmental organization – the NGO Parliament – that works on establishing closer co-operation between the governmental and the non-governmental sector. To that aim it prepared a Platform on the relations between the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia and the NGO Parliament. The principles of the Platform are the apolitical character of the activities, co-operation with all the non-governmental organizations, the society in general and with the media, and its main goal is the strengthening of the civil society.

This leaves space and new possibilities for greater co-operation and involvement of the citizens in the decision-making process, and with it for democratization of the relations and greater promotion of the civil society.

The Platform emphasises that the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia and the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly give possibilities for the citizens to personally, but also through their association, i.e. through the non-governmental organizations, instigate initiatives for adoption of laws and for opening debates on various issues. In recent times we are witnessing the activities of the every growing number of various non-governmental, non-party organizations, social movements (environmentalists, peacekeepers, movements for the rights of the women and others) etc, that with their activities, proposals and initiatives influence the public opinion, and with it have a direct influence on the work and the decisions of the authorities.

The citizens' participation in the creation of public policy as an ultimate goal may be achieved through participation in public discussions on draft laws. Hence, the Assembly may determine organs, organizations or association that the submitter of the law should consult in the preparation of draft laws. That may be a good opportunity to have insight in various opinions and proposals for solution creation to the law.

At the same time, there is a possibility to put the draft law on a public debate. In that case, the law will be published in the daily newspapers and will be directly available to all citizens, which in this way have the opportunity individually or through their association to present their opinions and proposals to the law. That will give space for creation of public opinion that, to a small or to a large extent, will influence the contents of the draft law.

The aforementioned possibilities will provide active involvement and influence by the non-governmental organizations in the decision-making process of the Assembly.

The citizens, through the electronic and printed media shall be informed about the work of the Assembly and its working bodies, that is for the debates on law and other issues in competence of the Assembly. The citizens, according to the parliamentary regulations, have access to the documents and other materials, to enter the Assembly, and they may be allowed to follow sessions of the Assembly.

The envisaged activities of the Assembly and the working bodies, the proposals on the agenda and other activities, have been continuously uploaded on the Assembly web-site and are accessible to all interested parties. The Rules of Procedure, as well, provide the possibility for citizens and representatives of non-governmental organizations to attend the sessions of the Assembly, in accordance with the regulations for internal order of the Assembly.

The co-operation with the National Democratic Institute (US NGO) has been continuously developed for several years and, according to programs prepared in advance, young people (law, economy and other graduated) have the chance to work as interns and build skills in the field of

parliamentary work and the parliamentary groups. This establishes a solid knowledge fund for persons that shall have the opportunity to be engaged in the parliamentary work in the future.

In this context is the co-operation with the Faculty of Law in Skopje, as with other faculties, institutes, primary schools, high schools, which show interest to follow the work of the parliament. The co-operation has been realised with non-governmental organizations as well, which have election monitoring and other issues in their domain of interest and work.

Organised groups, pupils and other interested citizens visit the parliament, meet the MPs and follow the parliamentary work, within the frames of work and exchange of opinions and suggestions for its promotion.

The co-ordination of activities, meaning co-operation between the non-governmental sector and the Assembly, that is the staff service of the Assembly is basically realised through the Secretary General of the Parliament, and with consultation of the President of the Assembly.

This activity is made by the Public Relations Unit within the Department of the Secretary General in the Assembly, and by that this important communication and co-operation of the parliament with the citizens is professionally realised. In the Cabinet of the President there is a public relations associate as well, which is in charge of informing the public about the activities of the President and the work of the Assembly. A separate Publication Unit has been established, to publish the parliamentary bulletin and other publications for the work of the parliament and the working bodies, promoting the ways of dissemination of information to the citizens for the work of the parliament.

On that basis, the parliamentary staff service assists in the realisation of contacts of citizens with the MPs, parliamentary groups, parliamentary officials and all persons of interest for the civil sector, and in the domain of the parliamentary activity. By that, the Staff Service of the Assembly provides conditions for these activities and enables the citizens access to the necessary information of their interest, as well as other information of use for non-governmental organization related to their initiatives and proposals on activities of the Assembly.”

Mr Constantin SAVA (Romania) made the following presentation, entitled “*The relations between Parliament and Civil Society*”:

I. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL- POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN ROMANIA.

In the context of the continuous growth of the complexity of the modern society there is a great need for enhancing the *representative democracy* through the presence of the civil society as decisional contributing factor in the political, economic and social fields; citizens involvement in supervising, monitoring or exercising pressures over the state institutions, being frequently associated with many conditions that are said to “*make democracy working*”.

Thus, the establishment of a constructive dialog among state, businesses and a better-organised and structured civil society became vital, especially in the case of the emerging European new democracies - as Romania -, facing the challenges of their transition to the market economy and their integration into the Euro-Atlantic and European structures. Neither democracy nor market economy or democratic implementation of the new legislation harmonised with the European *acquis* can be achieved without the active involvement of a strong civil society.

Beginning with the 22 of December 1989, moment that marked the collapse of the Romanian communist authoritarian regime, which have firstly programmatically annihilated and then forbidden the pluralism of ideas and the initiatives of the citizens, the strengthening of the civil society became a major objective. It's widely recognised that our country — as well as the other Central and East European countries, where communism was abolished, have seen moments of social vacuum and unrest and dismantling of state institutions, which had devastating effects but also offered us the opportunity to reshape societies and social welfare.

In consequence, over the last years, while people won the right of association and the liberty of expression, thousands of non- governmental organisations joined the mass media associations, syndicates, employers and citizens in a common effort of creating and consolidating an authentic political and civic culture, an authentic civil society, conscious of her rights and legal ways of sanctioning a poor political act.

II. MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE ROMANIAN CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ACTUAL SOCIAL-POLITICAL CONTEXT

As we all know, the attributions, the functions, the interests of the civil society as well as the relation between the civil society and the power differs from a country to another, in close link with its level of social and economic development.

The Romanian civil society and its components, still fragile, start to manifest their presence and to assume their role and place in the country's life, through organisational consolidation, but also by actions trying to face the challenges of consolidating the democracy, the state of law and the market economy. Taking all these into account, the Romanian civil society is called upon to fulfil some functions and to respond to some specific social necessities, among the most important are:

- To survey (monitor) the way the public power is managing the public affairs, the national patrimony, the destiny of the country. This function of surveying, requires an innovator and flexible participation of the civil society to the social and economic dialog – as a source of new solutions of the complex issues related to the transition.
- To sanction the power. The civil society shall represent a factor of pressure over the public power, able to determine it to respect its political programme, to be transparent in its actions and opened to dialogue and communication. The legal means used by the civil society in this regard are: street demonstrations, strikes, public debates on issue of great interest for the citizens, using as an efficient tool the mass – media. Certainly, the function of sanctioning the power gains its maximum visibility, at the time when citizens are all called upon to exercise their right to vote.
- The educational function. Through group activity, a process of social learning takes place, enhancing those attitudes, knowledge and skills on which democratic processes are based, making their members more effective citizens.

III. PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND MEANS OF PUBLIC ACTIONS CONSTITUTIONALLY CONSECRATED

1. — The improvement of the role and activities of the **public institutions** represents a constant preoccupation of the Romanian authorities in the process of enforcing the democracy, according

to the principle that the power, in all its forms (legislative, executive and legal) has to serve the people, the society and the national interest.

Taking into account all mentioned above, it is of utmost importance to stress here that in 2003, the Parliament of Romania assumed the role of initiating the law for the revision of the Constitution. This political decision laid on the necessity to harmonise the fundamental law to the new internal and external realities and to the new social trends, to adjust the mechanisms of decision and the functional relations among the state institutions, as well as *to expand the institutional and constitutional guarantees of the fundamental rights and liberties within the context of Romania's membership to NATO and in the prospective of accession to UE*. The new Romanian fundamental law was elaborated and finalized during a period of consultations, debates and negotiations among all the Romanian political parties with the active participation of the structures of the civil society and was finally submitted to the popular direct and universal vote, through National Referendum, and adopted in November 2003.

Among the specific Public Institutions constitutionally consecrated to play the role of counter-weighting and controlling/self-controlling the power, the most important are:

- The President of Romania – mediator among public authorities, society and state;
- The Parliament – which relation with the civil society will be detailed at item IV;
- The Public Ministry – representing the general interests of the society and defending the state of law but also the rights and liberties of the citizens;
- The Advocate of the People - constituting the interface among the rights of the citizens and the authority of the state – which appointment belongs to the Senate;
- The Constitutional Court- the guaranty of the supremacy of Constitution;
- The Court of Counts;
- Additionally, among the new provisions of the new Constitution it is important to mention that:
 - Art. 139¹ constitutionally consecrates for the very first time the Economic and Social Council as a consultative body of the Parliament and of the Government in the scope of establishing the legal ground for dialog with syndicates and employers in specific issues established by organic law. (Law No. 109/1997)
 - Art. 9 constitutionally consecrates the employers and the professional associations, together with syndicates, all of them developing their activities according to their statutes, in the framework of the law. These associations have the mission to contribute to the safeguarding of the rights and to the promotion of the professional, economic and social interests of their members.
- Other Romanian public institutions of partnership with the civil society are: The National Agency for Regional Development, the National Council for Environment and Sustainable development, Council of National Minorities, National Council Professional Training of Adults, etc.

2. — Among the most important means and ways of action of the citizens and of the civil society in order to promote their fundamental constitutional rights and liberties, we should mention:

- The legislative initiative which shall lie, as the case may be, with the Government, Deputies, Senators, or a to number of at least 100,000 citizens entitled to vote. The citizens who exercise their right to a legislative initiative must belong to at least one quarter of the country's counties, while, in each of those counties or the Municipality of Bucharest, at least 5,000 signatures should be registered in support of such initiative. (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 74 (1))
- Referendum. The President of Romania may, after consultation with Parliament, ask the people of Romania to express, by referendum, their will on matters of national interest. (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 90 (1))
- Right of petition. Citizens/legally established organizations have the right to address the public authorities by petitions formulated only in the name of the signatories/the collective body they represent. The public authorities are bound to answer to petitions within the time limits and under the conditions established by law. (Constitution of Romania, art. 51(1), 51(2), 51(4)).
- Right of a person aggrieved by a public authority. Any person aggrieved in his/her legitimate rights or interests by a public authority, by means of an administrative act or by the failure of a public authority to solve his/her application within the lawful time limit, is entitled to the acknowledgement of his/her claimed right or legitimate interest, the annulment of the act and reparation for the damage. The State shall bear patrimony liability for any prejudice caused as a result of judicial errors. The State liability shall be assessed according to the law and shall not eliminate the liability of the magistrates having exercised their mandate in ill will or grave negligence. (Constitution of Romania, art. 52(1),52 (3)).
- The right to attend the sittings of the Parliament. The sittings of both Chambers shall be public. (Constitution of Romania, Art. 68(1)).

IV. RELATIONS BETWEEN PARLIAMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The relation between Parliament and the civil society will be firstly analysed as a *direct relation* and secondly from the perspective of its impact over the reports of the Parliament with the Government and with the other structures of the public administration through the *function of parliamentary control*.

1. — Although a member of the Parliament is independent in exercising of its mandate,¹ this is yet very straight related to a well knowledge of the realities of their constituencies, to the establishment of close contacts with different socio - professional categories, all these leading to the adoption of some really efficient measures satisfying the needs and requests, which the electors express.

The Rules of Order of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies create an adequate framework for a very good interaction between parliamentarians and the civil society.

In this regard, is important to firstly mention the contacts of the President of the Senate and of the members of the Standing Bureau with the representatives of the economic and social life, of the syndicates, of the students, and of the different non-governmental bodies. They are all benefiting by audiences to the decisional structures of the Senate and the memorandums, documents

¹ In the exercise of their mandate Deputies and Senators shall be in the service of the people. Any imperative mandate shall be null. (Constitution of Romania, Art. 69 a), b))

or proposals submitted by them are transmitted, in order to be discussed, to the respective specialised committees.

Secondly, the Standing Committees, according to their own standing orders, whenever the case it may be, invite to attend their sittings, the representatives of the social bodies, whose proposals are discussed and usually taken into consideration. As for example, the Standing Committees have initiated meetings with NGO's in order to elaborate specific projects of law or some pertinent amendments to the acting legislation, as it follows: the Committee for human rights have established strong dialog links with the most important non-governmental organisations involved in actions of defending human rights; the Committee for science and education have initiated consultations with the representatives of state and private schools, students and science organisations in order to elaborate the Education Law, etc.

Thirdly, taking into account the role of the Parliament as the supreme legislative authority of the state, it is important to underline that, as a result of the increasing interest of the Romanian state authorities in the development of the non-profit sector, we have taken positively measures in order to establish the ground for an operational legislative framework. In this regard, the Parliament adopted:

- Government Ordinance No. 26/2000, which refers especially to the procedure of registration of the NGO's, their management and their relations with the public administration and non-profit organisations;
- Law no. 576/2001- which stipulates that a sponsor benefits by an attractive reduction for the profit tax equalling 5% of his donation to an NGO, level which is comparable with the one established in other UE' s countries;
- Law 544/2003 – regarding the free access to the public interest information;
- Law 52/2003 - regarding the transparency of the decisional process;
- Additionally, although in Romania there is not yet in force a specific legislation settling lobby activities, the claims of different social categories interested to promote some amendments or specific legislative regulations were and are, constantly taken into account.

2. — The relations between Parliament and the civil society analysed through the perspective of the reports of the Parliament with the Government and the other bodies of the public administration, this is materialised through the parliamentary control over the respective institutions activities, as follows:

- Information of Parliament. The Government and other bodies of public administration are obliged to present the information and the documents requested by the two Chambers. At the same time, if members of the Government are requested to attend the proceedings of Parliament, their participation shall be compulsory.
- Questions, interpellations and simple motions. The Government is bound to answer the interpellations or questions addressed by the members of the Parliament. The Parliament may carry out a simple motion expressing the position on a matter of domestic or foreign policy or, as the case may be, a matter having been the subject of an interpellation.

V. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SERVICES OF THE SENATE TO ENSURE AND FACILITATE THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE AUTHORITIES

The relation Senate – civil society is carried out by:

- *The Office for Public Relations* within the structure of the General Secretariat, which main responsibilities are:
 - To ensure the link between the Senate and the citizens, their associations or their different organisations;
 - To receive the petitions and the other documents addressed to the Senate, and to submit them to the Committee for Inquiry of Abuses and Petitions, to the respective Standing Committees or to the senators and to inform petitioners on the manner their petition is solved;
 - To inform citizens with respect to the legislative process of the Senate, offering data and information concerning the institution of the Senate;
 - To intermediate and to support the access of the interested persons to the Services of the Senate, to the committees or to the senators;
 - To organise the access of the Romanian of the foreign citizens, individually or in group, to the Senate meeting hall during the debates in plenary session or to visit the building of the Senate; in collaboration with the Division for protection and guard;
 - To table regularly reports on the fulfilment of the above-mentioned activities and to ensure the set up of the current archive of the office.
- *The Press and Image Office of the Senate*, subordinated to the Standing Bureau and to the Secretary General of the Senate, which:
 - Up-dates the information available on the web-site of the Senate at rubric of the Press and Image Office, putting at disposal of the citizens and mass-media all the public information on the daily activities of the Senate, working agenda of the Standing Bureau of the Senate; the order of business of the Standing Committees and of the plenary sittings, responses to the articles published by mass-media;
 - Organises the briefings and the press conferences of the members of the Standing Bureau, Standing Committees, Parliamentary Groups, of all the members of the Senate as well of the Secretary General;
 - Is involved in the organisation of some international meetings, national symposiums and in the creation of some mass-media audio-visual materials on parliamentary subjects;
- The Division for the Computerisation of the Parliamentary Activity

Taking into account that the *Constitution of Romania guarantees the right of citizens to information, and according to the same document, the public authorities shall ensure the accurate information of the citizens regarding the public affairs*, the Parliament was one of the first public institutions implementing an IT system connected to the parliamentary activity (based on the Internet/Intranet technology) aiming at circulating information within and without the organisation and ensuring the accuracy and the transparency of information. The Internet site of the Senate, which is available at the address www.senat.ro and which is actually under a process of modernisation, will further provide:

- The direct, rapid and easy access of citizens to the political making process, to the different phases undergone by a draft law in the debates of the committees and in the plenary sessions. The drafts of law or legislative initiatives will be consulted by citizens and media, which will have at their disposal a supplementary channel of information and communication via E-mail.
- The management of the activity of Senators;
- The management of the information on the sittings of the Standing Bureau of the Senate and joint sittings of the standing Bureau of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies.
- The management of Questions and Interpellations;
- The management of the short-hands of the Senate Plenary Sittings;
- The management of the Petitions. Citizens will have an additional communication channel at their disposal to submit a petition and follow up the process of its solution from the very first discussions on the respective matter by the specialised Committee, to the final report on it.
- The electronic cassette of the Senator;
- Set up and management of the archives of documents in electronic format.

VI. PROSPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT OF A INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Since 1989, international donors have been providing considerable funds to the non-governmental organisations in Romania, aiming to:

- Increase the capacity and credibility of the non-governmental sector;
- Enhance the role of the civil society in fields like human rights, democracy and state of law;
- Financially support of those NGO's programs of great relevance for Romania's membership to the European Union. In this regard, it worth to mention here the Programme "*The Parliament and the Civil Society*", financed by the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, aimed at consolidating democracy and state of law by encouraging and facilitating the collaboration between the civil society organisations and the democratically elected state bodies.

As we all know, nowadays, the dialogue civil society – public power exceeds the national states, which transferred a part of their sovereignty to the regional level. Thus, the non-governmental organisations are at their turn to internationalise themselves at regional and global level, which probably will further impose the institutionalisation of their participation in the international state and non-state organisation.

Finally, I express my conviction that the XXI century, the century of economic and social progress but also of integration and globalisation, will conduce to a re-evaluation of the statute of the civil society, to a reconsideration of its importance and of its role, imposing its presence as a constant to be taken into account in the national and international decisional processes.

Mr Arie HAHN (Israël) said that Parliament had to keep in contact with the citizen because citizens elected Members of Parliament, and because Parliament often suffered from low esteem in public opinion.

The available means for setting up this contact included the media, web sites, official visits to Parliament and the establishment of a Parliamentary Channel -- a Parliamentary Channel would be set up on 2nd May in Israel by the Knesset in collaboration with a private TV station.

Topical Questions occupied an important part of the Orders of the Day, as well as discussion of the conclusions of committees of inquiry or ad hoc committees. Such committees had recently dealt with the problem of violence in sport, the provision of water in Israel and the bank accounts of victims of the Holocaust.

Tuesday afternoon between 4 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. was given up to topical questions. These had to be put within one minute and had met with a real success, after a difficult start.

Mr Hans BRATTESTÅ (Norway) said that in Norway there was practically no limit to the availability of information for the citizen. Reports were published on the Internet site of the Chamber immediately after they were agreed and before they were debated, thus allowing citizens the possibility of making their reactions known.

Nonetheless, it seemed that these means of communication were not sufficient and that the representative system itself was put into question. The press was interested in arguments and debates and not in the results of the work itself, which went some way to explaining the indifference in public opinion.

Mr Ian HARRIS, President said that in the State of Victoria, in Australia, any association had the right to put a question to the State Assembly, which would be sent onto the relevant minister and that that was an excellent system for building a dialogue with civil society.

Mrs Helen DINGANI (Zimbabwe) said that the situation in Israel seemed to be a lot better than that in a number of developing countries.

In general, it was a lot easier to build relations with civil society through organised associations, representing for example a trade union, than with civil society, which was not organised — in other words at grassroots, which nonetheless represented the real social majority. This explained why it was difficult to attract the ordinary citizen and to get him to take part in the life of the Parliamentary institutions: the various means of communication, forums and other information centres. In practice they only affected a part of the public which was already interested and knowledgeable.

She wanted to know how the information points created in Sweden functioned.

Mr George CUBIE (United Kingdom) said that the problem of low participation in elections and the high level of abstentions was the same in developing countries as in industrialised countries.

In the United Kingdom an association known as the Hansard Society had given itself the task of educating the citizen in the ways of democracy. It organised visits to Parliament for electors, explained how this institution worked and carried out surveys of their opinions.

The Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons was very worried about the lack of knowledge among citizens of how democracy worked. For too long the House of Commons had believed that it was sufficiently understood; bit by bit, it had lost contact with the electors.

Media coverage of Parliamentary life was very rough in the United Kingdom and this undermined the credibility of Members of Parliament. In order to ensure better promotion of Parliamentary work, media consultants had been recruited who, after several months, had shown themselves to be very effective. Generally speaking, although individual Members of Parliament were often seen positively, public opinion perceived Members collectively in a much more negative way in the way in which they carried out their Parliamentary duties.

Mme Hélène PONCEAU (France) shared the disappointment which came from the split between the significant efforts undertaken by Parliamentary institutions to make themselves better known and understood and the mediocre results obtained in terms of improvement in public opinion.

The media had in these circumstances a lot to answer for. Sometimes they seemed to be motivated by a will to destroy conscientiously all the good work put in by assemblies, either by ignoring information which was made available to them or in misrepresenting it.

The efforts made by Parliamentary institutions in France had taken various forms, whether it was the establishment of a Parliamentary television channel which was broadcast continuously, and which was aimed to create a better understanding of the work of Parliament (and his audience remained unfortunately very limited) or the creation of direct links with the business world (work attachments, on the basis of exchange of employees, linking heads of businesses and Senators) and with the world of science, education or culture.

Mr Brissi Lucas GUEHI (Cote d'Ivoire) said that in his country Parliament had felt the need to open itself to society at the time of the last legislative period. For example, there had been a dialogue between the Social Affairs Committee with several trade union organisations which had brought to an end social conflict.

Information sittings had been organised which allowed the relevant minister to come and explained a particular problem.

In addition, various debates were now transmitted live, which allowed Parliament to combat the disinformation propagated by various media sources

Mrs Marie-Andrée LAJOIE (Canada) when dealing with the problems with which the Parliamentary institution was confronted, it was necessary to think about the expectations of society in respect of Parliament, because the separation of the link between the one and the other raised problems.

In Canada, there was a programme under which each year 100 teachers visited Parliament and they were able to relay their experiences to their pupils. In British Columbia an experiment piloted by university professors aimed at establishing a new institution with a new assembly elected on a proportional basis. The 170 people who worked there prepared proposals which were able to be taken up by the Legislative Assembly.

Mr Mario FARACHIO (Uruguay) said that he had been tempted on several occasions to consult citizens directly, but that that practice had seemed dangerous -- it was true, on the other hand, that Parliament was not an irreproachable institution and that it was by nature fallible.

There was a tension which underlined Parliamentary activity. On the one hand Members of Parliament needed time to take decisions on matters which were becoming more and more complex. On the other hand public opinion expected that decisions should be made quickly and put into effect rapidly.

Agreeing to a law was a complicated matter which necessarily took time. Members of Parliament should be able to make their choices calmly without a sense of urgency.

Mrs I Gusti Ayu DARSINI (Indonesia) said that in Indonesia citizens could send Parliament written petitions, which were sent to the relevant standing committee. She wanted to know what the practices in other parliaments in dealing with complaints presented by citizens.

Mrs Doris MWINGA (Zambia) said that in Zambia an inquiry had been carried out on the perception of Members of Parliament by citizens. A Modernisation Committee had been established which had examined the results of this inquiry. Its work had led to the creation of information points where citizens could inform themselves on the activity and work of Parliament as well as to a wider broadcasting of debates.

Improved knowledge of the work of Parliament, nonetheless, came up against the problem of multilingualism within society and the State.

Mrs Lulu MATYOLO (South Africa) said that the South African authorities wanted the public to participate more directly in the preparation of laws in order to sharpen the civic awareness of everyone in a country where the experience of democracy was still recent. These efforts had allowed numerous debates to take place and had led to the revision of laws which had become obsolete, arising from customary traditions (for example, relating to the inheritance rights of natural children).

Access to Parliament by citizens was guaranteed by attendance at public committee hearings, which is a right (unless the Committee specifically decided to sit in private).

Dr Yogendra NARAIN (India) said that the views exchanged had betrayed a certain disappointment. They could be summarised by a double question: how had the Parliamentary institution distanced itself so far from the people from which it was nonetheless derived? Were Parliamentary debates relevant to the expectations of citizens?

The institution had to be a more proactive than ever. The citizen had to find an answer to their expectations, an interface between him and the administrative authorities: if Parliament limited itself to examining the desires of Government, civil society would play no role. This attendance was aggravated by the fact that the media frequently concentrated on how things failed to work properly. These occurrences were not representative of the real balance of the political forces and the main work of Parliament.

Mr Wolfgang ZEH (Germany) said that the debate had not touched upon a basic question, namely, what was meant by the notion of civil society. It was necessary to ask oneself whether it was really useful to try to reach out to or dialogue with the grassroots at the risk of undermining the institutional relationship between Parliament and the electors following a regular pattern of elections.

In Germany, much effort was put into opening the Bundestag to civil society — exhibitions, pamphlets, visits, television broadcasts et cetera. Nevertheless, public confidence in the institution declined each year. There was a risk involved in trying to get more direct contact with civil society: more and more effort might lead to a constant increase in the expectations of citizens.

Mr Joao D'ABREU (Portugal) said that in Portugal relations between Parliament and civil society were expressed mainly by way of the Youth Parliament (since 1990), the Parliamentary Channel (since 1997), various exhibitions and the Internet site of the Chamber.

For example, the official Journal was on the Internet, all sittings of the Chamber were recorded and broadcast on a cable channel and public debates were available on the Internet.

In addition, there was an information centre for citizens , which was open 24 hours a day.

Mr Prosper VOKOUMA (Burkina Faso) returning to the question of the definition of civil society, said that it included in Burkina Faso associations and nongovernmental organisations working in the human rights sector, media and customary or religious communities. Naturally, this definition varied between different States and societies.

Mr Anders FORSBERG (Sweden) thought that the debate had shown that parliaments had to be transparent and above reproach in their working practices. They had to call out to citizens and be a place with which citizens could identify themselves.

Mr Ian HARRIS, President *thanked Mr Prosper VOKOUMA and Mr Anders FORSBERG, as well as all those who had taken part in the debate.*

PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF SECRETARY GENERAL IN A COUNTRY FACING PHYSICAL CHALLENGES SUCH AS EARTHQUAKES

Hafnaoui AMRANI (Algeria)

Mr Hafnaoui AMRANI (Algeria) spoke as follows:

The Parliament, as an official institution, is, following the example of the State's structures, concerned with all questions related to the country's national life.

This obvious fact is more and more faced, as regards the nature of the missions of the Parliament, on the basis of its place as well as its role as part of the country's institutional system.

In effect, this institution representative of the citizens in their different political, social and cultural components should be willing to listen to their legitimate aspirations and preoccupations.

As an example, however, the Parliament was fully involved in the recent catastrophes witnessed by our country.

It is worth recalling in this regard, that within two years, our country witnessed two major natural catastrophes (10.11.2001 Bab El Qued Flood, as well as 2 1.05.2003 earthquake) which have caused considerable human as well as material losses, for both the population and the national economy (see table below).

	Human Losses	Injured	Disappeared	Material Losses
Bab El Oued Flood	763	423	126	295 Million Dollars
Boumerdes Earthquake	2268	11455	----	5 Billion Dollars

Before these tragic events, the Parliament has taken a series of measures to contribute in facing the effects as well as consequences caused by these catastrophes.

This multifaceted contribution was made under the conduct of the Parliament Secretary General, and consisted, mainly, in a series of emergency measures taken in such a circumstance.

I. EMERGENCY MEASURES TAKEN BY THE PARLIAMENT

As soon as the above-mentioned catastrophes were announced, the Parliament decided on the following emergency measures.

- Setting up of an Emergency Committee: composed of the Parliament civil servants and headed by the Secretary General, the main missions of this committee are to:
 - make contact with the Parliamentarians and civil servants resident in the zones hit by the catastrophe.
 - collect all the information related to the catastrophe: zones hit, extent, first assessment of the human and material losses, etc;
- Meeting of the Parliament's Bureau: notably with a view to:
 - communicating and exchanging information about the catastrophe;
 - setting up a follow-up commission about the situation. Composed of Parliamentarians and civil servants, this commission is mainly in charge of enquiring about the event in question and permanently collecting all information related to the catastrophe, notably the extent of the losses caused, the consistence of first aid set up with the needs required.
- Collaborating with Governmental Authorities.

Within this framework, Parliamentarians and civil servants from the Parliament have been designated in order to strengthen the National Emergency Committee set up at the level of the Prime Minister's office and in charge of following-up the development of the situation in the catastrophe-hit zone, monitoring and coordinating aid actions and assistance at the national as well as international levels.

- Displacement Activity of the Following-up Emergency Committee in the Catastrophe-Hit Zone: this action aims notably at:
 - assessing the catastrophe extent, the losses caused, operations procedure, their organization, and their consistence.. .etc;
 - enquiring about the Parliamentarians and civil servants~ as well as about the losses experienced, possibly, by their families, houses, possessions and properties.. .etc;

II. ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENT'S SECRETARY GENERAL IN MANAGING THE CATASTROPHES

Given his position in the hierarchy of the Parliaments functions, competence as well as his capacity of hierarchical official in charge of the administrative and technical structures as a whole, the Secretary General has a predominant role to play as far as every internal or external action taken or intervention made by the Parliament is concerned.

Therefore, during the last natural catastrophes known by our country, the Parliament's Secretary General has been a key element in the assessment, coordination and follow-up of actions and measures taken by the Parliament, as part of his contribution to the national effort to face the catastrophes in question.

Within this framework, the Secretary General has mainly set up the following:

- the Parliament's Chairman and Parliamentarians information channel on all catastrophe aspects (extent, zones hit, losses, aid state, development of the situation... etc);
- the coordinator among the various contributors in caring for following-up the situation, notably between the national emergency committee and the local emergency committee (composed of parliamentarians and civil servants from the Parliament);
- the Parliament's authority for mobilizing human and material means as well as following-up the implementation of the Parliament's contribution in such a circumstance;

For that purpose, the Secretary General role consisted mainly in:

- gathering all the information related to the catastrophe in order to tally with and send to the parties concerned;
- assessing the catastrophe extent and the losses caused (human losses, material losses... etc.);
- assessing the actions and means set up by the Government and specialized bodies, (such as the Croissant Rouge Algerien — Algerian Red Crescent) to face the situation generated by the event (distress and panic within the population, aid and interventions emergency...);
- assessing the needs, material and human needs necessary to provide aid for the populations hit by the catastrophe.
- mobilizing the Parliament's human and material means.

III. THE PARLIAMENT'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF MANAGING AND PREVENTING AGAINST CATASTROPHES

The Parliament has, in its capacity of legislative power authority, as part of its constitutional competence and respect of the principal of separation of powers, contributed efficiently in managing and preventing against catastrophe risks.

This contribution ranged over aid provision and intervention, prevention as well as legislation.

A. At the level of aid provision and intervention

Given their capacity of local representatives, and consistently with their obligations, including the moral obligations, to be ready to listen to the citizens aspirations and complaints, the Parliaments members, individually or collectively, have taken actions and initiatives aiming at consolidating and reinforcing aid and assistance at the local as well as national levels.

In this regard, they notably endeavoured to:

- open local permanently manned offices in charge of coordinating donations collection, aid and assistance;
- contribute, in relation with the competent authorities, in organizing and reinforcing aid and assistance at the local level by mobilizing the citizens and militants;
- participate in organizing the collection of material and financial aid and assistance;

- contribute financially on their equity capital as well as on the capital of the party they belong to.

Furthermore, the Parliament, as part of regional and international inter-parliamentary relations, has taken actions to heighten foreign parliaments awareness and mobilize them to make their contribution, provide aid and assistance in such a circumstance.

B. At the level of financial contribution

In the framework of the national solidarity in benefit of citizens hit by the natural catastrophe the Parliaments members and civil servants have contributed financially to the national effort of help and assistance towards these catastrophes victims. This contribution has mainly consisted at the payment of a part of their parliamentarian indemnities or their wages to the effected persons profit.

C. At the level of prevention

Given its constitutional purpose and competence, as a legislative authority, the Parliament has taken, since the occurrence of these catastrophes, diverse actions of prevention against such risks.

These actions were mainly construed by making recommendations aiming at reinforcing and improving the legislative system in force as far as construction, urbanization, environment and control are concerned, with a view of providing for and including norms, rules and measures of security and prevention against natural catastrophes.

Furthermore, the Parliament, as part of its activities of popularizing and reinforcing the parliamentary culture, organized on the 22nd September 2003 a conference on major risks in Algeria: problems and perspectives.

This action aims at heightening the awareness and informing the parties concerned as a whole about the question, on one hand, and to make a veritable diagnosis on the status of the legislative and statutory system in force as well as to make the recommendations deemed necessary in this regard, on the other hand.

D. At the level of legislation

As part of its constitutional competence, the Parliament has adopted a bill on special measures applicable to those who disappeared following the earthquake of the 21st May 2003.

This text aims at facilitating the actions and procedures in favour of the families of those who disappeared following this earthquake.

For that purpose, this new law has set a maximum 8 month time limit to certify that the disappearance and death have occurred, instead of the 4 years set before.

Furthermore, it sets the time limits within which the courts should deal posthaste with the files of the disappeared and indemnify their families, and guarantees the coverage of legal aid as part of the procedure set in this regard.

Mr Ian HARRIS, President thanked Mr AMRANI for his communication.

Mr Arie HAHN (Israël) said that it was essential that a Parliament should be able to continue its work, even after a catastrophe. In Israel were to secondary meeting places — one in Jerusalem, one outside the town — which could be used to within eight to 12 hours notice. In addition, Parliamentary work was systematically duplicated and the copiers were stocked in protected places.

Mrs Marie-Andrée LAJOIE (Canada) as a result of concerns arising from IT systems and the year 2000, on one hand, and a series unprecedented changes in the weather (snowstorms) on the other, a programme called Business Community Management had been started in Canada under which disaster planning had been undertaken, which included the possibility from the summer of 2004 of establishing an alternative Chamber with the shortest possible notice period.

All departments — in particular, the IT services — had been made aware of problems related to continuity of activity. Departments had been invited to establish a list of potential risks, to evaluate their probability and to prepare, in each case, a proper response strategy.

Mrs Heather LANK (Canada) said that similar arrangements had been made in the Canadian Senate: alternative buildings, plans to safeguard data, etc. This had led to a useful period of reflection on what was considered as essential to the activities of the Chamber, as opposed to what was of secondary importance.

Mr Tom DUNCAN (United States) said that there had been similar thinking in the United States, in particular in relation to the possibility of major natural catastrophes or unexpected events.

Mr Mamadou SANTARA (Mali) conveyed to Mr AMRANI the sympathy of the people of Mali for the people of Algeria for the events which they had had to live through. He asked for information on three points: was the crisis group which had been established in Algeria an ad hoc structure or had it been made permanent? What role did the Members of Parliament for the affected regions play? What had been the precise function of the Secretary-General during the events, from the point of view, in particular, of cooperation with the specialist services (civil protection, for example)?

Mrs I Gusti Ayu DARSINI (Indonesia) said that Indonesia had known in the past natural catastrophes, which had been comparable in their scale to those which had affected Algeria. The action taken had been, on the one hand, to finance intervention by allocation from Parliament's own budget and, on the other hand, to set up a temporary committee, which in particular had been able to go to the affected places to establish the scale of destruction.

Mr Hafnaoui AMRANI recognised that the Algerian Parliament had not been prepared for the possibility of the events of that nature and that it had been taken by surprise. In replying to the debate, he said:

- the crisis group had been only *ad hoc*, and had been active for about four months and then was wound up;
- the Members of Parliament for the affected areas had established local information bureaux is to assist victims, to keep them informed and to coordinate assistance;
- after these events the ORSEC plan had been completely rethought by the Government: years had been acted, for example, the frequent violation of planning rules and the absence of insurance for houses;

- it had been decided the future to create a specific budget line within the Parliamentary budget to deal with the future catastrophes.

THE PARLIAMENT OF BIRDS

Ian HARRIS (Australia)

Mr Ian HARRIS (Australia) *spoke as follows:*

I have previously delivered a communication, which evolved into a report, on attempts in Australia to improve the public perception of the Parliament. On this occasion, I would like to outline some of the steps being taken by the Australian national parliament to educate its citizens (including its young citizens) on Australia's parliamentary processes.

University visits

One partnership the Australian House of Representatives has been developing over the past three years is with tertiary institutions. It is important for the parliament to connect more effectively with the up and coming talent of our nation and with those who are educating them.

To this end we have established a university lecture program whereby members of the House and senior parliamentary officials visit universities free of charge to provide lectures on the realities of working in today's House of Representatives. The program was trialled with a few universities and proved such a success that it has now been extended to tertiary institutions throughout Australia. Usually the Speaker and the Clerk of the House deliver the talks. A small and manageable number of universities is visited annually.

Internships

The House also participates in an intern scheme, sponsored by the Australian National University. Interns are attached for a short time to the staff of Members and Senators, and are required to produce a research paper during their internship. On occasion, an intern has been attached to the office of the Clerk of the House. We have also commenced a system of employing a small group of university students on a part time basis to do messenger duties in the Chamber and elsewhere. Our system is based on the very successful Canadian system. So far, one intern has joined the staff of the House, but this is not our principal aim. We draw from a variety of disciplines: science, the arts, forestry etc. Our hope is that Australia's leaders of tomorrow have some understanding of the operation of Australia's parliamentary system.

New technologies

We have made use of new technologies, such as the Internet and digital television, which present even further opportunities to engage with different sections of the community. The Australian Parliament has a comprehensive web-site providing access to most recent parliamentary material. On this site, 'House News' provides information on new developments in the House to back up the information provided to the media. In addition, recent experience in producing a documentary and CD-ROM on the first 100 years of the House, and the large number of orders received for the two products, show that the Parliament presented in interesting ways can capture the public imagination. Production of the documentary and CD-ROM involved collaboration with broadcasting colleagues in the Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff; contractual 'partnerships' with the private sector (multi-media company, design company; marketing and distribution companies); and commissioning of original music and actors.²

Parliamentary education

The principal means by which we attempt to reach the young people of Australia is by means of the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO). The PEO is located within the Department of the Senate. The House of Representatives provides financial support for the PEO's operations, and the staff of the House have input to quality control, content of programs etc.

Those elected to the Parliament have an input by means of a Presiding Officers Advisory Group, whose membership is made up of Senators and Members, and whose principal function is to advise the President and the Speaker on the operations of the PEO.

The PEO aims to provide a comprehensive service in parliamentary and citizenship education to schools and to assist senators and members to inform constituents about the parliamentary process. It can be seen as working in partnership with teachers to assist students (and teachers) to:

- understand the significance of the Australian Parliament;
- understand how the Australian Parliament works; and
- take an active role as citizens in our democracy.

The PEO carries out its national role by:

- conducting active learning programs for student visitors to Parliament House. These one hour programs take place in a dedicated venue—the Education Centre—and engage students in role-plays about parliamentary processes and concepts;
- conducting outreach programs for students and teachers in their own classrooms in schools throughout Australia. These programs show how teachers can use the parliamentary process of decision making as a teaching/ learning strategy in the classroom;
- producing and publishing state curriculum based parliamentary education resources for teachers. Many of the resources are published on the PEO website (<http://www.peo.gov.au/index.html>);

² Details of the CD-ROM and documentary are available from: <http://www.houseforthenation.gov.au>

- delivering professional development programs for school teachers, trainee teachers and tertiary and community educators in schools, technical and further education institutions and universities;
- providing fellowships that give opportunities for young professionals including Aboriginal and other community leaders, teachers and journalists to further their knowledge of parliamentary processes;
- conducting a range of special activities and events, including symposiums and Conferences, an annual forum on the subject of the Budget, sessions of the National Youth Science Forum, an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio program for rural youth), the Rotary Adventure in Citizenship, and Talk-back classroom (a program where senior secondary school students interview senior politicians and other community leaders for broadcast on the national ABC youth radio network). Further details are available from the PEO website; and
- maintaining a very useful website.

As would be apparent from this range of activities, the PEO works closely and pro-actively with schools systems, universities and teacher organisations on a number of levels. It seeks to work collaboratively with the relevant professional education networks. The scale of the work is significant and the quality high, and to illustrate this I will refer to three areas:

- services for school groups within parliament;
- a new education resource for primary school students, Cockatoo Island; and
- the PEO's new web site.

Services for school groups within parliament

In recent years, more than 100 000 students have visited our national Parliament House in Canberra each year as part of an organised school group. Based on recent survey data, this represents more than 80% of inter-state student visitors to the national capital.³ A comprehensive Visitors' Services Section in Parliament House conducts tours, explains and interprets the Parliament and provides written materials.

The PEO provides Education Centre services for almost 80 000 of the visiting students. Included amongst them are about 16 000 students (from 550 schools) who live a long way from the national capital and whose travel to parliament is partly subsidised under a program called the Citizenship Visits Program. The program is run by the Australian Parliament, and total expenditure last financial year was \$1.02 million.

PEO Education Centre services began with the occupancy of the present Parliament House building in 1988. They have evolved over time, and the current programs now include:

- debating a bill role-play (with a choice of five bills for primary, and eight bills for secondary, although others can be used);

³ Discover what it means to be Australian in your National Capital: Size and effects of school excursions to the National Capital, 2002, Centre for Tourism Research, University of Canberra, 2003.

- committee of inquiry role-play (with one topic available for primary, and eight bills for secondary, although others can be used); and
- Question Time role-plays.

Importantly, professional educators are involved in delivering the programs. For most visiting student groups, from all states and territories in Australia, the parliamentary education program is linked directly to primary and secondary social science curricula.

External and internal evaluations of the Education Centre program over the period have demonstrated that the program is achieving its aims of encouraging students to become active and informed citizens. Last year, an external evaluation, indicated a 97 per cent level of satisfaction by school groups participating in PEO programs.⁴

Visiting school groups have the opportunity to meet with their elected representatives during their visits to Parliament House. An automated booking system advises members and senators about bookings for schools visiting from their electorates or States/ Territories, and a refinement to the program will allow for an electronic reminder close to the visit. This enables members and senators, if they wish, to make arrangements to meet with the students.

I should also say that all members of parliament in Australia consider visits to schools as among their most important duties. To assist members and senators in this regard, the PEO has produced facsimiles of the Despatch Boxes in the House of Representatives' Chamber, for use as an education resource. The facsimile boxes include a range of parliamentary information, props, photos and other materials for use during visits to schools and other community venues. The boxes are produced in response to orders for purchase from individual members and senators and are sold on a cost recovery basis.

Cockatoo Island

Last year, our Presiding Officers launched Cockatoo Island, an exciting new resource for young school children produced by the PEO.

Cockatoo Island is an imaginary island run by a parliament of Australian birds. Three colourful 'Big Books' introduce students to a diverse and democratic society. Illustrated by central Australian artist Kaye Kessing, they tell the story of how the birds organise life on the island to be fair and tolerant with opportunities for all and the right to be heard. Birds Australia has enthusiastically supported the project, and provided advice which has ensured that the ornithological details in the teaching notes are accurate.

Teachers' 'In-Flight Guides' are provided with background notes about parliament (and the birds), curriculum outcomes, portfolio pages and role-cards. The stories and the activities that go with them have been trialled in schools over the last three years with great success. PEO staff members are now visiting different regions to introduce the resource to classroom teachers.

The Cockatoo Island package is now being sold throughout the country through the publishing firm Thomson Learning. Under the contract, the project has been undertaken at minimal cost to the Australian Parliament. In the five months since publication some four hundred schools have purchased the resource, involving an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 students throughout Australia (and royalty return to the Australian Parliament). Its potential for education programs in other parliamentary democracies is already being tested, successfully, in South Africa, using South

⁴ Ibid.

African birds. Details about how to order the product are available from the PEO website. Information about intellectual property and any adaptation of the concept are available from the author, PEO staffer, Ali Garnett.

Studies of citizenship education have concluded that it is not what we teach in schools but how we run them that determines whether students will emerge as active, participating citizens.⁵ The Cockatoo Island resource is a significant addition to the resources available to teachers to encourage their students to develop concepts of democracy. It complements a major curriculum initiative in the late 1990s by the Australian Government entitled 'Discovering Democracy'. The Cockatoo Island project demonstrates that innovative programs are the key to engaging young people's interest in the parliament.

Parliamentary Education Office Website

The PEO website has recently been redeveloped. The site continues to provide comprehensive, accurate and useful information on PEO programs, activities and events and a range of resources for teachers, primary and secondary students and internet resources. (For example, it includes photographs and other materials that students can download for their school projects). The site is logically structured, visually appealing, easy to navigate and easy to use.

As a new development, the site also now includes an interactive sub-site for upper primary students, called Kidsview, which includes a number of features designed to interest children.

Content is arranged across five main themes: Representation, Law-making, Democracy, Parliament House and Parliamentary Artefacts. Kidsview includes complementary teaching material for teachers and parents. It links directly with State and Territory social science curricula, assisting teachers, parents and students in achieving curriculum outcomes.

Comment

Australia's experience with the PEO demonstrates that a relatively small group of professional staff dedicated to the task of parliamentary and citizenship education for schools, can make a significant contribution. We consider the investment to be both important and necessary to contribute to the task of sustaining our system of parliamentary government.

I would be interested to learn of the experience of other legislatures in introducing young people to the operation of their parliaments.

Mr Anders FORSBERG, Vice-President thanked Mr Ian HARRIS for his contribution and invited members to put questions to him.

Ms Heather LANK (Canada) thought that the Parliament of Birds was a fantastic tool. The view in Canada was that it was important to get to people before they had learnt to be cynical about Parliament. She asked what age group was best to focus on.

⁵ Senator the Hon. Margaret Reid Taking Parliament to the People and Bring People to the Parliament. Paper presented to 30th Conference of Presiding Officers and Clerks, Fiji, 16-24 July 1999, p 11.

Mrs Helen DINGANI (Zimbabwe) said that the presentation tied in with the earlier debate on Parliament and the public. Many southern African countries would use animals other than birds, but nonetheless she had had talks with the Ministry of Education about similar projects. They were thinking mainly about aiming at secondary schools. She noted that internships for university students were well-established, but they tended to be less successful.

Mr George CUBIE (United Kingdom) thanked the President and congratulated the Australian Parliament on this initiative. The House of Commons and the House of Lords were doing similar work, but they had nothing so dramatic as the Australian initiative. He had been talking to a Member of Parliament who had commented to him that it was very effective when talking to schools in her constituency when she spoke about her work in post-conflict areas. He noted that the facilities of the Education Unit were vastly oversubscribed. One of the constraints on doing more was that there was no dedicated space for lectures and teaching. He would like to know how much resources the Australian Parliament had given to this. A web site had been established to help virtual visitors to Parliament. There was acute consciousness in the UK Parliament that the level of public awareness of the work of Parliament was a very low. Given that in the United Kingdom there was a tight educational formula it was not easy to find space in the curriculum for Citizenship Studies. He asked what staff resources had been devoted to the Australian project. He also wondered if it was possible to know more about the interface with universities.

Mr Carlos HOFFMAN CONTRERAS (Chile) congratulated Mr HARRIS on his presentation. The Chilean Parliament was just starting up a programme to improve the relations between the Senate and civil society. It was very tempting to borrow the method which he had just demonstrated. He asked what the intellectual property rights were in this concept.

Mr Petr TKACHENKO (Russia) thanked the President for his presentation. He asked how long the programme had existed. If it had existed from long time, how had the destiny of the children who had been through the programme been monitored? He wanted to know whether they tended to become officials or politicians. He also asked how the mass media involved themselves in such initiatives.

Mrs I Gusti Ayu DARSINI (Indonesia) said that there was a system in Indonesia for giving some education to visitors to Parliament. She asked what topics were chosen for lectures to students about Parliament. She asked how students' activities were paid for.

Mme Hélène PONCEAU (France) congratulated Mr HARRIS on his presentation. In both the National Assembly and the Senate in France there were special departments for education. They produced more austere documents than the one that had been demonstrated. They did not try to amuse as well as to educate. Nonetheless, there were some cartoon documents produced which were quite popular. There were some plans to introduce games and role-play. In addition, in France a Parliament was held for children. Despite the best intentions, all these instruments probably did not reach young people as much as they should. The difficulty in France was producing material in a light-hearted way was the risk that parliamentarians might think that they were being held up to ridicule.

Mr Pitoon PUMHIRAN (Thailand) said that cartoon material was produced in Thailand about the role of parliamentarians. In addition, seminars were held for secondary school children.

Mrs Lulu MATYOLO (South Africa) said that in South Africa the Public Education Office educated the public about their rights under the Constitution. It focused on rural women and on children. It produced reading material. It also produced educational material for use in schools.

In addition, an interschool competition was sponsored with the winners arriving to debate in Parliament itself. Recently, some schools had established shadow Parliaments. One school even had an annual appropriation debate. For financial reasons, there had been some limits set to this competition. Further, a system had been introduced whereby some schoolchildren shadowed particular ministers. The three universities around Cape Town sent students to Parliament on attachment.

Dr Yogendra NARAIN (India) thanked the President for his contribution. He had heard the presentation in Canada at the Speaker's conference. There had been widespread interest in the initiative described. He noted that in India Youth Parliaments were held. This initiative was being extended throughout states and provinces. In order to celebrate the 200th session of the Upper House a special seminar had been held on the role and relevance of the Upper House. This had been very useful and a lot of Members and former Members had attended. A web site had been established, which was a useful tool for interacting with the public. He would have thought that secondary school and university students were a better level for a target audience.

Mr Brissi Lucas GUEHI (Cote d'Ivoire) thanked the President for his presentation. He was very impressed. In Cote d'Ivoire there were also mock Parliaments. He had organised a mock Parliament for secondary school and university students. However, resources were limited. He would like to have someone deal with mock Parliaments on a permanent basis. These activities could create a sense of patriotism, which was very useful at the present time of crisis in Cote d'Ivoire. He asked whether the material shown could be used in Cote d'Ivoire.

Mr Hans-Peter GERSCHWILER (Switzerland) said that he was very favourably impressed by the Australian experience. He said that in Switzerland about 10 years previously all secondary schools had had material sent to them. Teachers had been invited to Parliament and had held a mock Parliament. The squeeze on resources had meant that there had been a change of approach towards interactive aids on the Internet. A web site had been set up. It was now possible to help teachers more systematically.

Mr Seppo TIITINEN (Finland) said that the most innovative point had been the enlargement of the target group to include very young children. He said this raised one question: what educational research had been carried out before the system had been set up and what the results were of that research.

Mrs Marie-Francoise PUCETTI (Gabon) congratulated Mr HARRIS on his presentation. She said that she also had organised mock Parliaments, which followed the session of the real Parliament. There was also an organised programme to host children visiting Parliament.

Mr Hans BAKKER (Netherlands) said that the Dutch Parliament had been looking for a good educational concept for children in the 12 to 16 age range. Each year in the Netherlands a mock Parliament was held which involved about 200 children, who were invited to debate in Parliament. The real Speaker chaired the mock Parliament and ministers attended. He noted that in Denmark and Norway excellent mock Parliaments were held, but that this was very expensive. He asked about the cost of the Australian initiative and whether it would be possible to copy that concept.

Mr Vergara BENJAMIN (Mexico) congratulated Mr HARRIS on his contribution. In Mexico a mock Parliament had been held involving boys and girls. Presentations and Communications had been made and there had been debates. About 300 children had taken part. Brochures and books were given out to children who participated. In 2003 a parallel election had been held by children.

Mr Anders FORSBERG (Sweden) said that in Sweden the Youth Parliament had been held. This had discussed drug trafficking in advance of the real debate in Parliament. The results of the children's debate informed the debate in Parliament. The regional press gave good coverage to the children's Parliament.

Mr Mohamed Salifou TOURÉ (Guinea) thanked Mr HARRIS for his presentation. He said that he was a teacher by training and hoped that the document would be translated into French and published more widely.

Mr Ian HARRIS, President thanked his colleagues for their kind attention. He noted that his contribution might well have formed part of the Tuesday's debate. Mrs Lank had talked about getting to children before cynicism set in. Like Mr TOURÉ, originally he had been teacher and this initiative had been aimed at children who were at a vital age. The concept tried to create an understanding of the principles of parliamentary democracy which would last throughout the children's lives.

As far as staff resources were concerned, not a great deal was needed. The initiative was run by the Education Office, which had a staff of six people. The biggest resource was involved in training the teachers who are acting as guides for the children.

There was also a programme of interfacing with universities. The students who were visited were very lucky. The Speaker of the House of Representatives and he went under the Chatham House rule, i.e. , nothing that was said in the room was repeated anywhere else. He had been struck by the conservatism of university students. Out of 2000 students who had taken part in this exercise there had only been one rebel, and he had been dealt with within the group of students.

The cost of this exercise was not great. It was absorbed within the budget of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Much of the expenditure had been recouped from royalties received. He hoped that it would work elsewhere. The main aim was not to raise money! He had not selected the animals illustrated, but it had been thought that birds were less fearsome! He hoped to share this programme as much as possible

Mock Parliaments were a very good idea. But very often mock Parliaments emphasised conflict between political groups. He thought that the type of training represented by the Parliament of Birds went against the TV short slot approach, which only showed the conflict at Parliamentary Question Time.

He emphasised that the initiative had only been going for one year. He still had to evaluate its impact. He noted the contribution of Mme PONCEAU and affirmed that it was necessary to make sure that Members of Parliament were happy with the way in which Parliament was presented. He said that Members of Parliament in Australia were happy with the association of the Member for rainforests etc.

Mr PUMHIRAN had noted the Thai experience, and it was clear that the Thai sense of fun informed their approach. He was happy to share the concept with South Africa. It was important to remember that children no longer used books exclusively , but also relied on videos for education. This needed to be remembered when building such programmes. The research on which the programme had been based was centred on the wildlife which was featured in the video and had been carried out by senior Parliamentary staff. Feedback was being received from teachers about what part of the programme worked. It was interesting to hear that children paralleled the real debate in Parliament in Sweden, as well as having committees chaired by real members.