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by

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on

**“Challenges and opportunities for the digital transformation of parliaments:
the case of Argentina, with special reference to artificial intelligence
technologies”**

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As of December 2019, when Sergio Massa became the Speaker of the Argentine House of Deputies, position now held by Cecilia Moreau—the first woman in the history of our country to do so—, our goal has been very clear: to initiate an innovation process that leads to the creation of the Congress of the future. The General Secretariat of the Speaker’s Office has been working hard to achieve this aim by means of a variety of projects and tasks.

The process of digital transformation, which started as soon as we took office, accelerated and extended due to an unexpected event, the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of an adverse scenario, we had to adapt, be creative and work out solutions using the available technology tools to keep one of the cornerstones of our Republic, that is, the legislative branch, running.

I speak of “digital transformation” because it works as an umbrella term that covers all the projects we have been carrying out in the different areas of the House to help every employee fulfil their daily tasks, provide access to public information to every citizen and improve overall performance in the legislative sphere. For the almost three-year period we have been in office, we have firmly focused on the optimization of processes and the improvement of management and performance, to which the use of digital tools is essential.

The world is subject to constant changes, which require public institutions to rapidly adapt to emerging demands and implement the ways of managing provided by new technologies. The adoption of flexible methodologies, making decisions with boldness and bonding with the different social sectors are some of the means through which we can achieve institutional objectives in a more efficient, comprehensive and transparent way. Our House is not alien to the global scenario, which allowed for the development of different digital systems and apps to modernize how we work and interact both internally and externally.

In this context, the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the House of Deputies has been, without a doubt, a key point of what we set out to do. Together with a team of scientists from the Argentine National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), we carried out the project “Intelligent Parliament,” the first algorithm to be specifically created and used by a legislative body in Argentina. An AI application that works with the Latent Dirichlet

Allocation (LDA) algorithm was designed and used to analyze all the speeches made by the deputies since 2005. This means that the algorithm goes through every discourse, identifies the co-occurrence of words and extracts forty topics without being monitored. The results are currently available and can be accessed freely through our website.

Similarly, together with the International Center for Parliamentary Studies, Research, and Forward-Looking Planning of the Austral University School of Government, the Open Government Institute of the Zeppelin University from Germany and the Hellenic Optical Character Recognition Team—a crowdsourcing initiative led by experts from Greece and other countries—, we carried out the first diagnosis, anticipation and projection applying AI technologies to the Argentine House of Deputies. Using a specifically designed methodology, which had already been implemented by the Greek and German congresses, Argentina was the third country in the world and the first one in Latin America to undergo this thorough analysis aimed at transforming the digital systems used by the Parliament and incorporating AI to the decision-making process and the parliamentarian management. Fostering international cooperation and sharing our findings enables us, in the future, to agree on an agenda jointly created with other parliaments worldwide to increase shared knowledge based on real institutional data.

What I have just outlined is only the beginning of a process that needs to consolidate as a State policy: technology and innovation at the service of common good. In fact, I strongly believe that we cannot think of the future of the legislative branch without including AI in the work plan.

In addition, I would like to point out a series of events of extreme importance to the Argentine House of Deputies. On the one hand, on 13 May 2020, within the framework of COVID-19 pandemic, we held the first remote sitting in Argentine history and deputies were able to meet from their own provinces. The drafting of protocols ruling virtual sittings and their adoption was agreed by all political blocs. This transformation entailed a great effort made by the House employees and joint work done with ARSAT, Argentina's leading telecommunications company, including penetration testing and ethical hacking to identify security issues that may arise and, later on, to repair them or improve the system to avoid

future attacks. We have also created a new voting system through which deputies are given a device to log in and cast their votes using their fingerprint. On the other hand, a virtual classroom to host training activities addressing topics related to digital communication and cybersecurity was created.

Given that moving forward necessarily involves being inclusive and gender-sensitive, this is another challenge we have taken on. In the context of an unequal society, the emergence of an excluding technological paradigm or, at least, one which reflects the same issues we find offline is to be expected. Thus, it is hardly surprising that men are still those who most probably have access to these developments. We need to rise up to the challenge and avoid the use of mechanisms that perpetuate patterns of inequality in terms of gender, race and class, which widen the gap between the society we belong to and how we would like it to be. Driven by this desire, we have designed the Gender-Sensitive Strategic Program for Digital Inclusion to put an end to the old practices that perpetuate obsolete behavioral patterns.

To conclude, I would like to share with you another historical event: the implementation of the digitalization of over 15 million documents, including parliamentary records containing information from 1854 until 2019. By giving rise to a more efficient way of working, which optimizes access to public information, and sharing it, this event marks a paradigm shift. It also enables using less paper, producing less waste and reducing our carbon footprint. Sustainability must be the beacon leading the way for all technological developments in the field of public management. The protection of the environment and the development of sustainable initiatives are going to be unavoidable issues for the State-led development of modern societies.

Thank you very much for giving me the possibility of sharing our contribution to this serious discussion and for remaining open to ideas that may broaden and improve our experience.