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**COMMUNICATION**

**by**

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**on**

**“Stronger together - Cooperation between parliamentary administrations”**

**Luanda Session**

**October 2023**

If , as is often said, parliaments are the engine room of democracy, then we as parliamentary administrations are the cogs in the wheel that keep the engine running. And like with every engine, it needs a little oil from time to time to ensure that the gears can continue to do their job reliably. And, to put it in more contemporary terms, every computer also needs an update from time to time. In our case, such an update lies in mutual exchange. The exchange of information, ideas and best practices to make our administrations fit for new challenges and to ensure that the members of our houses can do their work for the benefit of citizens.

For this reason, I also very much appreciate meeting in this round – the diverse insights, interesting discussions and instructive input. For our house, as I am sure is true for most of you, mutual exchange is only one aspect of several when it comes to the topic of “cooperation between parliamentary administrations”. Today I would like to share with you some thoughts on the topic of cooperation in the context of providing advice and support measures from the perspective of a relatively small administration in terms of numbers, and in doing so highlighting the different ways of using synergies in accordance with the motto of my intervention today, “stronger together”.

1. Where and how we get involved

At the beginning of every measure there is a request from a partner parliament, which may be addressed directly to us or to one of our partners with whom we cooperate in this area. Ideally, the request should already include specific ideas as to the areas and context in which the support shall to be provided.

When selecting the projects in which we get involved, we have to exercise a certain restraint simply because of our limited staff numbers – 200 people from the Secretary General to the doorman – in order to be able to live up to our aspiration of providing good quality advice. However, it is also important to us to show that good quality and efficient work can also be carried out by small administrations.

We focus our engagement primarily on projects that are aimed at advising other second chambers. This is where our greatest expertise lies. At the same time, however, we see ourselves – generally and independently of whether we are dealing with a first or second chamber – as a point of contact when it comes to questions of federalism or decentralisation.

Against the background of our limited staff resources, we welcome very much if our experts can concentrate on advising on the content, while the administrative implementation is carried out by third parties. In the past, we have had very positive experience in cooperating with INTER PARES, a European organisation that supports peer-to-peer parliamentary cooperation projects, or with German political foundations.

2. What is important to us

When we get involved in providing advice, two things are particularly important to us: on the one hand, cooperation on an equal footing and, on the other hand, the sustainability of our involvement.

Together with our partners, we want to develop customised solutions for the needs on the ground. We understand our procedures as a way of shaping parliamentary processes. But what works for us does not necessarily work for others. Therefore, with the help of our colleagues from the partner parliament, we depend on first developing an understanding of the local conditions, regulations and customs which can form the basis on which joint solutions can be developed that work for our partners. Peer-to-peer exchanges, i.e. the exchange of best practices among colleagues, can be a basis for real cooperation.

Sustainable involvement is typically not limited to one-off contributions, but develops over a longer period of time. Ideally, at the end of the process there will be a specific product. For example, in 2016 and 2017, together with colleagues from the German Bundestag and in cooperation with the Parliament in Myanmar, we set up a visitors’ service in Myanmar and developed information leaflets for public relations work. Last year, in cooperation with the French Senate, we developed recommendations for the drafting of bills and amendments with colleagues from the Côte d'Ivoire Senate. We will continue this work by running practical workshops in the near future. The use of video conferencing technology has made a lot of this easier as it allows us to follow and accompany the progress of such projects much more closely. And I would like to explicitly encourage colleagues who request such a measure to accept the offer to contact the partners even after completion of the official measure if there are any issues with the implementation or if there are still open questions, with a view to continuing the cooperation.

3. Lessons learned

The Corona pandemic has just shown us that many agreements, negotiations, talks and similar can also be successfully conducted at a distance via video link. However, we have also found that virtual encounters cannot completely replace real ones. Of course, this also applies to peer-to-peer advice. It thrives on the personal contact with the staff members who participate in the project and on the trust that is built up in the process. However, technology is a valuable addition, as constant on-site visits are not realistic in the course of a project and ongoing contact can be maintained via video link.

And this brings me to the next point: the provision of successful advice requires and costs time – on both sides. Staff members usually get involved in addition to their daily responsibilities. We therefore also have to make sure that we are mindful of our most valuable resources, our staff members. This means that a sufficient time budget must be taken into account in the planning of advisory projects.

Another aspect I would like to point out is the importance of coordination with other stakeholders. We can only achieve custom-made solutions if the advice is consistent not only for one chamber, but for the entire parliamentary body, for a country. For many issues, it would therefore make sense to work on a larger rather than on a smaller scale, for example, to provide advice to and from first and second chambers together.

Last but not least, with regard to our project in Myanmar, we had to learn the hard way that even the best planning and implementation are no guarantee for long-term success if the political circumstances change. Political stability is therefore an essential factor and the basis for the success of any advisory project – which, however, we cannot influence.

This should not, however, stop us from continuing to get involved where advice and cooperation are sought, where we can contribute to making the wheels of democracy run even more smoothly – both for our partners and for us in our houses because, as a rule, we are stronger together when it comes to cooperation between parliamentary administrations.