

OECD Report on Parliamentary Procedures and Relations



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OECD REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES AND RELATIONS

This is the final report based on responses to the "Questionnaire on Parliamentary Procedures and Relations" [PUMA/LEG(2000)1], as well as comments on the first draft report [PUMA/LEG(2000)2] received by 31 December 2000.

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OECD REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES AND RELATIONS

I. BACKGROUND

1. The OECD has long emphasised the vital role of good governance in achieving economic development and social cohesion. As an inter-governmental organisation, the OECD recognises the need to engage in dialogue with other key players in the policy-making process, including parliaments. As a consequence, when analysing the challenges posed by the changing context of governance, the OECD's Public Management Service (PUMA) has widened the scope of its purview to examine issues such as relations between the executive and legislative and the contribution of civil society to policy-making.

2. This report presents the main findings of the OECD survey of "Parliamentary Procedures and Relations" based on responses received from legislatures in 28 Member countries¹ as well as the European Parliament. This survey of executive-legislature relations was the first of its kind to be undertaken by PUMA. The first draft of the report was submitted to the annual plenary meeting of the Conference of Presidents of EU Parliaments held in Rome (23-24 September 2000). It was also tabled for discussion at the meeting of senior officials from Centres of Government in OECD Member countries held in Budapest (6-7 October 2000). The report represents a first step for PUMA's work on, and with, Parliaments to be developed in the future.

3. The origins of this report lie in the invitation of Luciano Violante, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Chair of the Working Group on the Quality of Legislation of the Conference of Presidents of EU Parliaments, to the Secretary General of the OECD, Donald Johnston, to attend a meeting of the Working Group in Cogne, Italy (31 March - 1 April 2000). At this meeting the Secretary General offered the OECD's support in the form of a comparative review of legislatures in OECD Member countries – an offer which was welcomed by the Working Group. The questionnaire used in the survey was developed by PUMA in close co-operation with the Research Service of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, while the draft report was subject to 'peer review' by a group of parliamentary officials and circulated among all OECD Member countries.

4. The report's findings contribute to the OECD's ongoing work on governance, by providing a preliminary review of relations between the executive, the legislature and civil society in the majority of its Member countries. This exploratory review will provide the basis for PUMA's future work on relations between Executive and Legislature in OECD Member countries, with particular reference to the quality of legislation produced, the use of public resources and capacity for parliamentary oversight.

Objective

5. The report aims to provide a comparative overview of selected aspects of the internal procedures and external relations of legislatures in 28 OECD Member countries and the European Parliament. The emphasis throughout is on how these procedures and relations work *in practice* rather than on the detailed

¹ In the period between the survey's distribution on 14 June and 31 December 2000, a total of 28 country responses had been received from: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK.

legal provisions governing them. By focusing on a number of key functions of parliament, the report highlights issues of common concern and illustrates the range of possible institutional responses.

6. The report is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It represents a first attempt to capture key features of the public management of parliaments as well as their interactions with government and civil society. The survey used open-ended questions allowing parliaments full discretion over how they chose to describe their role, functions and working methods. While this methodological approach reduced the possibility of strict comparisons, it also produced a rich variety of examples.

7. The report identifies key trends based on country responses to the survey, describes recent innovations and highlights concrete examples of good practice in a series of 'boxes' in four main sections:

- *Relations between Parliament and Government*: focuses on the key role of information.
- *Selected parliamentary procedures*: reviews internal procedures, the role of individual members of parliament and support services.
- *Relations between Parliament and society*: examines interactions with citizens, NGOs and academia.
- *Promising practices*: presents parliamentary initiatives in response to new governance challenges.

Context

8. Democracy has been described as a system of 'government by debate' in which legislatures represent the foremost arena. Legislatures in OECD Member countries are highly diverse, reflecting a wide range of constitutional settings and historical paths of development (see Table 1). The format, functions and role of the legislature in a given country depends upon the structure of the state and the political system – which also determines its relationship with the executive.

9. The form and size of the legislature varies across OECD Member countries in which both unicameral (e.g. Finland) and bicameral (e.g. Mexico) models are to be found. In bicameral legislatures the upper chamber may represent sub-national units in federal states (e.g. the US Senate, Germany's *Bundesrat*) or be the result of historical tradition (e.g. the UK House of Lords). The relative authority of the two chambers also varies – they may have equal powers of law-making (e.g. Italy), the lower chamber may always outweigh the upper chamber (e.g. Canada, UK) or usually do so except in certain cases (e.g. Germany). Other factors affecting the effective role and exercise of constitutional powers by legislatures include the type of electoral system, party system and partisan balance at a given point of time.

10. The legislative framework and organisational structures governing the activities of legislatures are also diverse. However, all legislatures in democratic countries fulfil a core set of functions, including:

- *Representation* - of a broad cross-section of interests through popular election of its members.
- *Law-making* - whereby policy preferences are translated into legislation, through the articulation and reconciliation of conflicting values and interests.
- *Oversight* - and monitoring of the executive, the effectiveness of which depends upon the legislature's formal powers, capacity, and willingness to act.

11. This survey covered both the law-making and oversight functions of legislatures. While it did not address representation in the traditional sense, it did explore how legislatures establish relations with citizens *other* than through the ballot box - for example through public hearings and consultation.

Survey responses

12. The OECD Member countries which participated in the survey cover all the general typologies defined in the literature, namely: presidential (e.g. Mexico)²; parliamentary (e.g. Australia, the Netherlands, Norway) and semi-presidential (e.g. France). Answers were received from 16 countries with bicameral legislatures and 12 countries with unicameral legislatures.

13. The majority of the responses were submitted directly by the legislatures themselves - in the case of Canada, Japan, Norway and Switzerland the centre of government replied following consultation with the legislature (see Table 2). As regards bicameral legislatures, the questionnaire was completed by the lower chamber in 7 cases (often including information on the other house), the upper chamber in 1 case (Poland), both chambers separately (Czech Republic, France, Mexico and UK) or jointly (Australia).³

14. The European Parliament also participated in the survey. While it represents a rather special case as a supra-national assembly, it shared several characteristics with counterparts at the national level.

² Among the OECD Member countries, the US Congress is the legislature operating under the strongest system of separation of powers. It did not participate in this survey.

³ The terms “lower” and “upper” do not imply hierarchical relations between the two chambers and are generic terms which may not reflect the particular national context to be found in each OECD Member country. The “lower” chamber here denotes the larger of the two with direct election of its members at the national level, while the “upper” chamber denotes the chamber with fewer members selected on the basis of territorial representation (e.g. Austria, Germany) or other criteria (e.g. hereditary peers in the UK; indirect election in the Netherlands).

II. RELATIONS BETWEEN PARLIAMENT & GOVERNMENT

➤ Information from government to parliament is key to law-making, implementation & oversight

Overview of main trends

- Parliamentary information requirements for draft legislation are often limited to budget impacts – new procedures, such as regulatory impact assessment, have yet to become widespread.
- Legislatures rarely demand, or receive, systematic information from government on implementation – and make little use of such information during law-making even where provided.
- Parliamentary capacity for oversight is growing – notably through closer ties with Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) and the establishment of Ombudsman offices.

1. Information from Government for law making

15. All of the 28 OECD legislatures who responded to the questionnaire reported that laws submitted by government are accompanied by supplementary information. The nature and amount of information required may be defined by government orders and regulations (e.g. Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France) or by parliament's standing orders (e.g. Czech Republic, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey). In a few countries (e.g. Greece, Spain and Poland) this information requirement is stipulated in the Constitution. In the case of certain bicameral legislatures, different chambers may impose different requirements on government. For example, Ireland's *Seanad* (Senate) requires government bills to be accompanied by supplementary information while this is not the case for those submitted to the *Dáil* (House of Representatives).

Impact assessment requirements

16. The nature, scope and amount of detail of the information provided by the executive ranges widely – from a brief explanation of the objectives and legal context of the draft law to a fully-fledged regulatory impact analysis (RIA). Two-thirds of the respondents reportedly received information on the expected impact on the state budget, reflecting a relatively widespread and consolidated practice. Luxembourg has recently introduced the requirement that all draft legislation and proposed amendments with an impact on the state budget be accompanied by a 'financial fiche' setting out the short, medium and long-term budgetary implications.

17. Half of the respondents reported receiving information on the estimated impacts on business and households, while a third received information on the expected impacts on the public administration. The depth and scope of the information provided is not clear from responses to this survey. Other PUMA work indicates that a full assessment of the compliance costs and benefits for citizens and businesses is seldom done when making law. Only a few OECD Member countries (e.g. Denmark, Italy) have taken the first steps towards adopting this practice. In Italy, minority parliamentary groups also have the right to request a technical report on the expected impacts of new draft legislation from government.

18. In a few countries, legislatures also received assessments of the impacts on the environment (e.g. Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland), as well as on gender equity and human rights (e.g. Norway). In the particular case of international treaties submitted to Parliament, New Zealand requires a 'National Interest Analysis' setting out the advantages, disadvantages and costs of compliance of

becoming party to the treaty. Several respondents cited a requirement for examining the compatibility of proposed legislation with obligations under international law or European Community law (e.g. EU Member States such as Denmark and the UK as well as candidate countries such as Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland).

19. In some countries, a one-page summary of the key information contained in the explanatory notes is required (Austria, Belgium, Germany) as a means to inform members of parliament, the media, and the general public on new legislative initiatives. In other cases (e.g. Denmark) draft legislation is accompanied by a one-page written introductory speech describing the broad outline of the bill and the reasons for it. In Canada, briefing packages explaining legislation initiated by the Government are provided to Members of Parliament (MPs), Senators and the media, while briefing books on the specific clauses are provided to members of House and Senate committees.

20. Legislatures in OECD Member countries have the right to initiate legislation. Half of the respondents reported that parliamentary draft laws were subject to similar information requirements as those prepared by government. However, they also reported that in practice the analysis is usually less thorough and rests upon the research of individual MPs or that of the parliamentary services. In the case of Norway, draft legislative texts prepared by members of the *Storting* are forwarded to the Government who undertakes the analysis of its consequences.

Box 1

FINLAND: EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Finland is one of the few countries to have undertaken an evaluation of impact assessment as it is conducted in practice. A recent study by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy and Parliament found that one-third of the draft laws submitted to the *Eduskunta* in 1998 had not been accompanied by an impact assessment – due either to their omission or because it was assumed that their consequences would be negligible. The impact on public finances had been studied in about 60 per cent of the cases, the effects on private finances had been evaluated in 25 per cent of the cases, while the consequences for households were estimated in only 15 per cent of the cases. Pressures of work and the difficulty of obtaining information on the expected effects of draft legislation were cited as the main causes.

Parliamentary capacity to check information received

21. The majority of the respondents take steps to verify the accuracy of the information supplied by the government when submitting a draft law. These ranged from simply requesting additional information from the government to undertaking in-depth expert reviews. In most countries, the basic instrument for verification remains the right of individual members and parliamentary committees to demand information from the government in the form of written or oral reports.

22. A number of legislatures rely mainly on their own services (e.g. Australia, Canada, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Portugal) or on external experts (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway) or on both (e.g. Germany) to conduct detailed evaluations of government impact assessment information. Legislatures in many OECD countries devote particular attention to examining government estimates of financial impact. To this end, several have equipped themselves with specialised bodies (e.g. the Committee for Expenditures of the *Tweede Kamer* in the Netherlands; the Budgetary Services of both chambers in Italy) or have developed close partnerships with external sources of expertise such as the General Directorate of Public Accounts (e.g. Greece) or the Supreme Audit Institution (e.g. France).

2. Information from Government on implementation

23. The survey questionnaire asked whether legislatures received information on how laws are implemented in practice and their actual results - and 'implementation' is used here in the broader context of the full policy-making cycle.

24. In the majority of the OECD countries participating in the survey, no mechanism for systematic reporting to parliament on implementation exists. However, almost half of the respondents noted that individual laws may include provisions for periodic reporting to parliament on their implementation. These provisions may be widely used (e.g. Germany, Italy, the Netherlands) or relatively rare (e.g. Canada, New Zealand).

25. Several sources of general information on the implementation of government policy or legislative programme were mentioned in the country responses. These include: annual presentations to the legislature by the head of executive (e.g. Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico); information on the implementation of existing legislation accompanying new draft laws (e.g. Norway); annual reports by government (e.g. Finland); and government policy documents which include a review of the current situation (e.g. UK 'White Papers'). In 1996 the *Assemblée Nationale* (House of Representatives) and *Sénat* (Senate) of France established two new joint bodies: one to evaluate legislation, the other public policy. Both are required to monitor the consequences of legislative and budgetary decisions.

26. The extent to which parliament dedicates time in its committee or plenary meetings to the review and discussion of such information on implementation appears to vary widely. At one extreme, a few parliaments reported dedicating substantial amounts of time (Denmark, Netherlands) to the review of implementation. Others noted that parliament rarely reviews reports on implementation (e.g. Italy).

27. Very few legislatures replied to the survey question which asked whether information on implementation received from the executive is actually used in subsequent law-making. Those that did respond generally reported that they rarely made use of information on implementation (e.g. Italy, New Zealand, Poland) when making law – the notable exception being Mexico's *Cámara de Diputados* which reported a 'wide use' of such information. In a few countries (e.g. Belgium, France, Korea), parliament conducts regular reviews of government progress in issuing secondary legislation and regulations.

Box 2

KOREA: PARLIAMENT'S CONTRIBUTION TO RAISING THE QUALITY OF REGULATION

All decrees, ordinances, instructions, notices and regulations issued by the President, Prime Minister or Ministers regarding the execution of laws are submitted to the *Kuk Hoe* within 7 days of their legislation, amendment or repeal. The relevant parliamentary committee then checks they are consistent with the terms established by law. If the committee concludes that they are not in accordance with the purpose or content of the law, such a conclusion may be notified to the head of the ministry responsible so that an alternative may be developed.

3. Information for parliamentary oversight

28. An important means of exercising parliamentary oversight is offered by ministers' obligation to respond to questions by members of parliament, either orally or in writing. Over half of the respondents mentioned this provision explicitly, but it is one which is common to most OECD Member countries. There are often fixed time limits within which ministers must reply or, failing this, provide an explanation for the lack of response. These range from a few days (e.g. 6 days in Denmark and Norway; 7 in Japan) or a few weeks (e.g. 3 weeks in the Netherlands), to a few months (e.g. 2 months in Austria). The

effectiveness of such requirements rest upon the ultimate sanction held by parliaments in many OECD Member countries, namely the power to dismiss the government.

29. In a number of OECD Member countries, legislatures have established special organs of control - notably to track budget execution and the actions of public administration. In Australia, the Senate legislation committees acquire information and report on estimates of all proposed government expenditures through the 'estimates examination procedure'. The Committee for Expenditures of the *Tweede Kamer* in the Netherlands is charged with the critical review of both the proposed budget and the previous year's accounts. Similar functions are discharged by the Public Accounts Committee of the UK House of Commons. In Luxembourg, parliamentary control of budgetary execution is carried out by a specific parliamentary commission which is chaired by a member of the opposition. In those OECD countries in which the Supreme Audit Institution currently reports to the government, parliamentary auditors play a crucial role in ensuring oversight in the use of public funds (Sweden and Finland).⁴ A similar function is assured by the Committee on Budget Control of the European Parliament (EP), which conducts an annual assessment of the European Commission's use of funds before granting a 'discharge' on the implementation of the budget.

30. Parliamentary committees to exercise parliamentary oversight of public authorities have been established in a number of countries (e.g. Greece, Sweden) while Korea's *Kuk Hoe* (National Assembly) conducts an annual inspection of the state administration.⁵

Box 3

FRANCE: STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENT'S CAPACITY TO MONITOR BUDGET POLICY AND REGULATIONS

In 1999, France's *Assemblée Nationale* established a permanent mission of evaluation and control (*Mission permanente d'évaluation et de contrôle* - MEC) to support the work of the Finance Committee in evaluating and correcting budget policy. The co-presidents are drawn from the majority and the opposition. Committees of the *Sénat* undertake systematic reviews of the application of legislation passed by parliament and identify any delays in the issue of government regulations. The results of these reviews are compiled and published as an annual report.

31. Parliamentary commissions on access to information (e.g. Portugal) and data protection (e.g. Austria, Czech Republic) and the control of secret services (e.g. Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal) also report directly to parliament which thereby ensures effective oversight of these highly sensitive areas.

Reporting by independent institutions

32. The Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) represents the main organ for parliamentary oversight in the vast majority of the OECD countries participating in the survey. Most respondents described the national SAI as an independent authority whose head is appointed by the legislature and which reports directly to it. There are few exceptions, notably in the case of European Court of Auditors (where the European Parliament expresses an opinion on candidates nominated by Council). A similar situation holds in Japan and Korea, where the head of the SAI is nominated by the executive with the consent of parliament. In

⁴ Under Finland's new Constitution, which entered into force on 1 March 2000, the State Audit Office is no longer under the direct authority of the government but is a fully independent body. It will provide its first report to the *Eduskunta* and other national authorities in 2001. The parliamentary auditors will be maintained. Similar reforms are proposed in Sweden under which a new Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) would be established on 1 January 2003 and would report its findings annually to the *Riksdag*.

⁵ Judicial review by the courts is, of course, another important non-parliamentary source of control and a means for holding governments accountable for their actions.

both cases, the independence of the SAI is ensured by law, but its annual reports are transmitted to parliament via the executive. All respondents reported that the legislature has the right to address the SAI directly with a request to conduct an audit investigation. The reports submitted by the SAI are generally discussed at the committee level (e.g. Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden), but may also be the subject of a plenary debate (e.g. Austria, Finland, Greece, Portugal).

33. Parliamentary Commissioners or Ombudsman are almost equally widespread and have been established in three-quarters of the countries participating in the survey. They are appointed directly by Parliament and may undertake investigations at their request. The same is true for the European Ombudsman appointed by the European Parliament. Some countries have established parliamentary commissioners for specific domains, such as data protection and privacy (e.g. Canada, Hungary) and health services (UK). Ombudsman reports submitted directly to parliament provide a valuable ‘barometer’ of public satisfaction with the public administration’s performance.

Box 4

BELGIUM: THE OMBUDSMAN AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT

The Federal Ombudsmen Office (FOO) was established in 1995 as an independent parliamentary authority. Belgium's *Chambre des Représentants* (House of Representatives) nominates the Ombudsmen, approves the budget, receives an annual report. The independence of the FOO is assured by law (art. 7, Federal Ombudsman Act of 2 March 1995) which stipulates that Ombudsmen do not receive instructions from other state authorities nor can they be removed from office for actions undertaken within the scope of their mandate. The *Chambre des Représentants* may, however, request the FOO to undertake investigations of the federal administration.

The FOO examines complaints brought against federal administrative authorities; indicates shortcomings in existing legislation and makes recommendations to improve the public administration. Its powers of investigation are wide – the Ombudsmen can acquire all documentation considered necessary, impose binding deadlines for reply on public officials, hear all persons concerned and waive any obligation to maintain confidentiality (by virtue of their profession or status) of those heard in the course of an inquiry.

34. Several other independent authorities submit reports to the legislature for their information, such as the National Bank (e.g. Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Mexico);⁶ the National Statistical Agency (e.g. Denmark, Hungary, Italy) and sectoral regulatory authorities (e.g. Hungary). Australia's Senate examines the performance of government agencies in administering legislation. In New Zealand, each public agency and authority is subject to an annual review by the relevant parliamentary committee to be completed within 6 months of receiving the agency's annual report. The committee also examines the report of the Auditor General and holds an oral examination of the agency’s chief officer in public.

35. Legislatures also play an important role in appointing or confirming senior appointments to key public institutions such as: the Constitutional Court (e.g. Korea, Portugal); the National Council of Magistrates (e.g. Hungary, Portugal); the Stock Exchange Board (e.g. Hungary); the Public Broadcasting Board (e.g. Austria, Finland,); the National Elections Commission (e.g. Hungary, Mexico, Portugal); Boards of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and utilities (e.g. Greece); and independent regulatory authorities (e.g. Austria, Hungary, Italy, Mexico).

⁶ Note that the President of the European Central Bank is *required* to present the Annual Report to the plenary session of the European Parliament.

Innovative procedures and practices: reviewing and modernising laws

Several OECD Member countries are considering reforms of law-making procedures which would increase attention to the 'zero-option' – that is, the avoidance of new legislation and the consideration of other policy options or instruments (e.g. Germany). Others have undertaken major initiatives to review, systematise and codify existing laws – Sweden, for example, has done so regularly since the 1980s while Italy has taken similar steps more recently with the 'Annual Simplification Bill' which provides a list of procedures to be streamlined.

The results of these legislative reviews have, in several cases, led to the repeal of obsolete legislation. For example, Austria adopted a framework law rescinding all laws adopted before 1 January 1946 unless specified in a list attached to the law.

III. SELECTED PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

➤ **Parliamentary debates, hearings and support services are evolving to meet new needs**

Overview of main trends

- **Legislatures are developing new forms of debate designed to capture media and public attention and are seeking ways to increase the effectiveness of their decision-making procedures.**
- **Public hearings and parliamentary inquiries are the traditional means by which legislatures access information from other sources and control government action – they continue to play a key role.**
- **Parliamentary work increasingly requires specialised knowledge and professional support – all legislatures recognise the need to strengthen their administrative and expert services.**

1. **Organisation of parliamentary debates**

36. The Rules of Procedures of a given legislature represent the main source of rules regulating the order, timing and organisation of plenary debates. Most set time limits on interventions by members as well as on the number of questions asked, while a rare few (e.g. Finland, Sweden) have adopted the principle of unlimited time for members' speeches. The Speaker (President) of the Parliament plays a key role in enforcing these rules to ensure the smooth progression of parliamentary debates and is vested with wide powers and authority to this end (e.g. right to invite or curtail speeches by members). The task of preparing the agenda for debates and order of interventions often falls to a co-ordinating body (Bureau, Steering Board) including both 'institutional' (e.g. the Speaker and Deputy Speakers) and 'political' figures (e.g. heads of parliamentary groups).

37. Many respondents described recent efforts to improve the quality of parliamentary debates through revisions to the Standing Orders or introduction of new forms of debate. One of the reasons for such reforms was the need to increase the visibility and salience of parliamentary debate to the general public. A number of countries reported recent changes in their laws on parliament or Rules of Procedure which support this objective, including: Finland (Rules of Procedure of 1 March 2000), Japan (1999 Act on the Revitalisation of Diet Deliberation and the establishment of a national policy decision-making system under the leadership of politicians), Korea (National Assembly Act of 16 February 2000) as well as the European Parliament (Rules of Procedure revised in June 1999).

Debates for law-making

38. Legislatures in several countries (e.g. Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan) have made efforts to place greater emphasis on the work of parliamentary standing committees in order to reserve plenary sessions for debates on major issues or aspects of a draft legislation. In 1991, France's *Assemblée Nationale*, introduced the 'simplified examination procedure' which also aimed at strengthening the role of the parliamentary committees leaving the plenary session free to conduct a short discussion of the general issues and an examination of those articles subject to amendments. The European Parliament has developed a set of procedures aimed at facilitating the passage of legislation. These provide a significant degree of flexibility and reduce the time spent on minor issues in plenary session. They include: the 'procedure without debate' for non-controversial issues; 'procedure without report' by which the plenary can approve Commission proposals without debate or a report by the relevant parliamentary committee and the 'simplified procedure' where committees report on the main aspects to plenary without an ensuing debate.

Other debates

39. Half of the respondents reported that the legislature did occasionally hold special sessions to debate specific policy issues. Several others mentioned that while such sessions were possible in principle, they were not held in practice (Ireland, New Zealand, UK). Often such sessions are ‘triggered’ by the submission to parliament of key strategic policy planning documents by government, for example economic forecasting and financial planning documents prepared in support of the annual budget (e.g. Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal).

Box 5

ITALY: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE OF FUTURE GOVERNMENT POLICY

Each year at the end of June, the Government presents its Economic and Financial Programming Document (*Documento di Programmazione Economico e Finanziario*, or DPEF) to Parliament for discussion. This document offers a summary of the government’s sectoral policies, analyses economic and budget trends, sets out policy goals for the following year and the legislative measures required to achieve them. In approving this document, Parliament effectively commits to these public finance goals and accepts to act in accordance with them in the following budget session. Government, on its part, is required to introduce budget proposals and related bills which are consistent with its stated objectives for the subsequent year. Extensive media coverage of the ‘DPEF debate’ provides public opinion with an overview of the government’s strategic plan and the comments of the opposition.

40. Over a third of the respondents mentioned the possibility for members to request, at short notice, that parliament hold a plenary debate on a matter of topical or urgent importance (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mexico, Sweden, UK). Some legislatures have made this a permanent feature. Germany’s *Bundestag*, for example, regularly holds debates on matters of topical interest which last one hour. Limits on the number of such requests may be set (e.g. one request per year for each member of parliament in Austria) and strict guidelines provided for its format (e.g. maximum 5 minutes for interventions in Germany).

2. Organisation of public hearings and parliamentary inquiries

41. Parliamentary hearings are common to all OECD Member countries, while the aims and objectives of parliamentary inquiries cover a large spectrum: from a general examination of an issue of public interest to an investigative inquiry into a specific topic the results of which may have penal implications.

Hearings

42. Committees in all of the 28 national legislatures participating in the survey, as well as the European Parliament, may conduct public hearings on draft legislation in order to collect information from representatives of public and private interest. However, the frequency with which this faculty is exercised varies. In some cases, public hearings are held only rarely (e.g. Czech Republic’s *Senat*, Hungary). In others they are always held on new draft legislation (e.g. New Zealand) or for major budget legislation (e.g. the draft budget in Japan). Over a third of the respondents (Austria, Canada, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Mexico, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland) reported that public hearings may be held on issues of general interest to the committee and not exclusively for the consideration of draft laws.

43. In most cases, parliamentary committees decide whether or not to hold a public hearing by putting the suggestion to vote. The number of votes needed varies (e.g. absolute majority in Belgium; one-third of committee members in Korea). The ease with which this threshold is reached may also depend

upon informal agreement among committee members and established practice. In some cases, preconditions may be placed on the exercise of committee rights to hold public hearings. In Mexico, for example, the decision by a committee of the *Cámara de Diputados* must be approved by the plenary. Members of the government and public officials are generally obliged to attend public hearings when requested by a parliamentary committee and special provisions may hold (e.g. Turkey, Mexico).

Box 6

NEW ZEALAND: MAKING EXTENSIVE USE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS IN LAW-MAKING

Committees of New Zealand's House of Representatives always hold public hearings when examining draft legislation and make every endeavour to hear all members of the public who wish to appear before them. They receive a large amount of public input in both written and oral form. Government is expected to make a report commenting on these public submissions before the committee decides whether to recommend the passage of the legislation or amendments to it.

Inquiries

44. The vast majority of the respondents confirmed the power of parliament to launch inquiries, although the extent to which they make use of their powers of investigation vary. In bicameral legislatures, both chambers may have equal rights to launch inquiries (e.g. Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands) or it may be an exclusive right of the lower chamber (e.g. Czech Republic, Poland). Membership in a parliamentary committee of inquiry is generally reserved to members of parliament. Specific provisions may exist, such as in Hungary where the chair of a parliamentary committee of inquiry is generally reserved for a member of the opposition.

45. The establishment of a parliamentary inquiry may require a qualified majority (e.g. Mexico) or a motion by only a small proportion of the members (e.g. Japan). In several cases, the approval of the main governing body of the legislature (e.g. Austria, Netherlands), its committee on parliamentary procedures (e.g. Denmark) or the plenary itself (e.g. Luxembourg) is needed to launch an inquiry. Additional steps are required in Korea's *Kuk Hoe* where the plenary must first approve an 'Investigation Plan' outlining the purpose, issue, scope, method, period and cost of the inquiry.

46. A third of the respondents described parliamentary committees of inquiry as enjoying extensive powers of investigation - similar in many cases to those of the investigating magistrate or prosecutor (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland). A parliamentary committee of inquiry may have all or some of the following powers: to summon witnesses to testify under oath, demand or seize documents and order on-site inspections. Courts and administrative bodies may be obliged to provide legal and administrative support. Hearings and testimony to parliamentary committees of inquiry may be held in public (e.g. Germany's *Bundestag*, Luxembourg's *Chambre des Députés*, European Parliament) and their results published (e.g. Belgium).

47. Time limits may exist within which parliamentary committees of inquiry must conclude their investigations. A six-month limit applies in France and Portugal (although in the latter case this may be extended by a further three months) while the European Parliament's committees of inquiry must report within 12 months (a period which may be twice extended by three months each time).

3. Parliamentary support services and participation of individual parliamentarians

48. The amount of support enjoyed by individual members of parliament in conducting their duties varies greatly. They may receive support from personal administrative and research assistants, the services of their parliamentary groups, parliamentary staff assigned to the committees on which they serve and,

finally, the general parliamentary services available to all members (library and information service, legal service, research service).

49. Half of the legislatures participating in the survey reported that individual members of parliament were assigned a personal administrative assistant, while individual research assistants were reported somewhat less frequently (e.g. Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Turkey, UK). Members of the *Vouli Ton Ellinon* in Greece, for example, are entitled to four private collaborators - one of which is remunerated by parliament, the other three being detached civil servants.

50. Parliamentary groups proved to be the most common direct recipients of budget allocations for research support, as indicated by half of the responses – resources which were often subsequently re-allocated among individual members of the group. Almost half of the respondents reported that technical and administrative staff are assigned to parliamentary committees to assist members in conducting their work.

51. The size of parliamentary secretariats and the range of services provided varies significantly among the 28 national legislatures participating in the survey. Most have a library or information service, many have legal services while some have dedicated research units. Members of the *Kuk Hoe* in Korea are supported in their work by a secretariat in which the Legislative Counselling Office and the Budgetary Policy Bureau each employ 41 staff. In contrast, the secretariat of Norway's *Storting* has only recently established a research service (currently with a staff of five), and Denmark's *Folketinget* has no such service but instead has recently chosen to strengthen the secretariat of parliamentary standing committees. The European Parliament represents a special case, as it employs 3,500 people of whom a third provide interpretation and translation services, given the parliament's 11 working languages.

Box 7

JAPAN: PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

One the largest support structures for the national legislature in OECD Member countries is that of Japan, where the secretariat of the *Shugiin* (House of Representatives) employs a total of 1,800 persons and the *Sangiin* (House of Councillors) employs about 1,300. Each house has a Legislative Bureau (with a staff of 75 persons) and benefits from a joint National Parliament Library (850 staff) which includes a research service of 160 researchers.

52. Several legislatures are undertaking measures to strengthen their administrative and expert support services. For example, in 1999 a statistics support unit was established within France's *Assemblée Nationale* to assist in parliamentary work. Standing committees in Iceland's *Althingi* have, in the past few years, been strengthened through greater staff and expert support with positive impacts on the quality of legislation passed. The new Organic Law of the General Congress of August 1999, in Mexico introduced a career civil service for Congress support staff and provided for the integration of the libraries of each chamber. Members of the *Cámara de Diputados* now have access to several newly established research services: the Public Finance Department (to assist in the examination of budget and revenue laws), the Law and Parliamentary Studies Department and the Social Studies and Public Opinion Department.

Duties of individual members

53. As general rule, seats on parliamentary committees are allocated to parliamentary groups in proportion to their overall seats in parliament. In turn, the parliamentary groups are generally responsible for assigning individual members of parliament within their groups to serve on committees. The role of *rapporteur* or spokesperson for a given piece of draft legislation is one of the key tasks performed by representatives in many legislatures, and this position is also generally allocated on the basis of

proportionality. In several countries (e.g. Hungary and Italy) it is also possible to appoint a 'minority rapporteur' when the committee presents a given draft law to the plenary session.

54. The number of committees in which an individual member of parliament participates ranged from 'at least one' (e.g. Belgium, France, Japan, Korea, Poland, Sweden) to 'no more than four' (e.g. Mexico). Members who fail to fulfil their duties face sanctions in a number of countries (e.g. Hungary, Korea, Turkey). Switzerland's parliamentary system represents a special case, as none of the members are professional politicians and they maintain their primary occupation while serving as MPs. A number of respondents reported that parliamentarians could attend the meetings of committees of which they were not members (e.g. Australia, Hungary, the Netherlands) and might even propose amendments although not vote (e.g. Belgium, Italy, Poland). An interesting example of inter-parliamentary exchange was mentioned in the responses by Belgium, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands - all of which have developed mechanisms to ensure the participation of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected in their respective countries, when the national parliament meets to discuss European affairs.

Innovative procedures and practices: Parliament's 'Question Time'

Over half of the respondents mentioned the introduction of a regular 'Question Time' in which members of the government answer questions in parliament. These sessions are broadcast live by TV or radio in a number of countries (e.g. Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK). Rules governing the preparation of 'Question Time' vary widely and have a significant impact on the 'element of surprise' inherent in such exchanges and which explains much of their attraction for the general public. In Australia's House of Representatives, 'Question Time' has two distinctive features: questions are put without notice and there is a strict alternation of questions between opposition and government parties. In the case of Finland's Eduskunta, for example, questions are not supplied to ministers in advance and both questions and answers are limited to one minute.

In a third of the countries participating in the survey, ministers are notified of the questions in advance (e.g. Austria, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK). However, in most of these cases during 'Question Time' itself any subsequent questions to the minister are made directly without prior warning. In Sweden, for example, parliamentarians may use all three types available to them (i.e. written questions with written answers; written questions with answers delivered orally; and oral questions and oral responses). Advance notice is given by the European Parliament whose members may submit one written question each to the Speaker, who then forwards them to the Council and Commission before 'Question Time' which is held once every part-session.

IV. RELATIONS BETWEEN PARLIAMENT & SOCIETY

➤ **Parliaments are seeking to increase their openness, transparency and links with civil society**

Overview of main trends

- Legislatures are seeking to balance aspirations for greater openness with the need for arenas – such as closed committee meetings – for non-partisan deliberations which foster better law-making.
- Legislatures are making significant efforts to improve the provision of public information – notably through the use of new technologies – and to provide greater opportunities for consultation.
- While all legislatures acknowledge a growing need for specialist expertise, very few have explored new ways to tap external sources – such as universities and research institutes – on a regular basis.

1. Relations with representatives of public and private interests

55. Among the key preconditions for successful consultation with citizens and non-governmental organisations representing public and private interests are access to information and transparency of decision-making.

Information and openness

56. All of the 28 national legislatures participating in the survey, as well as the European Parliament, have made significant efforts to strengthen their public information services and provide opportunities for tracking the legislative process. Many have long-established traditions of consultation with civil society organisations representing public and private interests, which may rest on formal rules or established practice. Others are taking the first steps in establishing an ‘open parliament’ and are beginning to recognise the opportunities and challenges of this undertaking. Among the factors underlying parliaments' efforts to establish direct relations with civil society are: a) the decline in voter participation which has taken place in most OECD Member countries over the past 20 years and b) the proliferation of non-governmental actors with a claim to represent particular sections of civil society.

57. The plenary sessions of parliament are, as a matter of principle, open to the members of the general public and the media. Many legislatures broadcast their plenary sessions live on television (e.g. Canada, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Korea, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey and the Czech Republic's Chamber of Deputies) or radio (e.g. since 1936 in New Zealand). Some have their own parliamentary television channel (e.g. France, Italy, Mexico, Portugal). While the regular business of the plenary sessions rarely commands large audiences, ‘Question Time’ is of particular interest to viewers and is regularly broadcast in several countries (e.g. Australia, Finland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden).

58. The meetings of standing committees are closed to the public in many legislatures (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Portugal). Several respondents reported that they had the faculty to hold sessions in public if they so wished (e.g. Denmark, , Mexico, Portugal). However, even where committee meetings are held in closed session the minutes of committee meetings and supporting documentation under consideration are often published soon after (e.g. Denmark, Poland). It has been the experience of some legislatures that closed sessions contribute to raising the quality of legislation by providing a ‘depoliticised’ arena in which members of parliament are free to concentrate on the technical aspects of a given draft law (e.g. Finland, Sweden). In other cases (e.g. Ireland, Netherlands) committee

meetings are, as a rule public, and sometimes televised, as a measure to enhance the transparency and public awareness of parliamentary activity.

59. Half of the respondents reported that parliamentary standing committees could decide to hold their hearings in public if committee members so decided (e.g. Canada, France, Hungary, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, UK, the Czech Republic's *Senat* and European Parliament). House and Senate committee hearings in Canada are not only open to the public, some are even televised. Even where hearings were not public, the minutes of the hearings and the evidence presented therein were often published soon after (e.g. Denmark, Spain). Hearings conducted by committees of inquiry represented a special case in many countries. They could be confidential as a rule (e.g. Turkey), upon the decision of committee members (e.g. Korea) or public (e.g. in the Netherlands where they are televised).

60. Many legislatures participating in the survey (e.g. Sweden, New Zealand) have established dedicated public information services for the production and dissemination of information on their activities to members of the public (e.g. brochures, bibliographic services). Others make this the task of the information services serving members of parliament (e.g. Hungary). Information may be delivered through free publications, drop-in visitors centres (e.g. Sweden), or telephone (e.g. Hungary, UK). Parliamentary education programmes also attempt to raise awareness of the role of parliament (e.g. the Education Unit of the UK House of Commons Information Office) - notably among school children. Such is the case of Italy, whose *Camera dei Deputati* has invested considerable effort in establishing closer relations with schools (e.g. through the 'Kids in the Chamber' initiative and training days for entire school classes) while Portugal's *Assembleia da República* has hosted a 'Children's Parliament' with similar objectives. The *Tweede Kamer* in the Netherlands hosts a 'Youth Parliament' and a 'Students Parliament' once a year, both of which are presided over by the Speaker or Deputy Speaker.

Box 8

SWEDEN: PROVIDING INFORMATION ON PARLIAMENT TO THE PUBLIC

Sweden's *Riksdag* operates an Information Centre providing access to published and on-line information about parliamentary work. Visitors can consult parliamentary publications, newspapers and journals in the 'Reader's Corner' while having a cup of coffee, follow the Chamber's debates on video, search the parliamentary databases on-line or attend lectures and debates. They can also write e-mails to MPs or put questions in person during the weekly 'Political cafés' attended by MPs from the same political party.

Consultation

61. The main vehicle for consulting citizens and their representative organisations during law-making remains that of the public hearing (see section 2 above). The extent to which legislatures undertake public consultation varies widely. In some countries, governments conduct such extensive public consultation prior to the submission of a draft law to parliament (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden) that parliament may choose to focus on reviewing its results. Denmark's *Folketinget*, for example, requires government to submit the comments received during its consultation procedure before the first reading of the draft law. Over a third of the respondents noted that government consultation exercises took place during the preparation of draft legislation. In no case, however, did this constitute a restriction upon parliament's right to undertake additional consultations should it so decide. Statutory requirements for public consultations by parliament may exist in certain policy areas. For example, labour law where trade unions and employers federations may have the right to be consulted on new legislation (e.g. Portugal, Poland).

Box 9

CANADA: PUBLIC CONSULTATION BY PARLIAMENT

Every year the Finance Committee of Canada's House of Commons conducts cross-country consultations on the federal budget. In November 1999, these Pre-Budget Consultations were held in the capital city and five regional centres. A press release and information provided via the Parliamentary website beforehand (including a schedule for the meetings and a background paper) encouraged citizens to state their priorities and offer specific proposals.

62. Few respondents reported any formal preconditions for the involvement of citizens or non-governmental organisations in law making. In Germany, interest groups and organisations must register with the President of the *Bundestag* if they are to claim a right to be heard by parliamentary committees, providing basic information on their executive officers and area of interest. Unregistered associations can still be heard where this is in the interest of the *Bundestag*. The Secretary General of Hungary's *Országgyűlés* maintains a similar list, but in this case registration is not a precondition for participation. The European Parliament issues a one-year, personal pass to representatives of all interest organisations, publishes the list of their names and requires them to adhere to a 'Code of Conduct' in their dealings with members.

63. Certain countries provide citizens a direct means of impacting on the legislative process through the right of popular legislative initiative - with the submission of petitions signed by a certain number of eligible voters (e.g. at least 100,000 in Austria and Poland).

64. Written petitions to the legislature may, if presented by a member of parliament, lead to a parliamentary debate on the issue (e.g. Austria) or be forwarded to the government which is then obliged to report on its efforts to address the issue (e.g. Japan). The Petitions Committee of the German *Bundestag* provides the plenary with an annual report as well as monthly overviews of petitions received and recommendations for decision-making.

Box 10

MEXICO: PARLIAMENT'S ROLE IN PROMOTING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Both chambers of Mexico's *Congreso de la Unión* have taken steps to encourage the participation of citizens and their representative organisations in the legislature's activities. The 'Citizen Attention Unit' of the *Cámara de Senadores* serves as a liaison between the Chamber and citizen associations. The 'Commission of Citizen Participation' of the *Cámara de Diputados* has, since 1994, promoted dialogue with non-government organisations (NGOs), trade unions, citizen groups and individual citizens in an effort to make their concerns known to deputies and include their proposals in the law-making process. The Commission calls public hearings, organises working sessions and reviews issues of public concern (such as the introduction of the right to referendum).

2. Framework agreements with external sources of expertise

65. Legislatures require expert assistance in reviewing complex legislation, monitoring implementation and ensuring oversight - which in many cases must be secured from sources outside the parliamentary services.

66. Over two-thirds of the respondents cited public hearings as the main vehicle by which parliamentary committees gain access to external sources of expertise. Half mentioned the possibility of contracting expert reports (e.g. Belgium, Canada, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Turkey). Although the possibility exists in other legislatures, budget constraints may limit its use in practice (e.g. Denmark, Finland).

67. Only a very few respondents mentioned the existence of framework agreements with academic or scientific institutions as a means of accessing information and advice. Mexico's *Cámara de Senadores* has established such agreements with the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the National Polytechnic Institute and the National Institute of Public Administration. In 1998, the *Assembleia da Republica* of Portugal signed an accord with the country's public universities in order to obtain scientific and technical support when preparing draft legislation.

Box 11

HUNGARY: EXTERNAL SOURCES OF EXPERT SUPPORT INSIDE PARLIAMENT

The Centre for Parliamentary Management (CPM) was established in 1990 with foreign technical assistance as a unit of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences located within the Parliament building. The immediate objective was to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Parliament to perform its role in the new context of multi-party democracy. Early achievements included a comprehensive needs assessment and the issue of a 'Manual of the Parliament' as a handbook for newly-elected members.

Today, the CPM continues to support the work of the General Secretariat of the Parliament in a number of areas, for example with the publication of a 'Parliamentary papers' series on specific operational topics of interest to parliamentarians; policy papers (e.g. on areas related to the annual budget review) as well as materials destined for the general public and media. The CPM provides Parliament with a source of expertise and non-partisan policy research capable of mobilising senior experts and academics as well as research assistants for Parliamentary committees through a university student internship programme.

Innovative procedures and practices: Parliaments 'on-line'

Legislatures in all OECD Member countries have established official websites offering public access to a range of information via the Internet (see Table 1). The declared objective in all cases is to make the parliament "more open and transparent" – in the words of the Speaker of Japan's Shugiin (House of Representatives) featured on the chamber's home page. Parliamentary websites can be highly popular with citizens, for example, that of Italy's Camera dei Deputati is the most popular site amongst all public institutions with 12 million visits during the month of July 2000.

The amount of information provided via the parliament's website and its ease of access varies considerably. All provide an overview of the institutional structure and functions of parliament as well as the legislative process. The text of draft legislation, agendas of forthcoming plenary and committee meetings and transcripts of past meetings are also commonly to be found. In the case of bicameral legislatures, each chamber maintains its own website and provides links to its counterpart, as well as other public institutions. A number provide on-line audio-visual coverage of parliamentary sessions (e.g. Australia, Germany, Iceland, Korea, Japan, Switzerland).

Full on-line access to legislation at each stage of law drafting and the emergence of 'paperless' law-making is a goal for the future in many cases (e.g. Austria, the Netherlands) – while many legislatures already make government drafts, committee

reports and official gazettes available on-line. Such measures contribute to greater efficiency and transparency of the legislative process.

While parliaments appear to have recognised that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer a powerful means of providing information directly to citizens, their full potential in establishing interactive relations has yet to be fully exploited. While citizens are able to lodge comments and complaints via Internet in many countries (e.g. Belgium, France, Korea, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Spain), not all parliaments provide individual e-mail addresses of members (e.g. New Zealand) nor do they all accept on-line petitions (e.g. Japan). Few currently make full use of the interactive potential of Internet when consulting with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizens.

V. PROMISING PRACTICES

68. Most respondents highlighted promising practices in each of the areas covered by the survey, namely: relations between legislatures and executives; selected parliamentary procedures and relations with civil society. Others offered interesting examples in areas not covered by the questionnaire.

69. Legislatures in OECD Member countries, like Governments, are exploring novel instruments and approaches as they adapt to new governance challenges, such as the proliferation of decision-making levels and the emergence of new social actors. Participants indicated several directions for the future, including:

➤ Monitoring policy-making across levels of government

National-international

Several legislatures have sought to increase their impact on issues shaped at the interface between national and supra-national policy-making. One source of concern for New Zealand's House of Representatives lies in the government's ability to commit to international obligations without adequate parliamentary scrutiny. This has led to the strengthening of procedures to review multilateral treaties prior to ratification and examine the National Interest Analysis submitted by government. Many parliaments in EU Member States have also reinforced their capacity to track EU policy-making 'upstream' by requiring government to provide information on proposals to be discussed in Council (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK). Parliaments in countries of Central Europe who are candidates for EU membership (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) are also actively engaged in setting the framework for the approximation of EU legislation.

National-subnational

Many OECD Member have embarked upon the devolution of decision-making powers to the regional and local level. In those with a federal structure (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Mexico, Switzerland) the interests of sub-national units have long been directly represented within the bicameral parliament. Legislatures in other countries have adopted a number of innovative responses to this challenge, for example, Italy's *Camera dei Deputati* (Chamber of Deputies) has promoted twice-yearly 'inter-institutional conferences' on regulatory simplification bringing together the Government, regions, local authorities, the judiciary, independent authorities as well as research centres and NGOs.

➤ Contributing to policy coherence

Plenary debates in parliament are themselves an occasion on which to review proposed legislation for their coherence with existing measures within a particular sector as well as with overall policy goals. Several legislatures have adopted procedures which can potentially reinforce parliament's capacity to monitor policy coherence. In Ireland, a system of 'policy or legislative review type' committees in the *Dáil* have been designed to avoid overlapping functions and they may meet jointly on issues of common interest. In Korea, the *Kuk Hoe* has introduced the 'Committee of the Whole' to have the entire chamber deliberate on matters of importance before holding a vote in the plenary session.

➤ **Identifying future policy issues**

The pace of technological and social change is accelerating and Parliaments, like Governments, are hard pressed to keep up with, let alone anticipate, developments. The need for ‘chambers of reflection’ to address emerging policy issues has been expressed in a number of OECD Member countries, and parliaments have provided the platform for such wide-ranging debate – a function explicitly assigned to Belgium’s *Sénat* (Senate). Finland’s *Eduskunta* has established a ‘Committee of the Future’ which examines issues and development models likely to influence society in the future. Others have focused on future developments of science and technology – for example, the UK House of Lords ‘Science and Technology Committee’ and the ‘Committee on Technology Assessment’ of Greece’s *Vouli Ton Ellinon*.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

70. This report on the OECD survey of 'Parliamentary Procedures and Relations' provides a comparative overview of several key issues common to all legislatures, identifies a number of trends and provides examples of good practice. The high rate of response to the questionnaire (28 out of 29 OECD countries) itself indicates the level of legislatures' interest in this exercise and provides good grounds for future work in this area.

71. The report is descriptive not prescriptive and more in-depth analysis will be required to identify policy lessons for the future. However, a number of features have already been identified in the report, namely:

- The **quality of information** from government to parliament is key to law-making and oversight.
- Parliaments seek improved **efficiency** in their internal procedures and stronger **professional** support.
- Parliaments are aiming to enhance their **openness, transparency** and **links with civil society**.

QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A number of key issues for legislatures and their relations with the executive and with civil society may be identified for more in-depth investigation in the future, including:

- *What steps can governments and legislatures take to reduce legislative overload and its impact on the quality of law-making?*
- *How much information does parliament need from government when considering draft legislation and of what kind?*
- *How can parliaments contribute to ensuring greater coherence across levels of government - from the supranational to the local level?*
- *What role does parliamentary scrutiny and oversight play in promoting greater government transparency and accountability?*
- *How far can parliaments and governments go in meeting demands for more public information and consultation within a representative democracy?*

Table 1 - SELECTED DATA ON OECD LEGISLATURES

Country	Population ⁷ (thousands)	Name of Parliament	Unicameral/ Bicameral	Names of Chambers (Lower/Upper)	Websites	Statutory no. of seats	Women members (%)
Australia	18 751	Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia	Bicameral	House of Representatives	www.aph.gov.au/house	148	22.30
				Senate	www.aph.gov.au/senate	76	28.95
Austria	8 078	Parlament	Bicameral	Nationalrat	www.parlinkom.gv.at	183	26.78
				Bundesrat		64	20.31
Belgium	10 203	Chambres fédérales	Bicameral	Chambre des Représentants	www.fed-parl.be	150	23.33
				Sénat		71	28.17
Canada	30 300	Parliament of Canada	Bicameral	House of Commons	www.parl.gc.ca	301	19.93
				Senate		105	30.48
Czech Rep.	10 295	Parlament	Bicameral	Poslanecká Sněmovna	www.psp.cz	200	15.00
				Senat	www.senat.cz	81	11.11
Denmark	5 301	Folketinget	Unicameral		www.folketinget.dk	179	37.43
Finland	5 153	Eduskunta-Riksdagen	Unicameral		www.eduskunta.fi	200	36.50
France	58 845	Parlement	Bicameral	Assemblée Nationale	www.assemblee-nationale.fr	577	10.92
				Sénat	www.senat.fr	321	5.92
Germany	82 024	-----	Bicameral	Bundestag	www.bundestag.de	669	30.94
				Bundesrat	www.bundesrat.de	69	59.42
Greece	10 507	Vouli Ton Ellinon	Unicameral		www.parliament.gr	300	8.33
Hungary	10 114	Országgyűlés	Unicameral		www.mkogy.hu	386	8.29
Iceland	274	Althingi	Unicameral		www.althingi.is	63	34.92
Ireland	3 705	Oireachtas	Bicameral	Dáil Éireann	www.irlgov.ie/oireachtas	166	12.05
				Seanad Éireann		60	18.33

⁷ 1998 data.

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Country	Population (thousands)	Name of Parliament	Unicameral/ Bicameral	Names of Chambers (Lower/Upper)	Websites	Statutory no. of seats	Women members (%)
Italy	56 979	Parlamento	Bicameral	Camera dei Deputati	www.parlamento.it	630	11.11
				Senato		326	7.98
Japan	126 486	Kokkai	Bicameral	Shugiin	www.shugiin.go.jp	480	7.50
				Sangiin	www.sangiin.go.jp	252	17.06
Korea	46 430	Kuk Hoe	Unicameral		www.assembly.go.kr	273	3.66
Luxembourg	427	Chambre des Députés	Unicameral		www.chd.lu	60	16.67
Mexico	95 675	Congreso de la Unión	Bicameral	Cámara de Diputados	www.camaradediputados.gob.mx	500	17.40
				Cámara de Senadores	www.senado.gob.mx	128	14.85
Netherlands	15 698	Staten-Generaal	Bicameral	Tweede Kamer	www.parlement.nl	150	36.00
				Eerste Kamer	www.parlement.nl www.eerstekamer.nl	75	26.67
New Zealand	3 792	House of Representatives	Unicameral		www.parliament.govt.nz	120	30.83
Norway	4 418	Stortinget	Unicameral		www.stortinget.no www.sauce.uio.no/Stortinget	165	36.36
Poland	38 666	-----	Bicameral	Sejm	www.sejm.gov.pl	460	13.04
				Senat	www.senat.gov.pl	100	11.00
Portugal	9 979	Assembleia da Republica	Unicameral		www.parlamento.pt	230	-----
Spain	39 371	Las Cortes Generales	Bicameral	Congreso de los Diputados	www.congreso.es	350	28.29
				Senado	www.senado.es	259	22.78
Sweden	8 851	Riksdagen	Unicameral	Riksdagen	www.riksdagen.se	349	42.69
Switzerland	7 106	Assemblée Fédérale	Bicameral	Conseil National	www.parliament.ch	200	23.00
				Conseil des Etats		46	19.57
Turkey	64 789	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi	Unicameral		www.tbmm.gov.tr	550	4.18
UK	59 237	Parliament	Bicameral	House of Commons	www.parliament.uk	659	18.36
				House of Lords		666	15.62
USA	269 092	US Congress	Bicameral	House of Representatives	www.house.gov	435	12.87
				Senate	www.senate.gov	100	9.00
EU	375 968	European Parliament	Unicameral		www.europarl.eu.int	626	-----

Sources: Eurostat website: www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat; Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) website: <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm> (data at September 2000).

Table 2 - AUTHORSHIP OF RESPONSES TO OECD QUESTIONNAIRE ON LEGISLATURES

Country	Unicameral	Bicameral		Other
1. Australia [^]		House of Representatives and Senate		
2. Austria		Nationalrat		
3. Belgium ["]		Chambre des Représentants		
4. Canada				Privy Council Office on behalf of both Chambers
5. Czech Rep. [°]		Poslanecká Sněmovna	Senat	
6. Denmark	Folketinget			
7. Finland	Eduskunta-Riksdagen			
8. France		Assemblée Nationale	Sénat	
9. Germany		Bundestag		
10. Greece	Vouli Ton Ellinon			
11. Hungary	Országgyűlés			
12. Iceland	Althingi			
13. Ireland ["]		Dáil Éireann		
14. Italy		Camera dei Deputati		
15. Japan				Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of both Chambers
16. Korea	Kuk Hoe			
17. Luxembourg [*]	Chambre des Députés			
18. Mexico ⁺		Cámara de Diputados	Cámara de Senadores	
19. Netherlands		Tweede Kamer		
20. New Zealand	House of Representatives			
21. Norway				Prime Minister's Office, with contribution of the Storting
22. Poland			Senat	
23. Portugal	Assembleia da Republica			
24. Spain		Congreso de los Diputados		
25. Sweden	Riksdagen			
26. Switzerland				Federal Chancellery
27. Turkey	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi			
28. UK		House of Commons	House of Lords	
29. EU	European Parliament			

([^]) Joint response

(["]) Includes some information on the other chamber.

([°]) An additional response was submitted by the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic.

(^{*}) An additional response was submitted by the Government Council of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

(⁺) An additional response was submitted by the Office of the Presidency of the United Mexican States.