

**ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL
OF PARLIAMENTS**

Working Methods and Rules of the Association

**Geneva
September 2004**

SUMMARY OF THE WORKING METHODS OF THE ASSOCIATION

April 2004

Note: *It was agreed at the Copenhagen session (October 1994) that a summary of the working methods of the Association should be sent to all at each session. This summary reflects the changes to the Rules of the Association agreed at Marrakech in March 2002.*

TYPES OF BUSINESS

1. Under Rule 21 of the Association, the Agenda setting out the business of the Association for a session or meeting proposed by the Executive Committee. It is provisionally agreed by the plenary at the conclusion of the preceding session or meeting and is confirmed at the beginning of the session.
2. The Association's business is of five types:
 - (a) Proceedings on Reports
 - (b) General debates on subjects decided by the Executive Committee
 - (c) Topical discussions under the "supplementary item" procedure
 - (d) "Communications" by Members
 - (e) Other presentations

REPORTS

3. Reports are prepared by a Rapporteur on the basis of information supplied by members and are agreed by the Association as a whole; the process takes place over two sessions.
4. When a subject has been agreed by the Executive Committee and confirmed by the Association as being suitable for a report, a general Debate on the subject is included in the agenda for the following session. The Rapporteur prepares an introductory note on the topic, together with a short draft questionnaire. These are circulated to all Members before the general debate, which is introduced by a speech from the Rapporteur. Other Members contribute to the debate, based on experience in their own Parliament. At the conclusion of the debate, the text of a questionnaire is agreed. (During discussion on the questionnaire the President may propose that the drafting of all or part of the questionnaire be delegated to a drafting Committee.)
5. After the session, the questionnaire is sent by the Joint Secretaries to every member Chamber. Each Secretary General sends a reply to the Rapporteur, who then prepares a Draft Report. This is circulated to all Members and is debated and amended at the next session. The Report as amended is then finally agreed by the Association.
6. The final Report, as amended, is printed in the Association's journal "Constitutional and Parliamentary Information".

GENERAL DEBATES ON TOPICS DECIDED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

7. At the end of each session or meeting, the Executive Committee will normally propose the inclusion in the orders of the day for the next session or meeting a debate on a particular subject. That subject will relate to the law or practice of parliament, the working practices of parliamentary structures, institutions and administrations, or any other subject of common interest. The aim of the debate is to allow exchange of experience between members. It is normally divided into several round table debates and usually takes up an entire day.

Each round table debate is introduced by a principal speaker who also acts as a moderator of the discussion. The principal speaker's presentation is followed by a general debate, in the course of which any member or substitute (under Rule 6) is invited to make a contribution. Such contributions are

preferably submitted in writing in advance; in which case it may be sent before the opening of the session or meeting in the official languages of the Association, to one or other of the Joint Secretaries.

At the end of the various interventions which must be short, a general discussion may be started. That is ended by the final response of the main speaker for that round table.

The minutes of these general debates are published in the review of the Association, Constitutional and Parliamentary Information.

TOPICAL DISCUSSION UNDER THE "SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM" PROCEDURE

8. The draft Agenda for each session includes provision for a Topical Discussion on a "supplementary item"; the subject for the discussion is agreed by the Association early in the session, on a proposal from the Executive Committee following suggestions from Members. Such a Discussion is introduced by a speech from the Member who has proposed the subject, who may also submit a written introductory note. A summary of the Discussion is prepared for inclusion in the minutes of the session and publication in the Association's journal "Constitutional and Parliamentary Information".

COMMUNICATIONS

9. The draft Agenda for each session makes provision for one or more "Communications" from Members. These are short presentations by Members on issues of interest to them, particularly presentations on recent developments in their own Parliament. They may be followed by question and answer sessions. The Communications to be presented are agreed by the Association, on proposal from the Executive Committee following suggestions from Members. A summary of the presentation is prepared for inclusion in the minutes of the session and publication in the Association's journal "Constitutional and Parliamentary information".

OTHER PRESENTATIONS

10. Longer presentations may also take place in other circumstances. Two common occasions are:

- (a) the presentation by the host Secretaries General, at the beginning of each session, on the parliamentary system of the host country, and
- (b) presentations by officers of the Interparliamentary Union under Rule 13 of the Association.

TABLING OF SUBJECTS

11. Any Member may propose subjects for the Association's Agenda. The proposal may be tabled by being given to the President of the Association or to one of the two Joint Secretaries. The Member should indicate whether it is proposed for consideration as a subject for a Report, for discussion as the "supplementary item", or as a Communication.

12. If it is for a Report, the proposal should be tabled before the last day of a session. It will then be considered by the Executive Committee. If it is approved by the Committee, a Debate on the subject will then be included in the draft Agenda for the next session, which is provisionally agreed by the plenary at the end of the sitting on the last day of the session.

13. If it is for Discussion as the "supplementary item" or as a "Communication", it should be tabled before the beginning of the session (by fax to one of the two Joint Secretaries) or on the first day of the session. Those proposals received before the first meeting of the Executive Committee¹ will be considered at the meeting and, if approved, submitted to the plenary with the agenda for the session.

¹This meeting normally takes place on the first (Monday) afternoon at 1430 or 1445, with the plenary starting at 1530.

Any proposals received later on the first day will be considered by the Executive Committee at a later meeting and, if approved, submitted to the plenary for inclusion in the agenda for one of the later days of the session.

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP

At its session in Mexico in Spring 2004 the ASGP agreed the following guidelines for conferring Honorary membership of the Association:

1. As indicated by rule 8, honorary membership of the Association will only be conferred on a former member of the Association, or a former joint secretary of the Association.
2. In accordance with rule 8, the Executive Committee, in proposing the conferral of honorary membership on a former member of the Association, will have regard to:
 - Active participation in the activities of the Association, including the preparation of reports as a rapporteur, sponsoring topical discussions, or presenting communications;
 - Regular attendance at Association meetings and participation in discussion of draft reports, topical discussions or communications;
 - Active participation, as an elected Member of the Executive Committee or a joint secretary, in the deliberations of the Bureau or the Committee; or
 - Other considerations that the Executive Committee believes form a valid basis for consideration by the Association for the conferral of honorary membership of the Association.
3. Formal proposals for honorary membership for former members should be forwarded to one of the joint secretaries, outlining the former member's history in relation to all of the matters outlined in paragraph 2.

RULES OF THE ASSOCIATION

September 2002

**Based on the Rules of September 1971
(as amended October 1973, April 1974, September 1977, September 1984, October 1999,
October 2000, April 2001, April 2003, October 2003 and April 2004)**

Aims

Rule 1 The Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, is a consultative organism of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in accordance with Section VII, Article 26 of the Statutes of the Union. It aims:

- to facilitate personal contacts between its members
- in conjunction with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to co-operate with those Parliaments which request legal and technical assistance and support
- to study the law, practice and procedure of Parliament
- to propose measures for improving the working methods of different Parliaments
- to secure co-operation between the services of different Parliaments.

Rule 2 Each member of the Association shall furnish information about the law, practice, procedure, working methods and organisation of his own Parliament and the administration of the parliamentary services, for any inquiry by the Association or at the request of any other member.

Composition

Rule 3 (1) The Association shall consist of Secretaries General and Deputy Secretaries General of Parliaments, or international Parliamentary Assemblies whether or not such Parliaments or Assemblies are affiliated to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

(2) Where a Secretary General or Deputy Secretary General is unable to take part directly and personally in the work of the Association, the Association may admit as a member a high officer of that Assembly who will act under the authority of the Secretary General.

Rule 4 By a Secretary General of a parliamentary assembly is meant a person who is in charge of the parliamentary services.

Rule 5 The Association shall decide upon applications for membership on a report from the Executive Committee.

Rule 6 (1) If a member is unable to attend a session, meeting or sitting of the Association, he/she may nominate as a substitute another member of his/her parliamentary staff.

(2) Any such nomination shall be communicated to the President of the Association in writing not later than the opening of a sitting to which it applies. It shall remain valid for that session or meeting only.

Rule 7 No Assembly may be represented by more than two members at any one time

Rule 8 The Association may confer honorary membership upon a former member of the Association who has rendered it important services at the proposal of the Executive Committee, either of its own motion or at the request of any member.

Rule 9 The Association may, taking into account the principles and conditions set out in the Statute of the IPU, at the proposal of the Executive Committee admit observers by reason of their particular status or technical expertise.

Rule 10 (1) When the affiliation of a Parliament to the Inter-Parliamentary Union has been suspended because it is in arrears in the payment of its contribution to the Union, a member from that Parliament may continue to be a member of the Association.

(2) When the affiliation of a Parliament to the Inter-Parliamentary Union has been suspended because the Parliament has ceased to function, the Executive Committee shall decide at the earliest opportunity on the eligibility of any member from that Parliament to remain a member of the Association.

Sessions

Rule 11 (1) In every year the Association shall meet in session concurrently with the Assemblies of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and at the same place.

(2) It may also meet otherwise, concurrently with meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Council of the IPU, and at the same place.

(3) The Association may also hold exceptional meetings in co-operation with the IPU.

Rule 12 The President shall convene each session or meeting of the Association in a circular which shall set out the draft Agenda for the session. The draft Agenda shall set out the order and timing of contributions and other matters.

Rule 13 A representative of the Union shall be heard if he/she so wishes at full sessions and other meetings of the Association.

Executive Committee and Bureau

Rule 14 The Executive Committee shall consist of -

eleven elected members: the President of the Association, the two Vice-Presidents, and eight other members who shall be elected by the Association; and

former Presidents who are members or honorary members of the Association.

All the elected members of the Executive Committee must belong to different Parliaments.

Rule 15 The Bureau shall consist of the President, of the Vice-Presidents, and two joint secretaries who shall be appointed by the President.

Rule 16 When Rule 10(2) applies, a member from that Parliament cannot be a candidate for election to any post on the Executive Committee. If at the time of the suspension a member from that Parliament is a member of the Executive Committee, his membership of the Executive Committee shall cease forthwith and the post become vacant.

Rule 16A: (1) Any elected member of the Executive Committee who is not present at any meetings of the Executive Committee during two successive sessions or meetings of the Association under Rule 11 will be considered to have vacated his/her seat from the start of the next session or meeting unless the Executive Committee decides otherwise. A list of those attending shall be prepared at each sitting of the Executive Committee.

(2) The President shall remind in writing any elected member of the Executive Committee who is not present at any meetings of the Executive Committee during a session or meeting of the Association under Rule 11 of the provisions of Rule 16A (1).

Rule 17 (1) Candidates for election to the Executive Committee must be nominated in writing in a set form by a time to be laid down by the Executive Committee. Such nominations must be accompanied by a formal acceptance by the candidate.

(2) The members of the Executive Committee shall be elected for a period of three years.

(3) Elections will take place at the sessions or meetings held under Rule 11(1).

(4) Terms of office shall take effect from the day after the close of the session or meeting at which elections take place and shall terminate at the close of the plenary session or meeting at which new elections take place.

Rule 18 (1) If a vacancy occurs during the term of office of a member of the Executive Committee, an election to fill the vacancy for a new full term of office shall be held.

(2) If the President is absent or a vacancy occurs in the office of President, the duties of President shall be carried out temporarily by the earlier elected Vice-President. Otherwise, the duties will be carried out by one of the other members of the Executive Committee, chosen on the same basis. In case of equality of seniority of election, the oldest member will take precedence.

Rule 19 Members of the Executive Committee may not stand for election to the same office for two years. Their place shall be taken by a member from another Parliament.

Rule 20 Each elected member of the Executive Committee shall have a vote. If the votes are equal, the President shall have a casting vote.

Rule 21 The Executive Committee shall

- (a) initiate subjects of study and appoint Rapporteurs;
- (b) decide about specific topics to be presented and discussed in the course of the forthcoming sessions or meetings;
- (c) propose the agenda for sessions or other meetings of the Association;
- (d) take any necessary steps to ensure the execution of the Association's decisions;

- (e) approve the draft annual budget of the Association for the forthcoming year and to lay the accounts for the past year before the Association for approval;
- (f) decide the place and date of exceptional meetings referred to in Rule 11(3);
- (g) consider and submit to the Association proposals to amend the Rules of the Association, and
- (h) propose arrangements for the holding of elections.

Rule 22 (1) The Executive Committee shall meet on being convened by the President. The Committee shall meet at least twice at the time of each session or meeting of the Association.

(2) The Secretary General of the Union or his representative may be heard at meetings of the Executive Committee at his request.

(3) The Committee may also make decisions by way of meetings held using electronic means of communication.

Decisions and methods of voting of the Association

Rule 23 Only decisions taken at a session or other meeting of the Association shall bind the Association. Apart from in exceptional circumstances the Association shall not adopt a report and authorise its publication until after it has been considered at at least one session.

Rule 24 (1) Observers shall not take part in votes on reports or in elections. They shall not be elected.

(2) Those who are members under the provisions of Rule 3(2) shall not be elected.

Rule 25 The majority required to adopt any proposal submitted to the Association shall be a majority of votes cast.

Rule 26 The President shall have a vote but no casting vote. If the votes are equal, the proposal shall not be carried.

Minutes and publications

Rule 27 The minutes of sessions of the Association shall be kept in the official languages of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and circulated to members of the Association by the Joint Secretaries.

Rule 28 (1) The Association shall be responsible for the publication and distribution of "Constitutional and Parliamentary Information" in the official languages of the IPU.

(2) Reports adopted by the Association shall be published in "Constitutional and Parliamentary Information".

(3) The following may also be published in the Review "Constitutional and Parliamentary Information" on the decision of the President:

- new or revised Constitutions
- Communications presented at sessions and meetings

- debates on specific topics decided by the Executive Committee
- other constitutional or parliamentary information of interest to members of the Association.

(4) The Association shall also ensure the distribution and publication of information on the Internet site of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Languages

Rule 29 (1) The languages used at meetings of the Association or the Executive Committee shall be the official languages of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

(2) All questionnaires, reports and other documents of the Association shall be drawn up in the official languages of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

(3) If a member cannot use one of these languages, he/she may use an interpreter at his/her own cost who shall interpret into one of the official languages.

Budget

Rule 30 (1) The President shall submit to the Executive Committee of the Association the draft budget for the forthcoming year which he/she has prepared in consultation with the Secretary General of the Union, and after having been heard by the Executive Committee of the Union if the budget estimates of the Association do not correspond to those proposed by the Secretary General of the Union.

(2) The budget shall be submitted for ratification at the earliest opportunity.

(3) Each Chamber represented in the Association shall contribute annually to the budget of the Association a sum to be fixed by the Association.

(4) Observers shall pay a contribution equal to half of the median level of subscription of members.

(5) The Executive Committee may propose that all or some of the rights associated with membership be suspended, as set out in article 5.2 of the Statutes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, if there is a delay of at least three years in the payment of subscriptions.

Amendments of rules of the Association

Rule 31 (1) Any member may propose an amendment to the Rules of the Association. A proposal to amend the Rules of the Association shall be considered by the Executive Committee before being submitted to a vote by the Association.

(2) The members of the Association may be informed by the President of any proposals to amend the rules which are sent to the Executive Committee before such proposals are discussed by the Executive Committee.

Temporary Rule

Rule 32 The term of office for members of the Executive Committee elected before the Spring 2002 session shall retroactively be set at three years. Such terms of office will be deemed to have taken effect from the close of the session at which they were elected.