Standing Committee on
Democracy and Human Rights

C-III/140/4-Inf.1
11 March 2019

Debate on follow-up to previous IPU resolutions

Monday, 8 April 2019 (9.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.)
Salwa 2, Sheraton Convention Center

Concept note

The Committee will examine how IPU Members have followed up on three resolutions adopted by the IPU in recent years. Drawing on the lessons learned from these three resolutions, the Committee will extend the discussion to examine the forms of action that parliaments can take to combat disinformation and "fake news", a global phenomenon with significant effects on national politics.

The session will be split into two parts:

Part 1: Testimonies and good practices from national parliaments

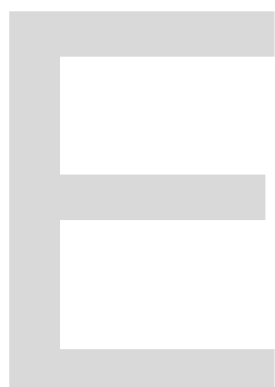Part 1 will focus on good practices in parliamentary follow-up on the following resolutions:

- 2015 Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms
- 2013 The use of media, including social media, to enhance citizen engagement and democracy
- 2009 Freedom of expression and the right to information.

The resolutions of 2009, 2013 and 2015 contain many recommendations for parliamentary action. Parliaments are invited to provide an update on specific activities they have undertaken in these areas, such as adopting legislation, holding committee enquiries and asking questions to ministers.

Parliaments are invited to submit brief examples of follow-up action using this online form by 22 March 2019. Parliaments are requested to identify to which resolution, and where possible, to which paragraphs their follow-up action is related. The impact of the follow-up action is of particular interest so as to identify what changed as a result. A compilation of these follow-up actions will be shared at the Committee session during the IPU Assembly.

During Part 1 of the session, parliaments will be able to provide testimonies about good practice examples of follow-up action. To allow wide participation, testimonies should be limited to three minutes.

The information gathered through the online submissions and during the debate will form the basis of a report on good parliamentary practices in follow-up to these resolutions.

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Part 2: Expert hearing on parliamentary action to combat disinformation and "fake news"

One of the major challenges that has emerged since the adoption of these resolutions is that of online disinformation and "fake news". Disinformation has the potential to harm democracy by decreasing trust in politics, encouraging conspiracy theories instead of rational debate, and perhaps even influencing electoral outcomes. It is the thread that ties together the themes of the three resolutions on freedom of expression, citizen engagement and privacy in the digital era.

Disinformation and "fake news" have been debated at two recent IPU events in recognition of the significance of the threat. At the 139th IPU Assembly in October 2018, panellists disagreed on whether "fake news" and misinformation should be regulated. However, they agreed that citizens, particularly young people, should be encouraged to develop a more critical eye when it came to information and its sources. During the World e-Parliament Conference in December 2018, the question of freedom of speech and freedom of expression was raised; how do we manage "fake news" and protect others' voices, such as minorities or political opposition? Regulation may be lagging behind, but parliaments should be careful to fully understand the situation before taking action. There is a risk that legislation could negatively impact free speech or silence critical voices.

Part 2 of this Committee session will build on those initial discussions by starting to move towards identifying specific actions that parliaments and parliamentarians could take to combat this phenomenon. This work will be informed by the experience and lessons learned in implementing the resolutions discussed in Part 1 of the Committee session.

The session will be organized as an "expert hearing", similar in some ways to a parliamentary hearing. Experts with different professional profiles will be invited to give introductory remarks. Parliamentarians will then be able to question the experts. This question-and-answer format should lead to the identification of specific actions that parliamentarians and parliaments could take.

The information gathered through this session will be shared with parliaments as a report on possible forms of parliamentary action to combat disinformation and "fake news".