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Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(a) Regional Seminar on the Sustainable Development Goals for the Parliaments of Eastern and Central Europe

Bucharest (Romania), 18-19 April 2016

In September 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Those goals will inform their development agendas and policies over the next 15 years. The parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe first met to discuss concrete steps to help implement the SDGs in their countries and the region at a seminar held in Bucharest in June 2015. They adopted an outcome document that calls for concrete parliamentary action in a number of key areas. Those areas include adopting sustainable development strategies, and tackling environmental risk and climate change. The parliaments also agreed to meet regularly to examine progress on the SDGs and to consider the role that each parliament plays in implementing the Goals.

The 2016 seminar followed up on the conclusions of the 2015 event. The seminar further defined the opportunities and challenges facing parliaments in exercising their SDG implementation role. Discussions were facilitated by experts and through tools that the IPU had developed. The seminar participants adopted the outcome document in annex. Mr. László Borbély (Romania) prepared and presented the document at the close of the meeting.

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Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Regional Seminar on the Sustainable Development Goals for the Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe



CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES
ROMANIA

Building strong foundations for sustainable development

Bucharest, 18-19 April 2016

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

*Presented by the Rapporteur of the Seminar, Mr. László Borbély, MP, Chairperson
of the Committee for Foreign Policy of the Chamber of Deputies, Romania*

We, members of parliament from Austria, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania and the European Parliament, have gathered in Bucharest, Romania, on 18 and 19 April 2016 for the second Regional Seminar on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The seminar was jointly organized by the Parliament of Romania and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

We followed up on the conclusions of our first Regional Seminar on the SDGs held in Bucharest in June 2015 and we further defined the opportunities and challenges facing parliaments in exercising their role and responsibility in the implementation of the SDGs. The discussions were facilitated by various IPU tools and by experts from partner organizations including UNDP; UNEP, UNISDR, UNESCO and REC. We underscored that the SDGs represented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve peaceful societies and a sustainable future for our citizens, and pledged to actively engage in SDG implementation through an inclusive approach focusing on People – Peace – Prosperity – Planet – Partnerships.

The starting point of our discussion was SDG 16, which highlights the importance of good governance, effective and accountable institutions, inclusion, participation, human rights, as well as peace and security, for the achievement of sustainable development. In this context we discussed how parliaments could mainstream and institutionalize the global goals so as to capture the synergies and build coherence at the policy level.

Through the prism of environmental challenges facing the region, our discussion aimed to shed light on some of the governance gaps in the respective countries, which make the response to this issue particularly difficult. In this context, we discussed the underlying challenges as well as the enabling factors that have the potential to improve the policy response. We placed special attention on the role that parliaments can play in ensuring a new culture of environmentally responsible citizens through education and prevention.

From the outset we agreed that to be able to effectively contribute to the implementation of the SDGs, each parliament will need to evaluate its own institutional processes. We welcomed IPU's draft Self-Assessment toolkit as a useful instrument to help us make informed decisions. We also welcomed other tools developed by the IPU, namely Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change and the Model Parliamentary Resolution on the SDGs.

We learned about the important roles that we as parliamentarians have in making sure that progress is achieved in meeting the new goals. We agreed that parliamentary action needs to take place at all levels - national, regional, global – in order to have a strong impact.

Our discussions turned to the following questions: What are the key elements of strong parliamentary action in the implementation of the SDGs? How can parliaments help achieve the much needed sustainable environmental protection through implementation of the SDGs? How can parliaments ensure improved education in sustainable development and contribute to stronger and more informed citizen engagement?

We actively engaged in these issues and drew up the following conclusions and recommendations to advance parliamentary engagement with the SDGs:

- We welcome clear signs of strong political will in the parliaments of the region to engage in SDG implementation. We congratulate the Parliament of Romania for adopting a comprehensive Declaration on the SDGs, the first of its kind, as a proof of leadership and an action-oriented roadmap. By this actions Romania proved that an active country could become a regional hub in promoting SDGs. We hope that this initiative will be inspiring across the region and will encourage all parliaments to take similar steps. The IPU model parliamentary resolution on the SDGs can serve as a starting point to inspire this work.
- The universality of the SDGs requires that parliaments in all countries play a role in nationalizing the goals and their targets. These priorities need to be developed in consultation with citizens, women and men alike, so that they reflect the real needs and expectations in a democratic manner. Every attempt should be made to include in the consultations marginalized groups and hard-to-reach populations. Outreach programmes are also important in engaging public opinion and the media.
- Parliaments in both developed and developing countries should make sure that they are fit for purpose and equipped in terms of institutional processes and capacities to do their part in implementing the SDGs. As a first step in this direction, each parliament should make use of the SDG Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments. The toolkit will help them identify the extent to which they are equipped in terms of institutional processes and capacities, and to identify what can be done to better enable parliaments to support SDG implementation.
- The SDGs represent a unique opportunity to achieve greater policy coherence. One of the key challenges faced by most countries is silo approach to issues within ministries, parliamentary committees but also civil society and other actors, which must be overcome if the SDGs are to be achieved. Parliaments have a unique role in establishing platforms to foster new multi-stakeholder partnerships and alliances across thematic issues and interests, and thereby help focus and advance the country's progress on the SDGs.
- Due to their proximity to citizens, parliamentarians have a key role in accelerating access to information concerning sustainable development and in general help translate the SDGs in everyday life of people. In the same vein, Members of Parliament should listen to the citizens and understand their needs and concerns, and make sure that this informs the national agenda and policy.
- Disaster risk and environmental degradation present an important challenge to our region. Disaster risk reduction and environmental risk therefore need to be part and parcel of the national sustainable development strategies. Parliaments need to make sure that legislation protects the environment and that prevention measures are included in the budget to avert the impact of climate change and disasters.
- Parliaments should promote integration of sustainable development issues into education policies, teacher training and other learning opportunities in order to build the specific knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that every human being needs to have to contribute to sustainable development. This also includes skills to understand complexity and interlinkages and make connections between different sustainable development challenges, as promoted by Education for Sustainable Development initiative coordinated by UNESCO.
- Data availability needs to be improved in order to enable parliaments to fully play their part in the implementation of the SDGs. Each parliament must closely examine capacity of its national data centers to generate disaggregated data and present it in a form that helps analysis and shapes policy and at the same time allows effective monitoring of performance and progress. In addition, we encourage the IPU to work with its United Nations and other partners on development of tools to help parliamentarians read and understand data and translate it into effective action.

- Each parliament should play an active role in monitoring progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. To this end, they should be closely involved in the national reporting exercise, including by screening and examining progress reports prepared by governments. Moreover, each parliament should establish a mechanism to provide input into the national SDG reviews to be reported to the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF). Members of Parliament should advocate for their inclusion into national delegations to the HLPF meetings so that they directly contribute to and benefit from the review.
- Parliaments should also take active part in the work of IPU's Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, which will serve as a platform for exchange of experiences among parliaments and a body to channel information from the HLPF to parliaments and from parliaments to the UN.

In order to inspire action on the SDGs, we will bring this Outcome Document to the attention of our colleagues in parliament through all possible channels. We also undertake to bring the document to the attention of other relevant stakeholders.

We request the IPU to bring our conclusions and recommendations to the attention of the global parliamentary community and ensure follow-up through its programs and Assemblies. We urge the IPU to continue to work with the United Nations and other relevant partners to channel information and scientific evidence that will support further parliamentary action on the SDGs. We also urge the IPU to include the SDGs in its future strategy in a more consistent way and to continue to promote parliamentary exchanges at the regional level and across regions.

We welcome the invitation of Hungary to host the next Regional Seminar on the SDGs for the Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe. We will reconvene again in Budapest in early 2017 to continue to learn from each other, assess progress and develop further recommendations for parliamentary engagement with the SDGs in our region.