

CHANGES IN ORGANIZATION, CONTINUITY IN COOPERATION
LIBRARY AND RESEARCH SERVICE AT THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Motto: "...for a fully effective service to be provided to users it is important that the library and the research service have close working relationships." Keith Cuninghame¹

The recent organizational changes as regards to the Parliamentary Library and the Research Service of the Hungarian National Assembly made it inevitable to think over their relationship and cooperation. The goal of this paper is to share with you the results of our reasoning, and to introduce a possible model of cooperation between parliamentary libraries and research services.

Milestones of development and relationship

The Library of the Hungarian Parliament was established in 1870. The Rules of Procedure at that time stated: "*the House of Representatives shall set up a library for the use of its Members*". However, it was originally set up for the House of Representatives; since it was moved to the current building of the Parliament in 1904 it served for both houses. The location of the Library in the building reflected its role within the institution: it was situated – and is situated now – in the centre, between the plenary halls of the two houses. The Library served exclusively for the Parliament and MPs, and supported the legislative work until the 1950s. Its collection was founded and regularly enriched by the donations of prominent parliamentarians. The Library was a unit of the Office of the Hungarian Parliament and reported to the Speaker and the Library Committee of the House of Representatives. The annual reports of the Library were discussed and approved by the plenary session.

After the Second World War the changes in the political system were reflected in the institutional structure and the role of the Parliament. It became unicameral and played a formal role in the political system. As a result, the MPs' information needs became minimal and the Library lost its unique role as a parliamentary library. It became open to the public, serving as an academic library with special collections of law, political sciences and modern history. Although it kept functioning under the same roof as the Parliament, it came under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. However, during this period significant developments were made to improve the collection and on-site services; its organic contracts with the legislation significantly reduced.

The democratic changes in the late 1980s had an impact on the role of the Library. During the parliamentary period 1985-1990 – when all the laws, necessary for the democratic transition were passed – MPs turned to the Library with information requests again. As a result, in 1990 the Library got back its parliamentary status based on the official agreement of the Speaker of the democratically elected parliament and the Minister of Culture. The duties of the Library were included in Parliament's deed of foundation and Rules of Procedure. These documents defined double responsibilities for the library: to serve for the parliament, and also for the

¹ Keith Cuninghame: Guidelines for Legislative Libraries. 2nd, completely updated and enlarged edition. IFLA Publications 140. p. 59. Online: <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/series/140.pdf>

public as an academic library of national competences. The Library became an independent organizational unit of the Office of the National Assembly, reporting directly to the Speaker.

To realise these double functions, and to answer the new challenges as a parliamentary institution; in 1991, the Library established a special unit for the benefit of internal users, the Department of Information Services for MPs. The services for the external and internal users were provided separately in terms of organizational unit, service portfolio and physical spaces. The new unit provided its services only for internal users (MPs, their experts and the staff of the administration) in two dedicated reading rooms, available both in the building of the Parliament and in the Office building. The main reading room of the Library in the centre of the building of the Parliament remained for the benefit of the public users. In addition to traditional library services, the Department of Information Services for MPs provided special tailor-made information services for MPs. Its service portfolio enriched gradually with new elements, with different background materials. These issues were prepared mainly on a proactive basis and they consisted of selected full text documents and articles. Different types were provided for anniversary speeches, for hearings at standing committees and as a support of the lawmaking procedure on the topics of particular bills.

In 2004, within the Library a separate department was established for research services to prepare analyses on different policy topics concerning the lawmaking process. The Department of Information Services for MPs continued providing information services in the two dedicated reading rooms and compiled background materials. After six years of parallel operation, it became clear, that a more effective and flexible service portfolio would be necessary as the two departments actually worked for the same target group, with relative few staff members. As a result, an integrated department of Information Service for MPs was formed; providing library, information and research services for parliamentary users – still within the framework of the Library. This special model of integrated library and research services was formed as a result of the common organizational belonging of the research service and a public parliamentary library, which is rather unique in European parliaments.

The Information Service for MPs

The Information Service for MPs (hereinafter Infoservice) provides relevant, objective, impartial and up-to-date information for MPs, for their experts & staff, civil servants of the Office of the Parliament & Members of the European Parliament. Infoservice with a staff of 15 was and – despite of the recent organizational changes – is currently responsible for providing library, information and research services for parliamentary users.

At two dedicated Information points (reading rooms) Infoservice provides reading on the spot, lending services, selected bibliographies and hard or electronic copies of requested library documents free of charge. Based on the requests of individual users it supplies tailor-made information and research services in the form of press- and media-reviews as well as selected information packages from different sources of information and research papers. The research papers, so-called “Infosheets” (short summaries of facts and opinions) are the most value-added research products. They are prepared when short and concise information is needed or the requested information is available only in scattered sources or in foreign languages.

In addition to making research on request, the Information Service for MPs prepares different background materials and research papers on a proactive basis and provides them for all parliamentary users. Similarly to the above mentioned responses to individual requests, –there are two main types of these documents: the compiled background materials consist of selected

full text documents and articles, while the analyses and the Infosheets are composed of the summary, synthesis and analysis of relevant information written by the researchers themselves.

- Compiled background materials, approximately 50 items per year, are prepared for memorial and anniversary speeches to be delivered for national and historical anniversaries, and other different illustrious days.
- The background materials, prepared for hearings of minister-nominees include the nominee's professional and political profile: curriculum vitae, selected publications that are relevant to the field concerned and recent interviews. Issues for regular hearings of ministers and government officials focus on the minister's or official's activities since the latest hearing related to committee's field of responsibility.
- Regular media-reviews are prepared on hot issues and on the policy fields of standing committees' responsibility. For these reviews – in addition to different newspapers and free online media – unique sources of information subscribed by the Library, e.g. written materials of TV and radio programmes are used.
- Comparative analyses are prepared on the current policy issues, the themes of certain bills and on parliamentary practice of other countries; 10-20 items per year. They are composed of a summary and a detailed prescription of the EU member states' legal regulation and practice on the topic concerned.
- Information briefings "Infosheets" are prepared on the topics of draft bills on the agenda, about 50 issues annually. They provide a short description (usually four pages) of the topic: definitions, EU and national legal framework, foreign legislation, reference to the relevant documents, professional, political and civil opinions and statistics.

The proactive research products are published on the intranet site of Infoservice and offered for MPs via email. They can request them in electronic or printed form, or they can download them from the intranet. The Infosheets are published also on the website of the National Assembly² (compiled background materials are not possible to distribute via internet because of the intellectual property restrictions).

The integration of library, information and research services within the responsibility of a single department provided more and easier access for users. The results of integrated services are reflected by the dynamic increase in requests. Requesters of one service very often become users of other ones. Infoservice handles approximately 8,000–8,500 requests per year. 29 % of them are traditional library uses (reading on the spot; borrowing, ordering hard or electronic copies of particular documents). 68 % require more substantial research work (compiling information packages or background materials, writing short summaries or analyses). This figure also includes demand for pre-prepared background materials. The proportion of different other works is 4 %: answers for ECPRD (European Centre for Research and Documentation) requests, tasks concerning different projects, etc. (data of 2013). The dynamic of the changes shows that number of library uses has slightly decreased, while the demand for more value-added research products has significantly increased in the last four years.

² <http://www.parlament.hu/infoszolg>

Changes in 2014

In 2013, based on the decisions of the Speaker as regards to organizational structure of the Office of the National Assembly, the organizational independence of the Library was terminated. It became a part of the newly established Directorate of Cultural Affairs, together with the re-established Parliamentary Museum and the Department of Public Relations. Since 1 January 2014 the Information Service for MPs has become independent from the Library, as a separated department within the same directorate³. The latter decision was based on recognition the fact that not only the target groups, but also the service portfolio of the Library and Infoservice (as a research service) are different. The organizational changes made it inevitable to think over the services, relations and cooperation of these two organizational units. The principles of cooperation were elaborated taking into account the needs and convenience of parliamentary users. They are laid down in an agreement between the Library and Infoservice, approved by the Director of the Cultural Affairs.

The decision on the division of the tasks and responsibilities between the Library and Infoservice was made not based on the type of the service provided (library or research services), but rather on the target group (to whom they are provided: for parliamentary or public users). The Library continues focusing on the public services; while internal users are being served by Infoservice both with library and research services. Infoservice continues to operate the two dedicated Information points (reading rooms) for integrated library and research services in the building of the Parliament and in the Office building.

The Library continues providing resources (documents, subscribed and self-developed databases) directly for external users and for research work. They are also available for internal users directly (via internet and internet) or indirectly, at the Information points, operated by Infoservice.

To sum up, the main principles of the agreement on future cooperation of the Library and Infoservice are to provide the continuity and clarity of the services, convenience for the users, and cost-effective operation.

Advantages of continuing the integrated services

Continuity: One of the main principles to keep on the integrated model of library and research services was to provide the continuation of an introduced and well-known service, irrespective of organizational changes. The relatively high demand (more than 8,000 requests per year) shows that the services provided by Infoservice are popular and its introduced information channels (Information points, central telephone number and e-mail address, intranet page) are well known and widely/frequently used. Any kind of change in the structure of the services would lead to the reduction of users and to difficulties in the service management.

Convenience: Parliamentarians need information, and they would like to get it as soon and as easily as possible. They do not have time to find different services for their different information needs. They are not interested in organizational structures and do not mind which unit will provide the requested information. An integrated service is convenient for users as long as they can find any type of information they need like in a “one stop shop”.

³ Organizational chart: <http://www-archiv.parlament.hu/angol/structure.pdf>

Clarity: An integrated service is more visible and can attract more demand. The users do not have to think about which type of information they need (library or research) and which service they have to turn to. They just have to find one of the integrated information points to get the requested document or information no matter whether it is library or research type. The most disappointing thing for users is to be directed from one service to another because of the lack of competence.

Cost-effectiveness: An integrated service facilitates to avoid duplication of different services and duplication of expenses. In this particular case: as its spaces are dedicated for the public, the Library would have to open a separate area and appoint special staff for the parliamentary users. The integrated service can satisfy all information needs on the basis of existing material and human resources.

The above subscribed situation and the chosen technical solution seems to be unusual. However, the results of the thinking about the principles of information services for MPs can be thought-provoking. The most important lesson of our experience is that a close cooperation of the library and the research service results more convenient and effective service for Members.