



**Parliament of Montenegro
Parliamentary Institute
Research Centre**

Research paper:

**Comparative overview of the structure of
parliamentary services specialised for international
relations and Office of the Secretary General in
some European countries**

Podgorica, December 2015

Number: 15/2015

Classification No: 00-52/15-

Date: December 2015

Prepared by: Research paper – Parliamentary Institute

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I MAIN FINDINGS

When it comes to institutional units of parliamentary services specialised for **international relations**, the analysed 28 European states contain more similarities than differences. Namely, virtually every analysed state parliament (with the notable exception of Denmark), has an organisational unit within its services dedicated exclusively to this issue area, whether in the form of a *sector* (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia), *department* (Estonia, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, FYR Macedonia, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden), *directorate* (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania), *office* (Croatia, Ireland, Netherlands), *secretariat* (Iceland), *service* (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Liechtenstein, Switzerland) or *bureau* (Latvia, Poland).

Despite these nominal variations, all of these organisational units handle a relatively equally defined workload – maintenance of bilateral and multilateral relations with foreign states and international organisations within the scope of Parliament, arrangement of visits to foreign states and visits of foreign delegations, as well as the preparation and processing of documents relevant to the field of international relations for the Parliament. The Secretary General (or, in some cases, the General Director), as the highest-ranking parliamentary service official, manages the work of these organisational units, while delegating the day-to-day management of the unit to a designated parliamentary official.

The majority of analysed states include the protocol-related activities within the competences of these organisational units. This is the case in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland. In other states, such as Serbia and Macedonia, protocol activities are reserved for the Office of the Secretary General.

Also, in a number of analysed states, these organisational units also carry out the translation and interpretation work for the needs of their respective parliaments. This is especially the case in countries of our region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia), as well as in Germany, Lithuania and Portugal. In Germany, Lithuania and Serbia there are also separate organisational units specialised exclusively for translation work.

In some parliaments, the organisational units specialised for international relations also have additional assignments. Thus, for example, in Greece there is a separate directorate for relations with emigrants within the General Directorate for International Relations and Communications, whereas in German Bundestag there is a special organisational unit specialised for international exchange programmes. Also, in a number of countries, these organisational units also handle public relations and public informing from the field of international (parliamentary) relations.

There is a certain specificity worth mentioning in force in the parliaments of Estonia and Finland. Namely, in these two states, the organisational units in charge of international

relations enjoy a special position within the hierarchy of parliamentary services – unlike other organisational units of the same rank, the Estonian Department of International Relations and Finnish International Department are under the direct authority of the Secretary General (or, in the case of Estonia, the General Director), who manages the functioning of these organisational units.¹

When it comes to the **Office of Secretary General**, the situation is significantly different. Out of 23 states included in the analysis, 13 of them (Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Macedonia, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Sweden) have this organisational unit as a part of their parliamentary services, while in the remaining ten (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Portugal) there is no such organisational unit.

In the parliaments which contain this organisational unit, its scope of work mostly consists of performing a variety of administrative, advisory, technical and professional activities within the scope of activities of the Secretary General, as well as other tasks delegated by the Secretary General. Also, as noted previously, in certain cases this organisational unit also handles protocol-related activities. Hence, the Office is under direct authority of the Secretary General, assigned with providing assistance in everyday work in a number of delegated areas. The case of the National Assembly of Serbia can be noted as an exception in a certain sense – it has the institution of the General Secretariat which includes a significantly larger number of employees, but also manages a much broader scope of authority, including: preparation of the National Assembly sessions, public relations, protocol, education, as well as organising and publishing stenographic notes. Netherlands is another state with a unique institutional model, because it merges the offices of the Presidency, President and Secretary General into a unified Secretariat.

When it comes to the parliaments which do not include the office of Secretary General in their respective parliamentary services, some of them have alternative institutional solutions: in Finland, Latvia and Liechtenstein, Secretary General is aided by a single deputy, while in Austria and Italy there are two, and in Iceland three such deputies, *i.e.* assistants, managing certain sections of parliamentary service. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is the institution of the Collegium of the Secretariat (consisting of secretaries of both houses of Parliament and the Secretary of Common Services), while in Estonia some of the Secretary General's duties are delegated to the Deputy Secretary General and the Administrative Director. In Denmark, on the other hand, instead of a single office there are two organisational units performing its duties: the Office for Human Resources and the Secretariat for General Management.

The following chapters provide an overview of institutional solutions in these two areas (international relations unit and the Office of Secretary General) in 28 European states.

¹ However, in both cases there is a managing officer as the head of the unit, hierarchically subordinate to the Secretary General (or General Director) who manages the day-to-day functioning of the unit.