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### The Documentation Centre of the Swiss Federal Assembly – providing knowledge in a complex environment

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#### Summary

*One of parliament's tasks consists in exerting an ordering and regulating influence as part of a complex political system. It must identify emerging problems, and then tackle them and solve them. This requires knowledge: knowledge must be acquired, processed and translated into action. My contribution uses the example of a small service to explain the conditions that have to be satisfied by parliamentary documentation to meet the requirements of a national parliament. What is crucial in this context is a good maintenance and organisation of the provision of knowledge.*

#### 1. Notes on Switzerland's political system

By way of introduction, I would like to sketch Switzerland and its political system, because this system also provides the framework conditions for the work of a parliamentary documentation service.

Switzerland is a country with about 7.3 million inhabitants and a surface of 41,285 km<sup>2</sup>. 63.9% of the population speak German, 19.5% French, 6.6% Italian and 0.5% Rhaeto-Romanic. Its linguistic diversity is also reflected in parliament, where members represent the national languages in due proportion. Parliamentary debates are conducted in four languages, and most documents are available in three languages. This has consequences for the Parliamentary Services, which basically have to work in three languages. When personnel are recruited, care is taken that the various linguistic

regions are adequately represented. Incidentally, about 20% of the population are foreign nationals, and 10% of the population have a mother tongue other than a national language.

In terms of government structure, Switzerland is a federation with 26 cantonal member states, which have significant competencies in many political spheres. The Federal Constitution was originally adopted in 1848. Modelled on the example of the United States, it created institutions which do not only still exist but have in fact hardly been changed at all.

#### *Parliament – with part-time members (“Militia System”)*

The Swiss Federal Assembly is organised according to the two-chamber system. The people's house, the National Council, consists of 200 members who are distributed among the cantons in proportion to their populations. The small house, the Council of States, possesses the same competencies as the National Council. Any enactments can only be adopted if they are approved by both chambers. Each canton sends two representatives to the Council of States, the six half-cantons one each, which means that the Council of States is made up of 46 members.

One crucial factor for the work of the Parliamentary Services is the fact that Switzerland has no full-time parliament. Members of parliament are not paid for a full-time job but only for a 50-70% job. In 2003, they are, for the first time, also being paid a special compensation that will enable them to employ an aide on a modest scale. To this day, the Federal Assembly conceives of itself as an institution whose members partially work in an honorary capacity.

#### *The Parliamentary Services – a young organisation*

This tradition of a part-time parliament, which is characteristic of Switzerland, is also the reason why the Parliamentary Services have not been in existence for very long and are still comparably small. What consequences does the part-time system have for the provision of information? We assume that a part-time member of parliament cannot invest as much time in his mandate as a full-time parliamentarian because his profession also makes great claims on his time. Thus we may well have a lighter workload than our colleagues who serve a full-time parliament. Then again, it must be said that the part-time system aggravates MPs' "knowledge problem", which is ubiquitous. A part-time parliament must always deal with very complex issues in a short period of time and thus requires exceptionally good and precise information.

In their present form, the Parliamentary Services have only been in existence since 1972. Previously, any services required by parliament were provided by the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Council's staff organ. The Federal Chancellery was responsible for the organisation of meetings, translation work and the publication of the parliamentary minutes, the Stenographic Bulletin. Only a few persons worked in this capacity. The legislative committees were directly served by the relevant offices of the Federal Administration.

In the 1960s, these structures were increasingly the target of criticism. The Mirage Affair – a scandal arising from the procurement of fighter jets – clearly showed that the existing

structures had to be improved and that they were incompatible with the principle of the separation of powers.

As a consequence of the Mirage Affair, the first services were set up as early as 1967: a Secretariat for the Auditing Committee and a Documentation Service. It is interesting to see that documentation tasks (the provision of information and knowledge independently of the administration) were central tasks of the Parliamentary Services from the start.

By 1976, the number of employees working for parliament had risen to 44. A further reorganisation took place in 1987 and 1988, after the need for an improvement in the infrastructure and services for members of parliament had been voiced repeatedly. In 1988, the name of the service was also changed. The existing Documentation Service was organised according to a new concept and named Documentation Centre. In the past ten years, further extension steps have ensued. Today, 305 employees work for the Federal Assembly, which between them occupy some 160 full-time jobs. In the field of documentation, 21 employees share 13 full-time jobs.

#### *A system of concordance in government: the "magic formula" since 1959*

The Swiss government, the Federal Council, consists of seven members, who are elected by the Federal Assembly. Ever since 1959, there has been a government coalition, the so-called "magic formula", according to which the big parliamentary parties are represented on the strength of their size: two representatives each are provided by the Liberals, the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, one representative is provided by the Swiss People's Party. We thus have an exceptionally stable concordance system rather than a competitive system with one party in power and another in opposition.

I think that this concordance system also makes the documentation tasks easier for us. The Federal Administration is not dominated by a "governing party"; rather, there is generally a climate of openness and cooperation. We have very close and good ties with the Federal Administration and, as a rule, are provided with the desired information without any problems.

#### *Direct democracy as a challenge*

Finally, the people's rights constitute a particular challenge for us in our capacity as information providers. Switzerland has institutions of direct democracy – the people's initiative and the referendum – which enable interest groups to bring about a popular vote on virtually every important issue. This results in approximately 15 popular votes per year. Members of parliament are frequently involved at the forefront of such voting campaigns. Our Service provides them with the necessary documents, which increases our workload to a considerable degree.

## **2. Information flows in the political system**

Before I introduce the Service, I would like to present some general reflections on the issue of information processing in a political system.

One of parliament's tasks consists in exerting an ordering and regulating influence as part of a complex political system. It must identify emerging problems, and then tackle them and solve them. This requires knowledge: knowledge must be acquired, processed and translated into action. It is obvious that members of parliament are unlikely to be able to solve their information and knowledge problems unaided.

One short comment should be made about the terms *knowledge* and *information*. As a practitioner, I would like to venture a simple definition:

*Information* denotes data concerning an event or a state of affairs.

*Knowledge* denotes a higher form of information, i.e. it is application-related information – or know-how – and enables its possessor to act in a problem-solving manner in a particular case.

Members of parliament require both knowledge and information and are able to acquire both in a wide variety of ways:

- For one thing, by direct access. They can retrieve information from the Internet, find it in a reference library or in files of their own, or they can consult experts. Frequently, such experts are colleagues in the parliamentary party, but they may also be external political advisors. We all know the great proportions that political consultancy has assumed, and we know the problems that are connected with it.
- Members of parliament can avail themselves of a special service that will provide them with information and knowledge. This is where parliamentary documentation services occupy an important position, but they do not have a monopoly. Members of parliament may commission other offices to conduct research, such as the members of the secretariat of the parliamentary parties, or associations to which they are close. If they enjoy any direct access to the administration, they will put that to good use, too.

Knowledge and information also reach members of parliament unasked. A large number of information producers send them their documents. They are sent many things in digital form; their mailboxes are always more than full. Apart from this, however, paper is still stubbornly fighting its corner. In everyday life this means that a member of the Federal Assembly receives about five kilograms of mail per day: it is an open secret that the vast majority of these documents are consigned to the wastepaper basket unread.

The Parliamentary Services and, as a further unit within them, the Documentation Centre are thus part of a complex system. For many members of parliament, they are very important, whereas others – and this must be said openly – regard them as of secondary importance.

The issue of information processing within a political system is apt to raise many fundamental questions. What kind of information do members of parliament actually need? In what form do they need it? And, come to think of it, what for? An information scientist who analysed these information flows would make many very interesting observations.

I must admit that, as a practitioner, I only deal with these questions in a marginal manner. We pursue a pragmatic approach. We try to align our services according to requirements, and we think that years of experience have enabled us to create the structures that do indeed satisfy these requirements. Then again, I must concede that the questions as to MPs' requirements is very difficult to answer.

Even so, I would like to add a little comment on a question which, generally speaking, hardly occupies us practitioners: for what purposes do members of parliament need information?

This question elicits very different answers since it is bound up with the question as to the point of parliamentary activities. A member of parliament can pursue many aims, ranging from selfless commitment to the common good and good legislation to behaviour patterns that have little to do with problem-solving. This is frequently about short-term, tactical considerations, responses to daily events, worries about their re-election, and personal advantages. In individual cases, such requirements may be justified, but they must not become the dominating element. In our capacity as knowledge providers, we generally ask few questions as to our clients' motivations, but we would be pleased to see that our work could contribute towards enabling parliament, as part of a complex political system, to find good solutions to pending political questions.

### **3. Tasks and organisation of the Documentation Centre of the Federal Assembly**

The tasks of the Documentation Centre (DC) are defined in Article 13 of the Regulation concerning the Parliamentary Services of 7 October 1988. However, some of these provisions are obsolete and will soon be replaced by directives that circumscribe the tasks of the Service in a flexible, general manner.

Instead of dwelling on the legal basis, however, I would like to represent the tasks of the Documentation Centre in the way in which we conceive of them and successfully practise them today.

#### *Tasks*

The documental services of the Documentation Centre are available to the members of parliament, the parliamentary parties and authorised third persons. Members of parliament may avail themselves of these services for the preparation of speeches, contributions to debates, motions, media appearances, conferences, trips to other countries, etc., or for a fundamental documentation in connection with certain factual questions.

It goes without saying that the tasks entrusted to the DC also concern extra-parliamentary political work. The DC works on a very wide range of tasks, which may concern highly unusually questions. In fact, there is hardly any question that we cannot be asked.

Thus the Documentation Centre is an organisation that collects, processes, indexes and provides knowledge and information. We provide information on request, but also offer members of parliament documents on our own initiative.

What is of greatest importance to us are good relations with other information providers, close cooperation, and the exact knowledge about where we are able to obtain what. Cooperation with the other Parliamentary Services – for instance with the Committee Secretariats, the Internet Service and the IT Service, and the Service for the Official Bulletin – must be particularly close.

Equally close are our relations with the government and the administration, which offer fundamental information on their websites. The fact that today, many important documents are accessible on the Internet makes our work substantially easier. I am thinking in particular of the statute books containing cantonal, national and international law, or of the statistical information provided by the Federal Statistical Office.

You are bound to be aware of the further framework conditions of parliamentary documentation. Of course, information must be precise, neutral, and tailored to the individual MP's requirements, and of course, information must be provided in due time, if need be in a few minutes.

Thus we consider our main task to be the provision of information. For this reason, our Service does not bear the name *Bibliothek* since classic bibliothecarial work constitutes only part of our main task. The English term *library* may well cover all the work we do, but the German term *Bibliothek* strikes us as too narrow.

How are we able to fulfil these tasks?

### *Organisation*

In an international comparison, our Service is relatively small. It consists of a total of 13 full-time jobs, which are shared by 21 employees.

- Secretariat

The Secretariat is run by four employees with a total of 220 job percentage points. They fulfil the following functions:

- they accept orders and pass them on;
- they carry out orders (if possible);
- they compile documentations;
- they carry out secretarial work and deal with the incoming and outgoing mail;
- they keep various records with frequently requested documents (Messages of the Federal Council, laws, etc.).

Thanks to a great deal of experience and efficiency, these employees succeed in fulfilling these difficult tasks to the MPs' great satisfaction. The good reputation of a service often depends on small details, and those small details include good accessibility, friendliness, and a quick and reliable service provided for clients. Orders can be placed with us in different ways, for instance with a form that is available in all the rooms of the Federal Palace as well as on the Internet.

The following documentations are produced in the Secretariat:

An important working instrument for members of parliament, but also for the media, is the *Preview* of the three-week sessions. This Preview contains a brief piece of information about each item on the agenda. It can also be consulted on the Internet.

The *Press Reviews* and *Documentation Packages* are further products.

A publication that the Secretariat compiles in cooperation with the Research Staff is the *Review of the Legislative Period*, which is published in German and French. The Review of the Legislative Period contains a survey of all the parliamentary business. There is a summary of each business item, which is written up during the legislative period itself and can also be retrieved from the CuriaVista business database.

Moreover, the Secretariat publishes a list of new items and parliamentary actions newly submitted during a session, ordered according to subject matter.

- Research Staff

The Research Staff have been allocated six full-time jobs, which are shared by eight employees. These employees fulfil the following functions:

- they carry out orders placed by members of parliament;
- they keep records on certain subjects (partially in digital form, as files on the website of the Federal Assembly);
- they study, evaluate and index documents;
- they undergo further training, particularly in the field of information gathering;
- they cooperate with regard to products of the Documentation Centre (Review of the Legislative Period);
- they maintain and develop the thesaurus of the Parliamentary Services (*Helvetosaurus*);
- they are responsible for the user project management of the CuriaVista business database.

The Research Staff are responsible for certain subjects in which they have acquired specialist knowledge. In view of the small size of the Service, however, this knowledge is often insufficient for a task to be carried out. We thus tend to conceive of ourselves as information specialists and generalists who know where to find information that is of high quality and satisfies an MP's requirements. In this context, there are countless good sources that can be exploited. There are many institutions which work for us whenever the need arises. For comparative studies, for instance, we can turn to the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, and for international relations, we can avail ourselves of the services of the ever helpful colleagues in other parliamentary services. In particular, I would like to mention the European Centre of Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), for which correspondents work in 70 parliamentary assemblies.

Yet I would still like to mention that at times we are perfectly able to build up competencies with regard to subjects for which there are no specialists in the administration. The website of the Federal Assembly, too, always displays records that are maintained by us and that cannot be found in this form elsewhere.

Evaluations in the sense of an analysis or a summary, however, are not possible as a rule.

One remark on the workload: we keep statistics on the major orders that require research work. These jobs are listed in an order list. The number of orders rose from 839 in 1994 to 1325 in 1996 and now stands at about 1200 orders a year. Apart from this, we also carry out many minor tasks, which often only consist in providing some information and about which no statistical records are kept.

There is no doubt that, with the same number of personnel, we were only able to cope with the increasing workload in the 1990s through an extensive use of electronic information provision. In many cases, members of parliament or other people find the requisite information on the website of the Federal Assembly or the Federal Administration without any problems. Here, I would like to mention the Systematic Federal Statute Book or the Federal Journal.

For this reason, the maintenance and further development of electronic information provision has a very high priority with us. This deserves a few comments.

One of the most important tasks is to offer the information produced by parliament to its users in an adequate manner. This mostly concerns information about parliamentary business, its content, and the status of the debate. For this purpose, we cooperate with other services to run the CuriaVista business database, which is open to all interested parties on the website of the Federal Assembly.

A wide variety of search possibilities are available. With the "extended search", we can look for things according to, say, business types, MPs and chamber. Users who want to have more information about the various possibilities can refer to the aid texts on the right. If I want to look for one particular MP's parliamentary actions, the titles will display in a menu. Of course, we can also find the names of previous members of parliament.

Naturally, the search according to issues is of particular significance to us. Members of parliament and other users of CuriaVista frequently require information about a certain subject. This type of search can be conducted with a full-text facility which, however, produces incomplete or far too many results in many cases. What we greatly recommend, and what is far more effective, is a search with the thesaurus. In my view, a good thesaurus still remains the best instrument for a high-quality indexation of documents.

*What is a thesaurus?*

A thesaurus is an ordered list of words which serves to index ("file") documents and to *find them again*. Like a subject index of a library, a thesaurus is a working instrument for ordering documents and for targeted research according to subject-matter criteria within extensive data inventories. Individual documents are filed in a database with

expressions from the thesaurus that match their subject matter. In this way, documents can be found again, ordered according to their content.

The basis for this thesaurus was EUROVOC, the thesaurus of the European Parliament and the Office for Official Publications of the European Union. This example shows you that Switzerland as a non-member of the EU is not afraid of rapprochement with the EU. However, EUROVOC was "helvetised", i.e. expressions required in Switzerland were added, expressions that could be misunderstood or would not be understood were deleted, and parts of the hierarchical structure were modified.

The thesaurus has the following essential advantages:

- *A hierarchical structure*  
The thesaurus has a hierarchical structure and enables users to conduct a summarising search across several hierarchical levels (generic term and the terms subsumed under it), as well as a precise search with only one single expression.
- *Synonym check*  
In everyday life, we often use various words for one single issue. In a database, however, the documents concerning one particular issue can hardly be found again if these different words are used in an unchecked manner. It is therefore of central significance that whenever documents are indexed and searched for, words with the same or similar meaning are subsumed under *one* preferential description, the so-called descriptor.

The CuriaVista database offers users a search with the help of the thesaurus. For example, a member of parliament would like to have a look at parliamentary actions in the field of alternative energies. Of course, there is a whole range of these, and they have a wide variety of names. A full-text search would be extremely time-consuming.

Before the actual search can be started, descriptors must be found that are appropriate to the question. Only with their help can the documents be looked for and found. According to the two representations of the thesaurus, the best descriptor can be determined in two ways:

1. If you already have a very precise idea of the search word, it is of advantage to start with this term. If there are no immediate results, it is recommended that the word should be truncated with asterisks at both ends, or else a synonym should be tried.
2. If you have no precise idea of the search word, the best thing to do is to start with one of the terms in the top hierarchical level. You first select a rough subject area, then look for a suitable term subsumed under it. In this way, you can work downwards to find as precise a descriptor as possible.

We thus click on "Energy" on the list of subject areas, and so obtain all the terms subsumed under it. Far down in this alphabetical list, we will find the correct descriptor, "Soft energy", with all its own subordinate terms. A search with the descriptor "Soft energy" on all the levels of the hierarchy will now result in 76 hits. If I only want any parliamentary business in which the soft energy issue has only been treated in a general manner, then I look for it without any subordinate terms, which will result in 17 hits.

I have treated this point in more detail because good indexation and a good maintenance of the thesaurus is a central point of our documentation services. What with the data that we have in the business database, it is in many cases not possible at all for a full-text search or an automatic indexing system to be successful. Without indexation, a parliamentary business can only be found again if it has a truly expressive title and contains a sufficient number of other terms that could be found with a full-text search. This is not always the case by any manner of means.

These were my remarks on our in-house databases and search facilities. Needless to say, exploring the Internet and external databases for information is also very important for the Research Staff. In this respect, we permanently follow developments and apply for access to those databases that are subject to fees. What is very valuable to us is access to the databases of the news agencies.

- Library

I suspect that I am about to introduce you to one of the smallest libraries of a national parliament. Three full-time jobs have been allocated to this, which are shared by various part-time employees.

*Services provided by the library*

- Library catalogue, archives; collection and recording of documents of all kinds, particularly "grey literature".
- Lending of documents from our library and other libraries.
- Research in library catalogues and on the Internet.

The procurement, administration and indexation of documents of all kinds is a core function of the Documentation Centre. This work is mainly done by those employees who work in the library. The Research Staff are involved in the indexation of the documents, which is carried out by means of the previously mentioned thesaurus. Particular attention is paid to the recording of papers published in journals and contributions to anthologies. As a rule, papers published in journals are of far better service to our clients than books.

At present, some 2500 documents are recorded annually in our library database, which consists of about 40000 documents.

The library database is part of the Alexandria Association, which unites about 30 important libraries of the Federal Administration, as well as the library of the Federal Tribunal. This Association is run with the VTLS software. We have been part of this Association since 1998; it provides us with access to more than a million documents. In June 2003, it was converted to the VTLS VIRTUA software. At present, we are evaluating other solutions which are intended to reduce our dependence on the Association and allow for further improvements in the range of our services.

The Alexandria Association is our most important partner, but thanks to the Internet, we also have access to virtually all the important libraries of Switzerland and the whole

world. As a consequence, it is less and less important where the book is physically situated. And this also serves to explain why just a few employees succeed in carrying out all the library work.

Needless to say, we are at pains to have books that are in frequent demand on our own shelves, in certain cases several copies. One particular task consists in storing a number of copies of publications (books, reports, studies) that are available free of charge in our archives and making them available to our clients on request.

A word about the Federal Parliamentary and Central Library (EPZB):

The EPZB is the Confederation's oldest administrative library. It evolved out of the Federal Diet Library, which until 1848 had always been located in *Vorort*, i.e. the canton whose turn it was to chair the Federal Diet. When the Confederation was founded, it was integrated into the Federal Department of Home Affairs as the *Canzleibibliothek*, the Chancellery Library. In 1914, the Federal Chancellery became an independent unit; for reasons of space, however, the library remained with the original ministry and slowly developed into a *Centralbibliothek*, which also kept an overall catalogue of all the Confederation's specialist libraries. In 1886 and 1899, the first printed catalogues appeared, which were periodically extended by means of supplements. After the First World War, many departments set up their own libraries, and the Central Library lost its earlier significance. During the Second World War, it remained without an actual management for a lengthy period of time. Federal Councillor Philipp Etter then instructed the new Head to build up a legal and administrative library that would serve the entire Administration. The renovation of 1963-65 provided the library with today's appearance. At that time, however, the Secretariat of the Department of Home Affairs left the West Wing and moved to Inselgasse. When parliament demanded an extension of its ancillary services in the wake of the Mirage Affair and set up the Documentation Services for the Federal Assembly, the Central Library received a new rule book with new functions, and moved from the Department of Home Affairs to the Federal Chancellery.

This resulted in the somewhat peculiar situation whereby, besides our library, there is an administrative library which also styles itself "Parliamentary Library". This fact, however, does not have any adverse impact on our good cooperation.

Electronic information provision as it presents itself today also deserves a few words.

- *E-Doc – information provision on the website*

Like any other institution, our library is facing new challenges. The librarians conceive of themselves as managers of information and knowledge, and they have to deal with innovations and problems in the sphere of librarianship. One important new issue is the "electronic library". In this field, we have broken new ground with the introduction of the *E-doc* page on the website of the Federal Assembly.

This page presents general information about the Documentation Centre, contacts, and an order form.

Under the heading *Aktuell* or *Actualité*, you will find topical reports, consultations, press reviews and documentation packages. Some of the documents can be downloaded. Documents that cannot be downloaded can only be ordered by members of parliament,

employees of parliamentary parties and employees of the Parliamentary Services, as is indicated on this page. We regret to say that we are unable to process orders placed by third persons. We would like to ask such third persons to refer directly to the publishers.  
– An *archive* contains documents that were offered in the past.

Finally, members of parliament can find a list of the digital files offered on the website under *Dossiers*.

Under the heading *Bibliothek* or *Bibliothèque*, members of parliament will find a list of new acquisitions, as well as the library catalogues. This facility can also be used for borrowing documents or for proposing an acquisition.

This is followed by a list of journals, statistics and annual reports that are digitally available. This is a transitional solution, which is soon intended to be offered in a new, improved form.

- Press evaluation

Finally, a word about the Press Evaluation Service. This service consists of three employees, who share 190 job percentage points. They evaluate 60 daily and weekly newspapers every day. The relevant articles are cut out and manually filed in about 400 subject files. Articles about members of parliament and other personalities from politics and the economy are filed in biographical press folders.

Most of these newspapers are also available in digital form today, but often only subject to the payment of fees. We continuously follow developments and ensure that we gain access to these papers. What is most interesting for us is to be included in an overall access package, i.e. in agreements which the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics concludes for the Federal Administration as a whole.

To date, we have been unable to do without manual press evaluation because as a rule, the archives do not allow for a useful selection according to certain issues. The future will show whether these research facilities improve in such a manner that a manual selection effected by a discerning individual will no longer be necessary.

#### **4. Conclusions**

I think I may say that the Documentation Centre fulfils the tasks entrusted to it very successfully in so far as this is possible with its limited means. As a rule, members of parliament always consider our work to be valuable and in accordance with their requirements.

It must also be mentioned, particularly from an international point of view, that our Service in its present state is unable to satisfy a variety of important postulates. In the medium term, we thus aim at a further extension and at the realisation of the following new services:

1. The creation of a *research service proper*. We mainly deal with the provision of information. Members of parliament do not receive in-house analyses but existing

reports, papers, newspaper articles and information from the Internet. In our environment, this lack is not crucial, however, since we live in an information society that is characterised by an extraordinary density of information. With regard to almost all orders, we succeed in finding high-quality information, frequently also in a short form as a so-called fact sheet. There is no doubt, however, that members of parliament would increasingly like to have concise, precise and high-quality information, particularly as a decision-making basis for dealing with parliamentary business in the chamber.

2. Increased *specialisation in specific matters*. We work as generalists; in comparison with specialists in the Administration, our specific knowledge is quite limited. This means that the Administration is still permanently superior to us, which is problematical in many cases.

3. *"Marketing"*. Our limited means do not permit us to go on the offensive. Thus we make only few efforts to make our product range known and to gain new clients. I suspect that there are a number of members of parliament who are unaware of our services and competencies. Moreover, there may well be numerous MPs whose use of the resource, information, is inefficient and who do not know our techniques and products. In this context, personal consultation and training should be on offer. At present, we are only able to do this in individual cases.

4. *"Knowledge management"*. The more the information volume grows, the more difficult it is to process and present. People who are interested in a certain issue should be able to get at the information they want quickly and safely instead of helplessly facing an endless list of hits. From my point of view, this is where we and many other providers of information have some catching up to do. We are therefore planning to set up and maintain a knowledge platform on the website that is intended to satisfy demands of a very high standard.

The application of the possibilities of knowledge management – i.e. the systematic utilisation and administration of knowledge – should be examined in depth, not only with regard to the Documentation Centre but in the Parliamentary Services as a whole. I am unlikely to say anything new if I mention here that information flows do not always flow in the way that we, as information providers, would like to see. The larger an organisation becomes, the more serious the impact of this. This leads me back to the remark I made at the beginning, namely that we are practitioners who pursue pragmatic approaches. I admit that this approach puts us at the risk of not becoming aware of developments and innovations in good time.

5. The structures that are available to parliaments in other countries include a *help desk* in the immediate proximity to the chambers. Our low number of personnel has made such an institution impossible so far. However, the fact that our offices are close to the chambers enables us to work efficiently even without a help desk.

### *Summary*

By way of summary, I repeat our complex *point of departure*:

- two chambers, one with 200 members, the other with 46 members;
- a part-time parliament;
- three languages;
- direct democracy;

- demand for high-quality information;
- great diversity of issues;
- short lead times: "become an expert in three minutes";
- low number of personnel.

*Success factors: working methods, work organisation, operative culture*

The factors which enable us to work successfully in these conditions are as follows:

- *Working methods*

- Focus on the provision of information: knowing what is available where.
- Good relationships with knowledge managers and knowledge producers: Administration, experts, Parliamentary Services, libraries.
- Good knowledge of sources: Internet, databases, libraries.
- Our own work: Preview/Review, Review of the Legislative Period, Press Reviews.
- Good presence of our own on the Internet (together with the Internet Service), CuriaVista, Official Bulletin.
- High research quality (newspaper archives, news databases).
- Indexation (thesaurus).

- *Work organisation*

- Short decision-making processes, autonomy, flat hierarchies.
- Close links between the individual parts of the Service.

- *Operative culture*

- Good cooperation among qualified, motivated personnel with a great deal of practical experience.

*Note:* A PowerPoint presentation will be drawn up for this paper which can be retrieved on the homepage of the Swiss Federal Assembly, [www.parlament.ch](http://www.parlament.ch), under E-Doc, Contacts.