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REPORT*

“Fostering digitalization and innovation in order to improve the legislative process and transparency of the parliamentary activity”

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the issue of fostering the process of digitalization in the parliaments has become topical. Implementation of urgent tasks in difficult pandemic conditions, ensuring the timely adoption of the decisions in an emergency situation and the fastest possible delivery of information to the population, has required innovative approaches for using effective digital communication means, as well as for improving data exchange standards, with a more efficient use of the Internet, of electronic media and of social networks.
2. In this relation, during the 57th Meeting of the PABSEC Legal and Political Affairs Committee, held online on 9 April 2021, the PABSEC Romanian delegation proposed the topic “Fostering digitalization and innovation in order to improve the legislative process and transparency of the parliamentary activity” as the main subject of the 58th Meeting of the Committee.
3. The development of the societies is marked increasingly by the growing role of digitalization and the new information technologies. Today about 5 trillion USD is spent for the development of digital technologies, and this figure is growing from year to year. Digital technologies are present in the everyday life of a person, surrounding professional activities and leisure as an important component of communication and information. Politics as well as other public spheres, is viewed, at the present stage, in the context of digitalization. Digital platforms are progressively integrated into the political processes, political communication and public administration. Digital technologies are widely used in political processes and the work of the parliaments: e-voting, e-democracy, e-participation, online campaigns, e-parliament, etc.
4. The parliaments, as one of the main pillars of the democratic society, play a key role in the enhancement of democracy and democratic institutions. The parliamentarians as elected representatives, have an important role in promoting the people-centred development based on the needs of their electors. In this context, the digitalization of the legislative institutions contributes to an increased transparency, accountability and a greater public interest and engagement in the legislative processes.
5. The present Report uses the information provided by the national delegations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Turkey and Ukraine. In addition, the reference material has been obtained by the PABSEC International Secretariat from the relevant sources of the Internet.

II. FOSTERING DIGITALIZATION AND INNOVATION IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY

6. The digitalization and innovation are actively being introduced into all the spheres of the life of the modern society. Today, modern mobile devices and electronic gadgets offer a wide range of services through mobile platforms and applications. The new technologies ensure the active entry of the national authorities into a new communication environment. The governmental structures, state leaders, parliaments, diplomatic missions more often use the main social networks (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) providing the opportunity for an immediate response to any information and mobilizing wider public opinion.
7. Fostering digitalization in the parliamentary activities contributes to a greater transparency and openness. Innovative approaches in the work of parliaments accelerate the mechanisms for

overseeing the strengthening of democratic governance and create the necessary conditions for improving the efficiency of the legislative process. To this end, it is important to ensure the transition towards a more transparent and efficient governance that requires sound strategies, long-term investments and efficient and sustainable use of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT). At the same time, it is necessary to guarantee the resilience of the technical infrastructure, including telecommunication equipment, software, special applications and security services. The countries in the world, including the BSEC Member States, are introducing various information and communication platforms to strengthen the accountability mechanism, since the participation of citizens in assessing the activities of democratic institutions and the quality of democratic processes is extremely important in the modern world.

8. In the era of the information society and in the context of the widespread introduction of new information technologies, new risks arise along with new opportunities, with possible negative consequences associated with the protection of big data. In the converged information and communication environment of new technologies, it is necessary to establish strict rules for working with personal data with due regard to the public safety. In this regard, it is necessary to pay a special attention to ensure the information security. The countries implement quite a number of information development projects, including the concept of an electronic parliament. It should be noted that during the pandemic, parliaments increased their efforts to promote accountability, transparency and social cohesion, and to create more inclusive and resilient societies, taking advantage of the latest achievements in informatics.
9. According to the 2020 World E-parliament Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Report, the Covid-19 pandemic has further strengthened the importance of the ICT in the legislative institutions. In all the countries there is quite a big number of development projects in the IT sector, including projects of applying e-parliament concepts. The parliaments have integrated digital strategies, embracing the full potential of digital approach to the parliamentary activities. The digitalization has been implemented in the daily activities of the parliaments and by the end of 2020, 65% of the parliaments have held virtual or hybrid committee meetings and 33%, a virtual or hybrid plenary meetings. During the last two years, the parliamentary activity has changed to remote working practices. Cloud-based tools and digital solutions have been used widely. During the pandemic, the ICT have become the main elements of the parliamentary operation.
10. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to modernization of parliamentary procedures, building on rapid changes in the institutional culture, by retaining and fine-tuning what has worked and embracing continued innovation. The crisis has appeared to make parliaments more agile as they react effectively to various problems through innovative and flexible approach, with a stronger focus on the existing needs. The digital innovation of parliaments has gone through three phases: enforced innovation, as parliaments have responded quickly, in order to continue their activity; improvement and second-stage innovation, in order to develop the working solutions; consolidation of the new approaches, to embed the new ways of working into the regular procedures of the parliamentary activities.
11. The process of the implementation of the concept of the e-parliament model has been accelerated by applying the new technologies, in order to strengthen the parliamentary participation and promote better political inclusiveness. The e-parliament as a qualitatively new form of governance within the information society, envisages an intensive use of Internet technologies, for the promotion of the parliamentary activity and visibility. The E-parliament is defined as a concept that places new technologies, knowledge and standards, at the heart of its business processes and embodies the values of collaboration, inclusiveness, participation and openness for the people.

The e-parliament is a management system based on automated processes within the parliament, serving the objective to improve the efficiency of the parliamentary activity and a better participation for every member of the society.

12. The creation of open and transparent parliaments increases the trust of citizens in the public institutions. All the online platforms play an important role in assessing the performance of government bodies, by citizens. Such platforms provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of achieved missions, goals and objectives, a potential and progressive development, etc. In this regard, the use of innovative information and communication technologies contributes to strengthening public control over the actions of public authorities and, to a certain extent, leads to the prevention of violations of the norms established by law. Strengthening the control over the activities of the state machinery can significantly reduce corruption at all levels.
13. Modern Internet technologies provide unique opportunities for state bodies, including parliaments, to quickly publish laws and decisions, as well as maintain a free flow of information and respond to citizens' inquiries. Publishing key information on official websites and disseminating it through other means of public communication, promotes trust. Free exchange of information among citizens, society and the state, is an important factor in increasing the level of transparency and strengthening stability. The internet transmission (streaming) of online discussions, surveys, e-petitions, online consultations is one of the most used tools to provide openness and transparency.
14. The current state of government participation in the digital and technological dimension of politics includes the increased use of new communication platforms and tools, in organizing general elections. Digital election technologies develop rapidly and involve the new forms of electronic or digital voting. However, an important task in this respect is to ensure a safe, reliable and transparent electoral process, using modern digital technologies and their regular improvement. The system of remote electronic voting is especially relevant in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, when the electoral system faces the difficult task of organizing and holding elections, ensuring the safety of life and the health of all the participants in the electoral process. In this regard, in a number of countries, amendments have been made to the legislation, providing for the possibility of conducting online voting, taking into account the observance of sanitary and epidemiological requirements in order to ensure the safety of citizens during elections.
15. In the prevailing digital environment, the main elements of political relations and interaction among countries, are being transformed. Digital diplomacy uses Internet and social media to influence a wide audience and is the most effective tool in modern diplomacy. Being a convenient tool for presenting the life in a country, the culture, history, traditions and values of states, social networks are good assistants to the press services of the foreign policy departments. The use of digital technologies in the field of diplomatic activity opens up new opportunities for developing coordinated actions to overcome the political, social and economic crises. Politicians and diplomats actively use the possibilities of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, to hold discussions on various issues, on their official accounts, with the participation of a large international audience, whose position can influence the opinion of the bigger masses, given the fact that the number of active Internet users is constantly growing (more than 59% of the world population actively use Internet in 2021). At present, the significance of personal accounts of heads of state and key departments has constantly grown, at the international information environment and the posted messages are perceived as official statements and diplomatic notes.
16. Today, one of the urgent problems in international relations is the increased cyber threats. The unprecedented level of use of digital solutions, tools and services in response to the pandemic has

accelerated the global transition to digitalization. The growing demand for the use of information technologies in various spheres of activity requires more attention to the information security. The public servers are often target for cyber-attacks since they carry valuable information: government documents, personal data, and important information. The number of cyberattacks on government servers is increasing from year to year. More news appears in the media about hacking of social networks, personal emails, and secret data. Modern cybercrimes make proposals in the global network for the acquisition of stolen data or place them free for the public access. The most topical problem of cybercrime against a particular state is cyberterrorism.

17. Development and efficiency of information and communication support of legislative activity is one of the main and priority tasks for parliaments. The applied information technologies are important tools that allow a better coordinated work of parliamentarians, of their assistants and of the parliamentary staff in the process of legislative activity, as well as information interaction of parliaments with other government structures and setting up of the electronic documentation management system. At the same time, the new form of interaction between parliament and society implies the transformation of all publicly available services into mobile applications. However, in some countries, the lack of experience and necessary financial resources create problems in the process of establishing secure information infrastructure. To this end, it is necessary to study the best practices of information technology and digitalization. It is also necessary to ensure that the professional capacity and level of knowledge and skills of the staff of legislative bodies are increased, to fulfil their duties in the field of digitalization of parliamentary activity.

Situation in the BSEC Member States

18. Due to the pandemic, the concept of electronic parliament and “electronic Signature” has been applied in ***the Republic of Azerbaijan***, thanks to which the work of the legislative body and the MPs has become more effective. The central place is attributed to the issue of maximum use of innovative methods of regulation and implementation of public administration in Azerbaijan, introduction of modern technologies and new procedures. Steps are being taken to enhance electronic public service delivery.
19. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and other legislative acts, digitalization and e-government play an important role in the implementation of the goals and the functions of the state. E-government creates the conditions for state bodies to deliver by means of modern technologies information and electronic services to all citizens, legal entities and individuals, foreign citizens and stateless persons living in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
20. The digitalization in Azerbaijan started in early 2000s when the Order of the President of Azerbaijan “National Strategy on Information and Communication Technologies for Development of the Republic of Azerbaijan” laid the foundation for e-government. Since then, new legislative framework and legal instruments were enacted, including laws adopted by the parliament, decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers, decrees of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the international legal norms.
21. Among these decisions, the most crucial in creating the relevant legal framework is the Decision on the “Rules of Provision of Electronic Services in Specific Areas by Central Executive Bodies” and the “List of types of Electronic Services”. This decision aims to ensure the implementation of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On some measures in the field of e-

services rendered by state bodies and public legal entities established by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan” of 23 May 2011.

22. Every citizen can receive legal acts immediately and free of charge through the “Unified Electronic Database of Legal Acts” operated by the Ministry of Justice, which contains thousands of regulatory documents. The establishment of connection of the Ministry of Justice to the information system “Electronic Notary” significantly simplified solution of citizens’ problems. At the same time, the provision of consular services through the “Electronic Notary” system ensures comfort of the citizens living abroad.
23. The parliamentary activities of the National Assembly of *the Republic of Bulgaria* are carried out through an Integrated Information System, which is a specialized software developed for the needs of the legislative body. It is implemented as a web-based application, using client-server model. Since its implementation in 2006, the database has been expanded without updating the software design. According to the Rules of Organization and Procedure of the National Assembly (ROPNA), an information file is formed for each bill, until its adoption or rejection, reflecting the process of its discussion in the parliament.
24. Another procedure adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria includes the construction and maintenance of a publicly available database of the consolidated texts of the laws. In accordance with the Law on Normative Acts, the certification of the text of a law can be carried out only by the National Assembly. In this regard, the consolidation process is regulated by the Law on Normative Acts and the state is responsible for the credibility of the text. The National Assembly simultaneously reviews the provisions, and, in case of errors, the members of the National Assembly are informed about the legislative initiatives and amendments.
25. The aim of the forthcoming establishment of e-parliament through the setting up of new information system shall reflect the entire activity of the National Assembly, including the legislative and parliamentary scrutiny, the consolidated texts of the adopted laws, maintained in an up-to-date status. The creation of a new information system, by the National Assembly, is vital for the maintenance of the legislative texts in a structured machine-readable form, which will allow traceability and will facilitate its consolidation.
26. The main objectives of the new Unified Information System are: optimization of the interconnection processes through an information system covering the stages of the legislative process from the submission of bills to their adoption in plenary hall; development of a voting system; provision of visualization of the texts under discussion; possibility of conducting an electronic meetings of the committees; enrichment of the legislative file of each bill with opportunities for any inquiries; possibility to see the proposals made, the opinions expressed, the votes, as well as the adopted text, under a paragraph of the bill; submission of questions to the ministers and the replies from ministers by electronic means.
27. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, several digital innovations have been introduced in the Parliament's work, such as: holding meetings/international events in virtual format (since 2020); online visits of citizens to the National Assembly (since 2020); online participation of MPs under quarantine, in plenary sessions. In addition, the Committee for direct participation of citizens and interaction with the civil society, provides the opportunity for a direct participation through an online petition portal. The meetings of the Standing Committees shall be broadcasted in real time, on the Internet, through the website of the National Assembly, as well as in its official profiles, in the social networks. The minutes of the discussion of bills shall be published on the Committee’s page on the website, within 7 days of the session and not later than 72 hours, before the

consideration of the report in the plenary hall, unless the Committee decides otherwise. The audio recording shall be published on the Committee's page on the website of the National Assembly, on the next day after the session, at the latest.

28. Considering the continuous spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Parliament of **Georgia** has introduced some changes in the work of the Parliament, in order to respond to its outbreak and prevent further spread within the country. On 21 March 2020, Georgia declared State of Emergency throughout the whole state. According to the Rules of procedure of the Parliament, in the State of Emergency, the Parliament continued its work within extraordinary sessions. However, in practice, the plenary sittings, as well as the committee sittings were suspended, and only a limited number of staff members were present at the Parliament, on a rotation basis. Most of the staff of the Parliament was working remotely.
29. The Parliament of Georgia uses Cisco WebEx for remote work of the committees, as well as for administration, in general. However, this tool is not used for plenary or committee sittings. Hence, the MPs do not use remote voting. A limited number of staff members of the Parliament have full access to the ICT system through the VPN (Virtual Private Network) secure access service. These staff members are designated from each parliamentary body and structural unit of the administration. They can have an access through parliamentary owned, as well as private devices.
30. Parliament Training Center in the permanent regime provides trainings to staff of the Parliament, on various professional topics. Remote internship program is successfully taking place in the Parliament of Georgia. Five young persons from four regions of Georgia and Tbilisi are involved in the program.
31. New regulations were established for the reception of citizens' applications and official correspondence. The special postal box is placed at the Parliament's premises to receive applications and correspondence. The box is being opened several times a day, in a safe manner, and documents are delivered to the addressees. Documents may also be dispatched by email or by post. There is a special phone number envisaged for additional information or requests.
32. The Parliament of **the Hellenic Republic** is actively present in different social media channels including Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook. The citizens have access to the parliamentary activities through the Parliament's Library (established in 1844) and via the Hellenic Parliament website. The Hellenic Parliament has developed a comprehensive, in terms of information, parliamentary website. Its qualitative and quantitative characteristics serve as a reference point for the websites of other state institutions of the country.
33. The website of the Hellenic Parliament, in its current form, started operating in June 2010. Its design, organization and structuring into sections and categories, was based on the Guidelines for the Design and Development of Parliamentary Websites of the IPU, as well as on the results of the public consultation. The system was established through the internal electronic document management platform, namely "PAPYROS".
34. The Hellenic Parliament, in the context of the mobilization of digital technology solutions during the Covid-19 pandemic, introduced the Cisco WebEx video conferencing software, aiming to support the Committee Meetings and the Plenary Sessions. Since May 2020, the meetings of the Standing Committee have been held in a hybrid way, with the physical presence of the Chair and a limited number of the members of the Committee, as well as online, through the video conferencing system. Since November 2020, the holding of hybrid meetings for the discussion of the bills in the Plenary, has been implemented.

35. Digital platform, namely “Demosthenes” has been established for transcribing the official minutes of the Hellenic Parliament. It utilizes automated voice recognition technologies to convert speech into text, in real time. It is adapted to the recognition of the oral speech of stenographers and minutes writers and as a result, it shortens the time and provides for faster publication of the official minutes of the Hellenic Parliament.
36. The Integrated Information System (IIS) of the Hellenic Parliament consists of subsystems and software application designed to support the internal business operations (Human Resources, Finance and Procurement management systems, Electronic Document and Parliamentary work management systems). The IIS was created in 2004 and it is based on software, which needs to be redesigned and upgraded further on, with the new technological approaches. The digital transformation of the Parliament’s IIS, is an ambitious and complex undertaking that aims to restructure the business processes, ease the management, and provide flexibility of the parliamentary activities.
37. The Communication Strategy of the Parliament of the *Republic of Moldova*, for 2020, aims to strengthen the image of the institution as a transparent and inclusive one, which is close to people, trustworthy, informing and encouraging people’s involvement in the decision-making. In the Communication Strategy, the digitalization is one of the most important objectives. Based on this document, a multimedia platform was created and launched, as a single communication platform. It is connected to all the necessary resources, for an efficient and prompt communication with the mass-media and the public, at large.
38. The online streaming of the meetings and events taking place in the Parliament, are important means, which minimizes the risk of misinterpretation of the message. There has been implemented a stable and functional system of live broadcasts, which made possible the access of the public to the sittings of the standing committees, round tables, debates, declarations, public consultations on draft laws, as well as parliamentary oversight activities.
39. Although it is not part of the toolkit of direct communication with the citizens, the Intranet of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is a rapid and high-performance communication system, both for the staff of the Parliament’s Secretariat and the MPs. It has been recently updated and allows for the sharing of documents and software, the access to regulations, contact data, etc.
40. From 2018 to 2021, the General Directorate for information technologies and communication of the Moldovan parliament, ensured the designing and functionality of the equipment, enabling digital communication, especially through: the use of various international videoconference platforms; connections secured within the Parliament’s Integrated Information System; the maintenance and development of the Parliament’s official web page and of other internal or external web resources, according to the areas of interest.
41. During the pandemic, several processes have been readjusted, such as: the creation and integration of the virtual tours of the building of the Parliament and their publication on the external web resources (considering the impossibility to organize guided tours on the premises); ensuring the 7/24 functioning of the servers stocking the video records of the sittings of the Parliament and of other events.
42. In *Romania*, an accelerated process of digitalization at the level of public administration is undergoing. At the same time, at the European level, digitalization is one the main pillars of the post-pandemic recovery plan. The main objectives of the institutional communication strategy of the Senate of Romania are to optimize, simplify and improve the communication with all segments

of the targeted audiences, by combining the traditional methods with online means, so as to ensure that the information can be accessed by all interested parties (citizens, media representatives, civil society). The Senate of Romania has its own webpage, as well as social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, in order to promote the parliamentary institution's activities and real time communication with the social media users. The plenary sittings, the debates of the standing committees and other events are broadcast live on the Senate's webpage, on YouTube and Facebook. Also, the meetings of the standing committees and other debates are held online, on the Cisco WebEx platform.

43. As a result of the pandemic, the Standing Bureau of the Senate of Romania adopted several Decisions concerning the development of working procedures on conducting the plenary sittings and the standing committees' meetings by electronic means, as well as the procurement of the informational system Cisco WebEx, which provides the possibility to follow meetings in real time and actively participate in debates. The plenary meetings of the Senate were held in audio-conference system and broadcast live on the Senate's webpage. Also, the Rules of the Senate of Romania provides the possibility of submitting the legislative drafts and proposals in electronic format, in the Application for registration management of the legislative proposals, which uses a private interface, accessible only to the senators, deputies, as well as to the members of the government, with access based on a username and a password.
44. The Senate of Romania introduced new technologies and innovations, such as a platform for digitization of the administrative and legislative work processes, which allows the modelling of working processes, management of administrative projects, management of documents and use of qualified electronic signatures, establishment of an electronic mechanism for exchange of information between the institution and beneficiaries/citizens/other institutions, through the portal to be implemented, thus eliminating the need for documents in paper format. This system will allow both the integration of existing IT platforms and their more efficient use.
45. A year and a half before the Coronavirus outbreak, the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of Romania started a project co-financed by the European Social Fund, with the aim to increase the use of digital technology and to promote more environment friendly solutions. This project allows the electronic exchange of information between the institution and citizens or business environment. Also, it allows a petition to be submitted online and to be answered to, in the same manner. In the near future, in case the content of a petition is in another's institution authority of competence, the Romanian Chamber of Deputies will have the administrative capacity to redirect it and keep the citizens informed about this. Moreover, the legislative decision-making is being brought closer to the citizens, by publishing on the website all the items of the Chamber of Deputies' agenda and minutes or reports of the parliamentary meetings.
46. According to the amendments to the Standing orders, in exceptional situations, including epidemics, pandemics, extreme natural phenomena, acts of terrorism, when parliamentarians cannot be present in the premises of the Parliament, meetings of the Standing Bureau, the Committee of Leaders of Parliamentary Groups, the Standing Committees, as well as the plenary sittings of the Chambers are to be held through electronic means. The remote plenary sittings are broadcast live on the webpage of the Chamber of Deputies. The MPs are able to cast their vote online for the plenary sittings of the Chamber and over the phone, by roll call in standing committees' meetings. However, if secrecy of the vote is required, then the presence in the plenary hall of the Chamber is necessary. In such cases, special measures of distancing are put in place.

47. The website of the National Assembly of *the Republic of Serbia* fully covers all communication possibilities with all stakeholders and the media. In addition, the National Assembly's YouTube account enables live streaming of sittings, while the website and the mobile applications publish press conferences, public hearings, Speaker's and other parliamentary activities. The video archive of all the above activities is available at the National Assembly's website, mobile application and YouTube channel. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the members of the parliament have intensively been communicating with their colleagues from other parliaments, through the Zoom platform.
48. The National Assembly Library conducts professional analyses and provides information, at the request of international organizations, national parliaments, and institutions, within the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, on the activities, national legislation and other economic, social and political issues in the Republic of Serbia. The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation promotes the exchange of information, experience, and good practice among the administrations of member states' parliaments. Collaboration between the National Assembly Library and the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation started in 2007. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, since 2020, the seminars have been held in the format of online workshops.
49. On 16-18 October 2014, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia hosted for the first time, the Annual Conference of Correspondents of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, gathering 98 representatives of parliaments from 36 countries and representatives of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.
50. Processing of personal data on social networks is based on the consent of the person using these networks. The users' consent is a condition for a legal processing of their personal data. Pursuant to Article 15 of the Law on Personal Data Protection, where the processing of the personal data is based on consent, the controller shall own evidence of the consent of the data subject. The data subject has the right to withdraw the consent at any time.
51. The Law on Personal Data Protection regulates a consent of a minor society services, related to using information. Pursuant to Article 16 of the Law, children over 15 years old may give consent for the processing of their personal data, when using information society services. If the data subject is under the age of 15, the consent must be provided by a parent who has the parental authority, or another legal representative. The data controller must take reasonable measures to establish whether the consent has been provided by a parent exercising the parental authority or another legal representative of the minor concerned, using all the available technologies.
52. The Grand National Assembly of *the Republic of Turkey* (GNAT) continued intensively its cooperation with national parliaments, international parliamentary assemblies and international organizations, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, through making use of innovative technologies, such as videoconferences and hybrid meetings. Accordingly, many innovations have been implemented in order to facilitate the access of citizens to the members of the parliament, with intent to increase the efficiency of the related works.
53. Digital Media Committee was established under GNAT Law No. 7252, on 23 July 2020. It is a specialized committee empowered with both legislative and supervisory functions. Additionally, a Parliamentary Investigation Committee was established in an effort to determine the actions to be taken in order to eliminate the potential harms of addiction to Information Technologies and to ensure the controlled use of these technologies.

54. Along with digitalization, many innovations have been introduced in the GNAT. At the end of each legislative year, speeches made by the members of the parliament are compiled into e-books and installed on flash memory. In this framework, 588 e-books were provided to the members of the parliament in relation to the last legislative year, and the preparatory work to provide 586 e-books continues for this legislative year. The Social Security Institution leads the project for the integration of the GNAT Health Expenditures Information System with the Social Security Institution Medula System.
55. The necessary information technology and cyber security infrastructure works were carried out in order to assist the legislative activities in a more effective and efficient manner. Software development works related to the “Legislative and Audit Information System Project” have been continued, using up-to-date software technologies.
56. “The Press Conference Appointment System” has been developed in order to enable the members of the parliament to make press conference appointments online. The necessary on-site technical support in relation to the videoconference meetings requested by parliamentary committees, parliamentary groups of the political parties and members of the parliament, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, have been provided. “Network Access Control System” has been put into practice, in order to make the GNAT network infrastructure more secure. The preparatory work for the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 27001 Information Security Management System, has been completed and the certification process has started.
57. One of the main state digitalization programs in *Ukraine* is the National Program of Informatization (NPI), which ensures coordination of informatics projects/programmes in the system of the state government bodies, coordination of the government priorities with global trends in e-governance, informatics and information security, delivery of timely, reliable and complete information to citizens and society through the wider use of the information technologies securing the information systems.
58. The main objectives of the NPI are: establishment, administration and functioning of the Unified State Web Portal of Electronic Services (Portal “Diia”), which includes an online monitoring system, a register of administrative services, a unified system of information and advisory support for the provision of electronic services, a mobile application of the portal “Diia”, and other subsystems of administrative services; development, administration and functioning of integrated electronic identification system.
59. In 2018, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine together with the European Parliament, elaborated and approved the E-Parliament Strategy for 2018-2020. One of the results of the implementation of this Strategy was the launch of the Electronic Document Management System on 4 February 2020, which includes the intranet portal “Electronic Document Management System” and the “Electronic Draft Laws” system. On 23 March 2020, the first meeting of the Conciliation Council of the Chairmen of parliamentary factions and groups was held in the video conference format through the Microsoft Teams platform.
60. In 2020-2021, the software of the mobile application of the “Diia” portal was modernized in order to perform a wide range of tasks, such as: a digital passport of the citizens of Ukraine in the form of ID card; digital passport for traveling abroad; digital driver’s license; digital certificate of vehicle registration and compulsory car insurance policy; digital student card; digital tax number; digital certificate of registration of an internally displaced person; digital birth certificate of child; creating conditions for citizens of Ukraine aged 18 years and older to enroll in the waiting list for vaccination against COVID-19; creation of a qualified signature “Smart Diia” in a mobile

application; implementation of certificates confirming vaccination against COVID-19 viral disease, negative test result or recovery of the person of the specified disease (COVID certificates).

61. The Parliament of Ukraine of the Ninth Convocation began its work on 29 August 2019. Since March 2020 the committees and the Parliament as a whole work in new realities, using remote working formats and videoconferencing. Ukrainian parliament continued functioning even after Ukraine introduced counter measures against COVID-19 pandemic. This was possible due to the timely response to the new challenges faced by the Parliament and the results of the work undertaken earlier.

III. INTERNATIONAL TOOLS AND INITIATIVES

62. *The Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies (GCICT)* is a joint initiative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and a group of national and regional parliaments, launched in November 2005, in Tunis. One of the main objectives of the GCICT, is to promote the use of digital tools to modernize the parliamentary processes, increase transparency, accountability, and participation, and improve the inter-parliamentary cooperation. It intends to achieve these objectives by providing a framework for sharing knowledge, coordinating actions, providing technical assistance, to the legislatures around the world. The aim of the Centre is to enhance their visibility, expand the space for dialogue and knowledge development, and create the conditions to support legislatures that intend to promote the use of new technologies, in order to achieve their highest democratic goals.
63. *The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)* has been examining the digital transformations of the parliamentary activity over the last 15 years, reporting biannually on the progress in this field. The IPU and its partners established the Centre for Innovation in Parliaments in 2018, which provides an online learning platform to guide parliaments in improving their IT governance practices through self-assessment of digital maturity and good practice approaches. The Centre for Innovation in Parliament harnesses the potential for innovation across parliaments, by bringing them together, supporting collaboration on solutions and sharing knowledge with the wider parliamentary community.
64. *INTER PARES* is the first global parliamentary project aiming to strengthen the capacity of parliaments by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions. It focuses both on the elected MPs, particularly in their capacity as members of parliamentary committees and on the staff of Parliaments' Secretariats. INTER PARES contributes, through the EU funding, to the IPU's Centre for Innovation in Parliaments, promoting research on parliamentary innovation in the following areas: a) the development of the 2020 World e-Parliament Report, intended to help parliaments harness the power of new technology to become better and stronger institutions; b) the Innovation Tracker, the blog sharing innovative practices in parliaments; c) good practice guides, that compile and analyze examples of how parliaments are addressing specific issues.
65. *The Innovation Tracker* is a blog about recent innovations in the way parliaments do their work. It is where MPs and staff find ideas for solving some of the problems, they face in running an effective parliament. It covers all types of innovation in parliament, including digital technologies. The Innovation Tracker also provides regular news from the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament.

66. ***The Open Parliament e-Network (OPeN)***, developed through the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative, and the support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), is another platform which supports the parliaments around the world to become more transparent, accountable and participative, as well as to contribute to broader government-led openness initiatives. The OPeN works by: providing technical and process-related support for parliaments and civil society to co-create, deliver and oversee the implementation of open parliament initiatives, commitments and plans; generating interest, awareness and political will for parliamentary openness, such as through knowledge building events and exchanges; developing tools and resources for parliaments and civil society, and for the broader OGP community, including step-by-step guidance and solutions to common challenges; enabling peer-to-peer sharing of experiences and lessons, such as for the use of innovative information technology for transparency and citizen participation; advancing the engagement of legislatures in broader OGP processes, taking forward and monitoring government-led commitments; conducting research to identify and share lessons and good practice.
67. ***The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)*** is a useful tool for inter-parliamentary cooperation and information exchange. The main activities of the ECPRD involve dealing with requests from one parliament to others, in the network for information which is used to compare the legislative activities and parliamentary practice across different countries and in different institutions. The objectives of the ECPRD are to promote the exchange of information, ideas, experience and good practice, among the administrations of parliaments, on subjects of common interest and strengthen the use and development of the ICT. There are also seminars hosted by the ECPRD member parliaments which enable participants to exchange different experiences and practice. The activities of the ECPRD are supported by a fully-fledged website. Its private section, being only accessible to the members of the networks, hosts a powerful electronic workflow for requests and replies, a growing number of specific seminars including online registration and parliamentary factsheets on each parliament, with data and contacts.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

68. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole world realized the importance of digitalization processes and began to rapidly readjust human life to a new digital domain, in order to quickly adapt to the emerging crisis conditions. Accelerated processes of digitalization of the public sector set the task to improve activities in the field of openness, data use and data security in a short time. The accelerated modification of digital government services has been a significant step towards remote administration and non-physical services. A huge number of public services for citizens have been transferred to online formats, and the number of citizens using online public services has increased significantly. In this regard, the parliaments have to strengthen legislative work to adopt the necessary amendments and innovations in the laws.
69. For modern society, almost any kind of activity, in one or another way, is related to the use of digital technologies, and parliamentary activities are no exception. The pandemic influenced the digitalization process not only in terms of promoting and developing technologies, but also in terms of increasing the efficiency of the legislative process and the degree of transparency of parliamentary activities. Parliaments have intensified their efforts to ensure greater transparency, information access and social cohesion.
70. Production of information is becoming the main resource for the development of the global community and significantly impacts development in all areas of life. The dominant activity in

the sphere of public production implies collection, accumulation, production, processing, transmission and use of information and its exchange. The ICT progress and digital ubiquity also transform social and political relations. Involving web instruments by political actors for the organization of social and political relations ensures interaction between society and public institutions. Fostering innovations and digitalization, digital democracy and digital diplomacy make it possible to use new technologies in political domain both at national and international arena.

71. Fostering innovation and digitalization does not only lead to fundamental transformations and simplify people's lives, but becomes tools in the hands of cyber terrorists and terrorist organizations. To this end, it is important to ensure a strategic planning to strengthen information security. It is necessary to develop policies to mitigate the risks and to guarantee that the personal data are duly protected. It is also important to develop more public awareness on threats and dangers and to ensure an integrated approach towards the need for security in cyberspace.
72. The digital transformation that began during the pandemic will continue after its mitigation. Parliaments need to take into account the lessons learned from the pandemic and take a more holistic approach to digital technology, fully integrating it into their legislative process. As moving to the new normal, it is imperative to completely change the way of carrying out the activities of public structures. The legislative bodies have become more agile, finding iterative solutions, to quickly address the emerging problems. There is currently a wide variety of digital transformations, conducted by the parliaments of the BSEC Member States, and a significant potential for the digitalization, to proliferate and become embedded in their standard parliamentary procedures.
73. The ongoing processes of digitalization are fundamentally changing many mechanisms of public communication, including both law-making and law enforcement. Digitalization has become a mechanism for strengthening the capacity of a state, increasing the level of citizens' trust, enhancing the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and improving public services. To this end, the openness of the representative bodies of power and the free access to regulatory legal acts on official websites, are becoming increasingly important.
74. In order to foster digitalization and innovation to improve the legislative process and the transparency of the parliamentary activity, the BSEC Member States should introduce the most advanced technologies for organizing the legislative process and the participation of citizens in the exercise of the state power. It is also necessary to ensure a regular exchange of best practices in the process of digitalization of parliamentary activities. Facing the global threat of a pandemic, parliaments and parliamentarians have to ensure a high level of mobilization of authorities and people, through strengthening coordination and enhancing cooperation.