The Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library
http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/kps/knih/a_elknih.htm
or
http://www.psp.cz/eknih/
and
http://www.nrsr.sk/dk/

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Simultaneous Interpretation:	No

Parliaments

Czech Republic
Bicameral Parliament: Chamber of Deputies and Senat
Number of Deputies: 200
Number of Senators: 81
Parliamentary Library provides services for both chambers
Staff: 14 librarians

Slovak Republic
Unicameral Parliament: National Council of the Slovak Republic
Number of Members: 150
Parliamentary Library
Staff: 9 librarians

Introduction

It is now widely accepted – and the experience gathered by many existing parliaments confirms this – that the relationship of the general public with the law-making bodies depends to a large extent on the level of information services concerning various parliamentary activities provided by parliamentary libraries. This applies even if a given parliamentary library is,

according to its internal statute, a non-public institution. Thanks to modern information technologies, the differences between parliamentary libraries open to the public and restricted-access libraries have become less distinct. We already became aware of this fact during the massive advent of the Internet in the first half of the nineteen nineties.

History – Digital Library "Czech Parliament"

The unparalleled surge of interest in our country's new democratic parliament after November 17, 1989 and the need to make this institution as accessible and transparent to the constituents as possible gave us the idea to achieve this goal through the Internet. And thus, in 1995, a project called Digital Library "Czech Parliament" was born. In its final phase, it was to become the unabridged digital rendition of all parliamentary prints (i.e. bills, including explanatory reports and resolutions), shorthand reports (i.e. verbatim records of any parliamentary business and voting), and other parliamentaria stemming from between 1861 to the present. The project's substantiation included the following: although the return on investment from a digital library could not be expressed in terms of money, it certainly

1.   increased the prestige of the Parliament whose activities had until then remained obscure to the public or had been filtered out by the mass media; by introducing this project, we beat the Czech Freedom of Information Act 1999 by four years, and the Library Act 2001 (Act No. 257/2001 Coll., in Respect of Libraries and Conditions for Operating Public Library and Information Services) by no less than six years;

2.   provided for any unforeseen natural disaster, such as fire or flood, or any act of war ensuing in the destruction of library and archive collections; in such an event, our parliamentaria would be preserved for future generations on alternative media stored in multiple locations unattached to the location of its origin or original storage; by putting this routine in place, we were prepared for the millennium flood that hit Prague in 2002 seven years before it actually happened; this deluge literally washed away dozens of Czech libraries destroying close to one million volumes;

3.   provided the deputies and senators with fast access to parliamentary materials as sources of learning and inspiration in their legislative, decision-making, and supervisory activities.

Having succeeded, by late 1997, in digitalizing all shorthand reports from 1918 to the present, we decided to make at least this particular segment of the entire corpus of parliament materials available on the Internet. The wide positive response and the superlatives used by the domestic and foreign media – both traditional and electronic – referring to this accomplishment, and the steady average number of about 30,000 registered monthly visits to our digital library confirmed the necessity and the value of this project to the public. We were pleased to learn that the Digital Library 'Czech Parliament' had become increasingly quoted in the daily press, specialized periodicals, and scientific monographs. It was often mentioned both by foreign and domestic university scholars as a valuable source of Czech law and legislation. In the year 2000, we were conferred the prestigious 'Czech @' prize by the International Conference on Internet Use in Public Administration and Self-Government held in Hradec Králové – for "an excellent project which greatly contributed to the development of the information society with respect to the needs of public administration and self-governing bodies."

International comparison is an important aspect of projects of this nature. Consequently in November 1998, the Parliamentary Library of the Czech Republic organized, within the framework of our European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), the very first specialized seminar covering the topic of "Digital Parliamentary Library". During this seminar, fifteen contributions were presented, portraying various stages of preliminary solutions to the given problems reached by eleven parliament chambers of various European countries. We were pleased to learn that, in comparison, the Czech digital library project was evaluated as one of the best with regard to the historical periods covered, the realization procedures selected, and the tangible results. All participants agreed on the necessity of continuing international meetings on this topic. The series of all-European seminars on the digitalization of historical and current parliamentary documents was continued in London in a seminar prepared by the Library of the Lower House of the British Parliament in 2000; the next seminar took place in Brussels in 2002 and yet another parliamentary seminar on this topic was held in The Hague in 2003.

During these international exchanges of experience in the digital parliamentary library and archive field, the idea of attempting the creation of a joint digital parliamentary library involving more national states was shaped. This would bring about a higher type of co-operation within the European integration framework. In late 2000, we found a kindred spirit in the Austrian Parliamentary Library Director Dr. Elisabeth Dietrich-Schulz. This was due to the common Czech and Austrian history, which left us with many shared parliamentary documents from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Nonetheless, at long last, the Directorate of the Office of the Austrian Parliament decided to take a separate road. We have therefore concentrated on the 'Slovak dimension' of our original 'Czech Parliament' digital library project. As the digitalization of parliamentary materials progressed, this dimension proved to be ubiquitous due to the common history and the existence of the joint Czechoslovak state (1918-1992). The Slovak deputies to the Czechoslovak Parliament were quite active before World War II as well as in the post-war period. On many occasions beginning in 2000, we acquainted the Slovak political representatives, various specialists, and the wider public with this fact. We conducted numerous negotiations with librarians, information specialists, and administrators from the Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. We provided conclusive proof that the digital library 'Czech Parliament' can be considered as one of the most important historical and legal resources for the study of the genesis of modern Slovak statehood. A single small step led from this realization to the signing of the Agreement on Co-operation in Creating and Operating a Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Library of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and the National Council of the Slovak Republic, by which the Director of the Office of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic and the Director of the Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic de iure confirmed, on June 3, 2002 in Bratislava, the creation of the corresponding project which is unique within the European context.

Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library

Czechoslovakia has been one republic of 2 countries – Czechia and Slovakia since 1918. Our common history lasted more than 70 years except the years during the 2nd World War. We had a common National Assembly, then there existed the Czech National Council and the Slovak National Council and also the Federal Assembly. The republic split in 1993 into 2 republics – the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

The idea to create the common digital parliamentary library originated in the Czech Parliamentary Library. The Czech Parliamentary Library started this huge project in 1995,

Slovakia joined in 2002. Everybody can imagine how complicated it was to collect the parliamentary documents from all historical periods for the digitalization.

The agreement was based on the idea, that both Czech and Slovak web pages would contain the same parliamentary documents: the Czech Parliamentary Library digitalized most parts of the Czech history and the federal history - and gave it as the gift to Slovakia. On the other side Slovakia started to digitalize documents of the Slovak parliaments, some of the missing federal history and also the documents from the old Czech history at the end of the 19th century. This was given also to the Czech partners. Since 2003 the Slovak Parliamentary Library has continued in digitalization of both Czech and Slovak documents. It can be also seen in this common project, that our republics still have very good contacts and the co-operation continues nowadays in many fields.

According to the Agreement on the Co-operation in Creating and Operating a Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Library of the Parliaments of the Czech Republic and the National Council of the Slovak Republic from 2002 the joint digital library should in its complete shape contain the complete full texts of parliamentary prints (proposals, interpelations, explanations, decisions, invitations) and stenographical documents (short-hand writings) from 1848 until now, in an electronic form. All these documents should be available at the web pages of both Czech and Slovak parliaments.

This effort brought the possibility to provide fast and easy access to current and past activities of the Czech and Slovak Deputies in their own and joint legislative bodies, to increase the prestige of the parliaments by making their activity more transparent, to preserve the historical documents for the next generations and protect them against destruction and loss. And to make the access for Deputies and public more comfortable, without any comments of the media, as the source of knowledge and inspiration.

This Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library premiered on the Internet on March 19, 2003 and received the "Czech @" prize for an exceptional achievement in the development of the information society in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia at the 6th International Conference "Internet in Public Administration and Self-Government" which took place in Hradec Králové City, Czech Republic. It was really impressive for both chancelleries and the members of parliament to see how successful this project was.

Objective of the Project

The objective of the Common Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library project was to create and operate an integrated information system covering:

a) the activities of Czech and Slovak deputies in various law making bodies (Austrian Constituent Imperial Diet, Diet of the Czech Kingdom, Slovak National Council) between 1848 and 1914;

b) the activities of the joint legislative bodies of the Czechoslovak Republics between 1918 and 1992;

c) the activities of the legislative bodies of the Czech and Slovak Republics from their creation in 1993 up to date.

The great advantage of the project is the fact that the Czech and Slovak languages are very similar and people of both countries understand each other. There is no language problem and the translation of the documents is not necessary.

At the beginning of the project the discussion about the structure of this system was held. Professionals from the fields of the legislative process, parliamentarism, political history and computer science met several times. It was difficult to decide about the structure of the library from the historical point of view. Some historical periods did not correspond with the electoral periods, mostly during the war years. At the end of the discussion it was decided that all documents should be included into the digital library according to the electoral periods, even when the length of these periods was different and one electoral period lasted e.g. 10 years (recently the normal electoral period lasts 4 years). The result is that the structure of the digital library seems for the user clear and not difficult to use.

Within the project Digital Library these historical periods were completed, covering:

- Austrian Constituent Imperial Diet 1848-1849
- Diet of the Czech Kingdom 1861, 1908 - 1913
- National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic and of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Chamber of Deputies and Senate 1918-1968)
- Diet of the Slovak Republic 1939-1945
- Slovak National Council 1944-1968
- Czech National Council 1969-1992
- Resolutions of the Presidium of the Slovak National Council 1970-1987
- Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (Chamber of People and the Chamber of Nations) 1969-1992
- Parliament of the Czech Republic (Chamber of Deputies and Senat) 1993-2004
- National Council of the Slovak Republic 1993-1998 and 2002-2004
- since 1993 (Czechia), resp.2003 (Slovakia) all documents are processed in the electronic form.

Participants

Participants of the project of the Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library are:
- for the Czech part:
- Parliamentary library
- Department of Information Technologies of the Chamber of Deputies
- Department of Information Technologies of the Chamber of Senate
- ESU Prague (private company)

- for the Slovak part:
- Parliamentary Library
- Parliamentary Archives
- Department of Information Technologies of the Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic
- exe-Information Technologies (private company)
- NUPSESO (private company).

Both parliaments use for digitalization of the documents private companies which won the public tenders. In both countries we have valid laws on public procurement and according to them the best and cheapest company is chosen to do the work within every year. The budget for digitalization in Slovakia is aprox. 100 000 $ per year.

In Slovakia the private company NUPSESO won this contest for digitalization. It is a Slovak company, which is the exclusive distributor of the ABBYY FineReader 7.0 software. That means this software is able to identify various kinds of letters, also "very difficult" letters (e.g. archaic Schwabach letters which were used in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century. There are thousands of pages in that form in the Czech Parliamentary Library from the period of the Austrian Constituent Imperial Diet and Diet of the Czech Kingdom and these are still being digitalized in Slovakia according to the agreement of the project). The documents are digitalized into HTML format as well as in original PDF form, so the user can also see how the document looked like when it was originally published.
Since 2003 all documents in the Slovak parliament and since 1993 in the Czech Parliament are processed in electronic form and they are automatically put into the digital library system.

The Slovak private company exe-Information Technologies was chosen to do all tasks connected with the software development (includes software for importing, publishing, searching and archiving of digital parliamentary documents), importing documents from the Parliament of the Czech Republic, exporting new parliamentary documents from the National Council of the Slovak Republic to the Parliament of Czech Republic. The company was responsible for proposing data model of digital document storage system with its implementation in environment of SQL Server, implementation of the system for data security and protection against data modification, proposing architecture of web system for searching documents with implementation of user interface in environment of ASP.NET. Nowadays the exe-Information Technologies Company is prepared to present a new model of exchanging actual parliamentary documents between National Council of the Slovak Republic and Parliament of the Czech Republic, which should substitute exchanging documents on CD-ROMs and should reflect the actual legislative process in both parliaments. The company closely co-operates with the Department of Information Technologies of the Slovak parliament.

Future Plans

We plan to complete remaining gaps in the historical periods with the help of other institutions /e.g. Slovak Central Archives/, to provide access to the documents which are not maintained by the Parliamentary Library and the Parliamentary Archives. The aim is to create automatic exchanging information system between the departments of Information Technologies of the Slovak and Czech Republics with regard of the specifications of the current parliamentary documents.

As it was said at the beginning of this presentation, the Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library project started in 2002. There is a plan to continue 3 more years – in that time all documents will be fully digitalized. The total amount of the digitalized pages will be more than 2 million pages.

The decisions of the co-operation are taken at the Joint Czech and Slovak Editorial Council, that takes place twice a year. It is a rule that the representatives of both countries meet in Spring in Slovakia and in Autumn the Czech Republic. Typical points for the

discussion are e.g.: fulfillment of the agreement in the past year, exchange of the digitalized documents on CD-ROM and DVD, the plan for digitalization for the next year, discussion how many Czech pages in archaic Schwabach letters can be digitalized in Slovakia, application of the software for both web pages, etc.

The Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library is nowadays widely used in both countries. People from all regions can open their computer and find necessray documents on our web pages. In both parliaments we have a special Department of Communication with the Public. The citizens have the possiblity to contact this department by e-mail, telephone or personally and they receive the advice how to use our digital library, if necessary. The members of parliaments, their assistants and the staff contacts our Parliamentary libraries if they have questions concerning the digital library. But the Joint Czech and Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library which is open 24 hours a day and 7 days a week became already famous also in other countries of the world. According to the statistics (see supplement No. 1) we registered 1 194 558 visits, it means daily average 3 273 visits, in last 12 month only. It shows evidence of a very great efficiency of the project. Especially if we compare these numbers with the number of a daily physical visits in our libraries which is reaching the 30 at the most.

Evaluation of the Project in Data

Duration of the project: since 2002 ad infinitum
- Participants: Czech Parliament , Slovak Parliament ;
- Content: full texts of the parliamentary documents: parliamentary prints and short-hand writings of the Czechoslovak, Czech and Slovak parliaments;
- Digitalized period: from 1848 until present times;
- Number of digitalized pages: approximately 2 millions;
- Costs: 970 000 USD until present
- Use: on both Czech and Slovak parliament's web pages.

Conclusion

We would be pleased if the example set by this international project, which represents a breakthrough in the mutual information exchange between the law-making bodies and the wider public in both countries were followed by parliaments of other states which were joined by a common history in the past, as well as by close and mutually intelligible languages. We are convinced that the only practical way for a parliamentary library, particularly a small one, to provide a high level of information services to its parliament and to wider public is through the appropriate application of information technologies, a narrow supranational co-operation, and well thought-out sharing of the rich resources available on the Internet. Not only does this result in a better mutual knowledge and considerable savings in the financial and human resources domains, but also in an important contribution to the search for, and recognition of a common parliamentary identity.

Supplement 1

Statistics for /eknih/

Month	Daily Avg				Monthly Totals					
	Hits	Files	Pages	Visits	Sites	KBytes	Visits	Pages	Files	Hits
Apr 2006	71552	48623	70314	4113	16764	42221958	123411	2109430	1458691	2146582
Mar 2006	51529	36271	50544	8629	17147	26077513	267523	1566887	1124405	1597419
Feb 2006	27421	20295	26849	3832	12692	12490611	107297	751783	568274	767802
Jan 2006	18545	13735	18130	2689	12223	8853750	83373	562056	425811	574916
Dec 2005	36238	31135	35546	2580	12628	16245846	79991	1101934	965205	1123402
Nov 2005	18113	14250	17665	2152	12199	9186027	64567	529960	427515	543394
Oct 2005	20603	16734	20108	3297	9920	6404106	62653	382058	317955	391464
Sep 2005	25394	23981	24918	3446	11679	12603506	103390	747552	719432	761825
Aug 2005	39387	36937	38973	2821	9485	27200453	87472	1208164	1145050	1221027
Jul 2005	18445	16208	17957	3286	5620	5513211	59156	323227	291752	332022
Jun 2005	20677	19416	20336	3242	11801	10384469	97277	610083	582498	620339
May 2005	17076	16311	16628	1885	13994	9007643	58448	515470	505646	529367
Totals						186189093	1194558	10408604	8532234	10609559