

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMITTEE CHAIRING

PARIS M A E P STRASBOURG

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Committee work: general outlook

The committee work (the resolution) must answer the questions put forward in the topic in a way that would be acceptable to the GA.

Example: *Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs* :

The question of freedom of the media in the European Union: is it possible to establish a balance between freedom of expression, privacy rights and national security? What action could the EU take in this respect? How should the EU deal with the developments triggered by WikiLeaks?

- There are three questions asked from the committee in this topic. Any resolution should first deal with answers to these questions. The first question requires that the committee deal substantially with the concept of freedom of expression and its meaning in Europe today; the same goes for privacy rights. The third aspect of that question requires an analysis of the relationship between what is published in the media and what effect it can have on security in a country (here one can discuss everything from Danish cartoons to war coverage). And this was just the first out of three questions. Questions asked from the committee in any MEP session provide more than enough opportunity for discussion.
- After team building but before brainstorming, have a general discussion about the topic and the questions put forward. Discuss what the person who wrote them might have meant and what the GA would like to hear from the committee. Have the committee defined all terms that are not basic knowledge. In this case, this might also include national security, freedom of expression etc. The point of this is to make sure that everyone understands the topic and the questions.
- During brainstorming, several other ideas for both IC-s and OC-s might come up that do not directly answer the questions. The committee is welcome to deal with those issues, as long as it keeps its eye on the ball and provides the main questions with answers. But the GA does not mind if you leave the side issues unresolved. On the other hand, the more content there is, the more there is to attack at the GA, therefore the committee should be careful when dealing with issues not directly related to their assignment.

Committee work

- **Before the beginning.** Tables in the classroom should be in a U-shape with the open side facing the front of the room. There should be enough space inside the U to do energizers and team building exercises when needed during committee work. There shouldn't be too many distracting things in the room.
- **Team building.** This is a very important part of committee work and should always be prepared by someone (could be the committee president, the vice president or a third person – it is important that there is someone responsible for it). The exercises should all include some sort of lesson for the committee, the following should be learnt during team building:

Names of committee members. It is strange to see young people addressing each other as 'the UK' or 'Austria' or 'Estonia', this often goes on during the entire session. Finding new friends is one of the best things about a session but knowing someone's real name is also a big help when it comes to discussions during coffee breaks or when the CP has divided the committee into groups. The whole "thank you mr/madam president" thing makes MEP formal enough, one should also make sure that there is enough informal communication, so that young people still feel as young people.
- **Examples of name games:**
 - ✓ *People Map.* Create a human map to show where people consider their home. Indicate North, East, South & West, then allow participants to position themselves to create a map.
 - ✓ *Name Pantomime.* Each person chooses an action-word to go with their name (e.g., "Swimming Sam"), then show the action to the group who repeat it. Stimulating way to introduce oneself & learn people's names.
 - ✓ *The Story of My Name.* Where does your name come from? Share the story of where your name comes from and what it means. Everyone's name has a surprisingly interesting origin.
 - ✓ *Group juggle.* Works every time. Find a nice bouncy ball, like a four-square ball (this works best on an uncarpeted floor). First player says her name and quickly bounces the ball to another while saying his or her name. See how fast people can keep the ball moving. Try it with two balls if it's not already too confusing.
 - ✓ *Pairs.* Split the group up into pairs. Give them a few minutes to interview each other and then have them introduce one another to the group. This allows two people to get to know each other quickly and form a

friendship. It's often easier for people to talk about others than themselves. It could be helpful to give everyone a list of questions in advance. This is more about getting to know one and other than names.

➤ **Example of trust games:**

- ✓ *Trust building activities* help people to develop mutual respect, openness, understanding. The main way to build trust is to get to know one and other, so these games are more of an addition to name games & getting to know one and other. But one or two of these games can't hurt.
- ✓ *Slice 'N Dice*. A dramatic trust activity for a large group. Group forms a gauntlet, arms out in front. As a person walks down the gauntlet, people raise their arms. Build up to people down running the gauntlet through a sea of chopping arms.
- ✓ *Mine Field*. Objects are scattered in an indoor or outdoor place. In pairs, one person verbally guides his/her partner, a blindfolded person, through the minefield.

➤ **Example of problem solving games.** This is the more substantial and important part of team building. Later on in committee work, it will be good to come back to the lessons learnt during these games:

- ✓ *Human Knot*. In a circle, people put their arms in and hold someone else's hand, then try to unravel the knot without letting go of hands. Involves getting physically close to others, stretching, laughing and problem solving.
- ✓ *Desert Island*. This should be the longest and most important game of team building. The story goes like this. The group gets stranded on a remote island. Everyone must think of one object that is most needed on an island. After that, a third of the objects will have to be discarded, the group must agree on which of the items will be left behind. Then half of the remaining items will be left behind in the second round.

These are all from team building websites. Google 'team building' and you will find loads.

Brainstorming

The key word here is 'EVERYTHING':

- This means that every problem that comes to mind should be written on the blackboard/screen.
- It is important to keep in mind, that brainstorming is only about problems (potential IC-s), the committee president should pay attention and guide the committee away from discussing solutions. The CP should have this in mind throughout the brainstorming, as the committee is bound to get off track very easily.
- Write all the ideas on the blackboard or on the screen. Write all of them down. If you feel there are enough, then start merging them. This means that those that are similar, should make up one discussion point. This is again a job for the committee, not the committee president.
- The number of problems you will have in the end will be likely be the approximate number of IC-s that you will have. So make sure that you have a manageable number. 20 would be way too much.

Introductory clauses

- ICs are full sentences describing the problems under the question at hand.
- Use the prefixes that are given to you.
- Although ICs can make up half of the text of the resolution, they are a lot less important than OCs. This means that the committee should avoid getting tangled up in ICs, they are subject to much less attention during the GA. This is especially true when formulating clauses. One option is just to give the task of formulating an IC to a group within the committee, perhaps involving the person that has been more active in proposing it or someone with good English. Formulating sentences in meetings of more than 10 people is a notorious time killer in any type of assembly of people, MEP is no exception.
- Keep the wording as simple as possible.

Operative clauses

- OCs are what your resolution and debate will be about. The first thing is to make sure that you answer every IC with an OC. There can be multiple OCs per IC, but not the other way round.
- First, when solving a problem and someone comes up with an idea to create a new institution, make sure if there is no such institution present already. In the case of the EU, it is likely that there is already more than one institution per problem. It's these institutions that often become the 'boxing bag' of the resolution during a GA.
- Remember that you are the European Parliament and that this is a resolution, not a law. That means that you have to take into account the actual authority of the European Parliament and the European Union. You cannot override other EU institutions, let alone national governments. But you can always use prefixes like 'endorses', 'supports', 'encourages' etc. This way, anything your committee feels is important can be in the resolution.
- Again, try not to spend too much time on formulation. But in this case it is more important than with the ICs. The GA needs to understand you correctly, you need to be careful.
- When a term requires explanation, you can add an appendix.

Working through committee work

Principles to be taken into account

- Keep the discussion central. This means that you should always have a clear idea of what it is that is under discussion at any given time. It may be a problem that is being formulated into an IC or an IC being formulated into an OC. There will always be committee members who go off topic (i.e. "But I think that the most important issue is..."). When this happens, politely tell her/him to keep that thought so that the committee can come back to it later. Or if it is already on the blackboard/screen as a problem/IC, refer to it and explain that you will come to it later. If the committee gets off track, explain once more what the issue at hand is.
- About formulation. Have a group within a committee formulate an IC or an OC. You can for example discuss 3 ICs/OCs and then divide the committee into 3 groups, who then each formulate one OC. Saves time.

- Keep everyone in the discussion.
 - ✓ You will always have delegates who are very active and fluent. They will be the leaders in the committee, but you need to make sure that they do not dominate too much. If that happens, others may lose motivation to think along and the resolution will be the work of a few people and therefore less thought through. These dominant delegates will then also be the only ones answering questions during the GA and it will become very obvious that there have been only a few people contributing to the resolution – that does not look good.
 - ✓ Then you will have delegates, who could contribute a lot or at least significantly, but who have something holding them back. The main reason is language. But it can also be a lack of confidence. In any case, you should make sure that every opinion that is articulated gets discussed. If the committee does not pay much attention to what that 'quiet mouse' is saying, you need to reiterate his or her thought and ask the committee's opinion. There will be delegates who oppose other delegates just because those others don't have the best mastery of English or because they are not confident enough. This is a simulation of a political process and in that sense MEP is very realistic. In this case you need to reiterate both viewpoints and make the committee understand that they are equal and should be tackled with constructive debate. To put it short – make sure that the content of your resolution depends on the quality of ideas presented, not the character of delegates.
 - ✓ If an active delegate speaks too often, ask the committee if there is someone else who wishes to speak. Don't worry about the ego of the active delegate, she or he will take it as a compliment and as proof of a significant contribution.
 - ✓ If there are delegates (there definitely will be) who do not speak at all, ask them about their opinion even when they do not raise their cards and see if they are encouraged. Do not give up on inactive delegates!
 - ✓ **If you do not control your more dominant delegates and if you don't enforce the system of giving the word around, delegates will take over your committee!!!**

- Remind a delegate if he or she proposes something that has already been proposed. There is little point in going over the same arguments over and over again. At that moment, remind the committee the ideas that are currently on the table and take the discussion forward and ask the committee whether they are ready to

formulate a clause. As said before, there can be several OCs per IC, as long as their content is not mutually exclusive.

- Keep yourself out of the content of the discussion. This is probably the most difficult task for a committee president. Since there will be no-one observing you during committee work, you will need to be ethically sound here. To make things as clear as possible, here is how committee presidents should and also should not influence the work of the committee.
 - ✓ The following must be avoided:
 - do not propose new ideas for ICs, such as problems during brainstorming, do not propose merging of problems
 - do not propose solutions or OCs
 - never say whether anything is a good or a bad idea
 - ✓ The following is okay:
 - to remind the committee that they need to think about the possible reactions and questions of the GA when drafting the resolution
 - to correct factual mistakes and answer factual questions from the committee
 - ✓ You will really need to reach the appropriate balance. This is not your resolution; this is the resolution of your committee. If there is something in it that you don't agree with but that the committee has decided on, then you will need to respect that and not make it publicly known that you disagree.

When the committee gets stuck:

- If the committee cannot come up with a solution for some time, it is better to move on to solving the next issue.
- If there is an issue that is divisive and where a consensus can't be reached, you should have a vote.
- The rules of votes are up to you to decide. It could be useful to give every committee member a right to veto. In many MEP sessions, there is a committee where a member from the committee gives a speech against his or her own committee. That doesn't make the committee look good in the eyes of the GA.
- If the vote is very close, then you might consider debating the issue further. A 2/3 majority is recommended in decisions, that way you have the committee solidly behind its own resolution.

- When the committee looks tired, do some energizers that are described before.

Concluding committee work

- Make sure you have an hour between when you finish with the last OC and when you have to send the final draft. This is the time to deal with the formulation and whatever needs changing. Several clauses might seem out of place or wrongly formulated once committee work is over, therefore you really need this hour.

Devil's Advocate

- This is where you take your gloves off. You are no longer restrained by the need to criticise the resolution, but you can only do it in the form of questions. You should not advise your committee on how to defend your resolution or how to explain a certain clause. Your questioning has to do the job. Make sure to write down all the questions when you come up with them during committee work. Definitely prepare before the last day. If you improvise right after handing in the resolution, you might not come up with some important things.
- Don't just ask one question per clause, bombard the committee with all sorts of questions that might come up. Also ask follow-up questions when you think an answer could be given in a better way.
- Don't forget to ask stupid questions, because there will be loads of them during the GA. Sometimes they can catch your committee off guard.

Preparation for the GA

Explain how the GA works:

- First, if the committee has made any textual changes, they will be read out. Here you should explain what textual changes are.
- Someone from the committee reads out the OCs. Stress that it's ONLY the OCs.
- Opening speech. Explain the point of the speech. This speech should basically be a sales pitch. It should not be a list of OCs and why they are good. The speaker should probably be chosen after the closing speaker is chosen. Candidates can be proposed by themselves and also others. **Candidates will leave the room for the vote.**
 - ✓ There should be an explanation for why this issue is important

- ✓ Then the speaker generalizes the content of the resolution into 2-4 points. She or he should not concentrate only on specific clauses, but rather emphasize key 'big things' that are a convincing answer to the questions asked in the topic. It's better to avoid the more controversial elements in the resolution, unless the speaker can convincingly sell them as 'bold and ambitious'. The opening speech should not be used as a pre-emptive strike when the more controversial aspects are concerned, that will just draw more attention to them.

Factual questions

- Sources
- Definitions
- Delegates should think twice about whether a question is factual or not

Amendments (can be to change or remove a clause)

- The submitter gives a speech in favour of the amendment (3 min max)
- Questions to the submitter
- Speech from the committee (about 2 min) – speaker should probably be chosen after opening and closing speakers have been chosen. That person should be able to react quickly, because the committee will not know in advance about which clause the amendment will be. She or he has to get the opinion of the committee before she or he goes to speak.
- It is sometimes better to concede and simply recommend the GA to support the amendment, if it could become too much of a hindrance later and cost the votes of those who would otherwise support the resolution.
- Votes in favour or against, abstentions not allowed

Open debate

- There are a couple of ways how a committee can be better prepared for open debate, in addition to playing devil's advocate:
 - ✓ Divide OC-s between committee members. Each of them will think through the OC-s they have been assigned and will be ready to answer questions about them. It's better to have two people per each OC, one from the more active half and one from the less active half of the committee, so that there will be at least one active delegate per OC. Tell them to do further research on OC-s, to find facts and statistics that could help with giving answers.

- ✓ Tell delegates to pay attention to what other delegates are saying about their resolution. If you have 15 committee members, then the committee should have 75 opinions about their resolution after delegation meetings. Hold a final committee meeting at some point before the GA to discuss these things. It is especially important to find out what amendments have been proposed, so that the committee will have a chance to think of a response and the one giving the response speech would be better prepared.

Speech against

- Most resolutions will have someone giving a speech against.
- It is important for the person giving the closing speech to respond to the speech against.
- Encourage your own delegates to make amendments and speeches against and to ask lots of questions during other resolutions. If they do that before their own resolution, they will have more recognition and the committee will have increased its reputation even before they start to defend their resolution.

Closing speech

- This is probably the more important speech and whoever gives it, should be chosen first.
- This is a speech that CAN NOT BE PREPARED. So the person giving it should not prepare one, because if she or he does, issues that have arisen during the open debate and closing speech can go completely unnoticed. So it's mainly a reactionary speech.
- On the other hand, it's not a rebuttal speech. It should have the same main points as the opening speech, but it should focus on how these issues were debated. If something not mentioned in the opening speech turned out to be a significant issue, it has to be discussed, but without making the speech seem defensive.
- The closing speech is often given by the person who has contributed most to the work of the committee. It should sound confident.
- The vote – in favour, against or abstain

About the GA in general, both during debates and speeches

Basic principles:

- Delegates should avoid saying stupid things
- Political correctness should be followed
- No swearing
- No props
- Clapping is forbidden, except when a resolution has passed.
- No food and drinks
- Keep jackets on
- Try to be polite, no one likes obnoxious and condescending delegates who see themselves as the second coming of Mrs Thatcher (true story from Stockholm '08)
- Take things seriously and don't make stupid jokes; a parliament is the cradle of a state's democracy, it should not be treated as your average classroom
- Don't overuse points of privilege cards
- To the committee president – even if a resolution is rejected, go to your committee afterwards and praise them for their work

RHETORICS/SESSION JARGON: The language of meetings

In preparation for the session as well as during committee work get accustomed to debating jargon. To help you through all the notions and motions of an MEP session refer to MEP phraseology.