Welcome address by the Vice President of the Italian Senate, Sen. Emma Bonino

● Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Rome, to the Italian Senate and in particular to the premises of the Polo Bibliotecario (the Joint Parliamentary Library) of the Italian Parliament, that is the facilities that both Houses recently decided to merge in order to streamline the activities related to **research and documentation**.

● I am pleased to notice that, as well as the European Parliament, 31 European countries are represented here today, a few more than the member states of the European Union. Indeed, also through technical cooperation and partnerships of this nature can Europe continue on its path to integration, keeping in mind future enlargements too.

● Parliaments, as the linchpin of any effective democratic process, must be able to enjoy unfettered access to **prompt, transparent, impartial and independent information**.

● To be able to produce better legislation, appraise its real impact, and effectively perform their task in overseeing and scrutinising the work of the Executive, today's lawmakers need **more and better information support.**

● The **global dimension of our modern world** makes it essential to refer to an extremely broad context in order to properly identify complex processes that cannot be considered in isolation. National parliaments must therefore reframe their function by exploiting their special and specific awareness of the overall political, social and economic dynamics taking place.

● The ability of parliaments to **avoid being sidelined** from the prospects opened up by the knowledge-based society, and indeed to be active frontline players in it and take on leadership roles in every respect, **is of particular importance**.

● Against this background, while parliaments need increasing access to more information, their role as **producers of information and knowledge** is also becoming more complex.

● Hence, it is crucially important for politicians and parliamentary staff to question the role of parliamentary information services and the degree to which they are capable of effectively meeting these needs. Such a task can be carried by reorganising structures and functions, and by mapping out strategies designed to fully exploit the opportunities opened up by massive developments that have been in progress for years now, and at an increasingly faster pace, in **creating, transmitting, disseminating and using knowledge**.

● On the issue of **transparency and the involvement of citizens**, the contribution that can be made by new technologies is proving to be highly significant. Albeit with a wide range of different approaches and strategies, many parliaments throughout the world are experimenting, thanks to the opportunities offered by **Internet,** to make legislatures more accessible, transparent and inclusive in relation to society, and in some cases to embark on actual dialogue with the public at large.

● Parliamentary **websites** have, in many instances, become an open door to a complex panorama of information on parliaments and their work, the documentation they produce (sometimes, but unfortunately not always, in open formats which are easier for the public to freely access and use), especially the real-time transcripts of plenary and committee debates. In some cases, parliamentary websites provide access to the digital archives of live radio and

TV broadcasts of parliamentary sittings, an area that should be more fully developed.

● In effect, while a number of parliaments have now consolidated their instruments for disseminating information, many others are still testing **new channels** to enable the public to voice their needs, their opinions and proposals, and their demands. Alongside the now "traditional" use of e-mail, there are many Parliaments that have inaugurated the use of tools for dialogue using Web 2.0 technologies and social communication tools. If used wisely, these instruments can prove fundamentally important in ensuring a better understanding of the political and institutional life of their countries.

● One of the reasons for establishing the **Joint Parliamentary Library** was partly this need for greater inclusion of, and dialogue, with society. The two Libraries of Italy's two national legislatures have decided to merge and coordinate the largest possible number of services, physical spaces and work, in order to serve their dual purpose of better supporting the lawmaking process and providing a full-fledged service to the public at large.

● The Joint Parliamentary Library is a facility open to the general public (you only need to be over 16 years of age to be admitted), and most of the users of the two Libraries are students and citizens that are given the possibility of using all the resources kept on these premises: books, newspapers, journals and magazines, databanks, manuscripts, ancient library collections.

● A great deal of progress has been made in respect of all these issues, **but much is still to be done.**

● In the specific context of the professional debate, parliamentary staff, especially officials involved in Information and

Communication, who share the same mission but with a wide variety of diverse experiences, should not confine their exchange of views to the technical innovations available, but should **offer answers** to theoretical and practical questions regarding the use of technology in the specific context of a parliamentary assembly. On these issues, they should concretely examine their objectives and aims, so as to pave the way for further progress based on the instruments available, and the knowledge of how to effectively use them.

● In this context, it is worthwhile to mention an increased use of the **digital signature** or the recourse to **multimedia solutions.** Particularly promising I find the **IPEX project** that would allow, within the framework of the Lisbon Treaty, to arrange for common standards and infrastructures in order to properly monitor the state of the art, in the different parliaments, of **EU legislation**.

● I am aware that the IPEX project - a sort of **Intranet** among Parliaments - will be illustrated later on this afternoon but, as former MEP and Minister for European Affairs, I can only stress the importance of pushing forward this kind of common tools.

● In conclusion, I can assure you that the Italian Parliament has a keen interest in contributing to this vast area by directly committing its parliamentary staff.

● I hope that meetings like this can promote the role of parliaments in fashioning societies that **ought to be** increasingly better informed, more open and more inclusive. And possibly, may I add**, respectful of the role of the institutions and of the checks and balances foreseen by the rule of law.**

● Thank you.