

## **Senate Official Information**

The principle that parliamentary business must be rendered public, enshrined in the Italian Constitution (article 64) and in the parliamentary Rules of Procedure, underlies the Senate's commitment to make its work transparent and publicly available.

A special Office had to be created to deal with all the communication and information activities, to publish Parliamentary Reports on debates in the plenary and in committees, and disseminate them using state-of-the-art media, designing systems to enable the public to gain prompt access to information (by telephone, or through Internet databanks, television, and web TV).

The Senate Official Information Office was established in 2003 as part of the Reports and Official Information Service, and is responsible for "framing projects and proposals for Senate initiatives regarding official communication, and for implementing them". This provision, which was taken from the Senate Administration Consolidation Regulation and then expanded to provide other powers and responsibilities over the course of time, applies to a wide-range of different initiatives which are often performed in conjunction with other Senate Services and Offices, the Chamber of Deputies, the Ministry of Education and other public and private agencies and institutions.

### **The Senate logo and image**

The first initiative to be implemented was to define the image of the Senate and to regulate it in a "Visual Identity Handbook" which determines the ways the Senate logo

can be used, the wording to be used in official forms and publications, and the colours to be used.

### **Information and explanatory materials**

A number of tools have been produced – in Italian and other languages – to disseminate information on the Senate, its functions, premises, in addition to numerous gadgets – pens, pencils, erasers, key-rings, notebooks, badge-holders bookmarks, and so on – which are given away to visiting groups of schoolchildren and citizens.

In recent years there has been a considerable increase in the range of information material designed for the younger generations. Firstly, there are the cartoon story books for young children, *Gianni, Johnny e Kiki*, about three children on a journey back in time to discover the institutions and the Constitution. In two years, beginning from a test issue (numbered zero), we have now reached the fourth issue, and at meetings with teachers and pupils the series is proving extremely popular.

Another specific instrument designed to familiarise young people with parliamentary law and procedure are scripts simulating Parliamentary debates. These are simplified reconstructions of important debates held on the floor of the Senate. Two versions have been prepared, one for children aged between eight and eleven, and one for middle and secondary school children. By reading these scripts on the Library premises these youngsters gain direct familiarity with parliamentary procedures and rules.

Once or more every year, the scripts are updated to take account of the novelties that have been introduced in the parliamentary debates, in order to offer young visitors direct

contact with the Senate. At the end of 2008, for example, scripts were written simulating the debate in the Senate when the *Ad Hoc* Committee for the Protection and Advancement of Human Rights was established. This initiative was backed up by printing and distributing copies of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

A great deal of care was put into publicising and disseminating The Constitution of the Italian Republic. It was printed in three versions: a facsimile of the original 1947 version, the pocket edition of the current text and, more recently, an illustrated version for children, prefaced with a message from the President of the Senate.

The pocket edition of the current version of the Constitution is given to every visiting student. Numerous copies are sent on request, at no cost, to schools and are distributed to the general public at locally-organised exhibitions and events in which the Senate takes part.

In 2008 alone, 60,000 copies of the current version of the Constitution were printed together with 15,000 facsimile copies of the original 1947 version.

The current version of the Constitution is also on sale to the general public, government departments and authorities, and corporations. In the current year of this Parliament (May 2008-May 2009) 21,000 copies of the Constitution have been sold. There has not only been a demand from private citizens, but a considerable demand from local government authorities who distribute them primarily to young people when they reach voting age or their local communities when particular events are staged.

When educational activities resume after the summer recess, the Official Information Office intends to offer two projects for the younger generation. The first twelve articles of the Constitution, the Fundamental Principles, will be published in a format reminiscent of cartoons: it will be a small folder, printed in colour, with drawings, and the text of the twelve articles that are normally learned by heart in schools. This educational approach, focusing on the wealth of values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, will thereby be more widely available through new models of communication.

The second project is to offer visiting students a reading of one article of the Constitution every day, together with a commentary. The aim is to create a permanent discussion and debate "workshop" on the Constitution.

### **Educational area**

The Official Information Office organises a number of events designed primarily for schools and youth. Numerous educational schemes involving various sectors of the Senate Administration and individual senators have been run in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Deputies.

### **I would like a law that...**

This is an initiative for children in the last year of primary school (aged 10), organised in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. Under the guidance of their teachers, students are asked to submit a Bill addressing issues that they consider important for

their own personal development and their communities. They are also requested to draft an explanatory memo accompanying their Bill. The first such initiative was held during the 2008-2009 school year and was greeted as a huge success. Work were submitted in different formats: in large exercise books, in colour with a wealth of drawings, DVD videos, posters, and relief models. Prizes to the best entries were awarded by jury including representatives of the Senate and the Education Ministry. The ceremony was held in Palazzo Madama. Delegations from the Senate visited the prize-winning schools, establishing a direct and very close linkage between the institutions, the schools and the local communities.

### **A day in the Senate**

This is a more established educational initiative of the Senate which is organised in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. The students in the final years of upper secondary school (aged 17-18) are asked to prepare Bills on issues of particular interest to them together with an explanatory memo to be delivered in the Senate hemicycle. Entries are examined twice: firstly, they are selected by the Regional Education Offices and those which pass muster are then examined nationally by a joint Senate-Ministry Commission. The classes which pass successfully through these two selection filters, numbering about ten a year, are hosted for two days' training in the Senate. They are given information on the way the Senate is organised and run. A visit to the premises and the most important departments form part of their cultural training. They meet Senate officials and discuss their Bill with them. They can have conversations with the

senators representing their Region and, what is perhaps more important, they run a mock Senate sitting debating their Bill in a committee room and finally adopt it.

### **Lessons on the Constitution**

This joint initiative, run in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Deputies, is for students in their final years in upper secondary school. It was run for the second time during the 2008/2009 school year. It was first held in 2008, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Italian Constitution with the purpose of familiarising young people with this treasure of our democracy. Schools submit multimedia projects which are selected through a series of several assessments, revealing the sensitivities and interest of students in the Constitution of the Republic and the institutions, and their civic commitment. Delegations from the prize-winning schools are received in alternate years in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies for a ceremony attended by the Presidents of both Chambers.

### ***Teaching platform on the Constitution***

A Teaching Platform on the Constitution was started during the first year of *Lessons on the Constitution* (2008) on the [www.parlamento.it](http://www.parlamento.it) website, managed by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. The website contains a text of the Constitution, pages and multimedia materials on the Constituent Assembly, the case law of the Constitutional Court, and the Constitutions of the other democracies. What makes

this platform particularly valuable is the study section, with a detailed bibliography for further study offering the possibility of downloading full texts.

### ***Human Rights Testimonials***

In 2008, an awareness-raising scheme was introduced to provide civic education to schools on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On 30 January 2009, over two hundred pupils from twelve Italian schools, accompanied by their teachers, attended a special session of the Senate in Palazzo Madama. The President of the Senate, Renato Schifani, gave the participants the role of *Human Rights Testimonials*, specifically mandated to disseminate knowledge of human rights. The students also took the floor in the Senate to illustrate a selection from the thirty articles of the Universal Declaration. The contributions of students were interspersed by speeches of senators attending the debate. At the end of the debate, the students moved the adoption of a policy document committing the Senate, in that composition, to promote human rights. The president of the *Ad Hoc* Committee for the Protection and Advancement of Human Rights, Senator Pietro Marcenaro, expressed the Committee's opinion on the document, which was put to the vote and adopted by a show of hands.

In view of the great success of the event, it will be taken up again in the next school year, with the aim of establishing greater integration between the Senate and the regions.

### **The Library of the Senate of the Republic**

For many years, the Senate Library was only a sales outlet in Via del Teatro Valle. The public could only tell the staff member which publication or parliamentary document they wanted.

In 2003, new premises in Via della Maddalena were opened and the Bookshop - Centre for Official Information and Documentation was created, as a walk-in enquiries centre, with an online information channel connected to the e-mail address [infopoint@senato.it](mailto:infopoint@senato.it): this e-mail address, which is on the Senate website, is the window through which the surfing public can gain access to the Senate website.

The main aim of the Bookshop is to sell the Senate publications and documents either directly or by mail. It also handles subscriptions to different series of Parliamentary documents and records, promptly replying to requests and forwarding them to subscribers.

The Bookshop premises are also used for exhibitions. Large panels are attached to the walls along a pathway to accompany visitors. In the past few years a number of exhibitions have been organised to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (1957-2007) and the sixtieth anniversary of the Constitution of the Italian Republic and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948-2008).

On the Senate website, in the Relations with the Public section, the Official Information Office runs the *Initiatives for Schools* and the *Senate for Children* web pages, providing information on the Senate to young children, as we saw earlier. It is also possible to download a large number of useful teaching and multimedia.

The Official Information Office is also responsible for the Senate Library web pages which, together with information on the opening hours, provide a catalogue of publications, and instructions on how to purchase them, and a list of all the initiatives and events organised by the Senate.

### ***Meetings in the Bookshop***

The Senate Bookshop is also the venue for educational meetings, primarily for young people. Between December 2008 and January 2009 an important series of workshops on human rights were held there coinciding with the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Upper secondary school students were given the chance to talk with the members of the Senate Committee for the Protection and Advancement of Human Rights and with leading law experts.

Other meetings have also been held on National Braille Day, Culture Week, and the anniversaries of the opening of the Bookshop.

School groups visiting the Senate premises or viewing floor debates are also taken to the Bookshop to learn about the organisation of the Senate and of Parliamentary business.

The Official Information Office also organises *ad hoc* training sessions for target groups. In 2008-2009, meetings were organised with junior officials from the Home Affairs Ministry, scholarship students of the "Silvano Tosi" Parliamentary Studies Workshop at Florence University, and interns of numerous national and international education and research institutions.

### **School visits and opening times at Palazzo Madama**

Palazzo Madama, the seat of the Senate, is open to the public on the first Saturday of every month, as arranged by the Security and Protocol Service. The Official Information Office provides visitors with free information packs.

School groups can visit the Senate or attend floor debates. Here too, the Security and Protocol Service organises the timetable of visits and provides guided tours to the Senate buildings. The Official Information Office distributes info packs made to suit young visitors. This provides an educational opportunity for school groups which, for organisational or logistical reasons, are unable to have a session in the Bookshop.

### **Website for children**

The Official Information Office intends to concentrate on the Internet as a special channel for getting through to, and debate with, young people. The school is present everywhere on the web and some schools already use online web pages to communicate with students' families and provide counselling and guidance.

A web strategy for young people has been specifically designed for this very purpose. It will begin with the implementation of a portal gathering and presenting all website contents developed for young people.

The portal will be closely linked to the Senate institutional website ([www.senato.it](http://www.senato.it)), but will operate with complete autonomy. The children's portal is the first step towards making the website a forum for debate, participation and sharing. Once an e-democracy

platform has been established, it will be possible to provide online educational services to schools, which could serve as a pattern for the further development of the institutional website.

**The presence of the Senate in the regions: attending exhibitions and events throughout the country, and school visits**

For several years, the Official Information Office has organised Senate participation in exhibitions and events throughout the country. In the first few months of 2009 the Senate was present at the Italian Quality Trade Fair in Milan and the International Book Fair in Turin. In Turin, like in the previous years, the Senate had its own stand, with a small replica of the Palazzo Madama plenary hall.

At all these events, copies of the Constitution of the Republic and a list of Senators are distributed for free, while books published by the Senate are on sale.

In the area of the stand including the replica of the Palazzo Madama plenary hall, teaching sessions are held for visiting schools, together with meetings and discussions with Senators. These activities establish a direct contact between the Senate and the regions and social environments far from Rome which it would be otherwise difficult to reach.

In most cases, attendance at exhibitions and events is organised jointly with the Chamber of Deputies Official Information Office.

This year the Senate has also run school visits on a trial basis. The *I would like a law that...* contest made it possible to visit some of the winning primary schools. The

response to these visits has been extremely positive and has shown the interest of local communities in meeting Senate delegations, alongside the need for senators and the Senate staff to keep an information and cooperation channel in operation. Visits by Senate delegations to different parts of Italy and schools will be one of the priorities of the Official Information Office in the months to come, as part of a targeted communications strategy.

### **The Senate satellite channel**

In 2002 a Senate satellite channel was opened, making unscrambled broadcasts of Senate sittings available on all digital receivers. During a recess, the satellite channel broadcasts past events and guided tours to the Senate.

### **The Senate website**

The Senate website provides real-time information on the structure, functions and services provided by the Senate. All parliamentary business is to be found online, in databases updated daily. WebTV broadcasts of Senate sittings are also available on the website.

Following thorough and constant upgrading, the site can now meet all accessibility requirements.

### **Publishing**

The Official Information Office plays a crucial role in enriching the publishing activities of the Senate, firstly through the production of information materials mentioned earlier, and secondly by offering collections of Parliamentary documents and records on notable events in Italian civil life.

### **Cultural events**

The Official Information Office also cooperates in the organisation of events taking place in the Senate, by providing information material, in such cases as, to name a few, a yearly Christmas concert and celebratory events held in the hemicycle and cultural meetings in Palazzo Giustiniani and Palazzo Minerva.