

AVIZOR



ANNUAL REPORT 2012

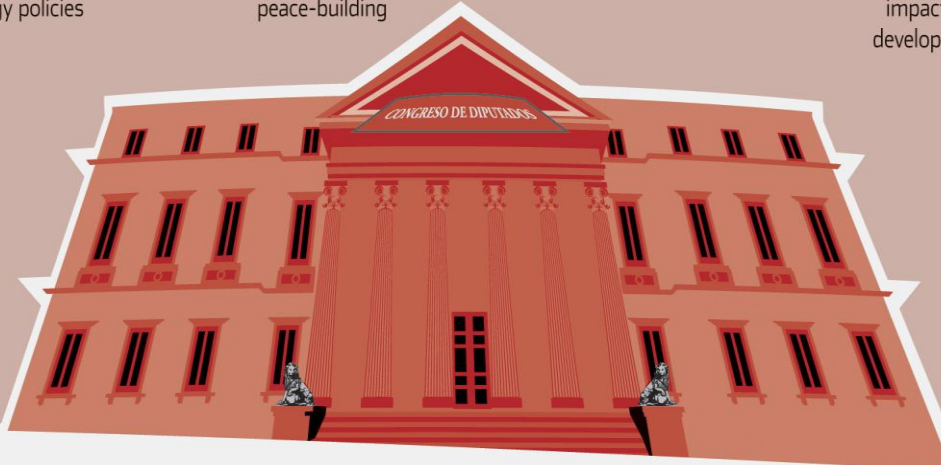
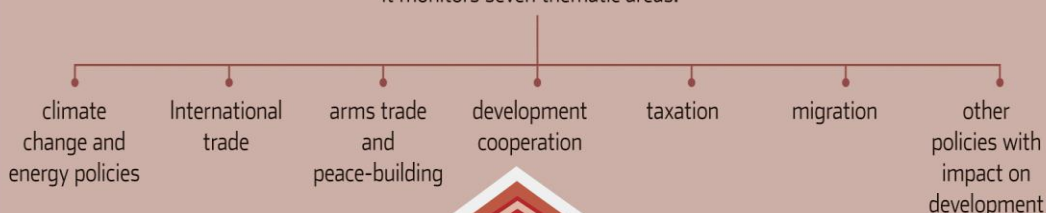
ONE YEAR MONITORING
THE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY
OF THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT



What is PROJECT **AVIZOR** ?

It is a project of monitoring and evaluating the activity of the Spanish deputies with regard to poverty reduction and the promotion of international development.

It monitors seven thematic areas:



What are the **AVIZOR**'s Acts?

They are those parliamentary acts or initiatives, which we monitor, as they potentially have impact and relevance in international development and the fight against poverty.

Which are pro-development **AVIZOR**'s Acts?

These are parliamentary initiatives that, besides having development impact, they have a focus on the fight against poverty or the promotion of a fairer, more equitable and sustainable world. By contrast, non pro-development acts are those that despite having implications for international development, these are not taken into account.

Which parliamentary activity do we monitor?

We monitor different types of initiatives and parliamentary acts such as Bills, Amendments to Bills and Draft Laws, Parliamentary Interpellation and Motions and Parliamentary Questions.

To do so, AVIZOR monitors parliamentary activity that takes place in the Plenary sessions of the Parliament and in the 14 parliamentary committees that have the greatest impact on international development and poverty.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Neither politicians nor the credibility of the Spanish Parliament are in top form right now. The greater part of society feels that the political groups have their priorities wrong in a rigid, opaque parliamentary system that lacks credible accountability mechanisms. There is a perception that poverty and inequality—two growing problems with common roots in rich and poor countries—are being consciously ignored by a machine that suffocates the individual initiatives of the most committed members of Parliament. In the eyes of the majority, our political system is seriously ill.

Unfortunately, the detailed analysis done of parliamentary activity over the course of the past year confirms this perception.

This document presents the first annual report of the Proyecto Avizor, a public control initiative that monitors and evaluates the activity of the Spanish Parliament with regard to poverty reduction and the promotion of international development. The project uses a transparent methodology that first determines the relevance of each parliamentary initiative to development and then ranks its suitability and efficiency. Over the past 12 months, the Proyecto Avizor has reviewed over 600 parliamentary proceedings, the activity of 350 members of Parliament (MPs) and 14 of the 17 parliamentary Committees, as well as the Congress' plenary.

As a result of this analysis, a main conclusion has been reached: **the Parliament responds poorly to the challenges of poverty and international development.** Many areas of Spanish parliamentary activity are related to development (international trade, taxation, migrations, energy policies, development cooperation...) and a focus targeting the promotion of a fairer, more sustainable and more balanced international system prevails in none of them. Almost three out of four of these parliamentary initiatives disregard any repercussions on third countries or directly propose political options which would have a negative impact.

The main causes of this unsatisfactory response seem to be related to the low level of interest and knowledge that the majority of our political representatives have in these matters and the lack of importance that international poverty has in our country's politics. In 2012 only 79 of the 350 MPs have presented any parliamentary initiative with a pro-development vision.

However, the Avizor Project's analysis points to other root causes, related to the structure and operation of our Parliament, the internal dynamics of the parties

and their parliamentary groups, and to transparency and public access to information. These elements may play a decisive role when it comes to explaining Congress' performance in this area and they should serve as guidelines for work and advocacy in the future.

These are the main conclusions of our analysis:

1. The Parliament and the parliamentary groups are not adapted to respond to complex problems such as development and international poverty:

Work organization and the division of issues among the different parliamentary Committees as well as among groups are rigid and compartmentalized. This represents an excessively simplistic conception of development within the Congress, removed from the complex, cross-disciplinary reality of the problems it faces. The absence of internal coordination and dialogue mechanisms blocks detection of inconsistencies, conflicts and synergies, as well as making it impossible to formulate comprehensive and coherent policies. The majority of matters that are relevant to development fall outside cooperation policies, which means that close to 60 percent of them are discussed in Committees with no history or capability in this area, and where there is little interest in their possible effects on development. The result is that Congress itself approves contradictory political positions on the same topic in different Committees.

2. Absolute majorities limit parliamentary activity in this area in a definitive way:

The Spanish parliamentary system means that an absolute majority makes the Parliament irrelevant, not only in the approval of legislative initiatives but also in their proposal and discussion. Parliamentary majorities may contribute to the system's governability but they reduce the democratic function. In situations of absolute majority the Government's hegemony in legislative activity reaches the point where more than 60 percent of the legislative initiatives debated this year are theirs. In the specific area concerning Avizor this irrelevance is even more appreciable because no legislation proposed by the opposition has been approved: one hundred percent of the Bills and Amendments to Bills and Draft Laws have been defeated.

Half of Spain's recent history has been spent in a situation of absolute majority, which means that this relationship between the concentration of political power and democratic quality is something to be taken seriously. Moreover, the data show that political commitment to development is more related to the size of Congressional representation and less to the Parliamentary group's political orientation. The Popular Group and the Socialist Group, which have the greatest representation and political strength to drive initiatives favouring international development, are the groups that least take this aspect into consideration. The Izquierda Plural Group stands out the most in a positive sense, followed by the Basque and Catalanian Groups.

3. The Congress neither controls nor guides the Government's activity:

Parliamentary activity's limited relevance also extends to another two functions of the legislative branch: political orientation and control over Government activity. With regard to the first, the mechanisms that exist to monitor the Government's compliance with approved initiatives are insufficient, and there is no political tradition of demanding its compliance, or of accountability. As to the function of controlling the Government, parliamentary questions have tremendous practical potential because they monitor the Government's work, but neither their content nor the Government's responses reach the public in the end, especially in matters as unglamorous as poverty and development. This means their efficiency and repercussion are very limited.

4. Parliamentary activity is not very transparent and is inaccessible to public initiatives:

The Project Avizor analysis has revealed the existence of two significant problems in the relationship between political representatives and the people. The first is that a lot of information about parliamentary activity is not public or real public access to it is scarce. So, for example, the information available on activity in the Committees, where three out of four parliamentary actions relevant to development take place, is substantially less than information on the Plenary. When there is public information the problem is real access to it, whether because of its format or the delay in its distribution. All of this represents a real obstacle to political accountability, assignment of responsibilities and the creation of a system that provides incentive for good political practices. In the current situation it is normal for parliamentary conduct, whether good or bad, to go unseen. It's remarkable that in spite of the uncertain and arbitrary way that parliamentary information is made available the Transparency Act currently being worked on will not be applicable to the legislative branch. Nor is any reform to this effect being considered for the Bylaws of the Parliament.

The second problem is that the formal mechanisms for public participation (the Public Legislative Initiative, the Congressional Requests Committee or the appearance of civil society representatives before the Congress at its request) are scanty, fairly ineffectual and poorly designed. There are also informal participation mechanisms that are more practical and quicker, but they are not very transparent, access to them is not equitable and they are not free from effectiveness problems, either.

5. The system anesthetizes individual MP initiative:

In the midst of this negative context, a small number of MPs from different parliamentary groups stands out. They are very active and committed to the problems of international poverty, but their initiative and individual leadership is discouraged by the circumstances under which parliamentary activity is carried out in Spain. Poor media coverage of their work and the lack of transparency and access to information, together with the tight control the parties exercise over their parliamentary groups and

MP voting make it difficult to recognize individuals' work and discourage their initiative.

Together with the evidence indicated in this report, the Avizor Project has identified some lines of work that could contribute toward integrating the perspective of the fight against poverty and the promotion of development into the political debate and decision-making processes that go on in the Parliament:

1. Strengthen the role of the Congress' International Development Cooperation Committee. In the absence of desirable institutional structure that would favour transversal capacity for analysis and decision-making, the Cooperation Committee could evaluate and rule on the repercussions for development that the different policies and initiatives of the Government and other Committees would have.

2. Promote the creation of a parliamentary inter-group on Development Policy Coherence. This type of work group could facilitate consensus and give rise to common positions or joint initiatives by different parliamentary groups with regard to pro-development policies.

3. Improve transparency in the Parliament. Information access and communication must be improved in the Congress in several respects: less time between registration and publication; incorporation of publication of the different amendments to the different non-legislative initiatives before they are debated; and publication of the different initiatives in a comprehensible, reusable format that makes it possible to individually look up all parliamentary acts.

4. Create a public register of the compliance status of the initiatives approved by the Congress and regulate the Government's accountability to the Parliament in this regard.

5. Regulate and improve the participation mechanisms for civil society in parliamentary activity. Instruments that ensure effective participation of civil society and include the use of open Government formulas must be developed and adapted to available technologies.

6. Increase the presence and relevance of political parties and parliamentary groups in development topics. Given the interdependence and interconnectedness of development challenges and the number of domestic policies that influence them, these actors need to begin a process of reflection on their position on these matters to incorporate them comprehensively into their decision-making processes.

7. Modify the electoral system to improve the mechanisms for MP accountability to the electorate. A system of open lists would increase the ability of the public to participate in a politician's election and would create the incentive among MPs to propose individual initiatives. The application of more proportional electoral formulas would enrich parliamentary functions, foment the need for consensus and could contribute to reducing the number of pro-development initiatives that are tabled in the course of parliamentary processes.

8. Promote the responsible, committed role of the media. The media's role is essential in political accountability and in promoting public recognition of those MPs who are active and committed to the fight against poverty in a system such as ours, which suffocates individual initiatives.

9. Promote and support the political advocacy work of civil society organizations. NGOs function in a context in which favouritism and the resources enjoyed by other stakeholders closer to Spanish political and economic orthodoxy represent an additional obstacle for introducing critical topics that are essential for development work into the public agenda. Supporting their political advocacy work and demanding procedural rules that make it possible for civil society to put forward its aspirations and demands is another way of working for development.

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