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The Potential of Soft Power in Conflict Management through the Lens of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Abstract

The 21st century has brought numerous different challenges in international relations. With the downfall of the bipolar world order, we are now witnessing the emergence of a new one. The framework resulting from globalisation, modernism and the digital revolution sets out different routes for states on their paths to creating a balance of power. The success of foreign policy does not solely depend on the toolkit of hard power, that is, military or economic strength. Manifestations of soft power are becoming increasingly significant in the assertion of interests. Diplomatic tools and active participation in international organisations are particularly important in relationship building. Many of the new states that emerged in the wake of the collapse of colonial empires have, in fact, no other choice. In the lack of military or economic power, they must use the instruments of soft power as effectively as possible, aiming not only to secure the best possible position in geopolitical competition, but also to shape the perception of a globalised society and the country's image, and to influence the views of their own citizens. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), founded in 1889 as a global organisation comprised of the parliaments of sovereign states, currently has 183 member states. Over the past 136 years, it has accompanied states implementing democracy or striving for democratisation in their quest to find their own identity. This paper seeks to answer whether the processes taking place within this global organisation validate the assertion that world politics has become multipolar and multi-civilisational. To what extent are Western countries successful in asserting their interests compared to emerging states? Is there any discernible co-operation between states with similar cultural roots? To what extent do young states follow the guidelines of Western countries, or is their influence on these states fading? Are there shared values and toolkits that point towards the prevention and mitigation of conflicts? Seeking answers to these questions, I will provide a summary of the IPU's Presidents and review historical General Assembly venues, along with their significance in terms of the visibility of the Global South. I will also outline the factors

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contributing to the success of the General Assemblies. Focusing on the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I will examine the application of its soft power toolkit and the dynamics of international relations through the lens of the IPU, by looking at geopolitical groups, proposals for urgent agenda items and votes. I will also touch upon the methods and initiatives through which the Inter-Parliamentary Union offers solutions to national parliaments and international platforms for the mapping and resolution of conflicts beyond what was available before. This study argues that the IPU serves as a kind of litmus test for mapping international co-operation, relationship networks, focal points and fault lines.

Keywords: *Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU, soft power, diplomacy, multilateralism, conflict management*

Introduction

Peace and conflict research is a young discipline seeking answers and solutions to the important questions of a world fraught with challenges.² The growing number of armed conflicts demonstrates that the issues of conflict management and peacebuilding are highly topical.³ The ultimate goal of achieving lasting peace requires a thorough assessment of the situation, constantly expanding knowledge, an understanding of the stakeholders involved, the analysis of interdependencies, and the constant monitoring and exploitation of opportunities.

This has also been recognised by the Ludovika University of Public Service, whose numerous workshops, projects and training courses supports and serves to enrich the local and international academic world in this field, and helps translate theoretical results into practical action. The Eötvös József Research Centre,⁴ the Religion and Security Research Workshop⁵ established in November of the same year, the specialist further education course in Radicalism and Religious Extremism launched at the Faculty of Military Science and Officer Training at the Ludovika University of Public Service (LUPS),⁶ and the new Africa programme announced in early 2026, expected to be utilised by the European Union as well, all serve as clear evidence of this.⁷

This essay aims to contribute to this work by showcasing the role of soft power and bringing one of its greatest platforms, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, into the spotlight. Established in 1889, the organisation is the only global body encompassing the parliaments of sovereign states. Due to its unique nature, its General Assemblies bringing together hundreds of Members of Parliament, and its relevant objectives, it serves as a forum for the exchange of views and dialogue among parliaments.⁸

In his 1992 report entitled 'An Agenda for Peace', UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali discussed the issues of greatest concern to the Security Council. They

² See www.uu.se/en/department/peace-and-conflict-research

³ Uppsala Conflict Data Program [s. a.].

⁴ Eötvös József Research Centre [s. a.].

⁵ Nemzeti Közszerológálati Egyetem Hadtudományi és Honvédtisztképző Kar [s. a.].

⁶ Nemzeti Közszerológálati Egyetem Hadtudományi és Honvédtisztképző Kar 2023.

⁷ SARNYAI 2026.

⁸ Országgyűlés [s. a.a.].

included preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. In the report, the Secretary-General emphasises that situations that lead to conflict and are identified as such must first and foremost be addressed through diplomatic channels, to prevent violence. He identifies confidence-building as one of the key elements of preventive diplomacy. Diplomatic means can be used to prevent crises, avoid the recurrence of conflicts and to build peace in the wake of conflicts.⁹ In his report titled *A New Agenda for Peace*, published three decades later, UN Secretary-General António Guterres identifies trust, solidarity and universality as the fundamental principles of an effective collective security system. He believes that the most important pillars shaping the vision of multilateralism are as follows: the UN Charter and international law, prevention, diplomacy in the service of peace, dispute management and confidence-building, strong regional frameworks and institutions, national action, a people-centred approach, the elimination of all forms of aggression, the dismantling of patriarchal power structures, a comprehensive approach, ensuring that young people's voices are heard, the funding of peace, support for network-based multilateralism and its instruments, and the effectiveness and impartiality of the United Nations Chief Secretariat.¹⁰

The emphasis placed by UN Secretaries-General on the importance of diplomacy draws attention to its role in conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding. At the same time, diplomacy remains an important part of soft power. As one of the key pillars of foreign policy, it is capable of enhancing a country's appeal, gaining acceptance for its position, improving its international perception, and boosting its social capital.¹¹ In his book published in 2004, Joseph Nye has a strong focus on the topic of public diplomacy. He lists the organisation of conferences and cultural events and programmes as means of public diplomacy. He emphasises that public diplomacy can play a major role in creating a favourable perception of the country.¹²

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is a unique platform of soft power. Its motto is: For Democracy. For Everyone.¹³ Thus, its member states can express their commitment to shared political values; i.e. democracy, the rule of law and human rights – components of soft power, simply through their participation and the work they perform within the organisation.¹⁴ The special committees and working groups of IPU address the most pressing issues facing humanity and specific regions, and aim to find solutions to them. The general assemblies serve as meeting places for representatives of countries in conflict, offering an opportunity for dialogue and reducing tension. In the debates, each party can express its position and articulate its grievances; while through lobbying for votes, it can assert its will, voice its political stance, and demonstrate its capacity for co-operation. By hosting general assemblies, it can draw attention to its cultural traditions and values, and impress participants with its hospitality.

⁹ BOUTROS-GHALI 1992: 2–3, 7–8, 23, 33.

¹⁰ United Nations 2023: 8–14.

¹¹ ABD ALLAH AJRASH – HAMID KHAYOUN 2023: 210–211.

¹² NYE 2004: 107–109.

¹³ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.a].

¹⁴ Magyar Diplomáciai Akadémia 2025.

The present essay examines the work of one of these international organisations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, seeking an answer to the question of what kind of dynamics international relations have following the collapse of the bipolar world order and during the emergence of a multipolar structure. How effective are Western countries in asserting their interests? Do young states follow their guidelines, or do they prefer to go their own way instead? Are there any new initiatives within the IPU aimed at reducing tension and intolerance? How do the member states of the Inter-Parliamentary Union use means of soft power to boost their appeal and influence?

I have been following the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union closely since 2013, and that is the reason why I have chosen this year as the starting point of the period under review. Following a brief overview of the relevance of soft power, the paper introduces the IPU.

The significance of soft power

The concept developed by Joseph Nye in 2004 builds on the principles of behavioural theory, i.e. behaviourism, and offers a framework for understanding the exercising of power and the shaping of others' preferences, showcases tools and capabilities that are not new.¹⁵ Their differentiation and application date back to ancient times.¹⁶ Directly enforced will, or 'hard power' as Nye calls it, achieves its goals by way of the 'carrot and stick' strategy, which may include intimidation, coercion, bribery or a 'backhander'.¹⁷ In practice, it often deploys economic and military components to influence others. Soft power, by contrast, means the use of a variety of soft power tools.¹⁸ It is characterised by cooperation and consensus.¹⁹ Joseph Nye's categories are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Three types of power

	Behaviours	Primary currencies	Government policies
Military power	coercion deterrence protection	threats force	coercive diplomacy war alliance
Economic power	incentive coercion	payments sanctions	aid bribes sanctions
Soft power	attraction agenda setting	values culture policies institutions	public diplomacy bilateral and multilateral diplomacy

Source: Nye 2004: 31

¹⁵ Nye 2004.
¹⁶ Kovács 2017.
¹⁷ Pál 2022: 100.
¹⁸ Mihálovics 2023.
¹⁹ Pál 2022: 101.

Nye believed that command power achieves its goals through coercion, whilst co-optive power does it through attraction.

Hard power	VS	Soft power
Absolute	1	Relative
Physical force	2	Attraction, influence
Military & economic force	3	Culture
Foreign policy	4	Country branding
Direct action, short-term effect	5	Indirect action, long-term effect
Controlled by the state or other organisations	6	Used by non-state actors, difficult to control
Ability to change the position of other people by force or coercion	7	Ability to change the preferences of other people attracting them

Figure 1: Comparison of the characteristics of hard and soft power
Source: Collidu [s. a.]

Soft power, however, cannot be sufficiently effective without hard power. The ideal scenario is a combination of the two, which Nye calls 'smart power'.²⁰ He points out that co-optive power can often be more effective in international relations and in the management of conflicts. Therefore, its use is often more effective than the means of hard power, and not only because it is more ethical.²¹

The mitigation of a growing number of conflicts, including armed conflicts, requires that individual countries, as well as the international community pay particular attention to the tools of soft power. Figure 2 and 3 showcase the rise in the number of conflicts.

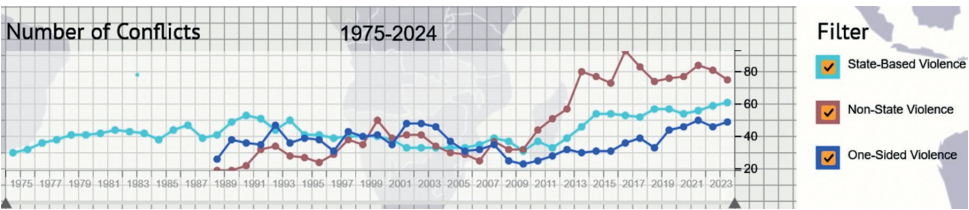


Figure 2: Number of conflicts
Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program [s. a.]

²⁰ NYE 2009.

²¹ PÁL 2022: 101.

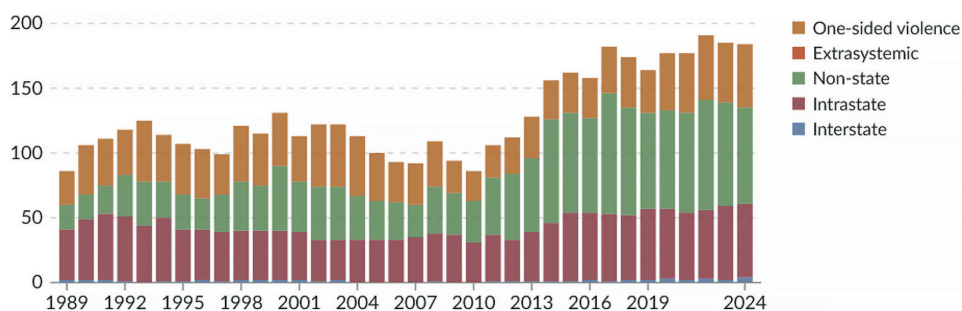


Figure 3: Number of armed Conflicts

Source: Our World in Data [s. a.]

Means of hard power tools can also function as soft power.²² One example worth mentioning is the UN peacekeeping operations ongoing since 1948.²³ Peacekeeping operations account for less than half a percent of global military spending; yet they come to a significant sum.²⁴ In the 2025–2026 budgetary cycle, USD 5.6 billion has been earmarked for the operation of peacekeeping missions. However, due to the UN's funding difficulties and the resulting financial austerity measures, the operations of peacekeeping missions must be scaled back.²⁵ In the autumn of 2025, UN Secretary-General António Guterres instructed all missions to reduce their spending by 15%. As a result, the number of civilians and uniformed personnel participating in the missions had to be decreased by 25%.²⁶ Consequently, their capacity to pursue peace and protect the civilian population is declining.²⁷ These developments support the view that, alongside the use of risky and expensive hard power tools, the use of cheaper soft power tools must be strengthened, even if the results only become visible in the longer term.²⁸

However, it is not merely the question of funding that highlights the importance of soft power. Due to globalisation and the resulting interconnectivity, nations have fewer opportunities to use hard power in the resolution of conflicts. Consequently, the tools of soft power are gaining increasingly more value.²⁹ These include, amongst others, diplomacy, communication and development policies. The strengthening of soft power is also justified by the need to address the new challenges posed by the information society, and to counter the emergence of new types of weapons. One common characteristic of these is that they exploit the possibilities of big data-based communication. In this new environment, the importance of traditional and public diplomacy is also increasing.³⁰

²² TÁLAS [s. a.].

²³ United Nations Peacekeeping [s. a.].

²⁴ United Nations 2025.

²⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping 2025.

²⁶ United Nations 2025.

²⁷ United Nations Peacekeeping 2025.

²⁸ Magyar Diplomáciai Akadémia 2025.

²⁹ ŞAHİN 2023.

³⁰ PÁL 2022: 129.

Today, we are witnessing a renaissance of multilateralism.³¹ This institutional form involves co-operation among three or more parties on the grounds of shared principles.³² The geopolitical challenges of the multipolar system necessitate this kind of collective thinking and action.³³ Soft tools for resolving conflicts of interest can be effective. This is further necessitated by the fact that states that are powerful in an economic and military sense are unable to ensure the security of the entire world, or even their own, alone.³⁴

In the transforming world order, next to the traditional great powers, emerging actors have significant influence and represent new dynamics. Due to their growing role and the transformation taking place in the world, the question arises as to what principles and values will shape the new world order and who will determine the new form.³⁵

Due to the above reasons, I consider it appropriate to describe and analyse the functioning of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, one of the largest organisations for multilateral co-operation and the only global organisation for parliamentary diplomacy.

The 'invisible big gun' of diplomacy: The Inter-Parliamentary Union

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and its operation yet is unknown to many, even though it can be regarded as the forerunner of every international organisation that exists today.³⁶ It was the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), established in Paris in 1889 by a group of MPs, that laid the foundations which, in turn, planted the seeds of international co-operation between governments and parliaments at the time, resulting in today's rich array of tools. It was on its initiative that the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague was established in 1899, and the discussions held during its meetings led to the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919 and, subsequently, the United Nations in 1945. Building on the pacifist ideas of the 1870s and 1880s, by the 1890s the organisation's founders were able to translate these ideas into tangible results. William Randal Cremer of England and Frédéric Passy of France had served the cause of peace with dedication in their respective countries before joining forces to pursue their common goals. In the United States, their initial attempts were unsuccessful, but they were a driving force for the pacifist movement.³⁷ It is not surprising that, in such a fertile environment, President Thomas Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, drafted on classical idealist principles, was written. This served as a kind of 'Magna Carta' for peace efforts.³⁸ It also laid the foundation for the League

³¹ Magyar Honvédség 2021.

³² REMEK 2023.

³³ Magyar Honvédség 2021.

³⁴ REMEK 2023.

³⁵ Magyar Honvédség 2021.

³⁶ Országgyűlés [s. a.b].

³⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.i].

³⁸ ODON 2025.

of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations.³⁹ The United States eventually became a founding member of the World Organisation, which later grew to global proportions. The Inter-Parliamentary Conference – which adopted the name 'Inter-Parliamentary Union' in 1899 – was officially founded on 30 June 1889 by delegates from nine countries. Its first President was Passy, with Cremer filling the position of Vice President. Both were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work.⁴⁰

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is headquartered in Geneva. It currently has 183 member states and 15 associate members. Its motto is: For Democracy. For Everyone. By strengthening parliamentary diplomacy and parliaments, it serves the cause of peace, democracy and sustainable development. Through political dialogue, co-operation and parliamentary action, it seeks to promote the creation of a world where everyone's voice counts and where democracy and parliaments serve the peace and advancement of people.⁴¹

The organisational structure of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is shown in Figure 4.

The work of the elected representatives (MPs) takes place mainly in the Governing Council, the Assembly, the Standing Committees and the 6 Geopolitical Groups.⁴² The Standing Committees serve as permanent forums for democracy and human rights, peace and international security, sustainable development, and UN-related matters. At the same time, the organisational chart also highlights the fact that there are serious issues addressed by dedicated committees with an elected body. Matters such as the human rights of Members of Parliament, issues relating to the Middle East and the prevailing situation in Cyprus, respect for international humanitarian law, health, terrorism and violent extremism, women's participation in public life and the representation of their interests, the involvement of youth, and the opportunities and challenges presented by science and technology represent key focus points in the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The potential of soft power and the dynamics of international relations through the IPU

The Inter-Parliamentary Union aims to ensure visibility and balanced representation for its members, whether they belong to countries of the Global North or the Global South. To this end, the presidency, which is for a three-year term, rotates among the geopolitical groups in accordance with customary practice. Since 2013, the rotation has been as follows.⁴³

³⁹ Office of the Historian [s. a.].

⁴⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.i].

⁴¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.a].

⁴² Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.r].

⁴³ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.n].

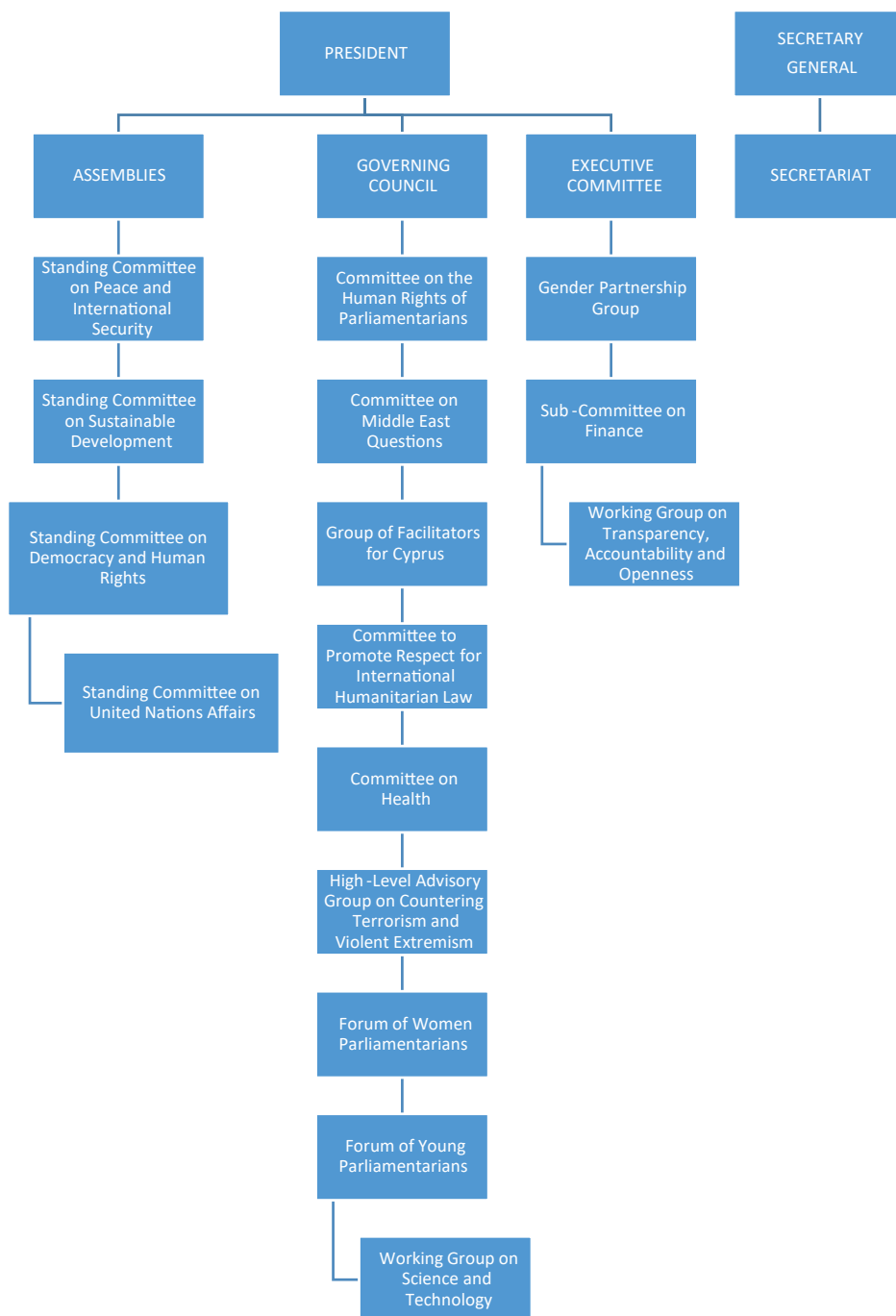


Figure 4: Organisational structure of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
 Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.q]

Table 2: Presidents of the Inter-Parliamentary Union during the period under review

IPU President	Years	Country	Geopolitical group
Abdelwahad Radi	2011–2014	Morocco	Arab ⁴⁴
Saber Chowdhury	2014–2017	Bangladesh	Asia-Pacific ⁴⁵
Gabriela Cuevas Barron	2017–2020	Mexico	GRULAC (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) ⁴⁶
Duarte Pacheco	2020–2023	Portugal	Twelve Plus ⁴⁷
Tulia Ackson ⁴⁸	from October 2023	Tanzania	African ⁴⁹

Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the IPU

Securing the presidency not only strengthens recognition within the Geopolitical Group, but also attracts the attention of other Member States to the President's country. President Saber Chowdhury was able to capitalise on this by inviting the 136th General Assembly to his home country, and it was hosted by Dhaka in the spring of 2017, as shown in Table 2. Tulia Ackson followed suit. Her three-year presidential term will come to an end in October 2026 in Arusha, Tanzania, at the 153rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.⁵⁰

In the IPU, there are numerous ways to enhance visibility, advocate for interests and build relationships. The organisation is headquartered in Geneva, but it strives to ensure that one of its two annual assemblies is hosted by a Member State. One precondition to this is that the host country must provide the required visas for all Members, Associate Members and Observers.⁵¹ Table 3 summarises the venues for the General Assemblies starting from 2013.⁵²

Table 3: Venues of IPU Assemblies

Assembly	Year	Venue	Geopolitical Group
128	Spring 2013	Quito (Ecuador)	GRULAC ⁵³
129	Autumn 2013	Geneva (Switzerland)	Headquarters
130	Spring 2014	Geneva	Headquarters
131	Autumn 2014	Geneva	Headquarters
132	Spring 2015	Hanoi (Vietnam)	Asia-Pacific ⁵⁴
133	Autumn 2015	Geneva	Headquarters

⁴⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.c].

⁴⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.d].

⁴⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.h].

⁴⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.r].

⁴⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.o].

⁴⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.b].

⁵⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.f].

⁵¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.q].

⁵² Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.k].

⁵³ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.h].

⁵⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.d].

Assembly	Year	Venue	Geopolitical Group
134	Spring 2016	Lusaka (Zambia)	African ⁵⁵
135	Autumn 2016	Geneva	Headquarters
136	Spring 2017	Dhaka (Bangladesh)	Asia-Pacific
137	Autumn 2017	Saint Petersburg (Russia)	Eurasia ⁵⁶
138	Spring 2018	Geneva	Headquarters
139	Autumn 2018	Geneva	Headquarters
140	Spring 2019	Doha (Qatar)	Arab ⁵⁷
141	Autumn 2019	Belgrade (Serbia)	Twelve Plus ⁵⁸
	Autumn 2020	<i>Virtual, Extraordinary Governing Council</i>	
142	Spring 2021	<i>Virtual, Geneva</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>
143	Autumn 2021	Madrid (Spain)	Twelve Plus
144	Spring 2022	Nusa Dua (Indonesia)	Asia-Pacific
145	Autumn 2022	Kigali (Rwanda)	Africa
146	Spring 2023	Manama (Bahrain)	Arab
147	2023 autumn	Luanda (Angola)	African
148	Spring 2024	Geneva	Headquarters
149	2024 autumn	Geneva	Headquarters
150	Spring 2025	Tashkent (Uzbekistan)	Eurasia
151	Autumn 2025	Geneva	Headquarters

Source: compiled by the author

Hosting an IPU General Assembly offers numerous benefits and opportunities for the host country:

- It can showcase its achievements in the field of democracy.
- It can demonstrate its commitment to democracy.
- It can demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism.
- It can demonstrate its commitment to soft power, parliamentary democracy and its instruments.
- It can use the event to build its national image by demonstrating the high standard of organisation, as well as its hospitality and culture.
- It can demonstrate its international integration and recognition to its own citizens.

According to a survey published in February 2026, the countries hosting IPU Assemblies rank as follows in terms of soft power: Switzerland 7, Spain 12, Russia 14, Qatar 20, Indonesia 45, Bahrain 49, Vietnam 52, Serbia 72, Uzbekistan 92, Ecuador 93, Bangladesh 101, Zambia 114, Angola 116 and Rwanda 122. A country's position in the ranking reflects its influence on the shaping of global opinion by means of culture, diplomacy, the business world and international influencing.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.b].

⁵⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.g].

⁵⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.c].

⁵⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.r].

⁵⁹ CONTE 2026.

Table 4: Number of participants at IPU General Assemblies

Assembly	Number of participating Member States	Number of participants			
		Total	Number of participating MPs		
			Total	of this number	
				Speaker	Deputy Speaker
128 (Quito) ⁶⁰	118	1198	619	33	38
129 (Geneva) ⁶¹	132	1191	539	40	36
130 (Geneva) ⁶²	145	1349	705	47	34
131 (Geneva) ⁶³	147	1410	707	47	48
132 (Hanoi) ⁶⁴	128	1370	678	45	46
133 (Geneva) ⁶⁵	134	1399	647	41	50
134 (Lusaka) ⁶⁶	126	1227	634	36	38
135 (Geneva) ⁶⁷	141	1487	693	51	50
136 (Dhaka) ⁶⁸	126	1206	608	42	35
137 (Saint Petersburg) ⁶⁹	155	1885	833	87	66
138 (Geneva) ⁷⁰	148	1526	744	59	39
139 (Geneva) ⁷¹	145	1545	737	51	50
140 (Doha) ⁷²	147	1521	757	74	38
141 (Belgrade) ⁷³	149	1729	739	63	57
142 (Geneva, virtual) ⁷⁴	133	1073	755	52	38
143 (Madrid) ⁷⁵	117	936	515	39	31
144 (Nusa Dua) ⁷⁶	101	778	404	30	28
145 (Kigali) ⁷⁷	119	959	573	39	39
146 (Manama) ⁷⁸	136	1205	683	58	43
147 (Luanda) ⁷⁹	128	1153	622	51	42
148 (Geneva) ⁸⁰	144	1479	716	51	48
149 (Geneva) ⁸¹	129	1267	631	53	36
150 (Tashkent) ⁸²	129	1297	697	47	43
151 (Geneva) ⁸³	129	1103	594	42	40

Source: compiled by the author

⁶⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2013a.

⁶¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2013b.

⁶² Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014a.

⁶³ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014b.

⁶⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015a.

⁶⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015b.

⁶⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016a.

⁶⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016b.

⁶⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017a.

⁶⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017b.

⁷⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018a.

⁷¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018b.

⁷² Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019a.

⁷³ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019b.

⁷⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021a.

⁷⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021b.

⁷⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2022a.

⁷⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2022b.

⁷⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023b.

⁷⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023c.

⁸⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024a.

⁸¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024b.

⁸² Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025a.

⁸³ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025b.

The countries hosting IPU Assemblies occupy very different positions on this list. Yet, they have been given the opportunity to host the largest event of the world organisation of parliaments, and they seized the opportunity.

The success of the Assemblies is often measured by the number of Member States present, and the number of participants and level of representation each country brings to the event. If one or more delegations, acting together, propose items as urgent topics for the agenda, it becomes possible to discuss national, international and global challenges as urgent agenda items.⁸⁴ It provides an opportunity to highlight and discuss national, regional and global challenges. The success of co-operation and, therefore, of the General Assembly, is best signalled by whether consensus can be reached, and a topic accepted as an urgent agenda item with a two-thirds majority vote.

As we could see from Table 4 and Figures 5 and 6, data from the period starting from 2013 show that, excluding the period immediately after the Covid pandemic, attendance at the Inter-Parliamentary Union's General Assemblies exceeds one thousand persons, with half of the participants being members of national parliaments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is the only international organisation, and its General Assemblies are the only forums where members of national legislatures are present in such large numbers. Many Member States are represented at the level of Speaker or Deputy Speaker. This means that 11–18% of the delegates participating in the General Assemblies are Speakers or Deputy Speakers. The presence of as many high-ranking officials as possible is a matter of prestige for the host country; and therefore, it is not uncommon for lobbying activities to take place among national delegations prior to the General Assemblies.

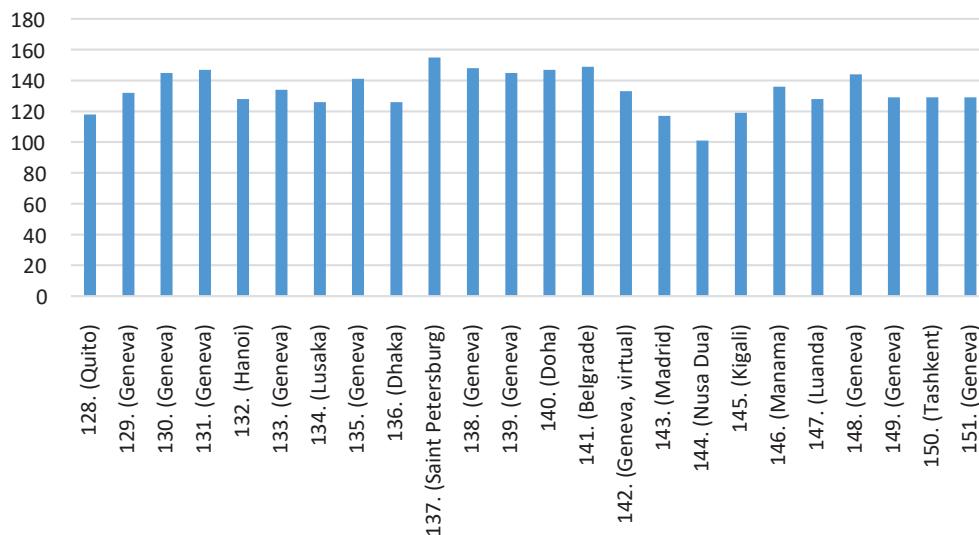


Figure 5: Member states participating in IPU General Assemblies
Source: compiled by the author

⁸⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017c.

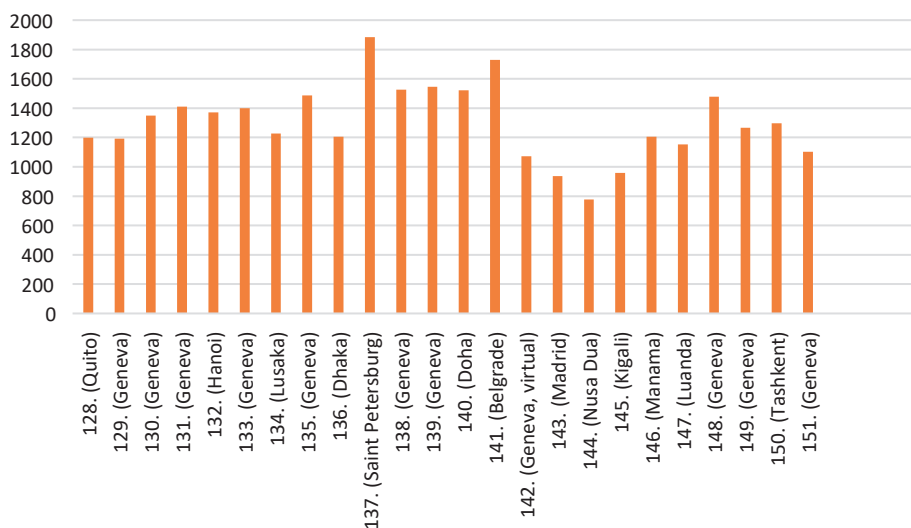


Figure 6: Total number of participants at General Assemblies
Source: compiled by the author

Within the Inter-Parliamentary Union, countries may form geopolitical groups.⁸⁵ These reflect both geographical and cultural affiliations. Currently, Member States are organised along six geopolitical groups. These are the Arab, African, Eurasian, Asia-Pacific, Twelve Plus and GRULAC (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) groups.

Table 5: Number of member states by geopolitical group

Geopolitical groups	Number of states
African	52
Arab	20
Asia-Pacific	37
Eurasia	10
GRULAC	28
Twelve Plus	47

Source: compiled by the author

⁸⁵ Statutes and Rules 2025b.

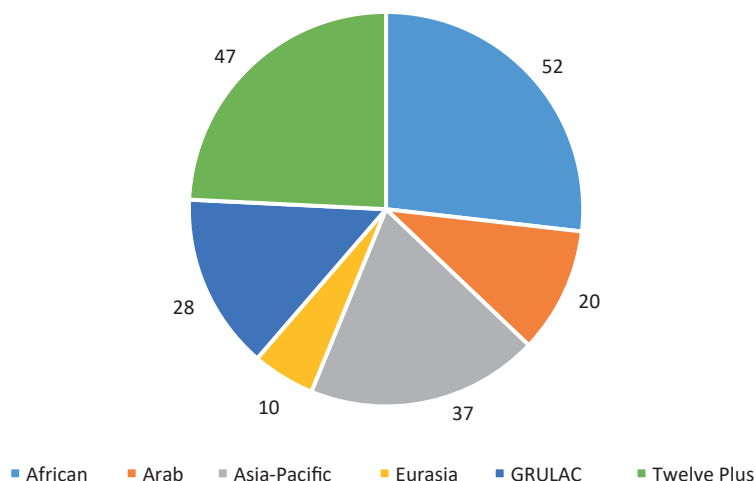


Figure 7: Number of member states by geopolitical group

Source: compiled by the author

If we add up the number of Member States by geopolitical group, we get a figure of 194. This happens because 11 countries have dual geopolitical group membership. Dual group membership reflects their cultural and geographical affiliations. I have summarised these countries in Table 6. However, when it comes to elections, they must decide which geopolitical group they wish to favour. This is also included in the table.

Table 6: Countries with dual geopolitical membership and their group preferences

Countries with dual geopolitical group membership	Membership of geopolitical group	Preferred group affiliation in the event of elections
Algeria	Arab and African	African ⁸⁶
Australia	12+ and Asia-Pacific	Asia-Pacific ⁸⁷
Canada	12+ and Asia-Pacific	Twelve Plus ⁸⁸
Comoros	African and Arab	African ⁸⁹
Djibouti	African and Arab	African ⁹⁰
Egypt	African and Arab	Arab ⁹¹
Libya	African and Arab	Arab ⁹²
Morocco	African and Arab	Arab ⁹³
Mauritania	African and Arab	Arab ⁹⁴
New Zealand	12+ and Asia-Pacific	Twelve Plus ⁹⁵
Tunisia	African and Arab	Arab ⁹⁶

Source: compiled by the author

⁸⁶ IPU Parline [s. a.a].

⁸⁷ IPU Parline [s. a.b].

⁸⁸ IPU Parline [s. a.c].

⁸⁹ IPU Parline [s. a.d].

⁹⁰ IPU Parline [s. a.e].

⁹¹ IPU Parline [s. a.f].

⁹² IPU Parline [s. a.g].

⁹³ IPU Parline [s. a.h].

⁹⁴ IPU Parline [s. a.i].

⁹⁵ IPU Parline [s. a.k].

⁹⁶ IPU Parline [s. a.l].

It can be seen that out of the countries belonging to both the African and Arab Geopolitical groups, three prefer to belong to the African group and five to the Arab group. This means more than just an emphasis on cultural roots, as it also indicates in which geopolitical group they wish to stand as candidates or compete in the event of personal nominations or elections. As the Arab Geopolitical Group has 20 members and the African Group has 52, smaller Member States have a better chance of competing. This reasoning may also apply to Australia, which has a preference for the Asia-Pacific Geopolitical Group over the Twelve Plus Group.

The Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group was established by nine member states in 1974.⁹⁷ Its alternative name, the Group of Advanced Democracies, aptly reflects the fact that it initially included countries exporting democracy, which is also largely the case today. This group primarily consists of countries that are part of Western civilisation. The members of the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group include Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.⁹⁸ Looking at Figure 8, we can see that the membership of the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group accounts for less than a quarter of the total number of member states.

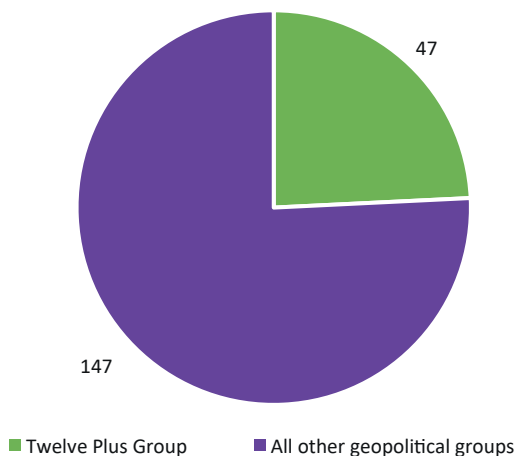


Figure 8: Membership of the Twelve Plus Group and all other geopolitical groups
Source: compiled by the author

If, in addition to the number of member states, we also look at the number of votes that may be cast, we arrive at a similar result. I have summarised the number of votes

⁹⁷ Országgyűlés [s. a.b].

⁹⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.r].

in Table 7 and illustrated them in Figure 9, whilst Figure 10 shows a comparison of the votes cast by the Twelve Plus and all other geopolitical groups. I have compiled the number and distribution of votes by geopolitical group using data from the 151st General Assembly organised in Geneva.⁹⁹ The table lists 181 member states, as in the cases of Brunei Darussalam and Niger, the Governing Council only decided on their admission and readmission at the General Assembly.¹⁰⁰ This is how, by the end of 2025, the Inter-Parliamentary Union had 183 members. The number of votes is influenced by the size of the country's population. Brunei Darussalam has a population of 0.46 million.¹⁰¹ Niger has a population of 26.16 million.¹⁰² I calculated the number of votes for Brunei Darussalam and Niger based on their population figures, subject to the provisions set out in the Statutes and Rules.¹⁰³ In countries marked with an asterisk, which have observer status and no voting rights, there are practical obstacles to voting. E.g. there is currently no Parliament in Myanmar, etc. I have included these because, theoretically, they could vote.¹⁰⁴

Table 7: Number of votes by geopolitical group

Geopolitical Group	Number of votes*
African	633
Arab	227
Asia-Pacific	503
Eurasia	133
GRULAC	354
Twelve Plus	578

**For countries with dual geopolitical membership, I have added their votes to the geopolitical group they expressed a preference for in the elections.*

Source: compiled by the author

The figures suggest, and this is indeed the actual case, that if the Advanced Democracies Geopolitical Group wishes to achieve a specific result in the votes, it must choose one of the following potential solutions: it must join forces with another geopolitical group or groups; or persuade the other geopolitical groups to support its proposal; or put forward a proposal – possibly reaching a consensus with the others – which the majority is satisfied with, and which is deemed worthy of support. This requires diplomatic skill, persuasive power and sound tactics.

⁹⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025d.

¹⁰⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025b: 14.

¹⁰¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.e].

¹⁰² Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.m].

¹⁰³ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025e.

¹⁰⁴ IPU Parline [s. a.m].

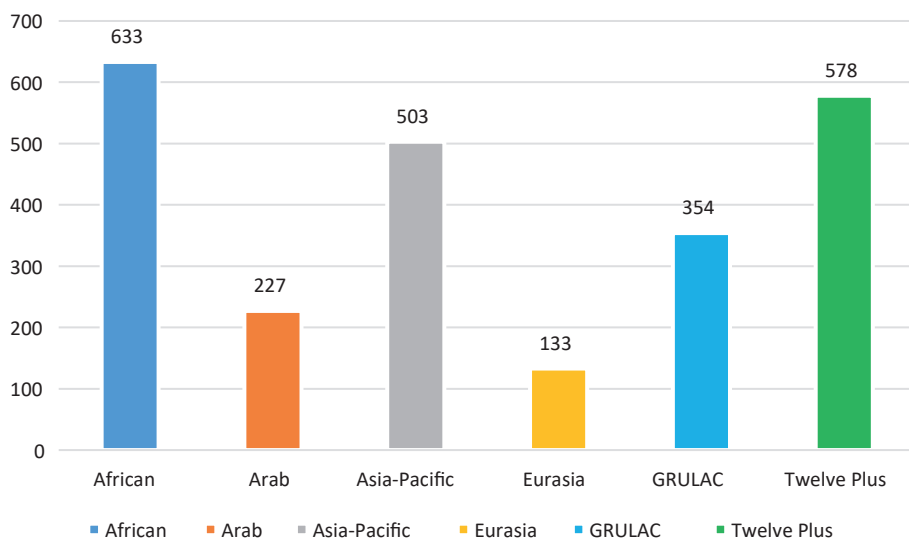


Figure 9: Number of votes by geopolitical group
Source: compiled by the author

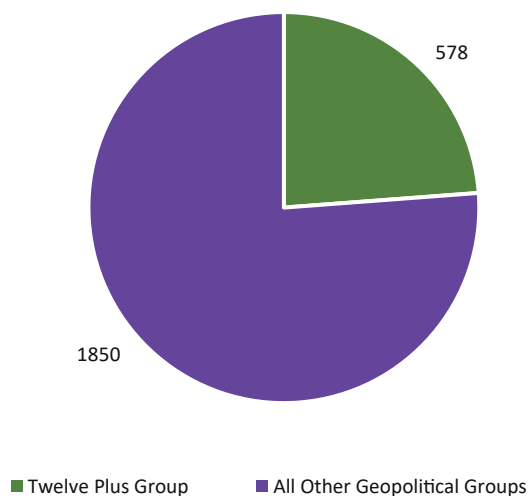


Figure 10: Number of votes for the Twelve Plus Group and all other geopolitical group
Source: compiled by the author

To focus attention on their own issues, delegations can primarily and most effectively use the submission of urgent proposals for agenda items and the adoption of such urgent proposals. Depending on the content of the urgent agenda proposals, the presentation of the proposals, the arguments for and against them, and the vote on the urgent agenda item can represent the tensest moments of IPU General Assemblies. The topic of the proposals highlights the most pressing issues at global,

regional and national levels. Those putting forth proposals engage in strong lobbying to secure supporters and ensure the adoption of their proposals. To this end, they rely on numerous components of the soft power toolkit. Decisions on urgent agenda item proposals are made by the Governing Council. A two-thirds majority is required for adding an item to the agenda.¹⁰⁵

I have compiled a list of the urgent agenda item proposals submitted since the 128th General Assembly held in Quito. I have examined how these urgent agenda proposals are distributed according to the geopolitical group to which the submitting delegations belong. I examined which proposals received support and the composition of the delegations that submitted them. Documents on requested and adopted emergency items can be found under links of Assemblies, then under "Results" or "Outcomes", then under "Results" and "Emergency item" links.¹⁰⁶

Table 8: Delegations that requested an emergency item by geopolitical group

Proposing delegates by geopolitical groups	Number of requested emergency items	Number of adopted requests
1 delegation from the African	14	0
1 delegation from the Arab	23	1
1 delegation from the Asia-Pacific	16	1
1 delegation from Eurasia	1	0
1 delegation from GRULAC	19	0
1 delegation from the Twelve Plus	18	2
Several delegations from 1 geopolitical group	14	3
A whole geopolitical group	8	2
Several delegations from several geopolitical groups	15	9
Several geopolitical groups	5	2
Total	133	20

Source: compiled by the author

Since the 128th General Assembly held in Quito, delegations have submitted 133 emergency proposals. At three of the 24 General Assemblies held in total, not a single proposal received a two-thirds majority, and therefore no emergency agenda items were added. At one General Assembly held online, it was not possible to propose emergency items for the agenda.

Table 9: Number of adopted emergency requests, grouped by submitting entity

Proposing delegations by geopolitical groups	Number of adopted requests
1 delegation from 1 geopolitical group	4
Several delegations from 1 geopolitical group	3
A whole geopolitical group	2
Several delegations from several geopolitical groups	9
Several geopolitical groups	2

Source: compiled by the author

¹⁰⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017c.

¹⁰⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.k].

Figure 11 shows that the majority of emergency items (68%) were submitted by a single delegation. At the same time, having an emergency item adopted was more successful (80%) when it resulted from co-operation among several delegations. This is shown in Figure 12.

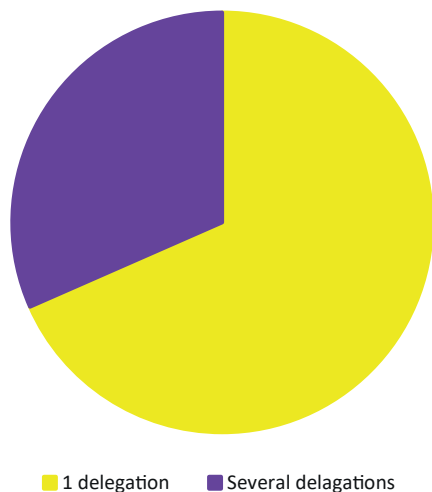


Figure 11: Number of requested emergency items by one or several delegations
Source: compiled by the author

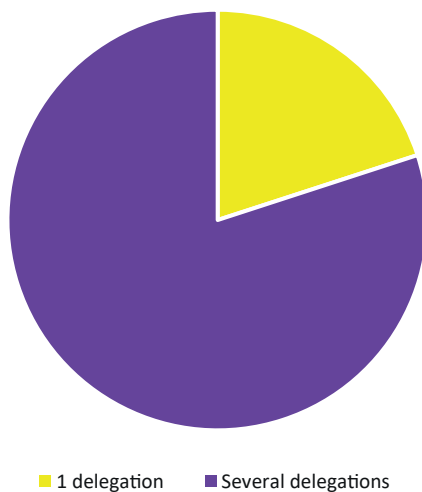


Figure 12: Number of adopted requests by the number of submitting delegations
Source: compiled by the author

It follows from the above that if a delegation or geopolitical group wishes to have an emergency item adopted, it must co-operate with other delegations, as neither delegations nor geopolitical groups individually have the two-thirds majority required to secure such a result. They must certainly make use of persuasion and positive influence, as well as the approach of mutual consideration. Diplomatic tact and strategy are also essential should significant competition arise over having items adopted.

From the number of emergency items submitted – as shown in Table 8 – it is also evident that the Arab geopolitical group is the most active one. This geopolitical group is a non-territorial community, organised according to cultural and civilisational affiliation. A review of the topics submitted also reveals that they very often raise their voices in defence of the Muslim community. Of the 133 emergency items submitted since 2013, 29 focused on issues concerning the Muslim community and its protection. This accounts for 22% of the total number of proposals. Of these, 15 proposals were put forth by one or more delegations belonging to the Arab geopolitical group. However, the proposing entities also included a number of countries that are not members of the Arab geopolitical group, but whose cultural and civilisational roots link them to it. They include Türkiye from the Twelve Plus geopolitical group; Indonesia, Iran, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan and Malaysia from the Asia-Pacific geopolitical group; and Sudan from the African geopolitical group.

One or more delegations from the Twelve Plus group, i.e. the geopolitical group of Advanced Democracies, or the entire geopolitical group itself, were the proposing entities of 14 of the adopted items; i.e. those that received two-thirds of the votes in favour. The other geopolitical groups have had six adopted proposals. However, further layers of complexity are added by the fact that two of the 14 emergency items submitted by Twelve Plus delegations were put forth by Türkiye. These concerned the Muslim community.

When discussing the topic of emergency items, it is clear that although the Advanced Democracies geopolitical group is effective in asserting its interests, delegations and countries from other geopolitical groups are also increasingly exploiting the opportunities offered by the Inter-Parliamentary Union for the same purpose. At the 147th, 148th and 150th General Assemblies, where no proposal achieved a two-thirds majority, the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group was unable to push through its ideas. At the 147th General Assembly held in Luanda, the proposers, who enjoyed the support of the Arab and African Geopolitical Groups, challenged a less balanced approach to the situation in Gaza.¹⁰⁷ At the 148th General Assembly held in Geneva, the GRULAC Geopolitical Group's proposal concerning Venezuela was one of the proposals put to the vote. The Arab and African Geopolitical Groups and the Twelve Plus also sought to address the situation in Gaza. The Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group once again outlined a more balanced position.¹⁰⁸ In Tashkent, at the 150th General Assembly, delegations from the GRULAC Geopolitical Group requested an urgent debate on a proposal focusing on the promotion of global economic co-operation. The Arab and African Geopolitical Groups put forth a multi-topic proposal, addressing the

¹⁰⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023c.

¹⁰⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024a.

violation of the Gaza ceasefire, the escalating conflicts in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the pressing issue of global warming. Delegations from the Philippines and Thailand wished to address the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. Of the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group, only Israel submitted an emergency item, which it later withdrew.¹⁰⁹

Theorists have long argued that the weakness of Western strategy lies in the fact that, on ideological grounds, it regards modernisation as achievable only through Westernisation – that is, the adoption of Western models – which, in its view, is supported by broad sections of the population. This view does not appear to be correct.¹¹⁰ The question is what Western countries can do about this.

Some examples of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's initiatives and toolkits for mapping and mitigating conflicts

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is a key space for the use of soft power. In addition to the ways shown above, this also manifests itself in other ways. As sources focusing on the topic of soft power indicate, and as I mentioned earlier, typical methods within the soft power toolkit used for influencing others, i.e. for exercising power over them, include dialogue and cooperation.¹¹¹ One recent example of this is the handling of the situation that has evolved in the wake of the eruption of the Russia–Ukraine war, in which the Inter-Parliamentary Union differs significantly from many other international organisations. The Council of Europe (CoE) excluded Russia on 16 March 2022.¹¹² The Task Force established by the CoE in 2026 aims to support the democratic Russian opposition.¹¹³ The OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) did not expel Russia, but in the winter of 2023 several countries boycotted the organisation's General Assembly due to the presence of the Russian delegation.¹¹⁴ At its General Assembly following the outbreak of the Russian–Ukrainian war, the Inter-Parliamentary Union set up a Mediation Task Force. Its role is to mediate, initiate and conduct conciliatory negotiations with both the Ukrainian and Russian sides, and to steer them towards dialogue.¹¹⁵ Since its formation, the Task Force has been working continuously and reports on its activities at meetings of the Governing Council. At its most recent, 15th meeting, the Task Force expressed its delight that, despite the regularly stalled process, results had finally been achieved regarding the issue of children separated from their parents and close relatives. A child was reunited with his father. This is the result of dialogue and mutual commitment between the Ukrainian delegation and the delegation of the Russian Federation. The Task Force encouraged

¹⁰⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025a.

¹¹⁰ ÁGH 1989: 168

¹¹¹ PÁL 2022: 100–101.

¹¹² Council of Europe Newsroom 2022.

¹¹³ Council of Europe Newsroom 2026.

¹¹⁴ Euronews 2023.

¹¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023d.

MPs to take further steps in their respective national authorities to promote family reunification.¹¹⁶

One goal of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's peace-promoting activities is to take action against all forms of intolerance. To this end, the 146th General Assembly held in Bahrain chose this topic as the theme for the General Debate: Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance.¹¹⁷ At the conclusion of the 146th General Assembly, the Governing Council also adopted a Manama Declaration in this matter.¹¹⁸ Continuing along this path, whilst also pursuing the process institutionalised in 2017, the Inter-Parliamentary Union organised its first global interfaith dialogue conference in Marrakesh that same year. The three-day event served as a forum for exchange, attended by leaders of religions, NGOs and academic representatives, as well as by hundreds of MPs from approximately 70 countries, including dozens of Speakers and Deputy Speakers.¹¹⁹ This conference was followed in 2025 by a second global event in Rome linked to the Holy Year.¹²⁰ Both global conferences were concluded with the adoption of a Communiqué, which drew attention to the importance of combating intolerance, building trust and fostering hope.¹²¹ Attended by hundreds of people, including hundreds of Members of Parliament, these conferences served as unique venues for understanding, acceptance and dialogue. Thus, the IPU has created a unique forum for this form of exchange.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Agenda 2030 document to promote well-being and peace for humanity. It identified the Sustainable Development Goals as the means to achieve this target. The 17 goals and 169 targets also constitute a strategy for action.¹²² Among the Sustainable Development Goals – and thus also from the perspective of human well-being and peace – high-quality education, i.e. Sustainable Development Goal 4, is high on the agenda.¹²³ The Inter-Parliamentary Union also sees the promotion of high-quality education and the provision of information as an important mission. This applies not only to citizens but also to Members of Parliament, thereby helping to ensure a more thorough understanding of the UN's goals and their more effective representation in national parliaments and international forums. To achieve this objective, it develops toolkits and publishes materials in both print and online. The 254 publications released so far constitute a global handbook on multilateral co-operation and joint thinking.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025b: 25.

¹¹⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023a.

¹¹⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023b.

¹¹⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023e.

¹²⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025c.

¹²¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.j].

¹²² United Nations 2015.

¹²³ United Nations 2015.

¹²⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.p].

Hungary's unique position and opportunities for the application of soft power within the Inter-Parliamentary Union

"Hungary kicks off the IPU's 130th anniversary", announces the news item on the IPU's website. And Hungary being the initiator of something is not unusual in the life of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Nothing proves this better than the fact that Hungary is one of the nine founding member states of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.¹²⁵

The founding conference, held in Paris on 29–30 June 1889, was attended by delegates from the United States of America (USA), Belgium, Denmark, France, Liberia, Hungary, Great Britain, Italy and Spain. Out of the founding members, the only country that is currently not a member of the IPU is the USA.¹²⁶ On behalf of the Hungarian Parliament of the time, Dr Viktor Hagara of Magosliget, Member of Parliament for the Nagyszőlős constituency, a talented legal scholar and humanist thinker who spoke five languages, represented Hungary.

Six years after the founding conference, a decision was made to establish the Hungarian Delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, initiated by Prime Minister Dezső Bánffy. The Delegation was established on 16 May 1895 with 131 members in attendance. The first President of the Hungarian Delegation was writer Mór Jókai, a member of the National Assembly and the House of Magnates (Upper House), whose engaging personality and captivating speeches helped foster a better understanding of Hungarian issues also at an international level. Members of the Executive Committee defining the scope of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's activities included Count Albert Apponyi, a Member of the House of Magnates, Member of Parliament, Speaker of the National Assembly and Minister for Religious and Public Education; as well as Albert Berzeviczy, writer, Member of the House of Magnates, Speaker of the National Assembly's House of Representatives, and President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, also participated as members of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee also included six other Hungarian Members.¹²⁷

Hungary has been a member of the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group, founded in 1974 with nine members¹²⁸ since 1991. In addition, it participates in the work of the IPU in numerous ways. It has hosted the General Assembly, the most prestigious event of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on three occasions, and has also been the venue for several special IPU events.¹²⁹ I have summarised these in Table 10 below.

¹²⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019c.

¹²⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union [s. a.l].

¹²⁷ Országgyűlés [s. a.a].

¹²⁸ Országgyűlés [s. a.b].

¹²⁹ Országgyűlés [s. a.a].

Table 10: IPU events in Hungary

Date	Event	Guests, participants' comments
1896	7 th IPU Assembly	This marked the end of the millennium celebrations
1936	32 nd IPU Assembly	
1983	IPU conference in support of the Helsinki Process	Topic: peace and security
1989	81 st IPU Assembly	100 th anniversary of the international organisation's foundation
March 1993	IPU–UNICEF seminar	Topic: the situation and rights of children
May 1993	Symposium	Topic: regional human rights
2004	Committee meeting in preparation for the 2 nd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament	
2009	3 rd Presidium Meeting of the World Centre for Information and Communication Technologies	
November 2015	Commemorative meeting marking the 120 th anniversary of the IPU's Hungarian National Group	Guest of honour: Saber H. Chowdhury, President of the IPU Host: László Kövér, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly Accompanying event: IPU photo exhibition and presentation of the commemorative Hungarian parliamentary medal
February 2017	Regional seminar	Topic: Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on climate change and water Participants: Parliaments of Central and Eastern European, as well as Central Asian countries
April 2017	Poster exhibition at the 136 th IPU General Assembly in Dhaka, Bangladesh	Title: 'Youth for Sustainable Development'
June 2019	Commemoration of the 130 th anniversary of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's foundation and the Hungarian National Assembly's IPU membership	Guests of honour: Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the IPU, and Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU Host: László Kövér, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly Accompanying event: IPU photo exhibition and the issuing of a commemorative stamp block
July 2019	Photo exhibition on the occasion of the IPU's 130 th anniversary at the UN Headquarters in New York	
2020	A room in the Parliament Building is named after Mór Jókai, the first President of the IPU's Hungarian National Group	On the 195 th anniversary of Mór Jókai's birth Attended by the Presidium of the Hungarian IPU Group
October 2024	Commemoration marking the 135 th anniversary of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's foundation and the Hungarian National Assembly's membership in IPU ¹³⁰	Guest of honour: Tulia Ackson, President of the IPU Host: László Kövér, Speaker of the National Assembly Comment: publication of a gold-embossed double image
18 February 2025	Memorial room in honour of Mór Jókai opened in the Parliament Building ¹³¹	On the 200 th anniversary of Mór Jókai's birth

Source: compiled by the author based on Országgyűlés [s. a. a]; Országgyűlés [s. a. c]; Országgyűlés 2024

¹³⁰ Országgyűlés 2024.

¹³¹ Országgyűlés [s. a. c].

The Hungarian National Group of the IPU has held membership in the organisation since 1990, meaning that all members of the Hungarian National Assembly are also members in the organisation. The main task of the IPU's Hungarian National Group is to support the work of the bilateral and multilateral friendship groups established by members of the Hungarian National Assembly, and to play an active role in strengthening the Hungarian National Assembly's international relations.¹³²

As a founding member, Hungary occupies a special position within the Inter-Parliamentary Union – a status it strives to maintain through active involvement. The international organisation, which has 183 members today, was established on the initiative of nine countries – a distinction that those who have joined since cannot claim. As the World Organisation of Parliaments, the IPU is a unique space for the application of parliamentary diplomacy and other means of soft power, providing Hungary with important and unique opportunities to promote its interests and further build its national image.

Conclusions

The growing number of conflicts and wars have highlighted the shortcomings of international organisations in finding solutions. They have also pointed to the fact that multilateralism is needed in addressing conflicts and new types of challenges, as, without international co-operation and dialogue, the consequences would be incalculable. Shortages in effectiveness, funding difficulties and the resulting loss of trust continue to make the reform of international organisations necessary. The same reasons, together with the framework of interconnectedness resulting from globalisation, simultaneously highlight the importance of soft power – the gentle exercising of influence. Its relevance lies in the fact that, in a world where trust has been lost, the path of trust-building using attractive methods, co-operation, and consensus is more effective than the "carrot-and-stick" approach, even if its effectiveness only shows over a longer period of time than in the case of hard power. For all these reasons, participants in the global space must identify the soft solutions and their diverse systems they can apply most effectively. This is not purely an option, but a necessity dictated by circumstances.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, founded in Paris in 1889, is the only global organisation for the Parliaments of sovereign states. This international organisation, which now has 183 member states, serves as a unique platform for parliamentary diplomacy. Its general assemblies, which bring together hundreds of parliamentarians, including Speakers and Deputy Speakers as well as experts in legislation and in other fields, serve as forums for dialogue and co-operation. Participation in these assemblies and the work carried out within the IPU's framework also show the commitment of member states to democracy, human rights, active participation in addressing global challenges, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

¹³² Országgyűlés [s. a.a].

Host countries can utilise various means of soft power to shape the image others have of them whilst demonstrating their alignment with the IPU's objectives. Through their hospitality and the showcasing of their culture and history, they aim to ensure that their guests become friends of their country. Since the majority of guests at these events are members of parliament working in national legislations and international organisations, this investment can pay off in many, perhaps even unforeseen, ways.

Hosts assess the success of the assemblies through the number of participants, as well as the number of Speakers and Deputy Speakers in attendance. On the other hand, there is always great anticipation surrounding the submission of urgent items for the agenda, the discussions surrounding them, as well as the actual voting, as these bring the most pressing issues facing individual countries or regions to the surface, along with global challenges. If one of the proposals manages to secure the two-thirds majority required for inclusion on the agenda, that is certainly a success not only for the proposing entities but for the entire General Assembly. After all, this is where a willingness to engage in dialogue and co-operation, attentiveness to others, tactical skill, and diplomatic aptitude can be demonstrated.

During the period I examined, 133 urgent items were submitted by the delegations. 68% of these were submitted by a single delegation. However, proposed items were more likely to be adopted when supported by multiple delegations. This was the case for 80% of the proposals that were adopted – i.e. that were added to the agenda. This also demonstrates that co-operation, consensus, and convincing MPs to support the issue bring positive results.

IPU member states continue their work within the Inter-Parliamentary Union organised into geopolitical groups. These geopolitical groups reflect geographical, cultural, and civilisational affiliations. No single geopolitical group possesses enough votes on its own to impose its will or choice of topics. It must necessarily join forces with delegations from other geopolitical groups or even with an entirely different geopolitical group. In terms of urgent items proposed for the agenda, since 2013, the Arab geopolitical group was the most active during the period examined. This group is organised not along geographical location, but based on cultural and civilisational affiliation. It frequently speaks out on matters affecting the Muslim world, where countries belonging to other geopolitical groups but sharing Arab cultural and civilisational roots also join them. There is a strong sense of solidarity among them. The Twelve Plus Group, i.e. the group of Advanced Democracies, consists mainly of Western countries. Their diplomatic skills and willingness to negotiate are demonstrated by the fact that they were the proposers of 60% of the emergency items put forth for the agenda, where they managed to secure a two-thirds majority in the votes, with the involvement of one or more delegations. At the same time, they were outvoted in several votes by other geopolitical groups or the countries of the Global South. This shows that developing countries have become increasingly adept at using international organisations, including the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to advance their interests. At the same time, they also employ means of soft power to influence the preferences of others in their own favour, through strategic alliances. This is also evidenced by the fact that they hosted IPU General Assemblies outside the Geneva headquarters on numerous occasions. The question arises as to how Western countries can adapt

to this changing situation and how they can ensure that matters important to them are also addressed.

Both former and present UN Secretary-Generals Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Antonio Guterres have emphasised the importance of trust in the establishment and functioning of an effective collective defence system. However, one defining feature of the changing world order – at local, regional, and global levels – is a lack of trust. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which builds on components of soft power, relying on co-operation, dialogue, and appeal, is ideally suited to address this. This is all the more true given that the IPU strives for universality in its membership. It can play a role in mitigating and resolving the conflicts of interest and tensions arising from the challenges of the 21st century. Beyond all this, the development and dynamics of co-operation among the delegations attending the general assemblies and, beyond them, the member states they represent, can also provide insights into the centres of power in the multipolar world order.

In the summer of 2025, the Inter-Parliamentary Union organised its second global conference on interfaith dialogue. At each of its general assemblies, the IPU offers a platform for discussing issues related to religion in the form of a dedicated working group. It is worth analysing and evaluating the topics, effectiveness, and recommendations of these forums in greater detail.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is the only global organisation of the Parliaments of sovereign states. It aims for universality – currently, the United States and a few small island nations are not members. Its uniqueness is evident not only from its distinctive institutional nature but also from the unique role it plays in parliamentary diplomacy. It serves as a sort of litmus test for international co-operation, power dynamics, attractions, and repulsions. To monitor developments within the IPU more thoroughly and comprehensively, it is worth further analysing the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Beyond answering the questions posed, the present study highlights the further research potential offered by this 136-year-old international organisation and its operation. For this purpose, one should visit not only the IPU website, which publishes a wealth of information, but also the IPU library in Geneva, where a broad range of additional archived materials are available.

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