CROWDLAW FOR CONGRESS

INTERVIEW WITH REP. ALESSANDRO MOLON

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Why did you decide to use Wikilegis in the 'Marco Civil da Internet' law bill?
Well, for several reasons, the first was that the bill, which originated the 'Marco Civil da Internet', was a bill built with the participation of society. Be it through public hearings, but mainly through participation via the internet. I came to the conclusion that if this bill had been constructed collaboratively through the internet, it would not make sense that the 'house of the people', the 'house of popular participation', which is the National Congress, did not open either its doors and its ears to what the population wanted to say about the project. After all, the questions that came up on it were arranged in a certain way by the Executive Branch that might not match the ideal opinion of the society that had given rise to the project. It was a kind of continuation of the participation, which gave birth to the project and at the same time brought it to the parliament. It was essential that this process of participation continued. Secondly, I was sure that it was possible and necessary to improve the project. So there were no smarter way of doing it, than by listening to people. The more people could participate, the better the project would be. The more hands helping to write the project, the more perfect it would be. For me, another very important aspect too, I knew we would face here in the House a heavy lobby of telecommunication companies. I knew there would be pressure from these companies on the Congress to prevent the bill from being approved. I came to the conclusion that the more people participated, the more they would feel like they were the owners of the bill, that they were the authors of the bill. So they would help pressure Congress to counterbalance the weight of this lobby and push the bill forward. That's exactly what happened. Thus the success that proved to be the Civil Landmark of the Internet.

Have you encountered any obstacles when you started this process of broader participation in the digital environment? And did you feel that you needed to develop new skills, a new language, a new format? How was that for you?
 Of course, this demanded of me some growth, an effort to become a better MP, to be able to count on this tool as well. This adjustment effort made me grow. It was a positive effort for me. I learned a lot in this process. The difficulty I felt was at the end of the process. It was a political difficulty. The Parliament had difficulty understanding that it was

important to take advantage of this position that came from the internet, which came from civil society. There was some resistance from representatives, saying "look, we were elected by 50,000 people, 100,000 people, 200,000 people. Why should we consider these 2, 3, 4 thousand people who participated in the process over the internet more important than the votes we received?" On the other side, I also encountered a challenge from civil society. It had the expectation that what it suggested had to be entirely welcomed by the representatives. That they had an obligation to accept what had been proposed. It took both parts, both sides, to make an effort to understand that the other side also had something to say. I tried to convince my colleagues, and I succeeded, to accept the participation of society and realize that this could enrich our work. That it could strengthened our work. At the same time, I had to explain to a part of the civil society that it was also important to recognize and respect the power of representation, the strength of votes. And they would not lose sight of this and make a productive dialogue with the representatives. It was an apprenticeship on both sides. I think they all won. I discovered in this process that representation is not weakened by participation. Participation strengthens representation. The more we open up to receive suggestions, ideas, proposals, visions, the stronger we get. My mandate became a more relevant, more respected, more heard mandate within Parliament, after I opened myself to listen more to society. It is not 'either representation or participation'. Either representative democracy or participatory democracy. But they are complementary, it strengthens them reciprocally.

To make this possible, it was indispensable that we had a minimum of support, of structure, to receive this participation. Technical structure, people specialized in this. It was fundamental that the Chamber had a Hacker Lab, a laboratory that helped us receive these entries, for example with the Wikilegis tool, with comments on the text. Not emails on the bill as a whole, but especially precise and specific observations on the writing of an article, a device, a paragraph in particular. This tool was indispensable and we even use social networks to receive suggestions as well. The Lab helped us get ideas through Twitter and they were incorporated. For the first time in the history of the Chamber we mentioned that an idea of amendment to the text was received by Twitter. We cite the social network, which in this case was a means to do so. That did help us quite much.