

ABSTRACTS*

Steinsdorff, Silvia von: Stable institutions in a fragile political environment: Central-Eastern European parliaments 25 years after the democratic re-start.

25 years after the breakdown of communism, all Central-Eastern European parliaments are consolidated, highly functional constitutional institutions that play a key role in the respective political systems. Despite all national specifics developed over the years, comparative research still displays significant regional similarities, which can no longer be explained as merely transitional. In fact, the established form of institutional autonomy guarantees for functioning legislatures even in fragile political contexts, characterized among other problems by volatile and fragmented party systems. Compared to their Western European counterparts, usually dominated by strong and highly disciplined party groups, the Central-Eastern European parliaments rely more on powerful committees and other mechanisms of “rationalized inclusion”. These internal structures promote their institutional autonomy, even in case of unclear or drifting parliamentary majorities. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 235 – 256]

Buzogány, Aron: Institutionalisation through imitation? The Europeanisation of parliamentarism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Central and Eastern European (CEE) parliaments could only briefly enjoy the new powers they gathered during and after the regime changes of 1989/1990. Already before the end of the 1990s, they were confronted with very low trust levels in the population and the rapid re-strengthening of executives' powers. The latter was also reinforced by the on-going process of European integration, which resulted in further changes of the domestic power balance to the benefit of core executives. How did the national parliaments in CEE countries adapt institutionally to the challenges of Europeanization? In formal terms, the institutional solutions to control governments in their EU-related activities are among the strongest ones in the EU. However, the results of policy transfers using the “best practice” examples of mostly Scandinavian parliaments has led to several discrepancies between formal rules and their actual use. Building on the theoretical literature on the Europeanization both of CEE states and of national parliaments, this contribution suggests that the suspected general decoupling between formal structures and rules-in-use seems to be overstated; indeed, CEE parliaments have developed very differentiated activities in relation to parliamentary control in EU affairs which fit the exigencies of their respective political systems quite well. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 257 – 271]

* Diese sind in deutscher Sprache zu finden auf www.zparl.de beziehungsweise www.politik.uni-halle.de/zparl.

Semenova, Elena: Parliamentary party switching: a specific feature of post-communist parliamentarism.

In Western Europe, legislators usually remain loyal to the parliamentary party group built by the party for which they won the election. In the case of Eastern Europe, parliamentarians switch parliamentary party groups more frequently. In this article, the assumption is tested that the high occurrence of parliamentary party switching in these countries stems from the career advantages of MPs who switched parties. Data from ten Central and East European countries (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria), which include observations from 1990 to 2009, was analyzed. Based on the results of Poisson regressions, compared the effect sizes of parliamentary party switching on tenures are compared to the effect sizes of party leadership and local experience on tenures. In most parliaments except for those of Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Croatia, the effect size of party switching was higher than the effect sizes of leading party experience and local/regional experience on parliamentary tenures. At the individual level, MPs aim to protect their careers from the volatile preferences of the voters by changing their party affiliations. At the aggregate level, however, these micro-motives led to increasing electoral uncertainty because of party volatility. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 272 – 291]

Priebus, Sonja and Astrid Lorenz: Strategic institutional politics. Contents, effects and risks of Hungarian parliamentary reforms since 2010.

The article describes the recent changes of parliamentary rules in Hungary and demonstrates which far-reaching consequences institutional changes below the constitutional level can have. It analyses the changes after 2010, which were enacted by the governing parliamentary majority of Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance and Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). Their two-thirds majority enabled them to enact several changes to the Standing Orders, to create a new law on parliament and finally, just before the general elections on April, 6, 2014, to pass a completely new set of Standing Orders. These changes affect the functioning of parliament, its position in the political system and its way of decision-making. In contrast to the interpretation of these changes being intended to establish a majoritarian democracy it is argued that actors did not proceed in a stringent way and did not follow a specific model. Instead they implemented only those features of majoritarian democracy, which enhanced the efficiency of decision-making and guaranteed their political influence regardless of future majorities. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. S. 292 – 309]

Grotz, Florian and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel: Weak prime ministers? Political experience and duration of office in Central and Eastern Europe.

Recent studies on parliamentary democracies have stated that prime ministers' duration of office is comparably lower in Central Eastern than in Western Europe. Analyzing the cases of 90 prime ministers in eleven countries of Central Eastern Europe from 1990 to 2014 major differences in their duration are found across countries: In Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic prime ministers stayed in office only for a short period of time while the average duration of their counterparts in Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary was similar to that in Western Europe. Furthermore, several prime ministers have served in government for more than four years; some of them have been re-elected; others came back

to office after a period of resignation. We explain these variances by different “political experiences” of prime ministers. Our findings clearly illustrate that political experience as party leader are, for instance, a stronger predictor for the duration in office than their experiences as members of parliament or cabinet. In a nutshell, we prove that factors of personal experience in various political offices might indeed be a relevant variable for explaining the duration of prime ministers in European parliamentary democracies. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 310 – 327]

Szabó, Zsolt: The mandatory minority initiative to set up a parliamentary committee of inquiry: a German invention that can only function properly in Germany?

Parliament’s right of inquiry, one of the most important tools of the opposition to control the government backed by the parliamentary majority, was designed as a minority right for the first time in Germany. In contrast to the optional minority initiative (where the parliamentary minority can only propose but not force the setting up of an inquiry committee), the mandatory minority initiative is a German invention. This model was adopted by some European countries such as Albania, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia; in Hungary it was abolished in 2014. However, the experiences show that due to a lack of effective legal guarantees this legal institute functions properly only in Germany. Apart from the initial phase, minority rights need to be respected also during the entire inquiry procedure if the original intention of the initiators is to prevail. This paper looks at the legal background and practice of the mandatory minority initiative in a number of European countries and also at the possible reasons why parliamentary inquiries fail. Further legal criteria for an effective minority right of inquiry are also formulated. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 328 – 348]

Wimmel, Andreas: The committees of the German Bundestag in the euro crisis.

In the euro crisis, the committees of the Bundestag have regularly discussed draft laws for the implementation of euro rescue measures, which were previously agreed on by the heads of state and government of the EU. This article traces the control activities of the lead committees in the national legislative procedure and analyzes the impact of the parliamentary opposition on recommendations for decisions. Although the Budget Committee in particular has passed several amendments they did not affect the substantial content of the measures and agreements adopted at the European level. Moreover and as a result of the complex multi-level system of the EU, the parties in opposition failed to reach their goals although they held a veto position in the plenary of the Bundestag. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 349 – 370]

Stykow, Petra: Parliaments and legislatures under the conditions of “patronal politics”: comparing Eurasian cases.

Eurasian representative assemblies are not democratic legislatures but neither are they merely imitating them. A comparative analysis of their constitutionally granted competencies, performance and internal organization suggests the emergence of three different types of assemblies over the last decade: In hybrid regimes, parliaments have evolved by way of po-

litical crises and subsequent constitutional agreements between rivaling elites. These parliaments have acquired government-related functions and distinct institutional identities while still falling short of performing in an efficient, professionalized and rule-driven way. On the other hand, two types of legislatures have developed in post-Soviet authoritarian regimes, mirroring and fostering the consolidation of presidential power. The first variety consists of constitutionally and politically weak bodies reduced to ceremonial activities. The second variety, however, comprises institutionalized, rationalized and well-organized legislatures controlled by a strong presidential “party of power”. [ZParl, vol. 46 (2015), no. 2, pp. 396 – 425]