

**The Centrality of Parliament in the Consolidation of  
Democracy: A Theoretical Exploration**

Ulrike LIEBERT

Political Science Institute Heidelberg

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## Introduction

In many western democracies the parliamentary institution suffers from a characteristic paradox. In theory it continues to be considered important in so far as it is thought to embody a complex of fundamental ideas which are held as essential for the legitimization of democracy, especially that of popular sovereignty and representation.

Parliamentary practice, however, frequently rises widespread disillusion leading up to the perception of a generalized crisis of modern parliament. The "decline of parliament" thesis finds in each country and at all times specific formulations and different explanations. In France it was the transitions from the IV. to the V. Republic which deprived the national assembly of a large part of its prerogatives with respect to the executive and the president (Birnbaum 1978, 1980). In the United States, since the last century complaints about the weakening of the role of the Congress vis-a-vis the President return periodically. In Great Britain, already in the middle of the last century, parliament was seen just as the facade of British political life, which was conceived instead essentially shaped by the council of ministers (Bagehot 1867); in the seventies of this century, the laments were that the executive controlled the legislature rather than the way round (Walkland/Ryle 1977). In the Federal Republic of Germany, the neo-marxist parliamentary critique since the end of the sixties complains about the lack of transparency and of citizen-participation in parliamentary activities. (Abendroth 1967; Agnoli/Brückner 1967). The trend towards neo-corporatist interest intermediation, which had been observed and theorized during the seventies in several west European polities (Schmitter 1974, 1977, 1982) provided a further argument to the thesis which holds that contemporary parliamentary decision-making processes were progressively **undermined** or by-passed by competitive, or even alternative circuits.

In a number of countries, however, parliament seems to have experienced recently not decline and crisis, but rather substantial rise and reinforcement. Telling examples for this trend are

- Italy, where in the midst of a profound social and institutional crisis in the late sixties and during the seventies a debate on the so-called "parliamentary centrality" developed. This topic had already concerned the Italian constituent assembly in 1946/7 and had found its expression in the Constitution of the Italian Republic with its strong parliamentary connotation (Cotto 1984, Ingrao 1985). The reform of the parliamentary standing orders in 1971 were correspondingly designed to increase parliamentary decision-making powers and direct relations with social subjects and thus to make it the "geometrical center of the social and institutional pluralism" (Cheli 1981);

- In Spain, parliamentary negotiations among the top elite of all major parties during the constituent process and the first legislature (1977-82) revealed to be capable instruments in diminishing the traditional conflict between the Spanish Left, Right and, the Nationalists, and became a "symbol of tolerance". Due to the moderating effect of a group of professional parliamentarians the Cortes thus became the major protagonist in the instauration of the new democratic regime in Spain, and a model for the importance of parliament in the transition to democracy (Capo 1981-1989);

- Portugal, where the sovereignty of the national assembly at the beginning of the democratic transition in 1974 was principally restricted and subordinated to the military organs, but experienced within less than a decade a striking increase of authority and influence, both on the symbolic and instrumental level (Braga da Cruz/Lobo Antunes 1989), which make it -in the eyes of Portuguese public opinion- one of the three most important centers of political power (CIS 1985);

- the Greek assembly, which though confined by majority governments since the beginning of democratic transition in 1974, and with little space for consensual decision-making, has become the major site of Greek political life where bipolarized conflict between the two major parties of the left and the right and the ideological battles among them become public (Alivizatos 1989).

Only in Turkey, where transition to democracy restarted in 1982, the Turkish Grand National Assembly has remained in a completely subordinate position, in decision-making terms as well as symbolically (Kalaycioglu 1989). In some aspects comparable to the Portuguese case -in particular with respect to the restriction of parliamentary sovereignty by the military, among others the General holding the presidency-, in most others the Turkish parliament represents the most different case within our Southern European setting, and resembles more Latin American legislatures, for instance the Argentine one (De Riz 1988).

At one time or the other during the transition to, the consolidation of, new democratic regimes or the reconsolidation of a democratic regime in crisis, and in different ways, parliaments in Southern Europe between the seventies and eighties nearly contemporarily have become major public arenas of partisan dispute, of encounters with social subjects, of negotiations and important decision-making. In public opinion, they have been perceived as the new protagonists of political life. And they have been in part reinforced within their institutional settings by constitutional or parliamentary reforms.

This phenomenon of parliamentary reinforcement contradicts not only the anti-liberal and anti-parliamentary traditions existing for instance in Spain and Portugal. It confounds particularly the "progressive" intellectuals and scholars in these countries who had just learned the "decline of parliament" thesis from their

international environment. Applying it to their home setting, they found themselves puzzled with contradicting evidence (Guerra 1982; Cotarelo 1989).

Parliamentary protagonism in new democracies is however corroborated and explained by some of the recently advanced hypotheses on the potential role of parliament in regime changes to democracy. According to Leonardo Morlino, there is one type of, consolidation of democracy in which parliament becomes the main agent and area where consolidation is achieved in so far as being the central decision-making arena for parties and groups as opposed to other government institutions or the party structures themselves (Morlino 1986a:233). Philippe Schmitter hypothesizes parliament to be, independently from its strength in terms of decision-making and next to interest groups, the central site where consolidation occurs, in the sense of where legitimization for the new regime is achieved (Schmitter 1988). These two positions are put into question by the "minimalist view" of Giuseppe Di Palma: according to him parliaments are either insufficient or overdetermining with respect to the solution of the problems involved in democratic consolidation (Di Palma, 1989).

In the following, we want to show that parliament is central

- if not for established democracies certainly for democratic consolidation. This hypothesis shall be developed mainly theoretically, but also by drawing on illustrations from recent case studies in the area of Southern Europe (1). In particular, we base our study on the assumption that parliament in established democracies and under conditions of "normality" becomes just site among many others in political decision-making; even more, its activities become "BORING" because of their routinization and formalization.

With respect to parliament in consolidating or reconsolidating democracies, our hunch is that its role is fundamentally different being this independent from its strength in decision-making terms. Parliament here is potentially central in so far as it manages to incentivize -more than any other institution, be it an elected president, an hegemonic party or a representative governmental body- a fundamental consensus/compromise between a maximum or political and social forces on the principles of the new order. Parliament may be central even before its formation and institutionalization in the sense that it may motivate the political actors to concur in a common project of democratization parliament contributes to the legitimization of a new regime. Not only as a symbol of principles of political democracy as popular representation, participation or sovereignty, but also as a material incentive for the integration of political forces and the development of a fundamental consensus on a broader or narrower range of principles of the political, social and economic order.

In order to elaborate these hypotheses, in the following we will develop three questions:

1. Which are the specific problems that have to be resolved during consolidation -as opposed to the other stages of processes of regime change to democracy- and which are the functions of parliament from this point of view?
2. How can we define the concept of the "relative centrality" of parliament referred to the process of democratic consolidation?
3. Which are the major conditions which enhance or diminish the centrality of parliament in democratic consolidation?

## **1. Theories on Democratic Consolidation and the Role of Parliament**

### **1.1 The concept of democratic consolidation (dc): stages and problems involved**

In the present discussion on dc (2) we find no unanimity on which of the different stages and processes involved in democratic regime change should be labelled as "consolidation":

Dankwart Rustow (1970) conceives dc as the "habituation phase" that comes after the initial "preparatory" and the "decision making phase" (3) as the last of three sequences involved in regime change to democracy. Similarly, Leonardo Morlino (1986a,b) defines dc as a process of "freezing-adaptation" of modes of peaceful conflict-resolution, and especially the widening of the legitimacy of the regime with regard to civil society, and delimits it from the preceding stages of transition and instauration (4).

Philippe Schmitter (1988) conceives dc as a process synonymous to "structuration", "routinization", "stabilization" and "institutionalization", which transforms the "ad hoc patterns" characteristic of the period of transition, "into stable structures in such a way that the ensuing forms/channels of access, inclusion/exclusion of actors, resources/strategies for action and rules about decision-making conform to the basic principle of citizenship" and a "procedural minimum". Dc is hence a stage overlapping with the preceding "transition to democracy" as well as with the subsequent period of "persistence of democracy". At the "heart of the matter" of converting patterns into structures lies the problem of legitimacy: The patterns must become valued "in and by themselves, not just for the instrumental benefits they bring", both by those who act in them and by those who are affected by them, if they are to persist (Schmitter 1988).

Giuseppe Di Palma's "minimalist concept of dc" (Di Palma 1989) **understands** consolidation basically as the "crafting of the rules of the game ... so as to prevent essential players from boycotting the game", "to remove breakdown potentials ... making all essential players enter into the spirit of democratic bargain", especially securing "that even difficult players enter the game", and finally aiming at "keeping players in the game". Only the subsequent process of democratization involves the time-consuming structuration and institutionalization of core democratic institutions, while "consolidation" is considered as a more or less time limited process. However, institutionalization processes may have "their own impact ... on how the democratic game is continued"; "whether the risk of a breakdown stays out of the agenda of a new democracy depends also on how institutions turn out".

Di Palma's concept implies that before we have not overcome additional "thresholds" built into the process of institutionalization, we will not be able to ascertain if consolidation-in the meaning of "keeping players within the game"- has indeed occurred. If players are not asked with respect to the instauration of the new system (in the case of an exclusionary transition mode) and are able to mobilize effective anti-system opposition, or if they appear to consent, but in substance do not, this will only turn out during the stage of the structuration of the new institutions and their relations with society, subsequent after the "initial" crafting of the new rules.

Hence we propose to include in our study both stages: that of "democratic consolidation" in the sense of the instauration of, decision-making on and setting up of the rules of the game, and that of their structuration, "freezing" and institutionalization. Hence, the fundamental problems involved in dc are not only the design of the fundamental rules of the game in a way to prevent break-down games, but also to institutionalize and eventually modify them in a way to keep the players within the game, and to de-motivate anti-system oppositions by extending the legitimization of the new democratic system.

## **1.2 The role of parliament in democratic consolidation**

Traditional and contemporary legislative research usually resorts to a standard spectrum of parliamentary functions -representation of public interest, legitimization of public decisions and legislation, formation and control of government, bringing general problems to the public mind, etc- which are considered the major tasks of parliament in modern democracies.

Theories and studies on democratic consolidation bring new, less obvious aspects of parliamentary activity to our mind which may escape our attention perhaps because they are considered as self-understanding. In the following we

will sketch five main hypotheses of the literature on dc concerning these less obvious functions of parliament. We will see that the preeminent place is attributed to the role of parliament in Philippe Schmitter's theory on democratic consolidation, although his relativist standpoint does not allow him at the same time to award to it or to any other single institution or set of institutions the status of particularly democratic or of a norm for successful consolidation (5). Leonardo Morlino is more prudent: consolidation primarily through and at the level of parliament is only one -and a relatively rare- case of several types of consolidation. Rustow remains implicit with his suggestions concerning the role of parliament. And Giuseppe Di Palma's "minimalist approach" to dc sees parliament near-too superfluous.

### **(1) The minimal role of parliament in "crafting the rules of the game"**

Di Palma makes strong argument for an only minimal role of parliament in decision-making on the fundamental rules of the game. According to him, parliament is either "institutionally insufficient" in so far that if a previous understanding between the relevant actors does not exist "elections and parliaments may lose considerable effectiveness as devices to remove breakdown games". Or parliament is "an unnecessary surplus", when, explicitly or implicitly, the significant parties have already come to an understanding before entering the elections that the electoral context will offer tolerable chances of representation to all and that the newly elected body will act to constitutionalize the rules of contestation. In this case the actions of parliament, "though necessary to further articulation, possibly renegotiation, and **finally** constitutionalization of the bargain", may be "more often than we think overdetermining". Because of the historical tradition that democratic institutions have in southern Europe, the founding elections of Europe's new democracies -as a tool for democracy- were hence according to Di Palma a "surplus" and not necessary; as a tool against it, they "proved late and insufficient". Whereas elections in southern Europe took place within an already reestablished democratic game, in Latin America they appeared to be more about democracy. There the electoral and parliamentary strategy was "one way of convincing reluctant players of the need for a democratic compromise", despite the absence or weakness of those conditions for institutional coexistence, more typical of new European democracies. Despite the presence of a freely elected parliament, democratic consolidation may therefore not be in sight, as in El Salvador since 1984, or in the Philippines after the fall of Marcos (Di Palma 1989).

But in so far as Di Palma generalizes a minimal role of parliament as an "unnecessary surplus" in cases where a democratic consensus among the major players already exists, he overlooks that precisely the parliamentary resources, rules and procedures are among the conditions which make such a "pre-" or

"extra-parliamentary" consensus possible. Although not yet formalized and institutionalized, their mere anticipation in the strategies of the major actors serves as a selection criteria for potential players, and as an incentive for each of them to compromise with the other forces. When he refers his thesis to cases where such a democratic consensus does not exist yet, he should not generalize his judgement independently from the amount of resources, rules and procedures with which the future parliament is going to be endowed by the protagonists of democratic transitions. This variable may be of crucial importance for the strategies of potential anti-democratic actors even in a system where no larger parliamentary tradition exists.

## **(2) Parliament as the central decisional arena in dc**

Morlino is not as sceptical about the role of parliament in democratic consolidation. According to him there exists one type of consolidation which preeminently takes place at the level of the parliamentary arena (6). Though according to him most contemporary processes of democratic consolidation are cases of consolidation through parties, there does exist a subtype in which parliament may become *the central decisional arena* for parties and groups, instead of other government institutions or the party structures themselves (Morlino 1986a:233).

In his perspective, parliamentary structures and procedures may serve as the fundamental structures to contain, regulate and encapsulate conflict. At the bottom of this conception is the assumption that the political actors with their differing, contrary or even opposed preferences and principles meet in parliament if certain rules and procedures allow them to establish regular relations of political exchange or competition, thus preventing them from extra-institutional strategies. The parliamentarians are seen as belonging to the influential political elite which as a result of interplay among the different forces establishes an explicit consensus and takes deliberate decisions with respect to the procedures for conflict accommodation to be institutionalized. Parliament gains importance for dc in so far as it develops by this a *decisional capacity* which enables it to resolve substantial problems, to revise the juridical order inherited from the authoritarian regime, neutralize the military (Morlino 1986b: 211, 217).

With respect to the conditions which allow parliament to play such a central role in decision-making and mediation between the political forces, Morlino identifies four institutional mechanisms: (a) a parliamentary regime without presidential institution and without direct elections of the head of the state; (b) a proportional electoral system, which allows minorities to be represented; (c) a legislature-executive relationship which is not unbalanced in favour of the last; (d) decisions being taken by consensus and not by majority (Morlino 1986b/447-448).

These requirements are modelled after the Italian experience, and meet also in the Spain constituent period: The Italian Parliament (Cotta 1987) and the Spanish **Courts** have certainly been decisive in the constituent processes in both cases (Capo 1981, 1983, 1989). But is it that parliament in presidential or semi-presidential systems, under conditions of a majoritarian decision-making become less central to democratic consolidation? Is it that an anglosaxon parliamentary model being adopted in early stages of democratization makes parliament an unnecessary variable?.

For a number of reasons, parliaments acquire importance independently from their weakness or strength in decision-making terms, and independently from their position in the constitutional configuration of the new institutional setting.

### **(3) The structuring role of Parliament: state institution, social organisations and Parliament itself**

As parliaments emerge as "subjects/agents in the phase of institution building", they "assume a central role in the reproduction of democratic consent" (Di Palma 1969). One of the fundamental levels where the consolidation of a young democratic regime occurs, is that of discrete institutions and organizations which have to undergo processes of structurations (Schmitter 1988).

Parliament contributes to this not only by establishing its own rules of procedure, but also in so far as the convocation of a regular legislature sets in motion processes which will define the nature and role of territorial representation, the connection between parties in the electorate and parties in parliament, the extent of party discipline and/or accountability to constituency pressures, the form of executive accountability, the autonomy of state and parastate agencies, the strategies of interest associations and so forth (Schmitter 1988).

Parliament furthermore may be central to the processes of defining the external status and of regulating the internal structures of the basic institutions of the regime, "both in the sense that it will have to structure its own operations and that it will be called upon (however formalistically) to ratify many of the codes and statutes which will structure the operation of other democratic institutions", especially of parties, interest associations, and the executive, and which will take approximately 3 legislatures (ibd.).

Only when the rules and resources of basic democratic institutions, e.g. of parliament, are "sufficiently .. protected by their own and. other vested interests and sufficiently endowed with symbolic significance and normative approval in

order to withstand foreseeable changes in their environments", dc will be accomplished.

#### **(4) Parliament in the structuration of the "electoral" and the "pressure regime"**

The level of "regime structuration" is that where "networks of power among interdependent or hierarchically ordered institutions" emerge, the so-called "partial regimes" (7). Also to this aspect of democratic consolidation parliament makes fundamental contributions: Due to its linkages with parties, parliament is involved in the structuration of the so-called "electoral regime", and by its interactions with the interest groups it participates in the constitution of the "pressure regime". In contemporary democracies, the pressure regime may become "less relevant since most of the interaction of interest groups takes place directly with involved state agencies. Parliament, however, is brought in when fundamental changes in fiscal legislation, welfare measures, etc., are required in order to seal social contracts drawn up elsewhere" (Schmitter 1988).

The relations which parliament develops with these intermediary forces enhance the legitimization of the regime structures (Morlino 1986a: 216). Both "partial regimes" determine the "legitimacy and, hence, viability in the long run of a given democratic regime" (Schmitter 1988).

#### **(5) Parliament, "hegemonic structuration" and the problem of regime legitimization**

Parliament contributes to dc above all at the level of "hegemonic structuration", that is with respect to the "rooting" of the emergent regime in the "social groups whose support or, at least, acquiescence is crucial to their longrun survival" (Schmitter 1988). The "legitimacy, and, hence, viability in the long run, of a given democratic regime" depends on the degree to which the partial regimes and their particular mix allow for satisfactory participation", "accountability to citizen preferences" and "responsiveness of authorities" to individuals and groups.

How the problem of legitimacy is resolved, and which mix of partial regimes is consolidated, has an impact on whether a more "societally-centered" or "state-centered", a "majoritarian" or more "consociational" type of democracy is emerging (Schmitter 1988).

While the rules of the new game may be worked out also by technical or governmental bodies the incentives and motivations to play the new game may also be provided in terms of governmental resources; the crucial reform decisions

can be taken at other sites of the regime; and parliament may remain rather marginal in the structuration even of itself and the other institutions: it is the legitimization function and its requirements which make parliament particularly "central" to the process of democratic consolidation. This aspect shall be dealt with more profoundly in the following section.

## **2. The "centrality of parliament" and the problem of parliamentary legitimization**

### **2.1 The traditional model of the "central parliament"**

Traditionally, the concept of "parliamentary centrality" has been interpreted largely in the sense of "predominance" of parliament vis-a-vis the executive power:

- In the French IV. Republic parliamentary predominance was linked to the constitutionalization of a sovereign Assembly with full legislative powers, without delegated legislation, and a vast control power vis-a-vis government. Parliament was conceived as the arena in which the mass parties participated in the elaboration of the general will, and, in particular, of the national policies (Birnbaum 1980);
- in Italy during the seventies, the idea and model of the central parliament meant to its advocates and opponents "assembly parliamentarism with strengthened proportionality and scarce unity and authority of the executive" (Long 1985). This concept seems to represent one of the most significant keys to understand the historical process which has characterized the developments of the Italian political system after the II. World war and, in particular, the developments after the crisis of the center-left governments. The idea goes through the **whole** republican experience with alternating fortunes, but becomes more precise only at the end of the sixties, with the passage from the 5th to the 6th legislature and the strong social dynamism and the corresponding strong tensions in the functioning of the political institutions (Cheli 1981: 343/4):

The leader of the Communist Party after the Second World War and during the Italian constitutional debates, Togliatti, was the first in the communist tradition to formulate the postulate of parliamentary centrality for the strategy of the PCI (Sassoon 1988);

Since the sixties and the center-left governments, parliament was conceived as an "arena of intermediation", first only referred to secondary political interests, later as the "geometrical site of the social and institutional pluralism", as an arena of encounter of all political forces, and a site of compensation between majority and opposition. The corresponding parliamentary function of "mediation"

implied the transformation of law from an expression of the will of the majority into the product of mediation between majority and opposition. At the same time the notion of "majority" passed from that of a "government majority" to that of a "legislative majority" which forms differently from case to case and with a high amount of unpredictability. With these characteristics parliament, finally, is defended as the natural place, where the guidelines of the national policies have to be elaborated, and the whole action of public administration has to be directed and controlled (Cheli 1981).

## **2.2 Premises and consequences of "parliamentary predominance"**

(1) The practical functioning of parliament as a "central site" in this sense depends from a variety of conjunctural and structural factors, which appear to make its occurrence rather an exception:

- An accentuated social and political dynamics may conduce to the institutional weakening of government centered circuits of decision-making, and enhance the role of parliament as the ultimate public authority. This happened in the case of Italy, where at the end of the fifth legislature, in 1969, union mobilizations and asocial movements produced strong tensions in the political institutions. In parliament thus was found the central motor of a system which after two decades of profound cleavages tried to reestablish a minimally homogenous basis (Cheli 1981);
- Structural, nearly unique characteristics of a political system, as the permanent exclusion of a major political force from government coalitions, may contribute to enhance the pressure for "parliamentary centrality" as a form of recompensation - as in the case of Italy and the PCI (Cotta 1987);
- The Italian chambers enjoyed a protagonism of a conjunctural nature especially between 1976-1979, due to the contingent dynamics of the political forces, in particular the experiment of "historical compromise" between DC and PCI and the "governo di unita nazionale";
- Institutional reforms, on the other hand, may codify the practical attempts to enhance parliamentary centrality. This happened with the reform of the Italian parliamentary code in 1971, which

- 1 introduced the legislative programmation;
2. acknowledged to the chambers not only the powers of control and information, but also those of instruction;
3. potentiated the cognoscitive activities, also by means of direct **relations** with external apparatuses and social groups;

4. acknowledged strong **guarantees** to minorities.

(2) From the point of view of government and regime stability, the predominance of parliament represents however rather a permanent threat than a desiderandum: The governmental instability which was endemic to the parliamentary regimes in Europe between the two world wars and after the second world war, especially in Italy, Finland, the IV. French Republic and Belgium had an important part of its origins in the excessive use of the parliamentary instruments of control and censure vis-a-vis government: a third of the 120 changes of government defeat in a motion of confidence; after 1945, most of these cases were produced during the IV. French Republic (Montero 1985; Colliard 1978).

(3) The traditional notion of "parliamentary centrality" in the sense of predominance is very much shaped by the dualistic institutionalist tradition in which parliament and government are put in juxtaposition to each other (Cotta 1987). Political science parliamentary research has since long overcome this dualistic and partially ideological conception in favour of more differentiated classifications (Jean Blodel 1973; Weinbaum 1975) and typologies of "parliament-executive subsystems" (Cotta 1987).

(4) In practice, the function of "political direction" (indirizzo politico) -which should unify the different state activities - even in the case of Italy is and was always essentially performed by the political parties. The position of parliament with respect to the determination of the government program, for instance, is secondary and limited to simple votation without motivation or qualifications. This extraparliamentary designation of the objectives and procedures for reaching them is not even compensated by an effective parliamentary participation in the selection of government personal. Only by their decisions in fixing the agenda of the parliamentary works the conference of the parliamentary group leaders may exercise some influence on the programmatic orientation of government, and the standing committees may formulate substantial guidelines (resolutions) not so much on general issues than on the sector level (Manzella 1975: 200ff).

### **2.3 "Parliamentary centrality" in terms of legitimization**

Our intention is to redefine the concept of "parliamentary centrality" by linking it with the process of democratic consolidation. Parliament in this view is not only and not fundamentally central in so far as it possesses a capacity of taking decisions, or even more of directing and controlling national policies and the executive action. Its centrality may consist also, but not primarily, in its role in the elaboration and codification of the constitutional chart.

More important is, first, at the moment of the "crafting of the rules of the game", and eventually during their "refracting" at a later point of time, the suggestive capacity of parliamentary resources, rules and procedures to incentivize the major actors either to enter into the spirit of parliamentary negotiation and to participate in the democratic game, or, at least, to drop anti-democratic strategies. Parliament contributes to the legitimization of the new regime by requiring the collaboration or at least acquiescence of these major actors, be it in appealing to their principles, or just to their instrumental interests. Secondly, the first legislatures, it is the way how parliament structures its relations with parties and interest groups which has an impact on how far the democratic commitment of these actors may become principled and stable, and on whether they may arrive at valorizing the principles of parliamentary democracy by themselves and not only for instrumental reasons.

Limitations to the assembly regime and a "deprivation" of parliament of part of its prerogatives (as e.g. the introduction of powers to dissolve parliament on the part of the prime minister or president, popular referenda, transfer of nearly all parliamentary powers to the president in exceptional situations; limitations on the legislative powers and autonomy in agenda-setting) may not necessarily put into question this parliamentary capacity to achieve legitimization.

Parliament, more than any other organ -be it an elected president, an hegemonic party, or a representative government cabinet, possesses two properties which consent it to play this important role in the legitimization of a new democratic regime:

(1) Parliament possesses an amount of material and symbolic resources which can benefit and consequently motivate a maximum of political actors, mainly parties with the need to organize and develop their party-**apparatuses** electoral appeals and mass following, as for instance:

- financial resources via parliamentary group financing
- recognition of the relative force of each party in terms of number of seats
- as a source of public prestige
- providing political and technical information
- incorporating an ensemble of fundamental principles of democratic order (representation and civic participation; accountability of public authorities; responsiveness towards citizens preferences and needs).

Thanks to these symbolic and instrumental resources parliament may have an impact already in the pre-electoral phase in which the new order is still in the state of experimentation, and some of the major actors are still undecided about which strategy to choose and remaining outside or getting into the parliamentary game.

(2) Parliament possesses a peculiar advantage which allows the "parliamentarization" of the strategies of very different political actors. Parties at the extreme left, moderate left, center and moderate or extreme right have ideological traditions which are so different that it appears unconceivable to make them compatible in a relatively short time period within a unique parliamentary culture. Concepts of representation vary so extremely along the political spectrum that we may wonder about the safety of the sources of parliamentary legitimization:

It is nothing more than the "fiction of representation" (Kelsen 1925) that serves to legitimate parliament by resorting to the principle of popular sovereignty, hence the idea that parliament is the representative of the people and the general good and that the people can express their proper will only in and by the parliament (ibid. 1982: 176/7). Against this concept of the role of the deputy as representative of the national interest, which is normally defended by the center, stand the conception of representation as a mandate of specific sectors of society, namely the working class, at the extreme Left, and the interpretations of the role of the MP as representative of territorial interests, at the Right (8).

These divergences can be conserved and made compatible within a certain margin thanks to the peculiar "ambiguity" of the parliamentary institution, of its rules and procedures which allow for different and even contradictory interpretations.

The reasons, interests or normative principles of the political actors that participate in the parliamentary compromise can vary along a broad range. The only important thing is that parliament during the process of consolidation becomes central for their strategies, that they abandon **their** antiparliamentary or extraparliamentary strategies and enter into a firm -active or passive- compromise with it, be it in its majoritarian or in its consociational variant.

Parliamentary centrality in terms of "parliamentarization of the strategies of political and social actors and of the general political climate" does hence not depend necessarily on the parliamentary decision-making power, its role in the elaboration of the constitution, the design of the parliamentary rules, the revision of the pre-existing normative order, even if these powers may represent an important incentive for the political actors. But participation in consensual decision-making on major political issues can have also high costs in terms of the threatening the identity of some of the more ideologized political parties vis-a-vis their following. A

subordinate parliament in terms of decision-making powers and of its position in relation to the executive can be more efficient and less costly for these parties because it allows the articulation of a symbolic opposition without the need to participate in governmental responsibility.

### **3. The Conditions of Parliamentary Centrality**

Which variables can introduce the bearing for the authority of parliament to progressively become part of the social and political "climate" of a new democracy, to substitute the coercive power of the state and dissuade social and political groups to use violence and other means than those of parliamentary bargain and exchange? Which factors explain that parliament may in some cases play the role of a major protagonist during the instauration of a new democratic system, like in Italy 1946/7 and in Spain 1977/8, but not in other cases, like in Portugal and Greece where they became strengthened only in a second phase, or in Turkey and Argentina where they remained in a subordinate position?

Certainly, there are numerous variables of different types which have a potential bearing for our question: historical factors (transition mode, duration of authoritarian regime), cultural determinants (parliamentary tradition), institutional factors (electoral system; form of state and form of government and the configuration of the parliamentary position within it), political conditions (government-formula, existence of mass parties; decision-making system, system of intermediation of interests), structural variables (economic development, cycle). We will limit ourselves at picking five of them.

#### **3.1. Parliamentary tradition**

Certainly, the pre-existing parliamentary tradition and the length of the authoritarian "interlude" play an outstanding role with respect to the degree to which and the facility with which the political actors enter into the parliamentary game. If an endogenous parliamentary tradition lacks or is weak, the leaders of the transition may destinate additional resources to parliament: a strong position of parliament in the new constitutional order, infrastructural equipment and financial resources which may constitute alternative incentives for the political groups in order to channel their demands and activities progressively towards the parliamentary arena.

#### **3.2 The Model of Decision-Making: Majoritarian versus Consociational**

Which effects have the consociational model of parliamentary decision-making on one side and the majoritarian model on the other on the centrality of parliament in democratic consolidation? Both models may be able to strengthen parliament, but in different ways (A. Lijphart 1984).

- The majoritarian model -in so far as it corresponds to "party government" and follows the dynamics between a party in government with a stable parliamentary support and a relatively strong parliamentary opposition-makes parliament the scene where government and its politics are questioned in public -but corrected only to a minor degree- and where the party and governmental elite is formed (Cotta 1987). This model fundamentally stimulates those parties to enter -and remain within- the game which gives the chances to win a majority or to enter into a government-coalition, under the condition that alternance in government is effectively possible.
- The "policentric model" of "government-parliament" relations, where the coalition-government assists to connivances between some sectors of its own parliamentary majority and the opposition, consents some influence to the daily legislative work and hence- may incentivize those parties with even little chances of entering into government but that represent certain sectors of society for which they can gain some legislative advantage.
- Only in the case of the "grand coalition" model parliament is effectively superfluous as a variable in democratic consolidation. This model lacks the antagonistic relation between a governing majority and an opposition which is substituted by a coalitional relation. Coalition-Government includes all major parties with parliamentary representation. All these parties participate directly in the resources commanded by the **governmental** office and hence are less interested in the incentives provided by parliamentary representation.

It depends on the political landscape and the nature and degree of polarization which one of these three models offers best chances and works best in order to achieve democratic consolidation in a given case. A high degree of polarization among the political forces' makes of course a "grand-coalition-model" unthinkable; lack of party-consolidation makes the "majority-model" unworkable, while a somehow blocked "rotation in government", a fluidity in the relationship between majority and opposition, and a elevated degree of fragmentation in the internal structure of parties may suggest some form of "policentrism" in government-parliament relations.

### **3.3 Mass Parties**

One of the most important variables with an impact on the role of parliament in democratic consolidation is the existence of party organizations and capable leadership, with the ability to channel social demands and at the same time not too ideologized for choosing a consensus strategy on the most fundamental questions of the new regime.

Only these conditions impede the military, a charismatic leader like a president or a king to emerge from the crisis and decay of the preceding authoritarian regime as the main leaders of a exclusionary transition process from above, which normally would confine parliament to a marginal role, at least during the transition and instauration period. If after the interval of dictatorship parties are not too weak they may be the protagonists of the transition process in which parliament will necessarily become more central for their political strategies.

### **3.4. Systems of interest intermediation: Pluralist, neocorporatist or heterogenous?**

According to the pluralist model of interest intermediation multiple interest associations with competitive relations between each other and none of them possessing a monopolistic position, maintain pressure -and lobbyist relations with the different levels of state institutions. This model makes parliament a central target of interest group strategies. Interest group influence normally becomes relatively dispersed, monopolistic economic power neutralized, and decision-making processes remain to a large extent transparent to the public.

The neo-corporatist model, on the other side, in the sense of tripartite arrangements with state, capital and labour representatives participating in the processes of social concertation deprives, in its ideal-typical parliament of its decision-making competences.

In reality however most systems of interest intermediation are of a mixed type and institutionalize pluralist together with corporatist elements (Lehmbruch 1979,1983). As comparative research in different cases of interest intermediation in Asia, Latin America and Europe has shown, social concertation normally is more effective and strengthens the stability of a democratic regime if it is integrated with pluralist elements which allow also weak oppositions to have some manoeuvre-space (Bianchi 1986).

The attempt to realize a purer type of social concertation conduces frequently to the convergence of social groups which before were opposed or divided and to the emergence of new opposition movements with the capacity to manace the stability of government and eventually of the regime (ibd.) A dualist or competitive relationship between party-parliamentary and functional interest

intermediation conduces to social and political conflict, which may endanger a process of democratic consolidation.

In order to consolidate -or reconsolidate- a democratic system which is thus challenged by social conflict and protest -like Italy at the end of the sixties and Spain since the general strike of the 14th of december 1988- parliament may play a crucial role. Parliamentary instruments like plenary debates, legislative propositions, resolutions with instructions for the government or the social parts, hearings of the mobilized groups, may serve as mechanisms to transfer the conflict from the streets into the aula and to compensate the shortcomings and failures of neo-corporatist strategies.

The centrality of parliament in relation to the social forces varies with a number of factors, for example:

- the intensity of the representational links which the parliamentary groups possess with interest groups, including the extent of personal overlap;
- the range of instruments at the disposal of parliament and its standing communities in order to establish direct relations with external groups or to realize conoscitive activities.

The more central becomes parliament for interest groups, trade unions as well as employers associations, peasant's interest groups and others the denser become the networks of informal and formal interaction between them develop, and the higher are the chances to integrate the economic interest groups into the new institutional system and to prevent them from system-destabilizing strategies (general strikes, investment strikes, capital flight etc.).

NOTES

(1) Case studies and comparative assessments on the role of parliaments in the processes of democratic consolidation in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey are forthcoming; cf. U.Liebert (ed.): *Parliament and Democratic Consolidation in Southern Europe*; Frances Pinter, London 1989.

(2) The processes of liberalization and democratization which occurred in the decade between the mid-seventies and the mid-eighties in different areas of the world, above all in Southern Europe, Latin and Central America, have stimulated the effort of a number of political scientists -namely Geoffrey Pridham, Leonardo Morlino, Philippe Schmitter, Giuseppe DiPalma- to fill the gap in democratic theory with respect to the forms, conditions and requirements of the consolidation of these new regimes. At the time being, no single "theory of democratic consolidation" (dc) has evolved. Instead, there are different conceptualizations and hypotheses in discussion.

(3) In the *preparatory phase* severe struggles and polarisation rather than pluralism prevail, and the country "is honestly facing, up to its particular conflicts and ... devising or adapting effective procedures for their accommodation"; in the *decision phase* a "deliberate decision on the part of political leaders to ... institutionalise some crucial aspect of democratic procedure" is taken, a "conscious decision" that results from the interplay of a number of forces that establish an explicit consensus. In the subsequent *habituation phase* the "agreement worked out during the decision phase is now transmitted to the professional politicians and to the citizenry at large" (Rustow 1970).

(4) Morlino distinguishes, hence, very much like Rustow, dc from the fluid and confuse period of transition, as well as from the *instauration* phase in which the new institutions and procedures are delineated, structured, formed and articulated.

(5) "An adequate theory of DC must be sensitive" to the fact that democracy "can be (and has been) put into practice through a wide range of decision rules, eligibility criteria and specific forums" (Schmitter 1987: 16).

(6) Morlino distinguishes between different levels or sites on which the consolidation of a democratic regime occurs: that of the democratic state institutions; the relations between state institutions; the parties and party system; the interest associations; the relations between parties and associations with civil society; the relations between parties and associations and state institutions. This allows him to formulate different types of "consolidation" according to the main agents of and areas where consolidation is achieved. Consolidation can be hence achieved mainly through parties; it can be of a "symbiotic" type and achieved through interest associations and parties; and, thirdly, it can be "charismatic consolidation" (Morlino 1986a: 222f).

(7) To these belong the "electoral regime" the "pressure regime", the "concertation regime", the "clientelist regime" and the "representation regime" (Schmitter 1987),.

(8) The plenary discussion on the "tráfico de influencias" in the Spanish Courts on the 22nd of June, 1988 gave a telling illustration of the discrepancies among the different "philosophies" of representation prevailing within the Spanish parliamentary Elite after more than a decade of parliamentary institutionalization.

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