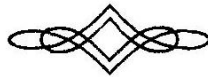# Parliament as a Conceptual Nexus

Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie and Kari Palonen

Parliament has for centuries been a central European political institution for expressing dissensus and for conducting debates among the representatives of the citizens in a spirit of fair play. A modern parliament controls government and bureaucracy by claiming the right to make sovereign decisions without appeal. This volume builds on the thesis that deliberation (between opposed points of view in parliament), representation (of the citizens in a parliament), responsibility (of the government to the parliament) and sovereignty (of a parliament within a polity) form the core concepts of parliamentarism and distinguish a parliament from other types of assemblies, making it a unique representative institution. This cluster of distinguishing concepts of parliamentarism creates a clear agenda for the historical, discursive and political analysis of questions that all real parliaments face, more particularly so as each of these dimensions has been fiercely disputed in most European parliaments. Parliament, parliamentarism and the cluster of parliamentary concepts constitute an excellent example of the essentially contested nature of political key concepts. Parliamentarism in any national context has been a product of a series of political disputes and has evolved further as a consequence of an ongoing process of political debate on its nature. It has become such a major feature of most European political cultures that such disputes and the consequent process of transformation in political systems have become tolerated.

This book is divided into three parts, each of which offers perspectives derived from different disciplines that contribute to present-day parliamentary studies, namely historical research (Part I, introduced in more detail in Chapter 1), discourse and rhetorical studies (Part II, introduced in more detail in Chapter 8) and political theory (Part III, introduced in more detail in Chapter 13). The discipline-specific approaches to parliamentary studies

will be discussed in these introductory chapters. In this general introduction, we shall define the points of departure of our joint multidisciplinary volume, review the implications of an ideal type of parliament for our research and discuss some central features related to the naming of parliaments. We shall discuss the particularly European features of parliament as an institution, the methodological potential of multidisciplinary parliamentary studies of this type for renewing the research field of conceptual history and the potential of conceptual history for bringing added value to parliamentary studies.

After analysing the four conceptual dimensions of parliamentarism from the perspectives of history, discourse and political theory and drawing together the findings of this multidisciplinary project (which is done at a theoretical level in this introduction and on the basis of empirical studies in Chapters 1, 8 and 13), we should be able to better understand the development of European parliamentarism in long-term comparative and multidisciplinary perspectives. This book explores the mutual relationships between the proposed four dimensions of parliamentarism in various historical periods from the French Revolution to the (re-)parliamentarization of Central and Eastern Europe and the attempted parliamentarization of the European Union through the analysis of national cases, varying from Britain and Finland to Russia and Spain. Side by side with deliberation, representation, responsibility and sovereignty, we also consider other concepts that have played central roles in conceptualizing parliament in modern European history.

The studied period is a long one, covering over two hundred years. From the point of view of conceptual history, parliamentary concepts do not change in successive stages or fashions in a linear way; rather, novelties are frequently combined with actualizations of old topoi. In order to make this recycling of past parliamentary experiences and momentums visible, parliamentary history needs to be studied from a long-term perspective. In present-day parliaments, for instance, we can distinguish different conceptual layers that can only be recognized and understood against the background of an extended time frame and by combining the tools of various disciplines. It is important to identify the political situations to which these layers were originally connected and to see how they have been further developed in differing political contexts. The rhetorical use of concepts by various political agents in the past has opened new horizons for research and debate. Both explicit and highly controversial conceptual changes and less visible and unintended ones in the course of parliamentary history need to be considered in relation to each of the parliamentary dimensions.

In this volume, we focus on debates about the character of parliament and parliamentarism within different European parliaments, countries and genres

of writing as one of the first comparative steps in conceptual history. In doing so, we integrate transnational elements into the analysis as far as possible. Eventually, we aim to identify the momentum of parliamentarization in terms of various aspects of parliamentarism in different national contexts – for example, the momentum of extended popular representation in a parliament or governmental responsibility to a parliament – with each momentum initiating a political point of reference for later parliamentary history. We argue that the key periods of parliamentarization in the history of several European countries include the French Revolution, which started in 1789; the parliamentarization of government and the extension of parliamentary suffrage from the 1830s to the last phase of the First World War and its immediate aftermath; the rearrangements that followed the Second World War; and the fall of the Soviet bloc starting in 1989.

On the other hand, the schedule of parliamentarization has varied from country to country, and its 'progress' has been anything but steady. The French Revolution created a break with the tradition of estate assemblies not only in France but also in other countries, offering an alternative to the older British parliamentary and continental estate models for how representative institutions in an increasingly democratic polity should be organized. The period from the mid 1860s to the early 1870s was another period of reform, expressed in the extension of suffrage (Britain and Germany), the parliamentarization of government (France) and the replacement of the estate system with a modern type of parliament (Austria-Hungary and Sweden). The breakthroughs that representative democracy made in several European countries (and not only in newly independent states) during and in the immediate aftermath of the First World War opened entirely new prospects for parliamentary democracy, even if overly optimistic expectations failed to be realized in the nationalistic and often totalitarian atmosphere of the interwar period. After the Second World War, in West Germany, Italy and in Western European countries that had been occupied, the return to parliamentary government with an almost exclusive emphasis on the responsibility criterion was followed without any greater debate on parliamentary principles. Four decades later, the historic changes brought about by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 transformed parliaments in post-communist regimes from pseudo-parliamentary or quasi-parliamentary institutions into key political players as democratically functioning representative and deliberative bodies.

We can, to some extent, build on studies in parliamentary history that have manifested themselves in Europe in recent years. Recent works with a comparative ambition include Christoph Gusy's *Demokratie in der Krise: Europa in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (2008), although it is limited in terms of both its

chronological and thematic scope. Two volumes compiled from presentations at conferences organized by the German Commission for Parliamentary History and Political Parties (KGParl) and the historians of the Humboldt University in Berlin have opened a series on comparative parliamentary history in German, discussing parliamentary cultures from a long-term perspective, albeit on the basis of loosely connected cases and bypassing most conceptual, discursive and theoretical aspects of parliamentarism (Schulz and Wirsching 2012; Feuchter and Helmrath 2013). A third volume, based on a conference in The Hague in 2013, is expected to discuss parliamentary ideals from a comparative European perspective.

The study of parliamentary discourse and practices has acquired real interdisciplinary scope only recently as a result of contributions made by scholars from the linguistic sub-disciplines, such as pragmatics, critical discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics, or closely related disciplines, such as rhetoric. Paul Bayley's edited book *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Parliamentary Discourse* (2004) is a pioneering endeavour that displays the use of several methodological frameworks for the analysis of parliamentary discourses in different countries (Britain, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Sweden and the United States). A broad spectrum of interdisciplinary perspectives is used in Cornelia Ilie's volume *European Parliaments under Scrutiny: Discourse Strategies and Interaction Practices* (2010a) to examine and problematize the impact of parliamentary debating practices and linguistic strategies on current political action and interaction in parliaments across Europe, including post-communist parliaments.

In political theory, we can speak of a renaissance of studies on the concepts of 'political representation' and 'representative democracy' (e.g., Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Concept and Genealogy*, 2006), although a tendency to make everything 'representation' and thus to depoliticize the concept is fashionable (see Saward, *The Representative Claim*, 2010). A critique of concepts of governance, depoliticization and a discussion of the 'crisis of representation' is contained in Danny Michelsen and Franz Walter's work, *Unpolitische Demokratie. Zur Krise der Repräsentation* (2013). Nicolas Roussellier's *Le parlement d'éloquence* (1997) and later studies may represent the first initiatives for rehabilitating the parliamentary culture of the French Third Republic and the rhetorical dimension of parliamentary politics in general (see Finlayson, 'Rhetoric and the Political Theory of Ideologies', 2012; Galembert, Rozenberg and Vigour 2014; and Palonen, Rosales and Turkka 2014). The political aspects of parliamentary procedure have also regained interest among scholars (see Clinchamps 2006; Sanchez 2012; Palonen 2014). A renewed interest in parliaments as such, beyond governments and parties, can be seen in more empirical studies in political science, for example in

Germany around the work of Werner J. Patzelt (see 2005, 2012; Patzelt and Dreischer 2009).

However, this is the first work that aims to create a comparative conceptual history of European parliamentarism. Instead of attempting to be completely comprehensive with regard to all European parliaments or all aspects of their conceptual history, this book consists of a selection of representative national and regional case studies written by leading experts in the field. The primary units of comparison are the national parliaments themselves, complemented by a separate chapter on the European Parliament together with some discussion of inter-parliamentary transfers. The selected cases are used to demonstrate central features in the development of parliamentarism as a pan-European phenomenon in key historical periods since the French Revolution. Most of the European great powers were involved in some formative historical period that produced turning points in the history of parliamentarism. Most of the other European regions are represented by illustrative national cases from smaller countries. It goes without saying that not all national histories of parliamentarism can be covered within the confines of this survey volume.

The parliamentarization of representative governments across Europe implies the conceptualization of a definite change in political cultures. This change has taken place rapidly in some national contexts, and it is also applicable to cases such as the replacement of Soviet-style facade assemblies by proper parliaments after 1989. The parliamentary experience, vocabulary, representation and procedures of deliberation to some extent tend to create transnational rather than purely national parliamentary political cultures, and in them the parliamentary language transcends the vernacular 'dialects'. The processes of conceptual transfer and translation concern the relationships between the general parliamentary language and its national 'dialects'. Parliaments use vernacular languages, and they are formed on a national basis, serving as symbols of the transcendence of sub-national particularities. Even if transfers between national parliaments are not self-evident and can imply considerable change in new contexts, parliaments nevertheless have numerous features in common. Supra- and transnational parliamentary assemblies can be expected to have a growing importance in institutions such as the EU and the UN, and this further increases the possibilities for transnational and inter-parliamentary transfers.

Having provided the first expressions of many parliamentary concepts in the past, the British and French parliamentary cultures play, to some extent, a double role in which the national institutions and traditions are mixed with parliamentary ideal types of concepts that serve as models for the latecomers, who have adopted elements taken from these two models. Appropriating the

elements of parliamentary culture from these countries and applying them to new contexts have taught the political elites of other countries parliamentary styles of debating. Of course, we should not overemphasize the possibilities for transfer in parliamentary language, as foreign models and references have usually been adopted selectively and even tendentiously in order to serve particular purposes in domestic circumstances (more on this in Chapter 1). Apparent conceptual transfers between parliamentary cultures do not imply that applications necessarily carry similar meanings in different political cultures.

Parliament and parliamentarism remain concepts of dispute. Unlike, for example, the concept of democracy, which has taken on consistently positive (though still contested) meanings in the course of the twentieth century, the concept of parliamentarism has never received universal approval. Not only do its key content and range of reference remain highly contested, but so do its value and its conditions of realization. The phrase 'crisis of parliamentarism' was coined in France at the time of the Third Republic in the late nineteenth century, and since then it has been a recurrent topos evoked from different political corners and for varying purposes (for current challenges to parliamentarism, see the Epilogue in this book). Constant contestation and an atmosphere of crisis have become essential elements of European parliamentarism. Indeed, parliamentarism should perhaps be seen as a long-term discursive process of disputes and crises that moves in time and space rather than a sort of goal that could be achieved at some specific moment in history.
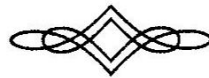
The Ideal Type of Parliamentarism

As was pointed out at the start, our hypothetical point of departure consists in the construction of a four-dimensional ideal type of parliament, comprising a cluster of concepts held together by parliament itself as a political concept. Each of the dimensions has been fiercely disputed among members and constitutes a criterion that distinguishes a parliament from other types of assemblies and institutions. The dimensions of representation, deliberation, sovereignty and responsibility set the agenda for the historical study of the concept of parliament, a concept that is used by political agents and writers on politics alike.

The dimension of representation refers to parliament as a permanent assembly regularly summoned to represent and act in the name of the citizenry and chosen at regular intervals in free and fair elections. The permanence of parliament, the regularity of its sessions, its representative character and the recurrent election of its members together with the freedom and fairness of its elections can be regarded as constitutive criteria for the distinction between

Epilogue

Some Challenges to Parliamentarism

Kari Palonen

Compared with the interwar period (see e.g., Gusy 2008), we are not really facing a 'crisis of parliamentarism' today. In Western Europe the central political role of parliaments is recognized everywhere, and the principles of parliamentary representation, responsibility and deliberation are widely shared. Nonetheless, parliamentary politics today faces a number of challenges, some of them old, others more recent, which may require some rethinking of parliamentary practices. I shall discuss here some politically important examples from a conceptual historical perspective.

The old challenges can be divided into four types: (i) the extension of the agenda and scarce parliamentary time; (ii) the governmentalization of parliamentary agenda setting; (iii) the election and party-dependence of parliament; and (iv) the reduction of the parliamentary timetable. We can add two more recent challenges: (v) counter-bureaucratization from within, and (vi) inter-parliamentarization, both by-products of the actual success of parliamentarism. There are, of course, also other problems that classical parliaments have not dealt with so well, such as the representation of genders and small minorities, but they cannot be discussed within the confines of this chapter.

The Fair Distribution of Parliamentary Time

The democratization of parliament and the parliamentarization of government have politicized parliament itself in terms of the growing number of items on the agenda. They have also raised the public's expectations that the members should participate in debates. The continuing growth of the parliamentary agenda is a consequence of a parliamentarization and democratization

of politics that could hardly have been avoided. Parliaments have to learn to protect themselves against their own success and to hold the activity of their members in check in order to prevent the paralysis of the entire institution.

The challenge lies thus in learning to cope with this constantly growing agenda in the face of scarce parliamentary time. One possibility lies in extending the parliamentary concept of fair play to a fair distribution of parliamentary time (see Chapter 14). The loquacity of members can be countered by reinterpreting freedom of speech to concern the content and presentation of speeches but not their length in order to ensure a fair distribution of time between members. The application of the principle of fair play between different items, however, requires various measures ranging from delegation to committees, using rotation or lottery in the selection of the motions for the agenda and sharing of motions between the lower and higher levels of parliamentary types of assemblies, to debating the content of the agenda itself instead of allowing the government or party leaders to determine it. This would require a lot of parliamentary imagination.

The Politics of Agenda Setting

A second topos that challenged parliamentarism in the nineteenth century and still does today concerns the governmentalization of parliamentary agenda setting without it being submitted to effective parliamentary control and debate. Walter Bagehot's nineteenth-century vision of the cabinet as an executive committee of parliament (see Chapter 14) underestimated the government's agenda-setting power. The reduction of parliamentary politics to a game between government and opposition tends to turn parliamentary speaking into an epideictic form of ratification or non-ratification of government measures. The deliberative dimension of parliamentary politics presupposes a degree of independence of parliament from the government-opposition divide within it.

The current Westminster procedure, however, provides occasions in which individual backbenchers initiate the debate. Griffith and Ryle consider this 'second confrontation' in parliament as 'equally important although less obviously manifested and usually less fiercely demonstrated' than the divide between government and opposition. They regard 'members without executive responsibilities [. . . as] free to criticize ministers or their department' (Griffith and Ryle 2003: 14). With a two-dimensional view on disputes between parliamentarians, the authors recognize that '[i]t is to a large extent the historical, constitutional confrontation between Parliament (answerable to the people) and the Executive appointed by the Crown' (Griffith and Ryle 2003: 14; see also Chapter 2).

Elections, Parties and Parliament

Parliamentary elections and government formation can hardly be realized otherwise than on a partisan basis whereby votes are counted and not weighted (see Weber 1988 [1917]: 167–70). The elective and representative quality of parliament has, however, frequently turned into a dependence not only of the composition of government but also of the politics of parliaments on election results. 'Popular sovereignty' has been given an anti-parliamentary interpretation; for example, in Carl Schmitt's (1970 [1928]) insistence that parliament, unlike referenda or presidential elections, dissolves the 'unity' of the people. In contrast, we could interpret parliamentary sovereignty to include elections as a medium for transferring parliamentary dissensus and debate to the citizens (see Palonen 2010). Even if they are elected on a partisan basis, the members face the questions on the parliamentary agenda as individuals; they speak as individuals and cannot delegate their vote to others even when they are members of the same party. In the procedural terms of a deliberative assembly, every debate, speech and vote is a chance to revise the parliamentary distribution of power.

However, parties are necessary mediators and simplifiers of parliamentary politics, and a member must carefully consider when, where and how to express dissent with his or her own party. The members' chances of re-election remain in the hands of the parties, although the grip of the party apparatus on parliamentarians has declined somewhat. The improved investigative, supportive and personnel resources of both parliaments and their members have also weakened their non-electoral dependence on the party leadership and apparatus.

The Parliamentary Timetable

Debating a motion in a parliament does not, strictly speaking, happen on a singular occasion but rather over a series of occasions and includes different perspectives in plenum or in committee. The key parliamentary procedures, such as moving, seconding, putting a question, speaking pro or contra the motion, amending, adjourning and moving a question of 'order' are all temporal operations. They concern the present, future and past of parliamentary politics, and the spending of precious parliamentary time. The debate itself provides occasions for sudden insights for or against the motion but also requires time to reflect on the arguments, to construct objections or to invent dissensual arguments.

There is also a temporal subtext in parliamentary debates. The moves of members are separate, successive, non-simultaneous and irreversible: in the

Parliament and Parliamentarism
A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF A EUROPEAN CONCEPT
Edited by **Pasi Ihalainen · Cornelia Ilie · Kari Palonen**

The great challenge for a book of this kind is to maintain cohesion among a multiplicity of authors and perspectives, and in this it has been entirely successful. Its overall framework of four principles that distinguish parliamentarism is clear and convincing, and its openness to different methodological approaches enables contributors to transcend traditional disciplinary limits.

OLIVIER ROZENBERG, Sciences Po

This collection offers an impressive historical and geographical sweep, covering a range of conceptual issues. The individual chapters provide both breadth and depth, and they are well situated within wider theoretical concerns.

ALAN FINLAYSON, University of East Anglia

Parliamentary theory, practices, discourses and institutions constitute a distinctively European contribution to modern politics. Taking a broad historical perspective, this cross-disciplinary, innovative and rigorous collection locates the essence of parliamentarism in four key aspects – deliberation, representation, responsibility and sovereignty – and explores the different ways in which they have been contested, reshaped and implemented in a series of representative national and regional case studies. As one of the first comparative studies in conceptual history, this volume focuses on debates about the nature of parliament and parliamentarism within and across different European countries, representative institutions and genres of political discourse.

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Cover images: Top – The House of Commons at Westminster, drawn by Augustus Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson for Ackermann's *Microcosm of London* (1808-11); *Below –* European People's Party Political Assembly, September 2015 *(www.flickr.com/photos/eppofficial/20873195008/in/album-72157657640519848)*

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