

Parliaments and Parliamentarians as International Actors

Andrés Malamud and Stelios Stavridis

Parliaments and parliamentarians traditionally have been a feature of domestic politics, as a distinctive branch of government or as representatives of the people respectively. However, lately they have come to develop a different role linked to international rather than domestic politics, especially regarding regional organizations. Parliamentary institutions engage in international affairs in three major ways: 1) by influencing foreign policy through national parliaments; 2) by conducting parallel diplomatic relations, known as parliamentary diplomacy; and 3) by establishing and empowering parliaments as representative bodies of international, often regional, organizations. These roles differ in form and substance. The first is a classical function of parliaments and implies no policy-making innovation, although the degree to which parliaments do so varies from one democracy to another. The second function is more recent and has focused mainly on peace-building and conflict-prevention activities. The third is the most atypical function, and is ideally oriented towards supranational institution building.

National Parliaments and Foreign Policy

The 2009 decision of United States President Barack Obama to send additional troops to Afghanistan received more support from Republican Party Congressmen than from his own party. Spanish Prime Minister José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero's move in the same direction was also supported by opposition parliamentary leaders, although several parliamentarians from the Popular Party (PP) could not help reminding the Spanish electorate of his earlier 2004 decision to withdraw from Iraq. These examples show how national parliaments are involved in foreign policy, and even security and defence issues.

This does not mean that parliaments have become the most important actors in foreign policy. Executives remain at the heart of foreign policy, but they are no longer the exclusive players. The most powerful parliament in this respect is the US

Congress, but several other democracies have strong parliamentary involvement in international affairs, such as the Scandinavian countries. In the wake of the 2004 Spanish withdrawal from Iraq the recently inaugurated Socialist government promised and delivered a new law on military deployment abroad. Since it came into force in 2005 the government has scrupulously asked and obtained majority backing to increase troop levels for existing missions or to initiate new ones. There have been similar debates in other parliaments such as the German and French, over Afghanistan for instance.

Empirical evidence confirms that parliamentarians are aware of their new roles in world politics. With the exception of democratic incompatibility theorists (Goldmann 1986), most analysts and practitioners view foreign policy as just 'one more' public policy. If democratic control is needed for public policies in general, why should this not include foreign or, for that matter, security and defence policies? It can be argued that expertise, urgency and secrecy are especially necessary for international affairs, and that these requirements may not emerge from long drawn out, often sterile and, more often than not, partisan parliamentary debates. But the world has changed since the end of the Second World War, and even more so since the end of the Cold War, and if democracy is not to be limited to the domestic dimension of the state then it should (and in practice does) influence foreign policy.

Democratic countries have expanded the 'reach' of their parliaments in world affairs. This is because the barrier between the 'domestic' and 'foreign' dimensions has been weakened as politics have become more democratic; it is also because globalization has led many 'domestic' public policies to acquire an external dimension as global issues increasingly affect citizens more directly, be it terrorism, pandemics, climate change, international financial or economic issues. Nowadays executives cannot simply argue that it is 'in the national interest' to do whatever they wish. Having achieved higher levels of knowledge, access to information and participation, modern democracies possess the means to exercise democratic (mainly parliamentary) accountability in most public policy spheres.

Parliamentary input is various and varied. It can refer 'only' to parliamentary control mechanisms, usually budgetary control, or it can extend to influencing long-term foreign policy trends. The fact that some policy areas require more secrecy does not mean that there can be no accountability mechanisms or open debate at all. It simply means that there is less openness. As Laursen (2002) has argued, democratic doctrine requires the involvement of parliaments in foreign affairs.

Extensive research on the United States (Martin 2000, Spanier and Uslander 1985) empirically negates the democratic incompatibility thesis. The US system shows that, whatever the limitations (particularly during war time), democratic control is possible if not perfect. Most analysts claim that the national foreign policies of the member states of the European Union (EU) suffer from democratic deficits. Even Denmark, the archetype of 'good' parliamentary scrutiny in EU 'internal' affairs, lacks comparable mechanisms when it comes to foreign policy. Because of this, parliamentary scrutiny has been characterized as 'grotesque' (Italy),

'amusing' (France) or 'decorative' (Greece). Only four out of 15 contributions in one comparative study of member state foreign policies refer to parliamentary accountability, or rather their lack thereof (Manners and Whitman 2000). The reasons for this include the nature of constitutional arrangements (executive dominance in France), the existence of a confrontational majority system (in the United Kingdom) or the frequent accusations of anti-patriotic behaviour to critics of and opponents to governmental foreign policy decisions. Whatever the cause, the key point is that foreign policy is not adequately subjected to democratic scrutiny. Even where it exists one cannot say that 'the processes of foreign policy scrutiny work well. They do not' (Hill 2003: 282).

Overall, there has been little interest in the question of how democratic the decision-making process of democratic states is. There are very few references to the role of parliaments in the literature. The sub-field of foreign policy analysis (FPA) is an exception to this rule, but it tends to leave aside the issue of democratic input, and it deals with parliaments as just another 'domestic source' of foreign policy (Hill 2003: 219-307). The question of how democratic the foreign policy output is raises another important point: democratic control is a necessary but not sufficient condition for foreign policy to be democratic. The output must also reflect and promote democratic principles.

Parliaments can try to influence executive agendas by issuing reports and through other mechanisms. Parliamentarians do not need to challenge executives; indeed they very often strengthen them. For instance, the French *Assemblée Nationale* issued a detailed report about how to 'construct the Mediterranean Union' only a few months after then presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy first mentioned this in 2007 (*Assemblée Nationale* 2007).

The *parliamentary decline thesis* argues that parliaments lost power to the executive branch after the Second World War, and particularly during the Cold War, because of nuclear weapons and strategic questions. This led to the coining of terms such as 'imperial presidency' (in reference to the United States) or 'nuclear monarchy' (applied to France). It was argued that there was little room for parliaments to control and have a say in various foreign, security and defence policy areas. Since the end of the Cold War, however, there has been a 'parliamentarization' of politics in several public policy areas, as is shown by the growth of 'public' and 'parliamentary' diplomacy. The emergence, consolidation and proliferation of regional and other international parliamentary assemblies is another sign of this trend. Regional integration processes have facilitated the 'parliamentarization' of world politics because of the emergence of hybrid areas that are not only 'intermestic' but, in the case of the EU, 'communitarian', and thus transcend the national-international dichotomy.

National Parliamentarians and International Diplomacy

The domestic parliamentary dimension of international affairs should not be confused with the related question of the international dimension of parliamentary activities. Often conflated with parliamentary cooperation¹ or with parliamentary control, *parliamentary diplomacy* as an academic concept has been almost invisible for decades (Stavridis 2002, Elorriaga 2004).

Parliamentary diplomacy has various levels. Many parliaments are engaged directly or indirectly in international affairs. The engagement can be formal or informal, led by parties or individuals, secret or open, and conducted with or without the blessing of national executives. In more institutionalized set-ups parliamentarians from sub-state bodies may mingle with their national counterparts, and even with members of 'international parliaments' (for instance, the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas, the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie, or the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association). Sub-state parliaments can also develop their own networks, associations and assemblies (Kölling et al. 2007, Brunet et al. 2004).

Other parliamentary set-ups group only the presidents of certain assemblies or parliamentary committees. Cutler (2006: 82-3) argues that parliamentary diplomacy 'represents an important middle ground between the traditional level of interstate diplomacy and the new level of transnational cooperation amongst grassroots non-governmental organizations (NGOs)'.

Involvement in Situations of Conflict and Human Rights Violations

Parliamentarians can intervene in areas that traditional diplomats cannot venture into. Records of such activities date as far back as the late 1880s (Sabic 2008a: 259). More recently, in announcing a shift in US policy towards Cuba a few weeks after taking office, Obama welcomed the fact that a number of Congressmen visited the island, even though they insisted that they had done it on their own initiative. Similarly in August 2009 Virginia's Democratic Senator Jim Webb visited Myanmar to meet with the ruling military Junta, apparently with the blessing of Washington. Other examples include the Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings that permitted the first contacts between Argentine and British parliamentarians after the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War, those between South and North Korean parliamentary representatives, and between Palestinians and Israelis. Several parliamentarians visited Gaza in the summer of 2008, risking their lives as the Israeli authorities had declared that they would not give them special treatment: left-wing Greek parliamentarian Tasos Kourakis described the event as an 'odyssey' (*Elefterotypia*, 27 August 2008).

1 *Technical Parliamentary Cooperation*, French Senate, available at: www.senat.fr/international/english/coop.html [accessed: 21 January 2010].

Parliamentary action can also complicate international crises, however well meant. Morocco prevented one of its senators from 'marching' on Parsley Island, an island in dispute with Spain since the near-military confrontation of 2002. The British government refused entry to radical Dutch Member of Parliament Geert Wilders in 2009, even though he had been invited to Britain by the House of Lords to show his controversial documentary on Islamic terrorism. The European Parliament (EP) is well-known for 'meddling' in international affairs: its 1989 declaration in support of the *muhajideen* against Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, which contradicted European governments' recognition of the Iranian revolution, is a case in point. But this is not to say that the EP and other parliaments behave irresponsibly. Euro-parliamentarians (MEPs) consistently criticize violations of human rights throughout the world. Activists worldwide are well aware of the EP's role in international affairs, and its headquarters in Brussels or Strasbourg are the venues of regular protests, mainly over human rights abuses. Parliamentarians also use the 'power of the pen', writing regularly in the press and contributing to other media.

Most academics and practitioners agree that parliaments and parliamentarians can play a role in trying to prevent and solve conflict situations (Beetham 2006). Thus at a June 2008 conference on the 'European Neighbourhood Policy East' in Brussels, then EP President, Hans-Gert Pöttering, stated that as 'parliamentarians, we are all bound to the idea of pursuing dialogue in order to solve problems' (European Parliament Press Office 2008). The Great Lake Parliamentary Forum on Peace, also known as the Amani Forum, tries to find peaceful resolution to conflicts in Africa, one of the most troubled areas in the world. The Canada-based Parliamentary Centre has organized numerous meetings between parliamentarians on the grounds that executive action is insufficient.

Electoral Monitoring, Friendship Groups, Moral Tribunes

To include parliamentarians or officials from parliamentary secretariats in electoral monitoring missions is considered an advantage. Not only do they have parliamentary experience, but they demonstrate how parliamentarians can play non-traditional democratic accountability roles. Parliamentarians from well-established democracies can share 'best practice' experience with their counterparts from less developed democracies.

The parliamentarization of international relations is often perceived as both a result and a cause of democratization. Be it through 'friendship groups', occasional visits, regular meetings or simply by participating in different regional or international parliamentary meetings, parliamentarians who come from 'less' democratic or emerging democracies can gain from 'rubbing shoulders' with their counterparts from well-established democracies. National and European members of parliament regularly refer to this. But others disagree; it is argued that as long as not all parliamentary actors involved originate from truly democratic states, successful democratization will remain elusive.

It is often claimed that parliamentarians and parliaments act as moral beacons in a world of *realpolitik*. As Cutler (2006: 83) points out, international parliamentary bodies 'establish ongoing transgovernmental relationships that restrain old power politics'. Thus parliaments engage in monitoring activities that transcend their budgetary control functions, including investigations that fall outside the traditional range of power politics activities. Regular committees or special commissions allow parliamentarians to act as 'moral tribunes' in international affairs. Cases in point include the 2006 EP investigation of the so-called 'CIA flights in Europe' (a temporary committee was established to look into the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the illegal transport of prisoners), the 2008 French Assembly Report on Africa, which heavily criticized French foreign policy (*Le Monde*, 10 July 2008), and the 2009 UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Scrutiny of Arms Exports.²

But there are limits to what parliamentary diplomacy can achieve (Stavridis 2002, Sabic 2008b: 82-3). One of the key problems is availability of time and expertise. The effectiveness of parliaments is limited by membership (dis-)continuities. Funding presents problems too. For these and other reasons, it has been claimed that parliamentary diplomacy is nothing more than 'parliamentary tourism'.

International and Supranational Parliaments

A parliament is a multi-member institution that performs four main functions within a political system: representation, legislation, control of the executive, and leadership recruitment and socialization. Parliaments usually operate at the level of the nation-state, but they are also found below and above as in the case of sub-national and supranational polities (this section draws on Malamud and De Sousa 2007).

Several regional international organizations, mainly in Europe, Latin America and Africa, have established parliamentary assemblies. In December 2009 membership of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) accounted for 152 national and eight associate members, all of the latter international in nature, such as the Andean Parliament and the East African Legislative Assembly. Table 8.1 lists the most significant international parliaments, including nearly all regional ones, and the IPU.

² See www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmaff/cmaff.htm [accessed: 21 January 2010].

PARLIAMENTS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS AS INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Table 8.1 International parliaments and IPU

Date of creation/ upgrade	International parliament	Acronym	Website
1889	<i>Inter-Parliamentary Union</i>	IPU	www.ipu.org/english/home.htm
1949	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*	PACE	http://assembly.coe.int/default.asp
1952/1979	European Parliament*	EP	www.europarl.eu.int
1964/1987	Latin American Parliament*	PARLATINO	www.parlatino.org
1979/1984	Andean Parliament*	PARLANDINO	www.parlamentoandino.org
1986/1991	Central American Parliament*	PARLACEN	www.parlacen.org.gt
1991/2006	Mercosur Parliament	PARLASUR	www.parlamentodelmercosur.org
1994	Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union*	IPC	www.uemoa.int/organes/organes_controle.htm
1997	<i>Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie</i>		www.apf.francophonie.org
2000	Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas	COPA	www.copa.qc.ca
2001	East African Legislative Assembly*	EALA	www.eala.org
2003	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Association</i>	CPA	www.cpahq.org
2004	Pan-African Parliament	PAP	www.pan-african-parliament.org
2006	ECOWAS Parliament*		www.parl.ecowas.int

Notes: Parliaments listed by date of creation. *In italics*, parliaments without a regional base.
* IPU members.

When examining their emergence, three questions come forward: first, why do region makers take the trouble to establish a regional parliament when integration is first and foremost an economic endeavour (Rittberger 2003)? Second, are regional parliaments what they purport to be or do they fall short? Third, how do these parliaments differ? Below we introduce and compare several international parliaments in light of the four constitutive functions enumerated above.

Early European Precedents

A series of organizations, established prior to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, have contributed to the singularity of the European integration process. Some of them have survived independently, retaining mainly deliberative and normative roles (the Council of Europe among them), or have been incorporated later into groups involved in the EU treaties such as the Western European Union (WEU). Some organizations have limited their membership to European countries while others have extended their activities to different world regions. A common feature of most of these organizations is their inclusion of a parliamentary assembly. There are other analogous bodies such as the Nordic Council (which includes representatives from the Scandinavian parliaments), the Benelux Inter-parliamentary Consultation Council, the Baltic Assembly, the Black Sea Parliamentary Assembly for Economic Cooperation and the Parliamentary Conference of the Central European Initiative. However, the role of these extra-EU bodies in the integration process is not comparable to that of the EP, nor have they comparable competencies.

The European Parliament (EP)

Initially EP competencies and institutional design were similar to that of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. Known as 'the Assembly' until 1962, and officially baptized as EP only in 1986, this was a forum composed of delegations appointed by national parliaments and selected from their own ranks, with a limited consultative function regarding a small number of issues and able to make legislative proposals prior to their adoption by the Council. The original treaties did not grant the EP a central role in the European integration process. Its competences evolved over time (Costa 2001, see also Chapter 20 by Saurugger in this volume).

The creation of the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe, the ECSC and the WEU after the Second World War had more than just a symbolic value. These assemblies served as an interface between the organizations and the national parliamentarians, and allowed politicians who came from previously warring countries to establish closer contacts, promoting the restoration of mutual trust and cooperation between former enemies. Furthermore in the Cold War context these assemblies also sent out the message that *the West does it better* (Lovecy 2004: 63-4).

PARLIAMENTS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS AS INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Three factors contributed to the EP's evolution from being simply 'another international parliamentary assembly' to becoming a unique supranational parliament with real decision-making powers and a central role in the process of European integration: early supranationalism, extraordinary leadership and, much later, direct elections.

The pooling of sovereignty rather than intergovernmental management was a founding feature of the European Community. Robert Schuman's and Jean Monnet's idea of building a political project beyond the nation-state raised problems of legitimacy and accountability, since it challenged the traditional concept of territorial sovereignty. Some believed that a supranational project would have to include a plenary assembly for members to air their views and to subject executive decisions to collective scrutiny, but it was too early to establish a parliament of the European people(s), transposing national democracy to the regional level, and some countries were opposed to this possibility. Instead the treaties established an interparliamentary institution to ensure the efficacy and legitimacy of the activities of the supranational High Authority created for the ECSC.

As regards leadership, the EU founding fathers had shared experiences and a common vision. Monnet, Schuman and Henry Spaak had supported the Council of Europe but later abandoned it in reaction to British euroscepticism and reluctance to move towards partial economic supranational governance. However, a small number of countries backed their supranational vision and decided to expand the integration process into other economic and social policy areas.

Finally events in the 1960s and 1970s unforeseen by the treaties, jointly with strong activism on the part of several MEPs, led to the direct election of the EP in 1979 and to the subsequent emergence of European party formations. This was a watershed, changing the role of the EP in the European triangular institutional complex and in the integration process (Corbett 1998). Since that time the MEPs have been elected by the European citizenry every five years, with the distribution of seats roughly reflecting the demographic weight of each state. A system of proportional representation, already in place in most member states since 1979, has been extended to all of them since 1999. Electoral dynamics, together with treaty and MEP-promoted empowerment, have transformed the EP into the only supranational parliamentary assembly in the world that has democratic legitimacy, decision-making competencies and the power to bring down a 'government' (in this case, the Commission) (Hix et al. 2003: 191-2). It gives MEPs the opportunity to hone their political skills in an influential, supranational environment, even if they are sometimes recruited from the ranks of elder politicians or party dissidents (Bardi 1996, Scarrow 1997).

The EP is still evolving and suffers from many limitations, the most notorious of which is the widespread perception of its elections being of 'second order' importance (Reif and Schmitt 1980). But outside Europe it has become the yardstick against which the performance of other regional parliaments is measured.

The Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO)

The Latin American Parliament is a unicameral assembly made up of members of 22 national Latin American and Caribbean parliaments, namely from Argentina, Aruba, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, the Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela. Founded in Lima, Peru, in 1964 with the aim of promoting domestic democracy and regional integration, it was institutionalized in 1987. From 1992 to 2008 it was located in São Paulo, Brazil, and thereafter in Panama City.

PARLATINO is composed of national delegations sent by the member parliaments, each of which can appoint up to 12 representatives in a proportion that reflects the weight of the national parliamentary groupings. A delegation may have less than 12 members though, in which case each delegate may cast up to four votes until reaching the overall number of 12; this disposition grants all countries the same voting power regardless of population and attendance. PARLATINO gathers once a year, and it has no decision-making authority and limits itself to issuing non-binding declarations and recommendations. Its main historical merit was to provide a protective umbrella for democratic political leaders and aspirations during the dark era of dictatorial rule. Because it is composed of national parliamentarians, it is intergovernmental, lacks legislative competencies and is quasi-continental in scope, PARLATINO more closely resembles the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe than the EP. Unlike the regional parliaments discussed below, however, it is unique in that it stands independently and is not part of a broader organization.

The Central American Parliament (PARLACEN)

Central American presidents first envisaged the creation of PARLACEN in 1986 as a symbol of reconciliation for a region that had been devastated by years of bloody conflicts and political instability. The institution was inaugurated in 1991 when its first assembly met in Guatemala City (the location of its permanent headquarters). Since then it has grown from a total of 65 deputies and 13 political parties from four countries to having 132 deputies and 42 parties from six countries. Deputies are elected directly every five years by member country citizens. Each country can elect 20 representatives and have two appointed deputies (former presidents and vice-presidents). The national representations are clustered in a handful of parliamentary groups.

PARLACEN is the deliberative body of the Central American Integration System (SICA, initially the Central American Common Market), and links the Central American countries on the basis of a variable geometry. Thus SICA brings together seven countries (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama), while PARLACEN excludes two (Costa Rica and Belize) but includes the Dominican Republic. The parliament's legislative competencies are limited to

proposal, analysis and recommendation. However, it can formally elect, appoint and remove the executive officials of SICA institutions. Thus it cannot pass laws but it is empowered to nominate and hold accountable various technical administrators. It can also request information and reports from, and issue recommendations to, SICA organs. However, these competencies have existed only on paper: to date, PARLACEN has not had a significant impact on the functioning of SICA.

The Andean Parliament (PARLANDINO)

The Andean Parliament is the deliberative organ of the Andean Community (CAN), which was established in 1969 by Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (Chile left and Venezuela joined in the mid 1970s). The institutional structure of CAN closely resembles that of the EU: it features a Commission, a Parliament, a Court of Justice, a Council of Ministers and a Presidential Council, various technical institutions (including financial entities), consultative civil society forums and even a university. But the performance of these regional institutions lags far behind those of their European counterparts.

PARLANDINO is a supranational entity headquartered in Bogotá, Colombia. Its founding treaty was signed in 1979 and entered into force in 1984. In 1997 it was decided that its members would be directly elected within the following five years, but this decision was only fully implemented in 2010. PARLANDINO has 20 deputies, five from each country. It can take various kinds of actions approved by an absolute majority but none are binding. Its competencies are vague and it has not had a significant political or technical impact.

The Mercosur Parliament (PARLASUR)

PARLASUR is the parliament of an intergovernmental regional integration organization, Mercosur, which was founded in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Until 2006 the delegations of the four national congresses were assembled in the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). In 1995 the JPC was designated to help incorporate Mercosur dispositions into national legislation, issue non-binding recommendations and declarations, and take the steps to create a full parliament. Each country could select up to 16 active legislators from their upper and lower houses, who thereafter were grouped into national sections. As with every other Mercosur body, decisions had to be consensual. Because of these conditions the JPC developed as another intergovernmental institution which contributed to blurring party alignments and to the sterilization of voting.

In 2006 Mercosur's member states decided to set up a permanent parliament headquartered in Montevideo, Uruguay, to be established in two transitional phases: first, a body similar to the JPC (with 18 rather than 16 members per country) replaces its predecessor, and second, direct elections must be held until 2011 (as of 2010, only Paraguay has done so). The first regular post-transitional elections

are to be held simultaneously in all member countries in 2014. The decision did not establish the composition that the parliament should have at the end of the transition period; on the other hand its competences were clearly determined: legislating was not among them.

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP)

Founded in 2004, the PAP was initially located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, but it was later moved to Midrand, South Africa. It is the parliamentary organ of the 53-member state African Union (AU) and currently has 230 members from 46 countries; each parliament can send five representatives, one of which must be a woman. The PAP is a semi-permanent body that convenes twice a year, has exclusively advisory and deliberative powers and is charged with harmonizing national legislation. However, there is no clear indication of how it might do this (Navarro 2008) as it lacks the competences to shape national decisions, to determine the AU budget or to nominate or censure the AU Commission. It focuses more on international issues than on domestic questions, operating as an international debate forum and an instrument of parliamentary diplomacy rather than as a community organ. The PAP has a weak and ambiguous mandate: although it is meant to 'represent all the peoples of Africa' and its members are supposed to act 'in their personal and independent capacity', in fact deputies are selected (or recalled) by the national parliaments.

East African Legislative Assembly (EALA)

The EALA, which was established in 2001, is the assembly of the East African Community (EAC), an intergovernmental organization that brings together Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, and is headquartered in Tanzania. The EALA has 52 deputies, nine per member state who are indirectly elected by the national parliaments, and seven ex-officio members. The EAC treaties require that members of parliament represent the diversity of views existing in the national assemblies, and that there should be a gender balance. The ex-officio members consist of the national ministers responsible for regional cooperation and the two top EAC executives. To date the impact of the EALA has been negligible.

Inter-Parliamentary Committee (IPC) of the UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union)

The 40-member IPC, headquartered in Bamako, Mali, is the parliament of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (known by its French acronym, UEMOA), a monetary union that brings together eight countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo). It has a consultative role and

issues annual reports and declarations. Although the founding treaties state that it should become a democratically elected parliament, its public visibility thus far is so minimal that it does not even have a proper website.

Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The parliament of the ECOWAS, a regional group of 15 countries founded in 1975, has 115 seats distributed among the 15 member states on the basis of population. Nigeria, with the largest population, has 35 seats, and Togo and Gambia, the least populated, have five seats each. The parliament plays a consultative role, issuing opinions on a broad range of issues, including human rights, telecommunications, health, education and treaty revisions. The functioning of the parliament is governed by a 2006 decision defining how executives make referrals to the parliament, and the time frame for the submission of recommendations and opinions. The parliament has a General Secretariat, under the Speaker's authority, which is responsible for administering the institution. From its inception member states have been keen to transform the parliament into a fully-fledged legislative body, so it is currently undergoing a transition that may lead to the direct universal election of its members.

Just like the modern state and contemporary democracy, regional integration and the establishment of supranational parliaments first emerged in Europe, then travelled to Latin America and later reached Africa. Notably, however, the parliamentarization of regional organizations has yet to take root in either Asia or North America. This can be explained by geopolitical factors (balance of power or hegemonic dominance), but it can also be the result of a critical reading of what parliaments have actually achieved. Below we address the plausible causes of such meagre results.

Conclusion

The history, structure, competencies and legitimacy of regional parliamentary assemblies vary widely. Only the EP has developed a truly supranational character and has real effective powers. Although the differences between the EP and its regional counterparts are remarkable, the latter have not always been irrelevant, but the functions they perform are insufficient to qualify them strictly as parliaments.

As regards representation, only a few international parliaments are popularly elected. Yet even where elections are held, demographic proportionality is absent. With regard to decision-making and control competencies, no international parliament outside Europe has significant legislative and monitoring powers.

Malamud and De Sousa (2007) outline five factors that account for the difference between the EP and its counterparts.

First, there is the time factor: the process of European integration started between two and five decades before the Latin American and African processes, so differences regarding institutional development may be due to maturity gaps.

Second, there is sequence: the current structure of the EU was set up according to the 'Monnet-method', meaning that function preceded form and that incrementalism was preferred to early institutionalization. This allowed Euro-parliamentarians to push for further empowerment of the EP, instead of the institution being granted full powers from scratch: thus increasing activity brought about growing competences and not the other way around. Other regions, by contrast, have unsuccessfully attempted to skip phases, admiring the European outcome but overlooking the process that led to it.

Third, there is a great disparity regarding levels of integration: while the EU has established a common market and is consolidating an economic union, most African and Latin American counterparts have not even completed full customs unions. Arguably a parliament is a fitting institution to govern an economic union, but it is hard to see how it could be necessary to rule over a free trade zone.

Fourth, the success of regional institutions cannot be dissociated from the effectiveness of their domestic sources: weak or unstable domestic institutions are not a good foundation upon which to build regional ones.

Fifth, most European countries have parliamentary or semi-parliamentary regimes, whereas most African and all Latin American countries have presidential systems. Parliamentary assemblies cannot be expected to perform invariably regardless of their institutional framework (Kreppel 2002). In Europe a parliament is viewed as the institution where governments are ultimately made and dissolved, whereas in most of Africa and Latin America the election, authority and survival of governments are formally independent of parliamentary will. Furthermore integration processes outside Europe are often driven by presidential diplomacy, and there is evidence showing that national presidents seek to design regional institutions in such a way as not to hamper their latitude (Malamud 2005).

The main implication of the last of these observations is that presidential or parliamentary domestic regimes make a difference to regional integration processes, especially to the establishment of regional parliaments. Political parties also matter in different ways and for different reasons from one regional setting to another. It has even been argued that a parliamentary system may not be the most appropriate way to govern a multistate democracy (Fabbrini 2004, Hix 2002, McKay 2001).

In spite of failing to perform most distinctive parliamentary functions, regional parliaments may help to accomplish other goals such as nurturing a shared regional identity among political elites, strengthening the symbolic presence of the regional organization in the minds of the public and in third countries, and facilitating intra-regional communication. They may also promote unexpected spillovers. However, these functions are neither exclusive to, nor characteristic of, parliamentary institutions. If regional parliaments are to be enhanced, the distinction between their constitutive and supplementary functions is worth acknowledging.

Further Reading

Recommended for further reading are Beetham (2006), Malamud and De Sousa (2007) and Sobic (2008a).

www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com

This page has been left blank intentionally

www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com www.ashgate.com