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**Report on the 'Central European
Parliaments: The First Decade of
Democratic Experience and the Future
Perspective' Workshop**

Prague, 6–8 November 2003

On 6–8 November 2003, the project group of the Parliamentary Documentation and Information Centre of the Political Sociology department at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in co-operation with Research Committee No. 8 – the Legislative Specialists of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) organised the international workshop 'Central European Parliaments: The First Decade of Democratic Experience and the Future Perspective'. The organisers gathered researchers from both Central and Eastern European countries, and from Germany, Canada and the United States, who are engaged in parliamentary research in the region. The workshop was also opened to members of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, its staff (particularly from the Parliamentary Institute), and graduate and doctoral students. A total of 30 participants from 8 countries participated in the workshop.

The main aims of the workshop were to bring together scholars engaged in field research in order to replace the style of isolated research on national parliaments and

their actors which dominated over the past decade with that of internationally co-operative investigations in the coming decade, and in order to assess the priorities in parliamentary research for the years to come. These aims were based upon the current trends in the Czech Parliament and the research assembled to date. Attention was primarily devoted to the role of those parliaments which are acceding to the EU, in the context of changes to the parliamentary agenda, and to the role of individual parliaments and the possible reciprocal links between the national parliaments and the European Parliament.

The conference was divided into four panels, each of which targeted current issues in parliamentary research and the methods of this research. Special attention was paid to opportunities for national and international comparisons.

The first panel – the Parliamentary Research Agenda – chaired by Drago Zajc (Slovenia, University of Ljubljana), presented current findings in empirical research on parliaments and parliamentarians in Central Europe and Germany. Michael Edinger (Germany, University of Jena) presented the results of a comparative study of East and West German parliamentary deputies, and Bernhard Weßels (Germany, WZB Berlin) reported on the results from a continual comparative study of German members of parliament and members of the European Parliament.

Further discussion was facilitated by a contribution from Zdenka Mansfeldová (Czech Republic, Institute of Sociology, AS CR), who concentrated on the description and analysis of the institutional framework and policy relations between the Czech Parliament and the Government. As the participant Jacek Wasilewski (Poland, Warsaw School of Social Psychology) pointed out, the relationship between the legislative and the executive has thus far been the subject of relatively little research in parliamentary studies.

The second panel – Parliaments and the Processes of Globalisation and Europeanisation – chaired by Werner Patzelt (Germany, TU Dresden), concentrated on the changing role and position of national parliaments in the process of transformation and globalisation. Petr Kolář and Jindřiška Syllová (Czech Republic, Parliamentary Institute, Prague) described the role played by the parliaments of the candidate countries in the process of EU enlargement. Jana Reschová (Czech Republic, University of Economics) developed this perspective further by focusing on the case of the Czech Parliament as an example of a national parliament in the framework of Europeanisation. In a comparative perspective, Drago Zajc made an analysis of the changing functions of national parliaments after joining the EU and suggested the implications for the development of Central and Eastern European parliaments in the near future. Edward Schmeier (USA, Colgate University) offered an interesting look at possible comparative outlines in the analysis of the scope of legislative powers of post-communist parliaments and of parliaments with similar experience outside the region.

The third panel – The Role of Political Parties in the Parliaments – chaired by Jana Reschová, aimed at re-establishing research on political parties and their role in parliaments. David M. Olson (USA, Parliamentary Documents Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro) presented an overview of the role of political parties in the organisation of parliament, with special attention

paid to the relationship between the party clubs and committees in Central and Eastern European parliaments. Petra Rakušanová and Lukáš Linek (Czech Republic, Institute of Sociology, AS CR) introduced the case study of the Czech parliamentary party clubs from the point of view of party unity and party cohesion. Csaba Nikolenyi (Canada, Concordia University) offered an interesting view of the coalition stability in the new democracies vis-à-vis rational choice theory, and Werner J. Patzelt elaborated an explanatory model of party discipline in the German parliaments and focused on its application in an international comparison.

The fourth panel – Legislative Recruitment – chaired by David M. Olson, focused on changes in legislative recruitment and career patterns. William Crowther (USA, Parliamentary Documents Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro) analysed legislative recruitment in Romania and Moldova, while Adéla Seidlová (Czech Republic, Institute of Sociology, AS CR) looked at recruitment patterns among the parliamentary elite. Stefan Laurentiu (Romania, University of Bucharest) presented the results of a survey on Romanian MPs, analysing their career patterns as well as their career preferences, and András Schwarz (Hungary, Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration) looked at experienced deputies in the Hungarian Parliament.

The workshop concluded with a panel discussion – Possibilities for Co-operation and the Co-ordination of Comparative Research – chaired by Darina Malová (Slovakia, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University). The main issues to be focused on in the discussion were outlined in the introduction by Lubomír Brokl (director of the Parliamentary Documentation and Information Centre at the Institute of Sociology, AS CR) and David M. Olson (chair of RC No. 8 – the Legislative Specialists of the IPSA). These issues included:

1. Evaluating the methodological approaches applied to the research on parliaments

and parliamentary elites in CEE countries and in Western European countries, along with the research strategies and data use.

2. Finding such topics for research on parliaments in the new decade that could be of common relevance and would enable the application of comparative analyses or, in an ideal case, common comparative studies.
3. Formulating and structuring issues related to the functioning of national parlia-

ments within the EU from national and European points of view.

A very lively discussion on the possibilities and limits of co-operation resulted in a proposal to create, as a first step, an overview of all the research instruments (questionnaires) and indicators used.

A volume of papers stemming from the workshop will be published in 2004.

Zdenka Mansfeldová, Petra Rakušanová