

## Petr Kolář , Štěpán Pecháček, Jindřiška Syllová: Parlament České republiky 1993–2001

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**Petr Kolář – Štěpán Pecháček – Jindřiška Syllová: *Parlament České republiky 1993–2001 (The Parliament of the Czech Republic 1993–2001)***  
Prague 2002: Linde, 296 pp.

The short list of works by Czech authors on parliamentarism and parliaments grew three years ago with the publication of the book, *Parlament České republiky 1993–2001 (The Parliament of the Czech Republic 1993–2001)*, co-authored by three employees of the Parliamentary Institute, an institute that provides service to the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Two of the authors – Jindřiška Syllová and Petr Kolář – are also university lecturers specialising in this subject.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, the book's 'General Introduction', the authors acquaint readers with the evolution of parliamentarism in the Czech Republic and with the basic variables that affect its composition and the representative function of parliament, i.e. political parties, the political party system and its legal regulation, and the electoral system. In the second part, 'MPs, Senators, and Parliament', the authors immediately proceed to the book's core interest and focus their attention on the legal provisions that refer to the political mandates of MPs and senators (the creation of a mandate, immunity, salary) and the organisation of parliament (rules of procedure, parliamentary bodies, committees, subcommittees, commissions, parliamentary clubs, and the bureau of parliament). In the third part, 'The Function of Parliament', the authors describe parliament's legislative function (in a detailed account of the legislative process), along with other functions of parliament, especially its creative function in relation to the government and the president. The text is supplemented with a large number of tables and graphs that illustrate the legislative function and the composition of parliament. The descriptions here are comprehensive and thorough and are definitely worth studying. But although the authors

put forth some interesting and thought-provoking interpretations, they are unfortunately rarely substantiated or discussed (see, for example, MP activism and the sources of activism, voting unity, extension of law-making activities).

The book's title and the authors' aspirations seemed to promise that this publication would contribute a scholarly social-scientific study to the growing number of textbooks on constitutional law and parliamentarism, as opposed to a legal treatment of the subject, and however much one must welcome the publication of this work, some critical points must be made. After finishing the book, readers would be excused for concluding that the study has not fulfilled the expectations and assumptions of quality. The reason for this is most likely that the team of authors, comprised of two lawyers and one political sociologist, were unable to go beyond the limits of their institutional affiliation. As employees of the Parliamentary Institute, they seem to have found it difficult to comment openly on some aspects of how parliamentarism works in the Czech Republic, and they have endeavoured instead to maintain a relatively neutral viewpoint. Perhaps for this reason also they focus more on surface descriptions of laws rather than going deeper to describe how the legislation works, whom laws give power to, how actors use these provisions to influence decisions, etc. The style in which the book was written, more a description of legal provisions than it is an analytical text, seems even itself to reflect a tilt in the team of authors toward the side of the lawyers.

The book consequently suffers from several flaws, which detract from its readability and its total value. A main problem is that the work oscillates between being an independently authored work presenting a critical examination of particular social phenomena and a text issued by the very institution it refers to. While the book is indeed an independent piece of work that was published by a publisher with no ties to the Parliament

of the Czech Republic, this reviewer cannot shake the impression that the authors were also trying to impress their home institution. That is why there are passages in the text that have no informational value beyond the brief descriptions of specific situations they provide, the sole aim of which is to uphold the level of complexity of the information provided, and the effort to offer the most comprehensive amount of information possible wins out over any interest in presenting a persuasive indication of the position of the Czech parliament in Czech politics.

The second flaw is related to this, and it can be described simply as the absence of the topic the authors were supposed to address. In the introductory chapter the authors indicate that, 'to determine the real position of parliament in the system, its dominance or submissiveness in relation to the other branches of state power, it is necessary to specify the fields in which the activities of parliament are to be examined'. Though some fields of inquiry or description are specified further on, in the next sections of the book, the introductory objective of examining the position of parliament in Czech politics remains essentially unfulfilled. That the authors actually abandoned their work of analysis and summary is also evident in the fact that the book has no conclusion, where the authors ought normally to have presented their summary of the position of parliament in Czech politics and any other goals of the research. The authors have thus indirectly assigned the book a textbook status, reinforced moreover by their legalistic way of thinking. And this despite the fact that the more than decade-long evolution of parliamentarism in the Czech Republic calls for the description and interpretation of the clear trends in its work and its cast of politicians – e.g. the increasingly stable pool of MPs, the growing support for government bills, greater voting unity in the parliamentary clubs, etc. Trends are also appearing that are rendering the Czech parliament much more comparable to the parliaments in western European countries.

The third flaw relates to inaccuracies in the data presented in the text. Jan Kysela has already drawn attention elsewhere [2002] to the relatively large number of errors in the text and in the tables, usually related to details, and it is worth noting that these inaccuracies are primarily in reference to the Senate and senators. It is as though the authors were mainly concentrating on the Chamber of Deputies, where their descriptions are much more precise, and the Senate was consequently somewhat eclipsed, perhaps even because the information they had on the Senate was not that accurate. Despite these reservations, this reviewer considers the book to be a successful introduction to Czech parliamentarism. It may be hoped that the authors honour their informal commitment to continue to publish summary work of this kind after the next electoral term, and that next time they perform this task in a much more analytical manner.

*Lukáš Linek*

#### **References**

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#### **Laurențiu Ștefan: *Patterns of Political Elite Recruitment in Post-Communist Romania***

Bucharest 2004: Editora ZIUA, 279 pp.

Laurențiu Ștefan represents the young and upcoming generation of Romanian political scientists, and he has written the book, *Patterns of Political Elite Recruitment in Post-Communist Romania*, which examines the structure and changes in the composition of political elite in post-communist Romania, devoting special attention to the routes they have taken to reach the peak party posts and the top positions in the executive and into parliament. As in the other post-communist