

**Committees in New and Established Democratic Parliaments:
Indicators of Institutionalization**

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Committees in New and Established Democratic Parliaments: Indicators of Institutionalization

The rapidly changing parliaments of Central Europe provide both a challenge and an opportunity to understand how democratic institutions begin and develop during and after an authoritarian system transformation. Legislatures themselves are central institutions in developed democracies. They serve a complex multiple function in policy formation, interest representation, and administrative oversight. Committees are often designated the prime organizational means by which parliaments act independently of the executive in the development of public policy. Hence understanding legislative committees is essential to evaluating the role that legislatures play democratic political systems. Yet neither the dynamics of institutional change in legislatures, nor their beginnings, are well understood (Shepsle and Weingast 1994 175). In this study we cast a wide net, both theoretically and empirically, seeking to understand diversity, change and institutionalization in very different countries, with very different experiences (Maltzman and Smith 1994 473).

Parliamentary committees are Janus-like in that they have two distinct, but intersecting attributes: they are repositories of expertise and knowledge and are also the means for the expression of political power. They can develop knowledge in a sector of public policy as they parallel the structure of government ministries, and as they become permanent and build a core of experienced members. To the extent, however, they build power in a legislature as a function of their expertise, executives and political parties attempt to control committees through both the allocation of members and the exercise of party discipline.

In this chapter we will explore these attributes of the committees of the newly

democratized and activated parliaments of post-communist states, employing evidence drawn from in the 1990-98 period. We want to understand the beginnings and subsequent development of committee systems in newly democratized parliaments. To what extent have committee systems become stabilized in Central Europe? To what extent, for example, do they develop a permanent and defined legislative jurisdiction? To what extent does committee membership reflect party ratios in the parent chamber? Are the new post-Communist legislative committees similar across Central Europe, or have distinct national patterns emerged? Does Central Europe as a whole reflect the pattern of committee activity characteristic of the rest of the continent, or is the entire group regionally distinct? It is our intention to shed light on these questions through comparative cross national analysis of the past seven years of legislative activity.

Our main summary concept, institutionalization, is a means to understand the extent to which the organization and activity of committees becomes established in new legislatures. The degree of stabilization can be approached through both an examination of committees within the newly democratized legislatures, and also by a comparison to the committee systems of more established democratic parliaments of western Europe.

This paper begins with an examination of the problems of institutionalization facing the newly activated parliaments of the new democracies of Central Europe. It will then assess the current research on committee systems, the large majority of which is based upon established democracies. Finally, we will suggest a model appropriate for consideration of the institutionalization of committee systems in the parliaments of new democracies of Central Europe in comparison with those of Western Europe.

Legislative Institutionalization

The current parliaments of post-communist democracies provide a unique window on the

processes of institutionalization. While we cannot directly observe salient features of early legislatures in western Europe or North America, the contemporary efforts of new members in newly activated legislatures of post communist democracies to build functioning and effective parliamentary bodies permits us to observe the beginning stages of institutional development.

Indicators of institutionalization of committees which we can directly observe among the newly active legislatures concern stability and uniformity. To what extent are organizational forms and practices uniform across committees within any one legislature, and among legislatures? To what extent are organizational forms and practices in the new post communist democracies similar to those in existing established parliaments of western democratic parliament?

The many definitions of institutionalization all revolve around the idea of stability, continuity and predictability (Hahn 1996 8; Copeland and Patterson 1994 151). Most, following Huntington's (1968) influential analysis in the 1960s, address the nexus between collective behavior and organizational structure. In examining legislative committees this study employs as a working definition of institutionalization: (1) organizational differentiation from the environment, (2) organization complexity and functional differentiation and (3) organizational use of universalistic rather than particularistic or discretionary criteria for conducting business. We can observe on only seven years of parliamentary development, and no more than two or three elections in the countries studied. We can therefore draw only initial conclusions regarding the institutional development of committees. Nevertheless, as Hibbing and Patterson (1994) argue, examining the early developments in Central European is important because institutionalization is likely to be rapid at first, and less noticeable later. Furthermore, as the work of North (1990) and others have pointed out, early decisions can play a crucial in the

pattern of institutional development that follows.

While committee institutionalization through time can be measured in legislatures which have existed over some number of years, we can search for signs of growing consistency among committees within particular legislatures, and for emerging cross national patterns among the newly democratized legislatures.

The established legislatures of western democracies are employed to provide a base line measure against which the new legislatures can be compared. We do not suggest that the central European legislatures are fated to inevitably evolve in the direction of their West European counterparts, or that West European institutionalization is the only possible paradigm. The West European cases do, however, provide us with clear expectations regarding the operative parameters of committees that are currently functioning within the context of well established legislative institutions.

As evidence of institutionalization, we can look for indicators of growing stability and consistency in salient attributes of committees. Among those indicators are: party ratios in both general committee membership and officer positions in committees, as well as changes in rates of turn over in committee membership and leadership. Furthermore, changes should occur in the external relations of committees, including the substance and quantity of referral of legislation to committees; inter-committee coordination mechanisms, relations with parliamentary leadership, relations with government, and policy impacts. Our observations now, in the beginning decade of post communist politics will provide a base line for future research.

Post-communist Legislatures

The circumstances facing the new newly activated legislatures of the sudden democracies

of Central Europe are unprecedented. The transition from one party dictatorship to open competitive democracy occurred much more abruptly in Central Europe than in many of the preceding democratic transitional episodes of this Century (Linz and Stepan 1995). The difficulties presented by this rapid change is evident in the efforts to reshape legislative institutions to meet the demands of the evolving political environment. Legislatures are a fundamental feature in the political processes of democratic states. They have played a central role in the democratization process in Central Europe and the former Soviet Union (Olson and Norton, 1996). Legislatures are themselves, as new instruments of democracy, transitional bodies. They are attempting to create an internal structure of democratic organization and regularized procedure, while processing a wide range of policy decisions. The inherited strictures and procedures of the communist period were inadequate to cope with the new demands, and opportunities, for disagreement among many parties, and uncertainty in the absence of external control by the ruling party.

Research on the new legislatures of Central Europe is undergoing rapid change. In the initial wave of studies immediately following communist system collapse, research on the newly democratized legislatures concentrated on a broad institutional description of each legislature (Agh 1994; Olson 1997). Early comparisons within the region were based upon separately written country papers (Hibbing and Patterson 1994, Olson 1994a, Olson and Norton 1996). The second and current wave of research on the newly democratized parliaments has begun to examine more specific internal features such as parliamentary parties, interest group activity and the members (Agh and Ilonski 1996; Crowther and Roper, forthcoming; Hahn 1996; Remington and Smith 1996; Wesolowski and Wasilewski 1992; Wesolowski and Pankow 1995).

The character of parliaments themselves, as transitional institutions in the post

communist political systems, provides the essential context within which legislative committees have existed and functioned. Committees are at the heart of the internal attempt by developed legislatures to cope with external tasks. The most recent cross-national summary of parliamentary development in the initial half-decade of post-communist democracy identified committees as prominent examples of institution-building within newly democratized legislatures (Norton and Olson 1996 237-38). Yet despite their obvious importance, only recently have the committees of post-communist legislatures begun to receive scholarly attention (Longely and Agh 1997; Davidson and Longley 1998). Thus far, no comprehensive cross national survey of post communist legislative committees has been reported.

The single most useful model of cross national research on committee systems for our purposes is an analysis of the procedural and structural features of 18 Western European parliaments (Doering 1995a). Of nine attributes of parliaments most closely related to the ability of parliaments to function independently in the public policy process, five referred to characteristics of the committee system (Doering 1995c; Mattson and Stroem 1995). Autonomy of committees from the Government was a critical component of the policy making capability of the larger institution. These findings confirmed the observation in an earlier examination of committees in eight legislatures around the world that committee autonomy from government and party control is the key element in an active and influential legislative committee system (Lees and Shaw 1979).

Comparison of Committee Systems in New and Established Parliaments

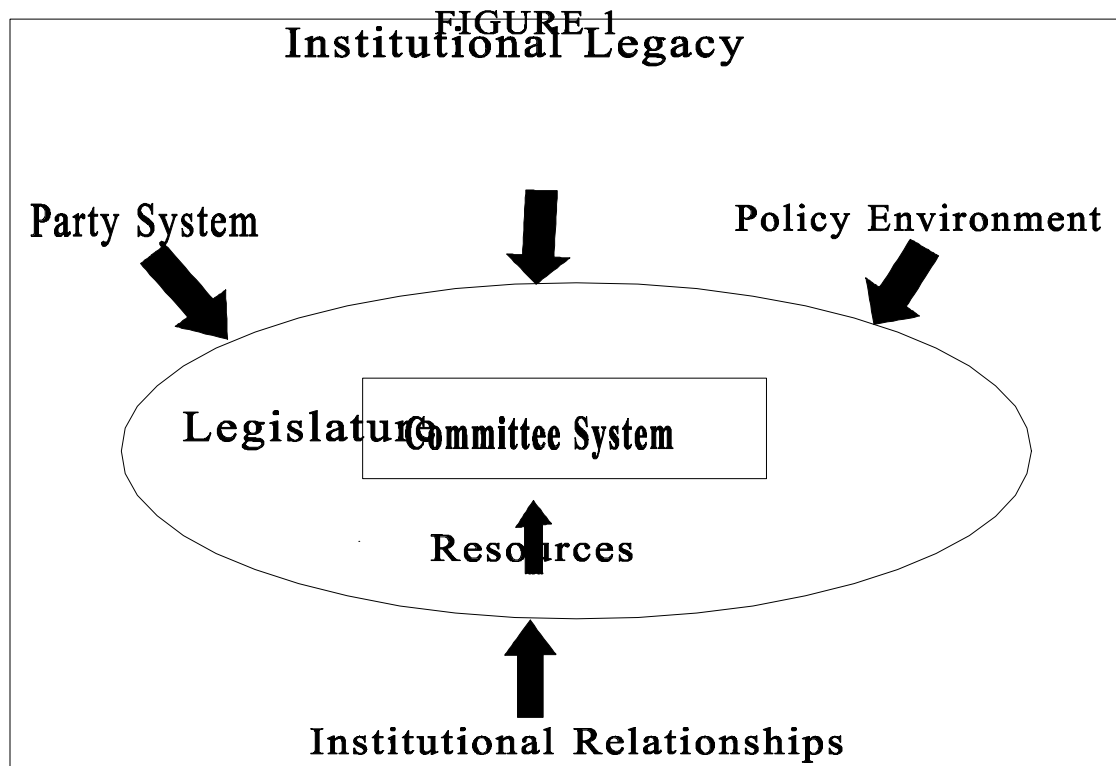
Our objective is to understand the processes of legislative institutional formation and adaptation in new post-communist democratic systems. We employ a cross-regional analysis,

which is also a cross-developmental stage comparison. Do the committee systems of new parliaments systematically differ from committees systems of older parliaments? Are systematic differences emerging between the new legislative institutions themselves, and if so what is the basis for divergent courses in post communist institutionalization?

We assume that the new democratic parliaments of Central Europe will systematically differ, because they are new, from the more established parliaments of Western Europe. We also assume that the older parliaments are more institutionalized than the new. Our evidence will test those intertwined assumptions.

We also suggest that six broad groups of factors are significant in shaping different outcomes (see Figure 1). First, institutional legacy, by which we refer to the initial institutional framework carried over from the previous regime. Second, the policy environment, comprised of the character and gravity of issues facing the new legislators. Third, the party system external to parliament has a major impact on events within the parliament. Fourth, is institutional environment, the number and nature of other governmental actors with which the legislature interacts. Fifth is the legislative environment, the character of the legislative institution within which the committees function. Sixth and finally, a specialized variable for our concentration upon committees, is the complex of resources with which committees function.

To test our model of committee institutionalization in post communist political systems,



we propose seven hypotheses, which can be validated by examining the committees of Central and Western European parliaments under several different headings: structure, membership, party composition, party relations, autonomy, floor control, and government relations (Appendix D). These measures combine formal and static variables with observations of events and dynamics. We will conclude with summary observations about degrees of institutionalization within Central Europe and, and compared with established parliaments.

Institutionalization hypotheses:

Indicators of committee institutionalization can be grouped into seven sets hypotheses:

1. Committees in institutionalized parliaments should, more than in newer parliaments, be permanent in existence and jurisdiction, and should parallel the structure of ministries. Such committees should be moderate in both number (10-20) and in size (10-30 members), in contrast to, for example, the committees of the French Chamber of Deputies.

2. As committees become increasingly institutionalized, committee membership should have greater significance for the entire legislative body and for individual members. As indicators of institution-wide significance, incumbency would be higher, and mid-session changes lower on committees in more developed parliaments. As indicators of personal significance for individual members, committee assignments would more clearly be relevant to member constituency and skills, and attendance would be higher.

3. Party ratios in membership and officer positions on committees should be more proportional and consistent across committees in more institutionalized parliaments.

4. The relationship between committees and parties should be clearer and more predictable in more established parliaments. Committee members should have more accurate knowledge of the policy views of their own parties, and would more consistently participate in the development of party views on topics within their committee jurisdiction.

5. Committees in established legislatures should have greater autonomy than those in less institutionalized ones. They should have more control over their own schedules, have greater latitude in the initiation and amendment of legislation, and make more use of minority reports. There should be more consistent inter-committee coordination, and in bicameral systems, committees would more directly mediate relations between the chambers.

6. Committees in more highly institutionalized parliaments should have more control over floor proceedings on legislation within their jurisdiction than their counterparts in less

institutionalized parliaments. Committees would consider legislation prior to significant floor decisions, and more proposed legislation would be considered in committee rather than directly considered on the floor.

7. Committee relationships with ministries would, in older more than in new parliaments, be more varied and regularized, including personal meetings with ministers, discussions prior to formal legislative introduction, and a variety of reporting and monitoring procedures.

Formative Factors Hypotheses:

The factors which shape the degree and kinds of committee institutionalization range from the broad and general to the narrow and specific (Sec. B, App I):

1. We would anticipate that both the pre-communist legacy and the communist experience of nearly a half-century defined the inheritance of newly democratized parliaments. This factor itself, however, has varied in intensity among Central European countries, while the parliaments of Western Europe have had their own distinctive developments.

2. The sudden transitions of economy, ethnic relations, and political system, and in some cases state definition, impose upon the parliaments of post-communist democracies major policy tasks of great complexity. The nature of the policy environment, however, differs significantly across the region, with different levels of intensity and policy salience presenting individual legislatures with distinct policy environments.

3. The party system, often fluid in new democracies, has a direct impact on parliamentary organization and activity. The number of parties and level of inter-party competition should effect committee institutionalization. We would expect, for example, that in single party dominant situations, committee institutionalization will be lower than in conditions

of ongoing multi-party competition.

4. Committees interact with external participants, especially the Government and its ministries. How these entities are organized and function will define the critical environment within which committees function.

5. Differential degrees of institutionalization of the committee system will reflect different degrees of institutionalization of the whole parliament. As subsets of parliament, committees will both reflect and contribute to institution-wide attributes.

6. Committees in more institutionalized parliaments will have more resources than in newer parliaments. Physical resources, skilled personnel and documentation will be more available to committees in older parliaments. While this factor is related to the resources provided by the parliament for itself, and thus reflects the prior hypothesis, we list it separately as a critical component for our understanding of committees.

Comparing Committee Systems: Preliminary Findings

1. Structural Attributes

Beginning with the Mattson-Stroem (1995) enumeration of the structural features of western European parliamentary committees, we will tabulate committee systems by organizational features, such as number, size, and basis of formation. A preliminary view suggests that the formal structural attributes of the newly democratized parliaments do closely resemble those of western Europe (Zajc 1996).

Permanent committees which parallel the structure of the ministries have greater opportunities for policy activity than those which are temporary and which have different principles of formation (Mezey and Olson 1991; Mattson and Stroem 1995: 270). The British

bill committees illustrate the former categories, while the parliaments of continental western Europe, as does the US Congress, illustrate the former.

Structure is closely related to function. Permanent committees, especially in parallel to the ministries, are able to consider all legislation relating to any one ministry, and are also able to conduct inquiries into the conduct of administration (Stroem 1997 59).

In western Europe, the size of committees has varied more than the sheer number of policy making committees. While the normal number of committees has been 10-20, size has varied from seven to 145 (Andeweg and Nijzink 1995 166, Mattson and Stroem 1995 260-69). Among a broader set of parliaments, the number of committees varied from six to 38 (Benda 1997 22). In Central European parliaments, the number of committees varies from 11 to 24, with the number of members per committee ranging from eight to 32 (Agh 1997 95).

Bicameral parliaments occasionally exercise the option of creating joint committees between the two chambers (Stroem 1997b 58). Several of the new parliaments of Central Europe are bicameral, though we know of no joint committees.

One distinctive characteristic of Central European parliaments is the use of subcommittees (Agh 1997 96). Though both formal subcommittees and informal working groups are found in most western European parliaments, little is known about them (Mattson and Stroem 1995 274; Stroem 1997 59-60).

Another distinctive feature in Central Europe is a powerful and centralized committee, with names including the terms 'constitution' or 'law'. An inheritance from communist practice, this committee has a legal drafting jurisdiction over most legislation which is also in the jurisdiction of the more specialized committees. In the absence of clear central steering committees in the new parliaments, this committee has a potential stabilizing function. It has

also, however, been criticized as a power-seeking body (Agh 1996 33; Karasimeonov 1996 52; Kanev 1997 344).

In addition to the permanent legislative committees, the new parliaments of Central Europe have created a medley of special purpose temporary committees for both legislative and investigatory purposes (Agh 1997; Olson and Simon 1997).

It may also be in Central Europe, that the ministry-parallel principle of committee organization is less effective than in the west. The multi-dimensional character of economic and legal reform legislation may often cut across, rather than fit within, the jurisdiction of ministries with administrative functions (Agh 1997 91). Budgeting presents an opportunity for, but challenge to, the capacity of either the government or the parliament to coordinate among many competing considerations. It has been observed that, in Hungary, the specialized ministry related committees usually offer amendments to increase the proposed budget, while the main committee on Finance has the task of defending the government's proposed budget (LeLoup and Papai 1997 334).

2. Membership

The distribution of committee seats among legislators is important to both individual members and to their parliamentary parties. Individual members may, as in the US Congress, complain about too many committee (and subcommittee) memberships, or may, as in the British House of Commons, complain about too few committee posts (Davidson 1977; Jogerst 1993). Parliamentary parties, particularly those in the government, may be expected to try to obtain a majority of committee seats to control both policy products and the allocation of internal power.

While we lack comprehensive data from western European parliaments on committee

memberships, the example of Sweden may be instructive: the total number of committee seats is less than is the full membership of the parliament. The smaller the committees, and the fewer the number of committees, the greater the difficulty in arranging a proportional distribution of seats among the parties (Mattson and Stroem 1995 269).

In practice, legislators seldom belong to more than two specialized policy committees in western Europe, though in few are there formal restrictions (Mattson and Stroem 1995 271; Damgaard 1995 311).

Stability of committee membership may be expected to be the norm, at least within a single electoral term, for the permanent committees of western Europe. Continued re-election also produces incumbency in established parliaments, leading to a selection criterion for committee chairs. In Sweden, for example, the average tenure of committee chairs in 1980 was almost 20 years (Olson et al 1983 364). In Central Europe, not only are most members of parliament new, but there has been a high turnover of membership in their two to four democratic elections. In addition, committee memberships can also change mid-session, both in western Europe and in the Polish Sejm (Damgaard 1995 319; Olson et al 1998). Incumbency, however, is noted to be higher on major committees in Central Europe than in the parliament as a whole (Agh 1997 96-97).

Constituency and interest group linkages to legislative committees are problematic. Committees with strong ties to interest groups in the US Congress and German Bundestag are difficult for both government ministers and party leaders to control (Fenno 1973; Price 1978; Braunthal 1972; Loewenberg 1967; Damgaard 1995 317). A committee with links to one clear constituency group could develop a collective identity, but if it was associated with groups in conflict, the committee itself would lack internal cohesion. The lack of research on this variable

complicates our understanding of its potential impact on the institutionalization process, though it would appear that western European parliaments vary greatly in the extent to which outside interest groups are active in both committee and in the parliament as a whole (Liebert 1995). In Central Europe, the terms “shadow policy communities, the hidden lobbies” suggests that legislative committees function within a wider set of policy making participants (Agh 1997b 447). The working relationship, however, depends greatly upon the personal aptitudes of the leadership of both the committees and the interest groups (Ilonszki 1997 481).

Personal characteristics of the individual members can also affect how committees function. In Central Europe’s new parliaments, the gap between members’s skills and committee jurisdiction can lead to either lack of attendance or willingness to follow party preferences. Sufficient attendance to meet quorum requirements for committee meetings is a problem. Some new parliaments provide additional salary for deputies who are members of committees which can also be based upon their attendance. These personal characteristics seem less problematic in western democratic parliaments (Agh 1997b; Olson et al 1998).

3. Party composition

Committee memberships in western Europe are usually proportional to party size in the parent chamber. (Mattson and Stroem 1995 276), reflecting a consensual rather than majoritarian approach to this potentially contentious issue. Since most democracies in both Western and central Europe are multi-party, and since governments are usually coalitions, power sharing among the parties has become the typical practice. An exception in Central Europe is Slovakia, where the majority government coalition holds disproportionate share of seats on the major policy committees (Sivakova 1995; Malova 1997).

Committee chairs, too, are usually allocated proportionally among the parties, resulting

from inter-party negotiations in advance of the formal procedures of officer election. Little, however, is known of these negotiations (Mattson and Stroem 1995 277-78). With closely balanced coalition-opposition party ratios in Sweden, the coalition parties chair major committees, while the opposition parties are allocated vice-chair positions (Olson et al 1983).

Central European parliaments have allocated chairmanships to government parties when the majority has been large, but have shared committee leadership positions when the party ratios have been closer. For example, the Czech Chamber of Deputies elected 1992 resulted in all committee chairs coming from the government coalition parties, while following the 1996 election, the largest opposition party negotiated a shared allocation of leadership portions with the government parties. In that case, the shared positions included, not only committee chairs, but the Speakership of the whole Chamber (Olson 1997b 181).

4. Party Relationships

The party ratio composition of both members and officers reflects the broader question of the working relationships between committees and parties. In Bulgaria, the opposition parties have rejected offers to them of the chairmanships of minor committees. The vice-chair positions, however, have been shared proportionally among the several parliamentary parties (Kanev 1997 345). In Romania, Crowther and Roper (forthcoming) have show that the distribution of party committee positions is related to party dominance, with the ruling party (FDSN/PDSR) permitting itself to be under-represented in committees for that period of time when it held a majority on the floor, but extracting a proportional number of committee assignments when it lost its floor majority.

5. Power from Procedures and Rules

Procedures and rules define and regularize the distribution and use of power. Do committees have, either by formal rule or in practice, discretion in how they develop public policy? These questions directly confront the issue of government and party control over committee activity and decision-making.

Do committees, or does the government, control committee time and schedule? Though committees are subordinate to the full chamber, western parliaments vary in the extent to which committees are delegated control over time. Control of committee time is related to control of time in plenary sessions: government control of one arena is usually associated with government control of the other (Doering 1995b 244). Given the difficulties new parliaments have had in developing ways to limit floor debate (Olson 1997 408; LeLoup and Papai 1997 333-34), it may be that the time control categories developed for western practices will be greatly expanded to include a wider range of time allocation conditions.

Authority over the content of legislation is an essential element in the development of committee activity. While the authority to initiate legislation can be differentiated from the authority to amend legislation submitted by the government or other sources, in practice these two policy actions are highly related in western European parliaments (Mattson and Stroem 1995 297).

The ability of a committee minority to submit its own statement on proposed public policy varies among western parliaments, but is associated with the above measures of committee autonomy (Mattson and Stroem 1995 283, 301; Shaffer 1997). Minority reports indicate that committees are not completely dominated by either the government or policy-based majorities, but rather, have developed an institutionalized practice of protecting and rights of all

members of the committee. Minority reports provide “political space” for the minority (Agh 1997 94).

The possibilities that committees can exercise independent policy judgement is increased if committees act on legislation prior to substantive floor consideration. Continental European parliaments, contrasted with the Westminster model, usually provide for committee consideration prior to floor debate (Mattson and Stroem 1995 284; Doering 1995b 233-35). This trait is associated with committee initiation and amendment powers (Mattson and Stroem 1994 301). Practice in Central Europe, however, shows two contradictory variations. On one hand, committees can be by-passed completely, with all bill consideration taking place in plenary sessions; but on the other, first reading stages can, at least in Poland, occur in committee rather than on the floor (Olson et al. 1998).

Intercommittee coordination appears much more frequently in Central Europe than has been reported for the more established parliaments. The visibility of these procedures may, in new parliaments, reflect the new character of developing institutional practices, or may relate to the complicated policy agenda of post-communist transformation.

6. Committee Activity

Committees among western European parliaments vary in their tasks or functions. While some are restricted to legislation, others may be investigative or budgetary, while others may be multi functional (Stroem 1997b 56). While their overt functions may be stated in the formal rules, another way to assess function is to measure activity.

Parliaments’ activities are difficult to measure comparatively, for each parliament organizes time and reports activity differently. It may be that the reported numbers would be

more useful over time or among committees for any one parliament than across parliaments. The sheer number of committee meetings, of reports on bills and agency reviews, and of joint committee action, would be useful in estimating the degree of activity of different committees.

One comparative measure could be the proportion of all introduced legislation which is referred to committees. That measure would provide an estimate of the extent to which committees are by-passed, or not, in bill consideration. That measure, if qualified for government legislation compared to other sources of bills, would also indicate government control over parliamentary activity.

Committee participation in the management and direction of floor proceedings will reflect the centrality of committees to the parliament's decision-making processes. Schedules, amendments, and even procedural rules on such matters as length of debate, can be set independently of committee preferences, or committee leaderships can participate in those facilitative decisions.

7. Government Relations

Information about and from the government is basic to both the autonomy and expertise of committees, but the ability of committees in western parliaments to obtain information varies greatly (Mattson and Stroem 1995 294-95). In new parliaments, government ministers have not always been cooperative in meeting with legislative committees nor in providing information.

A critical problem in any legislature is that committee members obtain early information from the government about prospective legislative proposals. A quickly called committee meeting for newly introduced legislation does not provide sufficient time for members to learn about the substance of the proposal. The rapid pace of both budgets and legislation in the new

parliaments has left the members and committee substantively unprepared to think or act independently (LeLoup and Papai 1997; Ilonszki 1997 478).

B. Formative factors:

While our data analysis concentrates upon the institutionalization hypotheses discussed above, we also consider some of the eternal factors which may help shape our more immediate findings (App. I, Sec. B)..

1. Legacy of the Past

The Communist legacy of one party rule, coupled with inactive and unsupported legislatures, have left the newly activated parliaments with major tasks but little preparation to cope with the policy demands of sudden democratization. The slower and incremental development of western parliaments has not been possible in the post communist democracies.

Our concentration upon committees will also permit us to examine variations in the legacy of the past. Though parliaments were carefully controlled, they continued to exist as formal bodies under Communism, and in some instances, especially Poland and Hungary, became increasingly active and assertive following the Stalinist era of the 1950's. Committees themselves had developed over decades an important niche within their systems. In Poland, especially, committees increasingly revised government legislation (Olson and Simon 1982; Zakrzewski 1982; Mason 1991).

2. Policy tasks

Policy complexity confronting the post communist democracies will in general confuse the organizational and procedural norms of more established parliaments. Variation in the policy environment will also impart upon the ability of legislatures to institutionalize. A highly

complex and cross cutting issue structure may, as Crowther and Roper (1996) point out, enhance the role of the legislature as a coalition building vehicle.

3. Party system

Fragmentation of the party system in parliamentary elections has an immediate impact on party fragmentation within the ensuing parliaments. The impact of this factor is often increased in new democracies, for party formation may be more parliamentary-centered in newer than in more established democratic systems. Single party dominance, on the other hand, appears to shift the scene of political action from the legislative committees to other venues, either on the floor, or to the executive branch (Crowther and Roper, forthcoming).

4. The Government and Ministries

Committees interact directly with ministers; how the ministers and their ministries are organized, and how they are coordinated centrally, will affect their modes of interaction with the committees. A centralized cabinet and powerful prime minister will prefer more limited minister-committee interactions than would a more decentralized government. Information available to committees from the government is related to committee power in western parliaments to initiate and to amend bills (Mattson and Stroem 1995 282, 293-97).

5. Institutionalization of Parliament

As subsets of parliament, committees both reflect, but contribute to, the ways in which the whole parliament functions. The degree of coordinated leadership of the chamber will directly affect both committee membership selection and the rules by which parliament considers legislation.

The stability of party membership within an electoral term is a basic consideration in the organization and functioning of parliaments. A set of stable parties can negotiate committee

party ratios, for example, and can develop working ties with its respective set of members on committees. As observed for the German Bundestag, party groupings were both multiple and fluid in the early years, but had stabilized after the third election. (Schuettmeyer 1994 37); the same party fluidity is characteristic of processes of party formation and fragmentation in the new democratic parliaments of contemporary post communist states (Malova 1997; Olson 1997a).

Internal structure and organizational differentiation of the parliamentary parties affect how party deputies on committees can interact with fellow party members and leaders. Some western European parties have an internal system of working groups which parallel the structure of parliamentary committees. The members of the party working groups are the party's delegation on the parliamentary committee, and they, in effect, become the party's experts on the jurisdiction of the committee. If parties wish to define a party position on a committee topic, it may be the Party's own members on the committee who shape the party position (Schuettmeyer 1994 38). Similar steps toward party internal differentiation in relation to the committee system have been reported for large parties in the Hungarian Parliament (Ilonszki 1997 480).

6. Resources

Western European parliaments have been slowly expanding their space and increasing their staff size over the past several decades. The newly activated parliaments of new democracies, having started with much smaller staff if not also space (vide Hungarian parliamentary building), have expanded much more rapidly in the 1990's than have western parliaments in the same short decade. Staff size and skills are often found inadequate in parliaments which newly become active (Benda 1997 25-26). Parliaments emerging from regime changes also face the problem of political loyalties, as well as old habits, in the existing

staff.

The frequency and thoroughness with which committee documents are published is not known among parliaments, though some have an extensive set (Olson 1994 69). We would estimate that the more extensive the committee documentation, the more active and important is the committee system, on the grounds that legislators provide materials which they find useful.

Conclusion

The established Western European parliaments provide a base line measurement for our understanding of the developmental processes of institutionalization which we can directly observe in the new post-communist parliaments.

Current Central European parliamentary research now suggests several additional features of committees to be included in our estimates of development. For example, inter-committee coordination seems a much more active feature in Central Europe than in Western Europe.

For another, subcommittees are used more than in western parliaments. Another distinctive characteristic of Central European parliaments is the practice of flexible committee memberships, which reflects the new character of both the parliamentarians and their institution.

If committee coordination and subcommittees could be considered as institutionalization indicators, flexible committee memberships might be considered, at least initially, as having the opposite meaning.

Our inquiry concerns the broader question of institutionalization of the democratic transition. Though the transition occurred quickly, even abruptly, the development of the practices and the organizations of effective and stable democratic political systems is

time-dependent. While the new democracies have consciously copied selected features of the western European parliaments, to make those features a stable and effective part of the parliament requires time for experiment, innovation, and learning. It is in committees and their working relationships with other portions of the parliament that we can observe these broader processes at work.

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Appendix I: Committee Institutionalization and Sources Indicators		
Indicator	Low	High
A. Institutionalization		
1. Structure		
a. Permanence	temporary	permanent
b. Principle organization	other	agency parallel
c. Number	few or many	10-20
d. Size	40+ members	under 40 members
2. Membership		
a. Number/member	none or many	1-3 committees/member
b. Incumbency	low	high
c. Mid session changes	high	low
d. Constituency links	weak	strong
e. Member skills	not relevant	relevant
f. Member attendance	sporadic	constant
3. Party composition		
	majoritarian	proportional
4. Party relationships		
	unstructured	structured
5. Committee Autonomy		
a. Schedule control	no	yes
b. Initiate legislation	no	yes
c. Amend bills	no	yes
d. Minority reports	no	yes
e. Prior to floor	no	yes
f. Bicameral participation	no	yes
g. Intercommittee Coordination	low	high
6. Floor Control		
a. % Bills referred to committees	low	high
b. Floor debate management	party	committee
7. Government Relations		
a. Meetings with ministers	seldom	frequent
b. Agency reviews	few	more
c. Require information	no	yes
d. Public hearings	no	yes
B. Sources		
1. Institutional Legacy	Communist experience	Democratic experience
2. Policy Tasks	Complex; interconnected	Functionally specific
3. Party system	Fluid, unstable	Stable
4. Government	Centralized or factionalized	Flexible coordination
5. Parliament institutionalization	low	high
a. Party Membership	fluid	stable
b. Party Internal structure	undefined	differentiated
c. Leadership	unspecified	stable
6. Resources		
a. Rooms, space	small; shared	more; separate
b. Staff	few, shared	more, separate
c. Budget	low	high
d. Documentation	few	many, varied