

YOUNG PARLIAMENTARIANS' PROJECT

SEMINAR 1

SUMMARY REPORT By Sheila Cannon

"The Working of Parliamentary Democracy in Western and Southeastern Europe, and the Relationship of Parliament with Government and Government Services"

27th-28th February 2000
Thessaloniki, Greece

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INTRODUCTION

The overarching message of the first seminar of the Young Parliamentarians' Project was that for a successful democracy and for successful communities both elected officials and civilians alike must take pro-active measures to improve their situations and not wait for some higher power to do it for them. National Parliamentarians from SE Europe must play an active role with European programs and institutions to bring stability to Southeast Europe.

The themes that re-occurred several times during the course of the two days were the Stability Pact, corruption in government, organized crime, and the continuous and organic process of democracy.

The speeches without exception were informative and interesting. Doris Pack spoke about the lack of action following the Stability Pact; Marietta Giannakou followed on the same theme but went into more depth on preventing organized crime. Enie Wesseldijk inspired more hope by describing concrete actions that would happen as a result of the Stability Pact: she, via the International Institute for Democracy, is organizing seminars in SE Europe. Robin Corbett spoke about the responsibility of an elected official to serve the constituents and to be made accountable for one's actions. Richard Balfe stuck to a more concrete issue: the history of the genesis of the European Union. Paul Silk and Dimitris Christopoulos gave specific examples of methods for fighting corruption in government; the British Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Commons (Mr. Silk), and the work of the Greek Ombudsman (Mr. Christopoulos). David Blackman discussed what has been and what can be done via the system of European Programs, such as Phare and Tacis.

The atmosphere was generally quite open. Possibly, the most valuable aspect of the seminar was the contact made between the MP's from different countries, and even from within the same country from different political parties. As is natural, individuals from the same country stuck together at the beginning, and branched out more on the second day. Equally important was the exchange of ideas between representatives from Western and Eastern Europe, both via the speeches and formal discussions, but also via informal discussions.

PARTICIPANTS

Speakers:

Richard Balfe, MEP, Britain

David Blackman, Director of the British School at Athens, Greece

Dimitris Christopoulos, Senior Investigator for the Greek Ombudsman, Greece

Robin Corbett, MP, Britain

Marietta Giannakou, MEP, Greece

Doris Pack, MEP, Germany

Paul Silk, Clerk, Foreign Affairs' Committee, House of Commons, Britain

Enie Wesseldijk, Executive Secretary, International Institute for Democracy, France

Audience:

In attendance were representatives from five different countries and ten different political parties. Name/Country - Political Party

FYROM

Natalija Markovic Dimova - Democratic Alternative Ickov Delce - Democratic Party (VMRO - DPMNE)

Mitko Tilevski - Democratic Party (VMRO - DPMNE) Sibirnovski Borce - Democratic Party (VMRO - DPMNE)

Haxhirexha Kastriot - Albanian Democratic Party (NDP)

Kadriu Nazmi - Albanian Democratic Party (NDP)

Albania

Fatmir Mediu - Albanian Republican Party

Meritan Alibali - Albanian Republican Party

Mikeli Arben - Christian Democratic

Party Mani Gasper - Christian Democratic Party

Sokol Hazizi - Socialist Party

Mark Nikolli - Socialist Party

Serbia

Pavic Obradovic - Socialdemocracy

Simeon Pobulic - Socialdemocracy

Jovan Surbatovic - Demochristian Party of Serbia

Bulgaria

Ivan Todorov - Euroleft Party

Romania

Costel Gheorghiu - Democratic Party

British Embassy, Athens

Francesca Flessati

SPEECHES AND DISCUSSIONS

Session I

Jens Reuter, the Executive director of the Center for Democracy, opened the seminar with a short description of the Center's current activities. Enie Wesseldijk chaired the first session which consisted of three speakers: Doris Pack, Marietta Giannakou, and Robin Corbett. This session was a tour d'horizon of the Balkans, sweeping over a broad range of subjects. The speeches and discussions touched on issues of philosophy, anthropology, political science, and psychology. Ms. Pack and Ms. Giannakou primarily focused on the Stability Pact, while Mr. Corbett discussed how to make democracy work, referring to his 20-year experience as a British MP. The first two speeches gave a feel for what had been discussed a day or two before at the EPP Leaders' Conference.

Doris Pack

Synopsis

Ms. Pack discussed two things, her work as head of the Delegation for relations with Southeast Europe, and the Stability Pact. Her message was forceful and her speech provoked an animated discussion. The audience expounded on the themes of anti-corruption, the dangers and risks on the process towards stabilization, and the work that needs to be done to make the Stability Pact a success.

Exposition

Ms. Pack began her talk with technical information; there are Joint Committees for countries which have applied to be member states of the EU, and Delegations for countries which have not yet applied to be member states. The Delegation for Relations with Southeast Europe has been in existence from 1989 until today. It is the largest Delegation with 28 Parliamentarians and serves as an official channel of communication between the EU and the other European countries. The Delegation plays an important role in incorporating the needs and considerations of non-member states, states that are geographically European, into the decision-making processes of the EU.

The thrust of her message on the Stability Pact was that the pact is an instrument with which Parliamentarians from all European countries can bring about Stability in Southeastern Europe together. Whatever the EU does toward stability in SE Europe can only be productive if the Parliaments and Governments in those countries are pro-active. Neither the EP nor the Parliaments of SE European countries can bring about stability in the region alone.

Ms. Pack's speech stimulated discussion about the possible failure of the S.P. and about dealing with corruption. Below are the four main points of the discussion.

1. Ivan Todorov, a Socialist MP from Bulgaria, made the point, obviously alluding to Serbia, that all the countries of SE Europe must be included in the common effort for stability. He said that if one country is excluded from the Stability Pact then no one will have stability.
2. Mr. Todorov also mentioned the danger of important politicians making empty promises in SE Europe. This region of the world is vulnerable and ready to believe in Europe. SE Europeans need to see some concrete action in association with the Stability Pact, otherwise a situation could be created in which organized crime worsens and hope for a better future is severely reduced.

3. Fatmir Mediu, MP, Albania, talked about corruption and organized crime becoming stronger. He acknowledged that corruption is in the government. He says, "First we must clean ourselves up, then the civilians, and then the region."
4. Simeon Pavolic from the Socialdemocracy party, Serbia, says that Serbians are aware of the difficult task of implementing anti-corruption measures following the overthrow of Milosevic. He says, "We know exactly how the corruption works in the Milosevic regime so we are not so afraid. We are very much afraid of the corruption amongst our ranks," and we need to have an institutionalized way of dealing with corruption.

Marietta Giannakou

Synopsis

Ms. Giannakou gave a brief speech about what is needed to have a democracy, summarizing in a general way the many steps that need to be taken on the road towards democracy. She mentioned, without going into detail, points such as: exact boundaries need to be defined, an open market economy is essential, and corruption needs to be fought in a regional way. Following her speech, there was an interesting but meandering discussion that covered a broad selection of topics without direction. The discussion was, at first, a continuation of the discussion that had followed Ms. Pack's speech. The topics were, again, corruption and control of the borders, but also ranged to other topics such as, the usefulness and importance of the greater European groups of political parties, such as the People's Party group, as a forum for discussion.

Exposition

Ms. Giannakou described the problem in Greece of illegal immigrants, primarily Albanians. She explained the social consequences of having open borders: ghettos are formed from impoverished illegal immigrants, children beg on the streets and have a very harsh life style with no education. These immigrants are perfect victims for falling prey to the black market, thus perpetuating illegal commerce in the region. She advised that borders need to be controlled, not closed, and a legal system of immigration strictly implemented.

Mr. Mediu, Albanian MP, took everyone off guard with his response. His points were empowered by the fact that he had an excellent command of the English language, was very well-read, and had a thorough and broad knowledge of history. During the two days, he quoted from memory, Alexis de Tocquville, Aristotle, Abraham Lincoln, the Bible, and John Adams, among others. Mr. Mediu said that there are more than 3000 Albanian kids begging on the streets of Greece; this is a problem for Albania, as well as for the other countries. The fleeing of impoverished young people and families from Albania leaves his country diminished and negatively affects relations with other countries. The legal status of the borders are in limbo. The Greek government in 1960 made a legal agreement to respect the border between Greece and Albania, but the Greek Parliament, 40 years later, has still not ratified this agreement. Mr. Mediu asked Ms. Giannakou if she could pressurize the Greek Parliament to finalize a law to control the border between Greece and Albania. Ms. Giannakou agreed to do so.

Mr. Blackman then asked a question that steered the discussion on a different course. Extracted below are the main points from Mr. Blackman's remarks, Ms. Giannakou's response, and the ensuing discussion:

1. The greater political parties of Europe which encompass national political parties, such as the European People's Party that met in Thessaloniki that same weekend, create a useful forum for discussing issues in a fairly relaxed environment.
2. The party links in those greater political parties are useful.

3. Other political parties are not excluded from these greater European parties. For example, the EPP included a wide range of right-wing parties in the EPP Leaders' Conference in Thessaloniki, not only center-right parties.
4. Richard Balfe felt that the recent election in Austria is a good example of what can happen under a Democratic system. The voters cannot always be trusted to support the liberal values that proponents of democracy share; one has to live with the consequences of an election. Mr. Todorov from Bulgaria differed in that he considered the situation in Austria to be a bad example for SE European countries because the situation calls into question the fact that stability and democracy go hand in hand.

Robin Corbett

Synopsis

Mr. Corbett's speech was colored by a tone that was personal and sincere. His words aimed at inspiring the audience to be the type of leaders that a democracy requires - leaders who serve the needs and wishes of the people. His message incorporated the point made by Ms. Pack, that Parliamentarians need to be proactive, and addressed the problem of corruption by stating that elected officials must always be made accountable for their actions by the people.

Exposition

The main points that Mr. Corbett made were:

1. Elected officials must put service before self, by listening to his/her constituents, understanding them, and accurately representing them in Parliament.
2. Elected officials need to understand the tension between the concerns of the individuals whom he/she represents and the concerns of political parties and government on housing, crime, agriculture, etc.
3. Elected officials need to understand the tension between government and parliament. A Parliamentarian may not agree with a policy or with a vote made by the government. This tension is especially acute if the government is of one's own political party. Parliamentarians are elected to their positions not only to go along with their party line, but to use their judgement. This sounds straightforward, but often results in tension between following one's party line and following one's own best judgement.

Session II

David Blackman chaired the second session on Sunday afternoon which consisted of speeches by Richard Balfe and Paul Silk. Following the morning session's broad sweep of many issues concerning the Balkan region, the afternoon session used a narrower canvas to depict two issues:

1. the genesis of the European Union (Mr. Balfe), and
2. one method, the British model, of combating corruption in government (Mr. Silk).

These two talks, which were grounded in fact, both historic and pragmatic, gave a nice balance to the breadth of the morning session.

Richard Balfe

Synopsis

Mr. Balfe's speech gave an informed history of the genesis of the EU. His message was a reality check for those who imagined the European Union as a utopia formed by altruistic politicians. The EU was born out of fear of communism and its founding fathers were not in fact Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, but, in a way, Stalin and Truman. The underlying message to the young MP's in Mr. Balfe's history was that fear, not altruism, is the motivation factor behind most political actions.

Exposition

Mr. Balfe gave a lively account of Winston Churchill's role in post-war Europe. In 1943,

Churchill accomplished two things. First, he thought it essential that Henry Wallace who was accused of supporting communism, be replaced by Harry Truman, a WWI veteran, on the ballot as Vice-President to Franklin D. Roosevelt. As Churchill and many others had predicted, in 1945 Roosevelt was reelected and, four months later, he died, leaving Truman President. Second, Churchill wanted to be sure that as little of Europe as possible was lost to Stalin and as much as possible was kept in the west - an idea known as 'containment.' Quoting from Misha Glenny's book, *The Balkans*, Mr. Balfe reveals the terse way in which Stalin and Churchill divided up Europe in the post-war settlement. Churchill wrote, "It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set it down." (Glenny, *The Balkans*, p.522)

The Americans, said Mr. Balfe, with British support, initiated the formation of certain organizations, behind which the motivating factor was fear of communism. In 1948, the Council of Europe was formed, not as free democratic nations forming a union, said Mr. Balfe, as is often thought. Subsequently, NATO, encircling Russia with a military ring, was formed to oppose the Soviet Union. Jean Monnet with Robert Schuman proposed the creation of an institution to assure the countries of Western Europe equal access to coal and steel. Next, a European Economic Community was established, orchestrated mainly, Balfe claimed, by the United States. And in 1957, the European Union was set up. Gradually the EU started becoming a self-functioning body, and in 1979 a directly elected European Parliament was created.

A discussion followed that addressed the future of the Western European Union, the role of the US and of NATO in Europe. The level of poverty in Southeastern European countries also was discussed and how to overcome that poverty.

Paul Silk

Synopsis

Mr. Silk's talk covered the history of the Foreign Affairs' Committee and the role of the Select Committees in the British House of Commons. The FAC makes in-depth inquiries into topical matters of the committee's own choice; the committee has the power to require people or documents to be examined by the committee. The advantage of this system is that when members of government and of Parliament are aware that what they do can be scrutinized, they need to be more cautious with their decisions than they might otherwise be.

Exposition

Mr. Silk informed that the system of Committees in the British Government to scrutinize each British governmental department came into being in 1978 by the will of Margaret Thatcher who saw the civil service hierarchy as hostile to her. The system was modeled on the American system of powerful congressional committees which can scrutinize officials. Now the British House of Commons has one Select Committee that looks at each governmental department. The FAC examines the administration, policy, and expenditure of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Silk's speech revealed the functioning of the FAC regarding points such as annual expenses, membership, chairmanship, loyalty, responsibility and frequency and length of meetings. The inquiries of the FAC require gathering written evidence from experts in the field, conducting visits, holding seminars, hearing oral evidence, and finally, writing a report with recommendations to be given to the government.

The only power the FAC has is the power of persuasion. The government ultimately decides policy, although it has the recommendations of the FAC. The relationship between the press and the FAC is very important; if the press publicizes the FAC's reports, the government is pressurized into seriously considering the recommendations.

The advantages of the select committee system are that the system encourages open government. The analogy that Mr. Silk used to describe the work of the select committees was that the work they do is like turning over stones and revealing the insects. He said, "The select committees can turn those stones over and say, 'look, there are insects here. Perhaps we can't identify them all but they are there.' That is an important part of open government." In other words, when the activities of the government are brought to light systematically, politicians have to make their decisions bearing this in mind.

Session III

David Blackman, Enie Wesseldijk, and Dimitris Christopoulos were the speakers for the third and last session of the seminar on Monday morning. Because the other speakers had left by that time, they rotated the chairmanship. This session was more relaxed and informal than the first two sessions, partly because the group had been reduced to three speakers and fourteen audience members. This session was largely informative, about European Programs, the activities of the International Institute for Democracy, and about the function of the Office of the Ombudsman.

David Blackman

Synopsis

Mr. Blackman's speech clarified some organizational points of the EP and European institutions by explaining linguistic and historical technicalities. Mr. Blackman described the subtle but important differences between certain words as they exist in different languages: control, union, Council of Europe, European Council. His final point was that the future EU programs to be implemented in SE Europe will be valuable if they are designed with a two way flow of communication between Eastern and Western Europe.

Exposition

Relying on his personal experience working for the EP for 20 years, Mr. Blackman discussed the importance of having continuous staff members who are not elected officials. The staff of the EP provides continuity and is free from the uncertainty of whether or not they will be re-elected. They gain valuable knowledge over time that they can bring to the EP in a way that elected officials cannot.

Mr. Blackman then went on to explain the Phare and Tacis Programmes of the EU and gave some advice for future similar programs. In his opinion, more emphasis should be put on training programs in public sector jobs in countries of SE Europe. In conjunction with training programs, there must also be money given to improve the salaries of public sector jobs. During the discussion, the example was given of a mistake that the EU made in the past with police training programs in Albania; 3,500 police were trained, 3000 of them went to work for private companies or individuals who paid better than the government jobs did. These future programs should also be used to improve measures of anti-corruption.

These European funded programs should be implemented in a way that there is a two way flow of information. Financial support should be given by the EU to SE European countries via programs that encourage pro-active behavior of all those involved. If money is given without the appropriate forethought and planning, EU's attempts at implementing programs in SE Europe may result in increased corruption and reduced motivation.

Enie Wesseldijk

Synopsis

Ms. Wesseldijk described some of the practical steps that will be taken within the framework of the Stability Pact, particularly by the International Institute for Democracy in Strasbourg of which she is the Executive Secretary. She also talked about the

importance of the relationship between elected representatives and civil society. The subsequent discussion was about the importance of translators and interpreters who know Parliamentary jargon, accountability of elected officials, the necessity of Politicians in SE Europe to have a Nationalistic line in order to appeal to voters.

Exposition

The IID will undertake the Action Plan of the Stability Pact for Parliamentary cooperation in SE Europe. The IID will conduct meetings in the countries included in the SP. The first round of visits will be informational and will consist of training sessions. Subsequently, meetings will take place in which representatives from all the counties involved will come together to discuss the same issues that were raised at the preliminary meetings, but, the second time, from a regional stance. An essential component of the planning of these meetings is cooperation and communication between the IID and Parliamentarians in the East. Ms. Wesseldijk stresses that the meetings for parliamentary cooperation in SE Europe can only be successful if the meetings' agendas are determined by the Parliamentarians from SE Europe.

Dimitris Christopoulos

Synopsis

Mr. Christopoulos described the activities of the Office of the Greek Ombudsman, from its creation in Greece one and a half years ago to the types of cases that the Office examines. He went on to discuss the future activities of the Ombudsman in SE Europe in the framework of the Stability Pact. His speech provided a description of one of the tangible institutions that will come out of the Stability Pact.

Exposition

The Greek Ombudsman is allowed to receive complaints from any resident of Greece against any governmental office. There are four divisions of the Ombudsman Office:

1. Human Rights division - accepts complaints from legal or illegal immigrants in Greece.
2. Quality of Life Sector - accepts complaints about the environment, public works, landscaping.
3. Social Welfare - accepts complaints in the areas of Social Security, National Health Insurance, pensions, and welfare.
4. State-Citizen Relations - accepts complaints about maladministration in the sectors of transportation, education, taxation, energy, education.

The Office of the Ombudsman deals with issues of discrimination, violation of rights, but does not deal with issues dealing with National Security. The main purpose of the Ombudsman is to find solutions when there is discord between civilians and the state, and to reduce the frequency of maladministration in the state.

The Office of the Greek Ombudsman is putting forth a proposal to undertake the creation of an Ombudsman institution in SE Europe via the Stability Pact. This Ombudsman institution will focus on the collective and systematic violation of human rights due to the ethnic origin of victims, rather than focus on individual complaints. The aim of this new Ombudsman Institution is prevention of future violations; one of the main concrete goals is to create a network of migration institutions.

Memorable Quotes:

"We do more when we come together than we can when we try alone." Robin Corbett, MP, Britain

"In a poor country, corruption is a devil who is always pushing you." Simeon Pobulic, Socialdemocracy, Serbia

"We (MEP's) are not the professors who go there (SE Europe) and tell them (Parliamentarians of SE European countries) what to do. We are there to give them an impression of how we work and how we can help them." Doris Pack, MEP

"Stability will not happen over your heads. It will have to happen with you explaining what you need and what you think should be done." Enie Wesseldijk

"We in the Balkans live all together. It is impossible for we the Bulgarians to live better at the expense of the Albanians, or of the Macedonians. That is history." Ivan Todorov, Socialist Party, Bulgaria

"We (elected officials) are the servants of democracy, not its masters." Robin Corbett, MP, Britain

"After all, if you look at this thick book, (referring to Misha Glenny's The Balkans) that is just 190 years of your history. It has been going on for thousands. Why not have a nice slim book for the next hundred.... Every body lost but everybody also gained because at the end everybody was richer." Richard Balfe, MEP, Britain.