

The Institution of the House of Representatives **[Ο Θεσμός της Βουλής των Αντιπροσώπων]**

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Introduction

The volume entitled ‘The Institution of the House of Representatives’ is the fruit of the largest scientific conference on parliamentary studies that has taken place in Cyprus, which was co-organised by the House of Representatives and the University of Nicosia Law School.

The aim of the volume is to present institutional, regulatory and legal aspects of the House of Representatives, while at the same time seeking to rekindle interest in parliamentary studies in Cyprus.

With more than 30 contributions, the volume covers classic topics, such as the autonomy of the parliament, representative democracy, parliamentary work, diplomacy and scrutiny, as well as the participation of the parliament in European and international institutions, the ‘conflicts’ between parliament and the judiciary, the activities of parliamentary committees and the representation of religious groups as well.

Structure and Content

The volume is divided into two parts, each of which consists of four thematic sections. The first part includes speeches by political figures, while the second part includes studies or interventions by academics and researchers.

The first section, entitled ‘The Cypriot House of Representatives’, includes five speeches. Vassiliki Anastasiadou, former Minister of Transport, Communications and Works and former Director General of the Parliament, shared her experiences and described the parliament’s evolutionary and maturing course. Former AKEL MP Giorgos Georgiou referred to the principle of separation of powers and the process of administrative and financial autonomy of the parliament. Former AKEL MP Skevi Koutra-Koukouma focused on the work of the parliamentary committees, giving examples of good practices during the vote and discussion with the government. For-

mer Secretary General of AKEL and MP Andros Kyprianou referred to the role of the parliament as a legislative body, but also as a means of controlling the government. Finally, former DISY MP Michalis Sophocleous spoke about the role of a member of the parliament, emphasising the political status and skills required from an MP.

The second section, entitled 'Representative Democracy and Parliament' includes four speeches. Former independent MP Anna Theologou criticised the modern system of representative democracy, saying that party parliamentarism does not allow for the real representation of people's will. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former MP of the Citizens' Alliance George Lillikas developed his proposal for participatory democracy, transparency and accountability, through the use of modern technology. Former AKEL MP Evanthia Savva referred to the application of the principle of free mandate. Finally, AKEL's Secretary General and MP Stefanos Stefanou referred to the connection between parliament and democracy, expressing the position that tackling the democratic deficit in the EU must begin with respect for national institutions.

The third section, entitled 'Parliamentary Work', contains four speeches. Former DIKO MP Andreas Angelides pointed out the long-standing failure to legislate on the possibility of sanctions in case of non-immediate enforcement of court decisions. Former Solidarity Movement MP Michalis Giorgallas focused on the impact of poor legislation on public administration. AKEL MP Aristos Damianou referred to the urgent need for initiatives to tackle corruption, pointing out that the upsurge of the phenomenon is altering the quality of democracy. Finally, DISY MP Demetris Demetriou spoke about the possibility of digital governance to improve transparency in legislative work and MPs' productivity.

The fourth section, entitled 'Parliamentary Diplomacy and Parliamentary Scrutiny', contains four speeches. The President of the Parliament and DISY MP Anni-ta Demetriou elaborated on the actions of the parliament regarding the systematic promotion of the foreign policy of the state and stressed out the importance of how international cooperation magnifies Cyprus' small geographical range. Former DISY MP Xenia Constantinou spoke about the exercise of parliamentary scrutiny and the role of the parliament as a monitoring body. AKEL's parliamentary spokesman Giorgos Loukaidis referred to the need for consultation between the government and the House of Representatives. Finally, the parliamentary representative of DISY Nikos Tornaritis elaborated on the actions of the Cypriot delegation to the Asian Parliamentary Assembly and stressed the need for further development of outward-looking parliamentary diplomacy.

The fifth section, entitled 'International and European Aspects', contains four contributions. Dionysos Alexiou, lecturer at the Department of Languages and Literature of the University of Nicosia, examined the function of cultural diplomacy as a pillar of foreign policy and the role of parliament in the development of initiatives in the field. Katerina Kalaitzaki, lecturer at UCLAN Cyprus, developed the role of the parliament as the guardian of the European authorities. Evangelos Parras, member of the scientific team of the Secretariat of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, analysed the participation of the parliament in the assembly from the perspective of exercising parliamentary diplomacy. Finally, Christiana Fryda, European affairs officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, elaborated on the evolution of the role of the permanent representations of national parliaments in the European Parliament and underlined the importance of interparliamentary cooperation.

The sixth section, entitled 'Parliament and the Judiciary', includes three studies. Alexis Antoniadis, parliament's international relations officer, addressed the special issue of the parliament's *locus standi*. Ioannis Kastanas, lecturer at the University of Nicosia, referred to the particular issue of the judicially unchecked *interna corporis* of the parliament. Petros Konstantinides, also lecturer at the University of Nicosia, pointed out the need to define methodological tools for the interpretation of the Cypriot Constitution.

The seventh section, entitled 'Legislative Work', includes three interventions. Lawyer Simos Angelides referred to the passing of legislation, in 1999, which codified the principles governing administrative action. Assistant Professor Vagia Polyzoidou and Professor Achilles Emilianides conducted a comparative and empirical research, analysing the options for introducing a regulatory framework for lobbying in the Cypriot legal order, in order to enhance transparency and citizen participation in policy-making. Finally, the research team of Nicolas Kyriakides, Petros Petrikkos, Georgianna Kelo, Andreas Pattichis and Leah Deniz, addressed how technology can improve transparency of parliamentary procedures. They also focused on the creation of an electronic legislative observatory and inclusion of parliament in the wider e-government efforts.

The eighth and final section, entitled 'Aspects of Parliamentary History', includes four studies. PhD candidate Ioanna Alexandrou conducted a comprehensive review and evaluation of the activities of the refugee committee. Researcher Konstantinos Delimatsis examined the principle of *non privilegium contra publicum* and its application in the Cypriot legal order. Associate Professor of Law Christos Papastylianos studied the distribution of power in the bicomunal system of government of 1960.

Finally, researcher Michael-Alexandros Hadjilyras referred to the representation of the three religious groups in the parliament.

Analysis and Evaluation

From a personal standpoint, I believe that the volume achieves its initial purpose, which was to present institutional, regulatory and legal dimensions of the House of Representatives. The reader can receive interesting insights from political figures, academics and researchers, on the way the Cypriot parliament operates, the political implications of representative democracy and the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. It also provides useful information on the international and European aspects of the parliament, the relations between the parliament and the judiciary, the modernisation of legislative work and parliamentary history. Some of the most important contributions of the volume are further explained below.

Vassiliki Anastasiadou, former Minister of Transport, Communications and Works and former Director General of the Parliament, in her speech entitled ‘House of Representatives-Milestones in the History of the Last Thirty Years’, clearly describes how parliamentary workload increased rapidly in the 1980s, as well as the reasons that led to this change. In my view, this contribution is important because it demonstrates the organic evolution of the Cypriot parliament and its ability to adapt to new circumstances.

The former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former MP of the Citizens’ Alliance Giorgos Lillikas, in his speech entitled ‘Representative Democracy in the 21st Century’, recognises the need to move to a more participatory democracy that encourages transparency and accountability. Furthermore, DISY MP Demetris Demetriou, in his speech entitled ‘How the House of Representatives Can Act as an Assistance of Digital Governance and a Space for Healthy Dialogue with Citizens’, highlights the need of live streaming in parliamentary committees as a measure of transparency and digital modernisation. In my opinion both contributions are important because they underline the need to transform the political process from representative to participatory democracy.

AKEL MP Aristos Damianou, in his speech entitled ‘Legislative Initiatives to Address Institutional Corruption: Conflict of Interest, Incompatibility, Asset Declarations’, emphasises a severe issue regarding systemic corruption and also indicates the need for immediate measures to be taken into consideration for better legislative regulation on conflicts of interest, incompatibility and asset declarations. I believe

that this contribution is crucial because it demonstrates the severe issues that have been a result of corruption, which need to be immediately resolved.

Former DISY MP Xenia Constantinou, in her speech entitled ‘The Parliament as a Monitoring Body: Means of Parliamentary Scrutiny’, successfully outlines the main means of parliamentary scrutiny, such as the examination and amendment of bills, the establishment of ad hoc parliamentary committees, the procedure for submitting questions and law proposals, as well as the discussion on various issues at the competent committees. From my point of view this contribution is important, because it clearly records the most basic means of parliamentary scrutiny, which are often sidelined by the parliamentary body, due to the tendency of some MPs to choose different means of governmental criticism.

Assistant Professor Vagia Polyzoidou and Professor Achilles Emilianides, in their intervention entitled ‘The Regulatory Framework of Lobbying and the Cypriot Legal Order’, underline the need to understand lobbying as a legal act, which is an essential part of the democratic process, and not as an act identical to corruption. It is my belief that this contribution is important, because the analysis of the regulatory framework of lobbying highlights the positive impact of institutionalised lobbying, while at the same time eliminates the prejudices that identify lobbying as an act of corruption.

The research team of Nicolas Kyriakides, Petros Petrikkos, Georgianna Kelo, Andreas Pattichis and Leah Deniz, in their intervention entitled ‘Transparency and Accountability for Cypriot Legislature: An Online Legislative Observatory for the House of Representatives’, addressed how technology can improve transparency of parliamentary procedures and focused on the creation of an electronic legislative observatory. In my opinion, this input is vital, since it demonstrates the benefits an electronic legislative observatory can have, exercising supervisory control and positive pressure towards the parliament and the MPs.

As mentioned above, the volume achieves its initial purpose, which is to present institutional, regulatory and legal dimensions of the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, in addition to the positive contribution of the volume, I think that there are several pathogenies and possible ways of enhancing the existing parliamentary work in Cyprus, which have not been sufficiently highlighted and which need to be examined.

Some of the pathogenies are, a poor internal communication in the parliament, MPs not showing up well-prepared for the committees’ meetings, and the process for examining draft laws being questionable. Also, as far as I am concerned, the parliament jurisdiction in terms of feedback from stakeholders, is not sufficiently used, the

absence of MPs at the committees' meetings constitutes a significant issue, and the separation of the existing permanent committees is insufficient as well.

Some possible ways of improving the existing parliamentary work are, the amendment of the Rules of Procedure governing the process for the examination of draft laws and the obligation for MPs to participate in committees and plenary meetings, the creation of advisory groups, as well as the redefinition of the existing permanent committees.

Conclusion

The purpose of the volume is to present institutional, regulatory and legal dimensions of the House of Representatives, and contribute to the revival of interest in parliamentary studies in Cyprus.

In my judgement, the volume achieves its initial purpose. Furthermore, the undertaking of such an initiative, contributes to the establishment of a constructive dialogue, allowing the reinforcement, reconfiguration and improvement of both parliamentary work and interest in Cyprus.

George Isaia