

to be a politician

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Subject: Written Assignment # 6: Comparing the Parliamentary system of Western Europe and the separation of powers system of the United States in terms of (a) their efficiency and (b) their accountability.

• ***Introduction:***

Before comparing both systems in terms of their efficiency and accountability, it is necessary to identify the most important characteristics of each one :

1)Presidential Regime (United States separation of powers system) : In this system the executive branch is the most important center of power and center itself of the decisionmaking process, according to the Constitution. It is accepted as one of the traditional expressions of the Monocratic Regimes, well-known as systems in which there is an enormous power concentration and a narrower distribution of the political power (weaker Legislative Branch).

Characteristics:

a.- ***Unitary Executive Branch:*** the head of the State is at the same time, the head of the Government : the President. The person on the top is an extraordinary powerful governing authority. The Presidency, also, has an unique capacity to exercise the power of persuasion through additional concessions and bargaining. The persuasion as a process

is attached to the structure of the separated powers system, although the authority given by the Constitution and represents a clear attempt to create a sort of centralized accountability.

b.-*The President is elected by the electorate* and not by the legislature (it implies a broader margin of independence)

c.-*Neither the President* nor the Secretaries of Departments are accountable before the Congress (there is no possibility neither of a non confidence vote nor of a censure one).

d.-*The President can not dismiss the Congress* and the Congress can not limit his/her time in office by using the figure of a non confidence vote.

e.-*The President and the majority at the Congress* might be affiliated with different parties.

f.-*Neither the President nor his/her top aides can be members of the chambers*, at the same time.

g.-*There are specific limitations to the reelection* of the head of the state.

h.-Many ways of exercising *Presidential veto* .

2)Parliamentary system (British strong party system): It is well known as the model in which the Government is part of the Parliament in a legal way and as an institutional need. I assume the British model as the case of the present study.

Characteristics:

- a.-*Government may be forced to renounce* when there is a non confidence vote and members of the Cabinet may be censured by the House implying an automatic dismissal.
- b.-*Government is able to dismiss the Parliament* and to call to anticipated elections.
- c.- *There is an intense discipline* of the legislative representation of the party in government, strictly guided and controlled by the head of the government.
- d.-*Members of the Cabinet* are members of the Parliament.
- e.-*The majority party leads the Parliament and the Government* at the same time. That is the reason why there is no veto possibility.
- f.- *There are two different expressions of the Executive Branch* : head of the State and head of the government.
- g.-*This system implies cooperation between branches.*The Government is assigned to the cabinet but it is controlled by the parliament. The Parliament has an important influence on the government composition .
- h.-*The cabinet subsists* only if there is a support of the Parliamentary majority.
- i.-*Reciprocal control* : Parliament can demand political responsibility from government, (the whole cabinet or one of its members). The Government may decide the dismissal of Parliament and to call to new elections.
- l.-*No limitations for reelection* of the head of the cabinet.

- Accountability:

1) In the American Presidential system the accountability is diffuse or shared. It happens because shared power and bargaining is the current way of dealing of both powers.

Also, there is a clear possibility to blame some people as obstacles. In the British system, there is a clear centralization of the responsibility (cabinet, party) because government and politicians can be held accountable for their actions. And the party itself is such a lightning rod that is continuously blamed as accountable for any failure. In fact, party also gives a special protection to those who vote according to the party instructions instead of voting pursuing their constituencies interests. That is to reinforce the influence of political parties and to give a sense of confidence in the responsiveness and capacity to achieve common goals that characterized those institutions.

2) In The British parliamentary system there is more a sense of collective Government, therefore the accountability is more a group responsibility rather than an individual one. Then a failure of the government implies low stakes of the party in government and affects the possibilities of those party members running for office in the next elections. So, vote itself is used to measure public reactions to policies and performances which may affect the candidacies of many party members. Parties lead the system, then, parties are responsible for the government and the parliament actions and their members are accountable for their parties actions.

3) Strong Parties system and the partisan control over the parliamentary representations give a sense of community and general responsibility. In the Presidential system, the

weak partisan discipline in the Congress implies a responsibility that spreads out.4) USA Parties are electoral movements with a minimum ideological content and each member of the Congress is his/her own party and is free to establish his/her own position. So it is difficult to set a specific responsibility when there are so many centers of active influence and so many decisionmaking criteria interacting. In some way, as long as there is no general identification with one specific issue, no one appears with the power to solve the problems and then, no one can be blamed with the entire or concrete responsibility. Also, they usually use political parties as scapegoats due to the fact that within political parties there is no common position on issues and each individual congressman is free to argue that all of the guilt should be allocated to someone else. Parties in Parliamentary system usually bring things and institutions together and there is a certain agreement on the way of implementing policies. Then, the internal debate is within the party and not in the Parliament, which mitigates the sense of individual responsibility and increases the idea of a collective decision from a collective and superior entity.

5)In USA most voting behaviors are not connected to parties platforms because they focus more on the individual responsibility assigned to both the president and the representative and their candidacies .Also there is an open invitation for technocrats to join the government. In the British system politicians are at hand and voters also analyze the party programs to get to reach a final decision.

6)In the British system, there are three traditional ways to hold someone accountable for certain policies : -through the parliamentary vote of non confidence or at least of

censure; through the criticisms made by the opposition parties and by the subsequent judgments of the electorate.

7) In the presidential system, constituencies can exercise more pressure over the representative because there are no such political parties as mediators. That is why they must build coalitions beyond the frontiers of each party in order to achieve goals.

- *Efficiency:*

In this part I will assess the efficiency of each system by measuring the capacity to achieve public goals. Then, it is a mixture of expectations, aspirations and administrative capacity.

1) There are many possibilities to avoid the responsibility for a failure in the Presidential system, just because there are important people to blame on. Not so many, but enough. Also the parties weaknesses exclude themselves from the specific center of power and imply the tremendous freedom to vote for main constituencies interests (popularity is much more important than discipline) instead of following instructions from the National Committee. In Great Britain, the weight of the party sometimes is overwhelming and covers many aspects, such financing, etc. But, at the same time, the strong discipline of the party allows the executive branch to count on the support of the legislative as a whole. This implies a greater capacity to accomplish more rapidly given goals just because it is easier to reach a unity of commitment and a common purpose.

2) In the Presidential system, the capacity to decide assigned to a strong executive branch gives a sense of stability which is interesting to analyze. But In the British

system, the greater control over both powers allows them to make superior policy choices, securing the consistency and coherence of the whole State.

3) Although United States system brings some opportunities to many well trained technocrats to be in the cabinet, many of them do not have even an idea of the real importance attached to some performances and they do not have any political intuition. Then, the design of policies is made by some people who have to constantly consult to the top in order to get authorization to perform the most important policies. Therefore the typical way of acting of the top is command. In Great Britain, the professionalization of the Cabinet implies the presence of real politicians and technocrats as their assistants. Then, the typical way of acting of the top is the coordination of initiatives rather than command itself.

4) Undoubtedly, there is a clear sense of the whole state as a coherent institution in Great Britain. In USA, the conception of the state is associated with the power of the executive branch.

- *Few words about hybrid systems: a look at Venezuela.*

In Venezuela there is a coexistence of a powerful executive branch which is very similar to American Presidential system (elected by the electorate, head of the state and government with the right to veto some legislative acts, etc) and an influential Congress (mitigated by the addition of some parliamentary figures as the censure vote against a minister, the control over the President's actions and accountability, and the conception of the

Cabinet as a collective decision center). But the thing that I really regret is the misinterpretation of those institutions. In fact, accountability and efficiency are low in Venezuela. Why?

1)Some of the figures of the parliamentary way of governing have been inappropriately established in my country. In fact the concentration of accountability is not the rule but the diffusion of it. And there is something worse: two powerful entities are in constant confrontation. In fact, the hybrid system instead of reinforcing one center of power by weakening the other, just reinforced both. Thus, a powerful Presidential Power is to confront with a powerful Congress. The outcome : reciprocal accusation of sabotage and the breakdown of the state at usual conflicting points. Usually reciprocal accusations are finished when both actors begin scapegoating political parties. So, there is no clear institutional responsible for the performance of the State, even those powerful actors consider themselves such victims of political parties decisions. There are clear responsible actors for the management of the executive Branch and legislative Branch, each one, but there is not specific center to assume the whole responsibility for the management and performance of the State , as the superior entity and the institutional expression of both public branches.

2)As a consequence of the hybrid inner failure, coherence and consistency of the state emerged as the most severely damaged notions. Then, what the executive branch decides to implement, the Congress decides to stop it. And so forth. In some way, I might say that the system has turned into the constant confrontation of powers.

3) The coherence of the public performance depends on the political discipline partisan members in power or in the Congress might have. The problem is that usually the party in government does not control the Congress. Then, the discipline is used to conduct a massive attack against whatever the counterpart plans to do. And it usually represents a harmful deadlock. The level of the party discipline in legislature is high because there are many ways to control the vote of the members of the parliament and Political Parties really know how to use them (exclusion of the lists, expulsion,etc).

4) Regarding the presence of technocrats in the government and in the Congress, extremists decisions have been made: at the beginning professional politicians were appointed ministries but they did not have the technical expertise to manage the new challenges. Then, technocrats were appointed in top offices and they demonstrated that they did not have even an idea of the social aspect of the implementation and they showed an enormous incapacity to manage some room for maneuver. Now, the government is moving forward to the center . I hope it works.

Final Conclusions:

1) There are clear differences between the separation of powers system and the parliamentary system which affect the level of accountability and efficiency of each one.

2) Crucial effects of those differences can be seen on the decisionmaking process and on the level of the most important public capacities regarding the achievement of the superior goals of the state.

3)The Parliamentary system (British Model) implies more concentration of accountability, more cohesion of the State and more consistency in the public performance as government. Also, the control over the whole decisionmaking process gives the opportunity to enact superior and more integrated policies and increases the possibility to accomplish the corresponding objective.

4)The hybrids are not expected to success when there is a coexistence and a simultaneous interaction of powerful actors capable of acting by themselves on their own fields but unable to achieve the whole goal by their own : a strong presidency, an influential congress and solid political parties, sometimes beyond the institutional game.