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**TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY
PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT
AND INNOVATIVE EXAMPLES OF BEST
PRACTICES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
(Translation *In Extenso*)**

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine trends in contemporary parliamentary development and to determine the position of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and domestic parliamentary practice in relation to global processes. The legal-theoretical analysis begins with an exploration of the role of parliament in modern democracy, the expanding concept of parliamentary autonomy across multiple levels, the standards of a contemporary democratic parliament in the 21st century, and the growing significance of parliamentary diplomacy. Applying comparative legal and legal-dogmatic methods, the study finds that in the published five-year global parliamentary research reports (particularly those from 2017 and 2022), the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia is recognized and highlighted as an example of good and innovative practice. In this context, the paper identifies and analyzes the innovations that have been introduced and institutionalized in the parliamentary practice and normative framework of the National Assembly over the past 15 years. Key developments include the establishment of informal

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parliamentary groups (GOPAC, Women's Parliamentary Network, Green Parliamentary Group, Economic Caucus, Energy Forum, Focus Group for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals), the introduction and regular holding of public hearings and committee sessions outside the National Assembly headquarters, the Green Chair mechanism, the Budget Office, and the public finance oversight portal. Finally, the paper explores current topics at the forefront of global parliamentary development trends over the past year, along with the latest published results, particularly those concerning the role of parliament in combating climate change and the democratic parliament indicators released at the end of 2023.

Keywords: parliament, democracy, citizens, National Assembly, parliamentary diplomacy

INTRODUCTION: PARLIAMENT AND CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACY

Global interconnectedness has made it easier to see that all parliaments worldwide face the same challenges and are making efforts, each in their own way, to respond to these challenges. The causes of these challenges are reflected in two seemingly contradictory facts: the executive branch dominates and is the de facto center of decision-making, while parliament is (and should be) the central institution of democracy, as it represents the citizens from whom sovereignty originates.¹ The traditional concept of the separation of powers into legislative, executive, and judicial, aimed at creating a system of

¹ In this sense, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006, Article 2) clearly stipulates that sovereignty originates from the citizens who exercise it through referendum, popular initiative, and through their freely elected representatives. In comparative constitutional law, in the majority of constitutions, the people are identified as the bearer of sovereignty; in a number of constitutions, the nation is the bearer of sovereignty; in a number of constitutions, a mixed solution is found whereby, although sovereignty belongs to the people, national identity and national heritage are included in the foundations of the state; while a fourth group of constitutions are those that have citizens as the bearers of sovereignty (Mikić 2022, 886–888).

checks and balances to prevent the concentration of power in the same hands, i.e., tyranny, is today not only questioned but considered to be insufficient and inadequate in the context of modern societies and states. Discussions about power organization go so far as to say that there are no pure models in either horizontal or vertical organization of power but that pure models exist only in books and professors' heads (Fira 2004, 314). Within the proliferation of institutions, a proposal has been made to introduce a branch of integrity, which refers to institutions that should control and prevent corruption (Ackerman 2000, 691–694). Further development has led to the conception of a fourth branch of government, which in a broader sense includes various actors, from civil society (non-governmental organizations and the press) through public (regulatory) agencies and the constitutional court (guardian of the constitution). In a narrower sense, it consists of independent oversight bodies, such as the ombudsman (Radojević 2022, 448). Regardless of the system in question and whether there is a unity of power or a division of power into two, three, four, or even five state functions or branches of government (if constitutional adjudication is considered a separate function or branch of government), it seems indisputable that parliament is the first branch of government. This power adopts the constitution and laws. Whichever constitution is opened, as a rule, the legislative power is regulated first.² Furthermore, when considering the number of articles regulating a particular matter in the current European constitutions, it is concluded that the most significant proportion (about the total volume of the constitution) is devoted to the legislative power (parliament and legislative procedure), which is 17%. In comparison, 15% relates to the executive power and 10% to the judicial power (Mikić 2022, 46).

However, regardless of the undisputed role of parliament in all systems of government organization, in contemporary societies, there is talk of a so-called “democratic deficit,” which implies challenges related to insufficient inclusion of all and non-compliance with democratic rules. It is also observed that in modern democracies, there is a clear gap between the theory of representative government and political reality

² Within the provision on the separation of powers, the legislative power is most often mentioned first, followed by the executive power, and then the judicial power (Mikić 2022, 626).

(Lovo 1999, 69). It is pointed out that governments are increasingly unable to formulate public policies and quickly solve the problems faced by societies and states, as well as a decreasing level of trust of citizens in their rulers, their political programs, and their authority to implement them through public policies. Three symptoms indicate a crisis of legitimacy: a decline in voter turnout, electoral volatility, and a decrease in citizens' interest in engaging as members of political parties (Jovanović 2024, 229). The identified problems and difficulties do not only relate to parliament as an institution but to the entire representative democracy, which, due to the issues identified, is supplemented, corrected, strengthened, and consolidated through deliberative democracy³ and encouraging citizens to participate in public affairs and shape public policies, as well as increasing participation through various forms of public deliberation and public consultations. A systemic approach to deliberative democratic systems shows that many interconnected participants in public decision-making can complement each other and influence each other, creating a system that is deliberatively democratic as a whole, even if each part individually may be insufficient (Levy 2022, 28). Regarding parliament, the idea is that election campaigns should not be the only contact that future MPs have with citizens. However, holding elections should only be the beginning of continuous two-way communication between citizens and their parliamentary representatives.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY AUTONOMY AND THE EXPANSION OF ITS SCOPE AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

Firstly, it is essential to note that parliamentary autonomy is directly linked to the very idea of the separation of powers and, as such, is enshrined in the constitutional texts of most states. Parliamentary independence is considered a principle that maintains the constitutional system in balance and prevents the abuse of power by the judiciary and the executive (Wintr, Chmel, and Askari 2021, 86–87). Apart from the

³ Jovanović (2024, 244) points out that the deliberative response to the crisis of democracy is not contradictory to representative and direct democracy, which is best seen in Habermas' two-track model of deliberation.

question of the breadth and scope of parliamentary autonomy being an internal or domestic level issue, which is thus aligned with other constitutional principles within a state, contemporary law indicates that it is also strongly influenced by the international or supranational level, given that certain principles are established by supranational and international courts that must be taken into account (Albanesi 2022, 126). It is also observed that parliamentary activities are under increasing scrutiny from international actors and are subject to multiple examinations at global forums and that parliamentary issues are no longer merely a matter of one institution or nation (Szabó 2021, 2). Today, parliamentary autonomy practically relates to all aspects of the organization and functioning of parliament. Although expressed differently and to different extents depending on the state, several fundamental aspects stand out. Traditionally, it is understood as the right of parliament to self-organize, i.e., for parliament to regulate its internal organization and work independently. This aspect is commonly referred to as institutional or functional autonomy. However, contemporary parliamentary development has led to this being only one level, or aspect, of parliamentary autonomy, which currently has a broader expression. The significance of all aspects of parliamentary independence lies in the need to ensure the necessary conditions for the performance of parliamentary functions, which are expanding in contemporary society, and on which conditions the effectiveness of work directly depends. The lack of adequate conditions directly affects the functionality and quality of work, negatively affecting the separation of powers.

The previously described institutional or functional parliamentary autonomy implies a normative aspect of independence in that parliament regulates its organization and works through its legal acts. This aspect has been realized in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (from now on NA) by adopting a legal framework that regulates the work of the NA and includes the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the Law on the NA, the Rules of Procedure of the NA, the Decision on the Organization and Work of the NA Service, the Rules on the Internal Organization and Classification of Jobs in the NA Service, the Rules on the Basic Principles of Work, Conduct and Dress Code of Employees in the NA Service and Persons Engaged to Perform Duties in the NA, the Unified Methodological Rules for Drafting Regulations, the NA

Resolution on Legislative Policy, and a whole range of regulations, instructions, decisions and other acts that are mostly adopted by the Secretary-General (independently or with the consent of the committee in charge of administrative matters) or by one of the NA committees.

Financial independence, as the next aspect of the parliamentary autonomy of the National Assembly, was introduced in 2010 with the adoption of the Law on the National Assembly. This law regulated the financing of the National Assembly so that, for the first time, it was stipulated that the National Assembly independently determines and disposes of funds for its operation – a formulation that can be briefly described as the assembly budget. The Law on the National Assembly explicitly stipulates that the assembly budget is an integral part of the budget of the Republic of Serbia and that the Government cannot, without the consent of the President of the National Assembly, suspend, postpone, or limit the execution of the assembly budget (Zakon o NS 2010, čl. 64). The Secretary-General is the ordering authority for the use of funds from the assembly budget, prepares the draft assembly budget and submits it to the committee of the National Assembly responsible for administrative matters, which determines the draft assembly budget and submits it to the ministry responsible for finance for an opinion. The National Assembly has also introduced the position of an internal auditor.

For the parliament to effectively perform its representative, legislative, and oversight functions, there must also be expert and administrative-technical autonomy within parliamentary independence. This refers to the importance of the conditions and capacities of the parliamentary service, parliamentary officials, support for MPs in the form of a library, research service, scientific service, the existence of assistants and consultants, as well as the possibility of engaging experts, as a lack of such capacities in the parliament (as well as a lack of funds for them) can also cause weaker parliamentary oversight and negatively impact the balance of power. In the context of this aspect of parliamentary autonomy in our parliament, there is a Parliamentary Service that is unique and headed by the Secretary-General. The Parliamentary Service performs expert, administrative-technical, and other tasks for the needs of the National Assembly and its working bodies, members of parliament, the President of the National Assembly

and Vice Presidents, parliamentary groups in the National Assembly, the Appeals Commission of the National Assembly, the Republican Election Commission, as well as other tasks by the law, the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly and other acts of the National Assembly and its working bodies. Within the Parliamentary Service, the following have been established as basic internal units: the Legislative Sector, the International Relations Sector, the General Affairs Sector, the Operational-Technical Affairs, and Information Technology Sector, and (in addition to the aforementioned) the General Secretariat of the National Assembly and the Office of the President of the National Assembly have been established as separate internal units. Apart from internal capacities, an essential and valuable resource available primarily to European parliaments, including ours,⁴ is the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). The Centre, founded in 1977, essentially represents a network of parliamentary research centers, which, based on questionnaires sent to member parliaments (usually within three weeks), enables parliaments to gain insight into the legal and practical solutions of member parliaments, or rather, answers to questionnaires. In our parliament, the possibilities of members of parliament in terms of data available from the aforementioned center are regulated by the Rules of Procedure for Submitting Requests for Research and the Preparation of Research Papers of the National Assembly Library (dated January 12, 2012, adopted by the Secretary General of the National Assembly). In addition to the above, it should also be said that although there is currently no more extensive scientific research service in the National Assembly, the President of the National Assembly, at the proposal of a working body, may engage scientific or expert institutions, as well as scientists and experts, to study specific issues within the competence of the National Assembly (Poslovnik NS 2002, čl. 43).

Regarding the internal organization of parliaments globally, there is a trend towards strengthening committees or parliamentary working bodies. In contemporary parliamentary development, there is a tendency to shift the focus of parliamentary work from plenary

⁴ The mentioned centre has 49 members, three observers (Israel, Canada, USA), while four parliaments have limited access within the framework of partnership (Jordan, Morocco, Palestine and Kyrgyzstan).

sessions to parliamentary working bodies while preserving the principle of proportional representation. In addition to being traditionally regulated by parliamentary rules of procedure or laws on parliament, parliamentary committees today are not only a matter of law (in the sense that they are explicitly mentioned in various laws) but are also becoming a constitutional matter. They are, therefore, regulated or mentioned in many constitutions. This is either through general provisions dedicated to parliamentary committees, enumerating their scope, or imposing an obligation for public authorities and individuals to cooperate with committees. In some constitutions, investigative and specialized committees, the composition of committees, and the determination of their chairpersons are also a constitutional matter, and some contain special provisions related to the work of committees (Mikić 2022, 545).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENT AND THE PLACE OF OUR ASSEMBLY

Recognizing that in today's interconnected world, societies, states, and parliaments alike face similar challenges, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the oldest and most important international parliamentary organization founded in 1889, established a Working Group on Parliament's Contribution to Democracy in 2008. This working group conducted research and analyzed both legal provisions (constitutions, laws on parliament, rules of procedure) and parliamentary practices and, in collaboration with parliaments that provided data and participated in the research (including our Parliament), identified five key characteristics that define a contemporary democratic parliament in the 21st century. These are: (1) ensuring adequate representation, (2) being transparent, (3) being accessible, (4) being accountable, and (5) being effective at all levels – national, international, and local (Beetham 2006, 10–11). Even in this comparative legal study, and about the first criterion – adequate representation in parliament, and in the context of the observation that most of the parliament's work takes place in committees, a solution from the then Assembly of SCG was highlighted as a good example. Such a solution is also contained

in the later Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly. It relates to considering proportional representation when constituting the working bodies of the assembly (Beetham 2006, 28).

When it comes to transparency and accessibility, it is essential to emphasize that the principle of public access to the work of the National Assembly was introduced and guaranteed by law in 2010. The manner of ensuring public access to the work of the National Assembly and its working bodies was established (Zakon o NS 2010, čl. 11). It is important to note that in parliamentary practice, all sessions of the National Assembly and its working bodies are publicly available on the National Assembly's website, both in the archive and through live streaming of all plenary and committee sessions. In comparative constitutional law, the rules on the publicity of the work of parliamentary committees are prescribed by the provisions of only a few constitutions (meaning that this matter is left to the parliamentary rules of procedure), while the widespread rule contained in many constitutions is that parliamentary sessions are open to the public, and some constitutions also prescribe the obligation to publish minutes of parliamentary sessions (Mikić 2022, 324; 327).

Traditionally, foreign affairs and diplomacy have been exclusively associated with the executive branch. However, for over half a century, there has been a growing trend of involving parliamentarians in state delegations and international negotiations (Onderco 2018, 411). This paper focuses on modern parliamentary diplomacy, considered an autonomous activity of parliaments worldwide. Arising from the political practice of parliamentarians, it remains uncoded mainly in international and domestic law, making it primarily political and informal (Stavridis and Jančić 2017, 5). In the case of the Serbian parliament, the National Assembly decides on the composition of standing parliamentary delegations to participate in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and other multilateral parliamentary institutions and organizations, with the proposal for a decision on the composition of standing delegations submitted by the President of the National Assembly, in consultation with the presidents of parliamentary groups, taking into account the proportional representation of political parties and gender representation. The number

of members of our parliamentary delegations varies; for example the delegation to the IPU has nine members, and the head of the delegation is always the President of the National Assembly; the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has 14 members, and our country has been a full member since 2003; the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE has eight members, and after participating in the First Constitutive Session of the PA OSCE in 1991 and the interruption of membership due to sanctions, our continuous membership has existed since 2001; the delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has ten members, and our country has been an associate member since 2007; the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean also has ten members, and our country has been a full member since its founding (2006). The delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the South-East European Cooperation Process has four members and four deputy members, and the Republic of Serbia has been fully involved in the activities of this organization since the Summit in Skopje held in October 2000. The delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation has six members, and our country has been a full member since 2004. The delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization has five members. The delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie has four members, and our country has been a permanent observer since 2008. The delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy has two members, and our country has been a full member since 1995.

Beyond the aforementioned channels of multilateral parliamentary diplomacy, the National Assembly maintains intensive bilateral cooperation with the parliaments of foreign states through friendship groups. These groups are parliamentary bodies that can be formed in the National Assembly voluntarily, aiming to promote collaboration (and, more broadly, relations) between the Republic of Serbia and foreign states. This means that the mutual interest in establishing and developing cooperation between the two countries' parliaments is considered when forming a particular friendship group. A member of parliament who wishes to be a member of a specific group of friends submits an application to the President of the National Assembly, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs decides on its formation, appoints the

president and members of the friendship groups, approves the decision on the exchange of visits with friendship groups of representative bodies of other states, and keeps a record of membership in friendship groups (Poslovnik NS 2002, čl. 50. st. 4). By the principle of voluntariness, there are currently 61 friendship groups in the 14th convocation of the National Assembly (as of September 3, 2024), while in the previous 13th convocation there were 161 friendship groups, some of which were previously independent and have now been merged and grouped. The number of members of friendship groups varies significantly – from 2⁵ to 102⁶ Members.

TRENDS OF CONTEMPORARY PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT, GLOBAL PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS, AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FROM SERBIA

The IPU's intensive work in monitoring and systematizing trends in parliamentary development has led to the publication of five-yearly global parliamentary reports jointly published by the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The first global report was published in 2012, the second in 2017, and the third in 2022, each focusing on a specific theme. Serbian parliament's practices and innovative approaches have been recognized in these reports and highlighted as global examples of good practice. For example, the Second Global Parliamentary Report from 2017, which focuses on parliamentary oversight as a key feature of the parliament's relevance in the 21st century, highlights the Serbian parliament in several places. It points to the building of public trust in the parliament in Serbia. It states that the Republic of Serbia has been actively working to improve political institutions to strengthen public participation and build public trust and has worked to achieve transparency in its work, accountability, and the inclusion of civil society, i.e., the non-governmental sector (IPU

⁵ Friendship group with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

⁶ The number of members of the friendship group with China. The friendship group with Russia has 97 members, with Greece 89, and with Italy and the Holy See 78 members (as of September 3, 2024).

and UNDP 2017, 24). In the context of achieving the aforementioned goals, the introduction of public hearings is highlighted. Particular attention is paid to the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, which institutionalized the organization of public hearings to obtain information and expert opinions on draft regulations, as well as in the context of monitoring the implementation of rules. At the same time, committee meetings held outside the parliament's premises are cited as examples of good parliamentary practice, which have enabled the National Assembly to exercise parliamentary oversight throughout the country. Such innovations based on public inclusion have helped to create contacts and improve relations between representatives of citizens and the public, resulting in more efficient resolution of both local and national issues. It should also be added that the successful application at the republican level in our country has led to the transfer of best practices from the national to the local level (Vukadinović 2015, 39), so public hearings began to be organized in the assemblies of cities and municipalities in 2014 and were then explicitly introduced into the legal framework of local self-government in 2018 by the adoption of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Local Self-Government (2018). Lightbody (2024, 2) also points out that the capacity of public hearings is multiple, as they can be used at different stages of the policy-making process and to varying levels of governance, which potentially emphasizes their suitability for linking with other methods.

In addition to the aforementioned examples, the introduction of the Parliamentary Budget Office (established on November 13, 2013) and work on the Portal for Monitoring the Execution of the Public Budget, with the aim of parliamentary government oversight, are cited as positive examples from Serbia. The Office assists MPs during the budget process (offering expert opinions, analyses, and short studies in various areas) and in the process of reporting on budget execution, with the idea of finally establishing an exceptional expert service in the National Assembly that would provide analyses and specialist support about the budget and financial oversight, as well as advice, information, and other types of support to MPs (IPU and UNDP 2017, 66).

Among the examples of good practice for which Serbia has been recognized by the IPU and UNDP, informal parliamentary groups (cross-party groups) are also mentioned as voluntary associations from

different parliamentary groups (IPU and UNDP 2017, 87). Informal groups of MPs are characterized by voluntariness (i.e., the parliament can function without them, which distinguishes them from committees as permanent working bodies); they are not named either by the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly or by law. They have a different, and often unlimited, number of members; proportional representation is not required as with committees; they were not formed by the plenary session of the National Assembly, and thus, MPs do not exercise rights as for the work of committees. The focus of the work of informal groups is usually specific, emphasized, and narrower than the scope of committees, or it concerns issues that permeate a more significant number of committees (i.e., it does not represent a parallel system to committees, but the scope is different); they hold meetings and not sessions (like committees); a quorum is not required for work, although there may also be internal rules. By all the above, informal groups of MPs have more political than legal significance, which committees have, and from which, as previously stated, they differ at several levels. The number and work of informal groups of MPs in the National Assembly varies from convocation to convocation. Still, overall it can be seen that the following groups have existed and/or exist: the National Branch of GOPAC (Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption), the Women's Parliamentary Network, the Green Parliamentary Group (established in 2009), the Economic Caucus (Parliamentary Group for Economic Development of the National Assembly)⁷ – based on November 20, 2014, the Parliamentary Forum for Serbia's Energy Policy (Energy Forum), the Focus Group for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Parliamentary Network for Digital Security (founded on March 30, 2021).

⁷ The reasons for the formation of the Economic Caucus are twofold: the need was recognized to find a functional mechanism that would contribute to strengthening the role of MPs in formulating and adopting documents of significance for the economic development of the state. At the same time, the need was recognized to establish an effective forum for developing a dialogue between MPs and representatives of the economy on issues of importance for the economic development of the country, and for exchanging views between MPs, as representatives of the central government, and representatives of local self-governments (Knežević Bojović i Vukadinović 2016, 289).

The third global parliamentary report (2022) focuses on public participation and engagement in parliament's work, which implies citizens' involvement and encouragement to shape public policies. The IPU highlights explicitly five key themes: 1) youth engagement; 2) leaving no one behind (which implies inclusion, i.e., that everyone is represented); 3) transforming the way we communicate and work in line with modern technological changes – digital tools; 4) encouraging innovation; 5) connecting and networking (IPU and UNDP 2022, 60–70). In the context of parliamentary committees and consultative processes (an effort to encourage greater involvement), examples from Serbia are highlighted, primarily the departure of parliamentary committees from their seats to hear and include – committee meetings outside the seat and public hearings (IPU and UNDP 2022, 27).

An innovative example from Serbia also relates to the mechanism at the Committee on Environmental Protection of the National Assembly that enables a “green chair” – a single place, on a rotating basis, for a representative of the civil sector who can actively participate in the work of the committee, ask questions and participate in off-site meetings and public hearings, and thus articulate interests and better inform committee members (Vukadinović 2022, 16). The committee may allow the presence or participation of citizens and citizens' association representatives at the committee meeting to discuss specific issues in the field of environmental protection (Poslovnik NS 2002, čl. 63. st. 2.).

CURRENT TOPICS IN FOCUS OF GLOBAL PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT

Climate change and environmental protection stand out when exploring relevant topics at the global parliamentary level. In recent years, the IPU has been paying increasing attention to the role of national parliaments in environmental protection. The roots of these activities can be traced back to 2006 when, at the 114th IPU Assembly, a Resolution on the role of parliament in environmental management and the fight against global ecological degradation was adopted. The resolution's preamble highlights the alarming state of the world's ecosystems, expressing deep concern and then, in 42 points, indicating the need for cooperation between all stakeholders, including state

institutions, civil society, and the private sector. Four specific roles of the parliament (as an institution) in the fight for a healthy environment have been identified, based on which four areas have been formed in which the IPU is developing manuals and guides for parliamentarians as valuable sources of information when making decisions. These are 1) parliament and climate change; 2) parliament and renewable energy; 3) parliament and forest degradation; 4) parliament and the extractive industry.

In 2023, the IPU launched a new Parliaments for the Planet initiative, including a media and social campaign to mobilize parliaments to take action on the climate crisis. As part of this campaign and the presentation of case studies from around the world, the IPU has published case studies from 54 (as of 04.09.2024) parliaments, i.e., countries, including Serbia, under the title: Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Serbia: Informal Parliamentary Groups, which essentially refers to the Focus Group for Sustainable Development Goals, which was formed as an informal group of MPs in the National Assembly. Additionally, the IPU publishes two-minute video clips (with one parliamentarian each) explaining their parliament's specific measures and actions for the planet and answering the question: How does climate change affect your country?

As of September 4, 2024, 78 video interviews have been published, and a compilation of experiences of parliamentarians worldwide has been prepared titled "My Parliament, My Planet, Our Future!". In this way, MPs and parliaments demonstrate a more significant commitment to environmental issues through their examples, enabling the exchange of experiences and encouraging other parliamentarians and parliaments to engage in global efforts to protect the environment and improve in this area. The Cremer-Passy Award, granted annually under the auspices of the IPU, was awarded in October 2023 to a parliamentarian for exceptional achievements in the fight against climate change, further confirming that environmental issues are one of the most critical priorities for the IPU. Based on the above, it can be seen that action on climate change has been recognized as a key priority for the IPU.

In addition to the above, in 2023, the IPU published a unique guide titled "10 Actions for Greener Parliaments (and Those Who Work in Them)", which outlines specific steps and key actions that institutions

and individuals can consider and undertake to adopt “greener” policies and embrace a culture of sustainability. These actions aim to address the climate crisis and pave the way for more decisive climate action. These ten actions are categorized into three groups: institutionalizing “greening” in parliaments, introducing green practices into the work of the parliament and its members (MPs), and leading and promoting a culture of sustainable change.

The trends and current topics described above are not limited to the work of the IPU. Still, they are also evident in the work of other international and regional organizations, as well as in the work of researchers. In this context, it should be noted that the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted in 2023, within the observed trends in deliberative democracy, that there is a noticeable trend towards environmental and other long-term policies being the main focus of deliberative processes (OECD Database 2023). Furthermore, an empirical study in 2021 that investigated the relationship between political freedom and environmental performance in 156 countries shows that countries with a higher degree of political freedom are expected to have stronger ecological performance (Averchenkova, Plyska, and Wahlgren 2022, 8).

In addition to the above, and of significance for the same thematic area in parliamentary development, it should be noted that an electronic database of all national laws and documents related to climate change has been established, covering all countries. The London School of Economics (LSE) and the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment have collaborated on this project to build an evidence base for evidence-based decision-making (open data and tools for researching climate policies and laws). This publicly available database of climate change laws from around the world currently contains over 5,000 documents. Searches can be conducted by various criteria, as well as by country, by clicking on a world map, and there is data on the Republic of Serbia, with a total of 21 documents from Serbia.⁸

In addition to the aforementioned topics, in recent years, parliamentary practice, particularly monitoring law implementation by parliamentary bodies, has been a focus of parliamentary development and

⁸ As of September 4, 2024.

advocacy by specific parliamentary organizations. There is a growing interest in the idea that parliaments, within the context of parliamentary oversight, should consider the possibility of regularly preparing ex-post analyses of law implementation with the aim of post-legislative scrutiny (PLS) – monitoring the implementation and application of laws, the actions of ministries, the adoption of secondary legislation, and the verification of the achievement of legislative objectives.

Finally, in November 2023, the IPU, in collaboration with relevant international organizations⁹ Consolidated the previously diverse aspects of trends and topics relevant to parliamentary development, systematized them in one place, and published them.¹⁰ The result is the Indicators of a Democratic Parliament, a comprehensive self-assessment tool designed to help parliaments assess their capacities and practices against established democratic standards. A total of 25 indicators of a democratic parliament are categorized into seven groups: 1) parliamentary autonomy (members of parliament, parliamentary procedures, parliamentary organization, administrative capacity and independence, lawmaking, oversight, budget, representative role of members of parliament, relations with other branches of government, key parliamentary powers); 2) parliamentary ethics and institutional integrity; 3) transparency of parliamentary processes (communication and cooperation of parliament with the public, access to parliament); 4) addressing public concerns; 5) inclusive lawmaking, oversight, and budgeting (inclusive institutional practices); 6) parliamentary environment for public participation (public participation in parliamentary processes, participation of different groups in the work of parliament); 7) electoral integrity (composition of parliament, composition of parliamentary bodies).

⁹ Represents an initiative of multiple partners, led by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Directorio Legislativo Foundation, Inter Pares / International IDEA, the National Democratic Institute, the United Nations Development Programme, UN Women and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

¹⁰ The website also provides detailed guidelines on conducting the assessment, as well as case studies and online resources.

CONCLUSION

Since every society and state is characterized by a specific national legal tradition and a specific development of statehood, one should not expect a single pattern for the development of an institution such as parliament. However, global research and five-year parliamentary reports, which offer the experiences of other states and parliaments in addressing common or similar challenges, can be helpful both in terms of being taken into account when deciding on the choice of models or creating one's solutions, and in providing us with an insight into the state of affairs about global trends in parliamentary development. In the search for the goal of this paper to determine the place of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and domestic parliamentary practice about global processes, it is first noted that the broadening of the understanding of parliamentary autonomy at several levels has also been reflected in the normative solutions of our parliament. Furthermore, applying a comparative legal and legal dogmatic method in the work established that the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia is recognized and highlighted as an example of good and innovative practice in the published five-year global parliamentary research (especially from 2017 and 2022). The innovations introduced and institutionalized in the last 15 years relate to the formation of informal groups of MPs (GOPAC, Women's Parliamentary Network, Green Parliamentary Group, Economic Caucus, Energy Forum, Focus Group for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals), the introduction and regular holding of public hearings and committee meetings outside the seat of the National Assembly, the green table mechanism, the budget office, the portal for oversight of public finances, etc. Finally, the part of the paper that is focused on researching current topics that are the focus of global parliamentary development and trends in the previous year shows that it is focused on the role of parliament in the fight against climate change and the indicators of a democratic parliament that were published at the end of 2023.

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