

## UNDERSTANDING GOVERNANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY ADMINISTRATIONS

**Mauro ROMANELLI**

*University of Naples Parthenope  
13 via G. Parisi, 180132, Napoli, Italy  
mauro.romanelli@uniparthenope.it*

**Abstract.** *Mechanisms of governance within parliamentary administrations rely on the role of the Secretary-General as a trait of the union between the political sphere and administrative sphere. The role of parliamentary staff is to permit to the representative assembly or legislature to perform constitutional duties without being dependent upon information source of the executive power. Mechanisms of governance following the historical, strategic and organizational evolution of parliament as an organization tend to develop reshaping and redesigning the relationship between politicians and administrators along with a continuum ranging from separation of overlapping and complementary roles. The managerial and strategic role of the Secretary-General is increasing in relation to high operational and organizational complexity of parliamentary staff leading the relationship politics-administration towards a continuous search of dialogue and partnership.*

**Keywords:** *politicians-administrators; mechanisms of governance; parliamentary staff; secretary-general.*

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to elucidate that mechanism of governance within parliamentary administration following the historical, strategic and organizational evolution of parliament as an organization tends to develop reshaping and redesigning the relationship between politicians and administrators. The use of parliamentary staffs permits to the legislative branch to counterbalance a perceived advantage within executive branch agencies (Hammond, 1984). Mechanisms of governance rely on building and maintaining the relationship between political and administrative spheres: the Office of Speaker or Bureau and the Secretary General as top administrator of support staff. The relationship between politicians and administrators may be conceived as complementary: politicians may freely make decisions but cannot deny the advisory role and policy-advising activity of the administration (Svara, 2006; Svara, 2001). Governance of parliamentary administration relies on the role of the Secretary-General as a trait of the union between the political sphere and administrative sphere in order to ensure legislature, parliamentary or representative institution and assembly to perform their duties and operate without being dependent upon information source of the executive authority.

### **Politicians and Administrators: from separate to complementary roles**

Traditionally, the relationship between politics and administration was based on separation of roles (dichotomy) between politicians providing guidance and administrators as bureaucrats, professionals and mere executors of political mandates responsible for making their neutral competence available to the policy process and translating value choices into concrete results (Wilson, 1887; Weber, 1922). Peters (1987) deduced five ideal-typical modes of interaction on a continuum of strict, formal, separation and hierarchy, in which political leaders prevail over neutral bureaucrats, to the administrative-state model, in which technical expertise, bureaucratic activism, and command of information allow bureaucratic professionals to dominate the policy process. Thereby, Putnam, Rockman and Ackerman (1981) have identified four images: simple and clear distinction between politicians as policy-maker and bureaucrats in charge to merely implement policies; both politicians and administrators participate in making policy providing distinctive contributions; bureaucrats may play a *political role* because they engage in policymaking and are concerned with politics; a *pure hybrid* without any distinction between the roles of politicians and bureaucrats. The distinction between politics and administration can be viewed as a continuum ranging from a total and clear separation to a situation where there is no distinction between the two spheres (Jacobsen, 2006). Politicians and administrators are interdependent because they operate together in the common pursuit of sound governance and contribute to public activities and interests based on their distinctive perspectives, competencies, and roles. Within structure and framework of public organizations central administrators may be more tightly linked to politicians and political processes; politicians at the top level will act more actively into administrative matters so that the overlap between the two spheres can occur (Jacobsen, 2006). The total relationship between politicians and administrators can be conceived as complementary which tends to imply distinctness but the emphasis on how each contributes to the whole: politicians may freely make decisions but cannot deny the advisory role and policy-advising activity of the administration (Svara, 2008). The administration may influence and interpret the decisions and the intention of the legislature, exercising an independent judgment in executing policy. Politicians may respect administrative process in abstract but reserve final decisions to themselves and seek to redirect the administrative decisions (Svara, 1998). The boundaries between the political and the managerial spheres tend to be considered as more blurred than separated and the two roles appear to be complementary and overlapping with their features depending on contextual, organizational and individual factors (Svara, 2001; Jacobsen, 2006). Elected officials and administrators maintain distinct but overlapping roles in policy and administration (Svara, 2006a) based on their unique perspectives and values and the differences in their formal positions. Elected officials tend to dominate mission formulation although the administrators may play an advisory role in developing proposals and analyzing conditions and trends (Svara, 1985).

Complementarity recognizes and stresses the interdependence and reciprocal influence between elected officials and administrators along with distinct roles; compliance with independence; respect for political control along with a commitment to shaping and implement policy in ways that promote the public interest (Svara, 2001). The relationship between politicians and administrators could be seen as the interaction between different degrees political control of elected officials and

professional independence (high/low) of administrators (Svara, 2001). The zone of complementarity implies both high-middle levels of political control and professional independence of administrators. Complementarity tends to reconcile conflicting aspects: how politicians maintain control and allow administrators to maintain independence and adhere to professional values and standards to be responsible to the public. The combination of low control and low professional independence is producing behaviors related to 'live and let live', while a high level of control associated with low professional independence leads to administrators not committed to public interest acting without respect for politicians. Political dominance relying on the high degree of control of politicians opens up to potential for political corruption (Svara, 2001).

### **Models of Parliament and models of Parliamentary Administration. The role of parliamentary staff**

The staff has been conceived as a deliberate organization for thought rather than execution, purely advisory but necessary in a large and complex organization to serve the line (Golembiewski, 1961). It is difficult to imagine even the most basic of legislative bodies operating effectively without being aided by a support staff administration. Parliamentary staff may represent a thread of continuity, institutional memory, and expertise within the institution. Legislatures have expanded their staff levels and the expertise on staff to cope with increasing complexity of governing (Romzek & Utter, 1997). The expansion of legislative staffs has been justified as a way of enabling politicians to counterbalance the growing influence of the executive. Parliament needs a technical staff able to keep it informed. Parliamentary staffs do most of the preliminary legislative research and help generate policy ideas providing support to the Parliament outside the operating workflow and do not directly exert influence on the workload (Bontadini, 1983). When Members of Parliament are aware of their state of inferiority in front of the executive authority are likely to demand technical and specialized assistance on lawmaking (Campbell & Laporte, 1981). The role of parliamentary staff is to permit to the representative assembly or legislature to perform constitutional duties without being dependent upon information source of the executive power. While executive branch agencies are considered as the operating core of governmental administration (Pinto, 1983), the parliamentary staff is responsible for providing non-partisan assistance and professional aide on lawmaking and policymaking without being dependent on the executive branch agencies (Finzi, 1934; Tocanne, 1993; Zuddas, 2004). Parliaments have developed staff structures shaped according to their own historical traditions. Staff structure also reflects the strategic role of the legislature in the political system (Campbell & Laporte, 1981; Ryle, 1981; Blischke, 1981). Parliament may play over time a decisional/ratifying behavior designing a staff structure consistently with a strategic choice. Mixed models of parliament and administration may emerge over time. Ratifying Parliament does not play an active role in policymaking. It is supported by a registration staff able to perform only an administrative task (convocation and registration of sittings, transcript of debates). Decisional Parliament may play a competitive role with the executive power on policymaking. It is supported by a consulting staff able to provide professional support and aide on lawmaking and policymaking (Chimenti, 1981). During centrist governments (the 1950s) Italian Parliament played a ratifying role. In 1970s Italian Parliament could be qualified as a 'governing parliament' playing a

strategic behavior and decisional role in the political life (*parliamentary centrality*). Since Parliament (the 1970s) adopted more effective inquiry and control powers the impact of innovation on the structure of administrative and legislative staff occurred as Parliament changed political role and strategic choices (Pinto, 1983; Cheli, 1987).

### **Mechanisms of governance. The role of the Secretary-General**

Governance of parliamentary administration necessarily implies dialogue and cooperation between political governing bodies and administrators. Mechanisms of governance should ensure parliamentarians as operating core to work without being dependent upon information source of the executive power. Members of Parliament, as representatives, legislators, and scrutinizers of the government, tend to select by-election the members of Bureau or Office of Speaker as the strategic apex of parliamentary institution. The Office of Speaker or Bureau is considered to be as a political and governing collegiate body (Gnan, Hinna, & Tomasi, 2008). Bureau as the collective governing body may decide on the procedural propriety of draft bills, appoint the SG and other officials senior, organize parliamentary business, arrange the organization and running of service and staff in accordance with the procedure and decide the rules relating to the accounts of the Assembly, organize cooperation between Parliament and outside bodies. Bureau generally may comprise the Speaker or President of the assembly, The Vice-Presidents, The Questeurs, the Secretaries. The Speaker is in charge to organize parliamentary business, control debates in public sittings, decide the order of amendments, ensure that procedure is followed, direct and monitor the operation of parliamentary services, sign administrative decisions. The questions are responsible for the administrative organization (staff, equipment, buildings), finance (proper accounting, expenditure, procurement). The Secretaries may assist the President at sittings on voting, read documents, roll-calls, verify the minutes of each sitting.

Most of Parliaments are organized with one Secretary-General for each Chamber as the managerial apex of parliamentary administration accountable to the political governing body (strategic apex) (AA. VV., 2003; Courdec, 1998; Tocanne, 1993; Zampetti, 2000). The Secretary-General as the top manager of administrative and legislative support staff is accountable to the political governing body (Bureau) playing as necessary interface and boundary spanning role between support staff work units and Members of Parliament (Ciaurro, 1983; Tocanne, 1993; Zampetti, 2000). The SG is the highest official senior within the management of parliamentary administration in vis-à-vis the political collegiate governing bodies (*strategic apex*). The SG is a full-time servant of parliament being unable to take up other posts in conflict with institutional duties. The SG is the main benchmark figure for providing legal and procedural advice to the President/Speaker and is accountable for the efficient working operation of the administrative apparatus. The SG may play a dynamic role operating both as the head of hierarchical structure and liaison guaranteeing that structures work together in order to ensure that all issues are dealt with on the necessary across-the-board basis due to the complexity of the administrative activities. The SG does not cease from office when a new parliament is elected or when the House is dissolved early, and it is not necessary to be reconfirmed in office. The candidate for SG's job must be highly competent, with managerial skills, specific professional capabilities, not only in public administration but above all in parliamentary and institutional affairs and matters. In

this connection, specialist knowledge of the parliamentary law is often required as desirable.

The SG may perform a dual role. SG is the principal adviser on law, practice, and parliamentary procedures. The SG as top manager may direct legislative and administrative services and ensure the efficient functioning of the parliamentary administration, usually entailing broad management responsibilities for parliamentary staff, budgets, and assets (AA.VV., 2003; Zampetti, 2000). *Hourglass* configuration or form is the term used to describe the mechanism of governance emerging within the organizational development of Italian parliamentary administration. Bureau is the political apex of the parliamentary organization. The Secretary-General (SG) acting as a nexus between support staff work units and parliamentarians is the *trait d'union* between the political sphere and administrative sphere (Bontadini, 1983; Cheli 1983; Chimenti, 1981; Ciaurro 1983; Pacelli 1984). The Secretary-General as the effective fulcrum of legislative and administrative staff is responsible for setting policies, scrutinizing and monitoring the work of the Administration, with an overall unifying function by identifying objectives and programs for the workload, laying down directives for their attainment, assessing the results and playing an active part in the main functional processes (Posteraro, 2009).

### **Historical evolution of governance and organization in the Italian parliamentary administrations: the changing role of the Secretary-General**

Mechanisms of governance tend to follow both historical-political and strategic-organizational evolution of parliamentary administration. Support staff work units increasingly evolve over time in terms of operational complexity. The task of the Secretary-General evolves from advisory to managerial roles. The responsibilities of a political body (Bureau) move from managerial to strategic tasks. Support staffs move from registration to consulting administration. Functions, tasks, and activities tend to change over time: from data acquisition and processing to research, study and documentation activities.

Historically, the organizational evolution of the support staff tends to follow the political evolution of the parliamentary system (Cheli, 1983; Chimenti, 1994; Chimenti, 1981; Ciaurro, 1983; Pinto, 1983). Originally, the task of parliamentary staff consisted of maintaining the physical facilities required by Parliament, accounting for its expenditures, and providing transcripts of its debates (Chimenti, 1981; Ciaurro, 1983). Increases in legislative workload and constituent demands have been responsible for the growing reliance on staff coherently with increasing complexity of activities on policymaking and lawmaking over time (Ryle, 1981). There has been an increase in the scope of the other traditional staff activities as well as a general modernization of administrative methods (Campbell & Laporte, 1981).

With Parliament becoming the centre of political competition (*parliamentary centrality*) (1971) and the introducing of new instruments of investigation, inquiry, and control over the executive (Pinto, 1983) strategic and operational complexity of parliamentary staff increased in terms of number of personnel, professionalism of human resources, differentiation and specialization of tasks, work units (Garella & D'Orta, 1997; Cheli, 1983; Pinto, 1983; Tocanne, 1993). Modern legislators must

depend on expert sources of information and advice. Parliamentary administrations have increased their informative and legislative sources by developing activities of study research and information process (1948-1977). The professional evolution of the administration is consistent with support staff able to provide both legal advice and data, information and knowledge for aware decision-making of parliamentarians (Ciaurro, 1983). The diversity of expertise is an important feature. Technical and scientific staff, program and business analysts can bring added informational and analytical expertise to parliament (Fox & Hammond, 1977). In 1980s sources of information and knowledge, data and information process and acquisition tend to improve leading to consider the organizational and managerial dimensions as critical variables (Tivelli, 1992). Investigative functions have been enhanced through the horizontal coordination and functional integration of powers and information distributed across the services and offices as ordinary method to perform tasks and ensure organizational flexibility, in order to adjust the structures to the specific task of each sector and to the changing remits on a case-by-case basis (AA.VV., 2003; Zuddas, 2004).

The Secretary General was appointed as responsible for functioning of legislative services at Chambers of Deputies in 1907. The task of the Secretary-General was focused on legal and procedural advice. Thereby, the Secretary-General as vested of a coordinating role and *primus inter pares* between the official seniors was becoming the first and direct advisor and accountable official of the Speaker of Chamber in law and parliamentary procedures. The Speaker is at the top of parliamentary services and responsible for the proposal for appointment of the Secretary-General to Council of Presidency (Bureau). Council of Presidency is responsible on the matter of personnel. With the advent of the Fascist regiment (1922-1943), Parliament has become ratifying and executive assembly of registration without any influence on lawmaking and policymaking. Political apex (Speaker and Bureau) has enhanced its power and responsibility. Political body is responsible for the appointment, hiring, promotions, careers and dismissing of personnel without SG may make any proposal (Pacelli, 1984). Since 25 June 1946 support staff work units were dependent on the Secretary-General who was responsible in front of the Speaker as responsible on the whole personnel. Since 1953 the Council of Directors as an administrative body could direct services being responsible on careers of low hierarchical level personnel. The Office of Speaker was in charge to appoint both the SG and the officials of services, to structure the organization design, to determine tasks and responsibilities of personnel. In the 1960s a new parliamentary majority of the centre-left coalition was leading to a decisional parliament playing a proactive role in policymaking (*parliamentary centrality*). Since 1964 the structure was moving in the transition from registration to consulting and professional staff leading to an improvement of information and knowledge sources and infrastructures (legislative, research and study service). In 1964 the Secretary-General was becoming the director of personnel at the top of the parliamentary staff. Managerial responsibilities were added to advisory and administrative tasks. The SG can stay at sittings of Office of Speaker with consultant vote driving an enhanced autonomy of parliamentary administration (Pacelli, 2001). At beginning of 1980s role and task of the Secretary-General evolved from purely advisory and administrative to the strategic and managerial task. Since 1990s managerial responsibilities of the Secretary-General increased in relation to the operational complexity of structure. Today, the Secretary-General is being required to be both an adviser on legal and procedural matters and top manager of the

administration. The broadening of managerial powers enhances the advisory role because of the increasing importance of the tasks connected with the scheduling and planning of parliamentary business (Zampetti, 2000). With regard to the administrative reform (1999-2001), the Vice-SGs are responsible both for coordinating traditional sectors of activity and transversal functions relating to services closely linked to the SG. Principles of organizational flexibility permit to the SG to create new work units consistently with new policies without any or previous approval of the political body.

### **The role of Secretary General within organizational evolution and complexity of parliamentary administrations**

The appointment of Secretary-General at the managerial and administrative apex is associated with the rise of modern Italian parliamentary administration as support staff structure autonomous and independent of Parliament as political organization and institution. The distinction between political and administrative spheres was considered a key principle for functioning and effectiveness of parliamentary administration as public administration. The re-organization design of support staff administrations is strictly related and dependent on managerial development within the structure and demands organizational and management skills on the part of the SG in relation to increasing evolution of task of work units and departments (Zampetti, 2000). As the organizational complexity is increasing strategic and organizational changes rely on bridging politics and administration (Gnan, Hinna & Tomasi, 2008). Complementarity tends to reconcile the need for politicians to maintain high control and allow administrators to maintain high independence and adhere to professional values and standards to be responsible to the public (Svara, 2001). Historical and organizational developments of Italian parliamentary administrations lead to design mechanisms of governance based on complementary roles that always more and more emphasize strategic task of the Secretary-General in relation to high degree of organizational complexity of parliamentary administrations relying on decisional parliament supported by a consulting administration. The Secretary-General is able to play a coordinating or strategic role coherently with the development of a registration or consulting administration providing support to a decisional parliament. The Secretary-General is able to play a management or professional role coherently with the development of a consulting or registration administration providing support to a ratifying parliament. The relationship between politicians and administrators tends to evolve coherently with different degrees of organizational complexity of parliamentary administration.

### **Conclusion**

Innovation processes lead to the redesign of the relationship between politicians and administrators as grounded on dialogue, relying on cooperation and shared partnership (Gnan, Hinna & Scarozza, 2009; Hinna, 2009), based on complementary roles. In relation to increasing organizational complexity, strategic and organizational changes require mechanisms of governance bridging politics and administration that emphasize the dynamic, conflict-oriented and dialectical interactions between Bureau and the Secretary-General as so to elucidate the multidimensional characters of the

relationship between politicians and administrators as suggested by the logic of disharmony (Hansen & Ejersbo, 2002).

## References

- AA. VV. (2003). *Seminar on parliamentary administrations and legislative cooperation*. Roma: Camera dei Deputati.
- Aberbach, J.D., Putnam, R.D., & Rockman, B.A. (1981). *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Blischke, W. (1981). Parliamentary Staff in the German Bundestag. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 4(4), 533-558.
- Bontadini, P. (1983). Strutture organizzative complesse e dinamiche. In AA.VV. (Ed.), *Burocrazia parlamentare. Funzioni, garanzie e limiti* (pp.31-39). Roma: Camera Dei Deputati.
- Campbell, S., & Laporte, J. (1981). The staff of parliamentary assemblies in France. *Legislative Quarterly Studies*, 6(4), 521-531.
- Cheli, E. (1987). Ruolo del Parlamento e nuovi caratteri della burocrazia parlamentare. In AA.VV. (Ed.), *Studi in memoria di Vittorio Bachelet. Vol. I. Amministrazione e organizzazione* (pp.187-204). Milano: Giuffrè.
- Chimenti, C. (1994). Ruolo delle Camere e amministrazioni parlamentari. In AA.VV., *Lo Stato delle istituzioni italiane. Problemi e prospettive* (pp.235-257). Milano: Giuffrè.
- Chimenti, C. (1981). Gli apparati delle camere. *Quaderni costituzionali*, 1(3), 573-580.
- Ciaurro, G.F. (1983). Il parlamento italiano: III. – Gli apparati. *Bollettino di informazioni costituzionali e parlamentari*, 3(1), 93-152.
- Courdec, M. (1998). The administrative and financial autonomy of parliamentary assemblies. *Constitutional and parliamentary information*, 15-59.
- Finzi, C. (1934). *L'autonomia amministrativa ed economica delle assemblee legislative*. Roma: Camera dei Deputati.
- Fox, H.W., & Hammond, S.W. (1977). *Congressional Staffs. The invisible force in American lawmaking*. New York: The Free Press.
- Garella, F., & D'Orta, C. (1997). *Le amministrazioni degli organi costituzionali*. Roma: Laterza.
- Gnan, L., Hinna, A., & Scarozza, D. (2009). Public organizations and innovation process. In M.C. Di Guardo, R. Pinna, & D. Zaru (Eds.), *Per lo sviluppo, la competitività e l'innovazione del sistema economico. Il contributo degli studi di Organizzazione aziendale* (pp.180-201). Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Gnan, L., Hinna, A., & Tomasi, D. (2008). Gli organi direttivi nei processi di cambiamento del settore pubblico. Paper presented at XXXI Convegno AIDEA, Napoli 17-18 ottobre, 1-35.
- Golembiewski, R.T. (1961). Toward the New Organization Theories: Some Notes on 'Staff'. *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 5(3), 237-259.
- Hammond, S.W. (1984). Legislative Staffs. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 9(2), 271-317.
- Hansen, K.M., & Ejersbo, N. (2002). The relationship between politicians and administrators – a logic of disharmony. *Public Administration*, 80(4), 733-750.
- Hinna, A. (2009). *Organizzazione e cambiamento nelle pubbliche amministrazioni*. Roma: Carocci.
- Jacobsen, D.I. (2006). The relationship between politics and administration: the importance of contingency factors, formal structure, demography, and time.



- Governance: an international Journal of policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 19(2), 303-323.
- Pacelli, M. (1984). Alcune riflessioni sui Segretari generali delle Camere del Parlamento. *Bollettino delle informazioni costituzionali e parlamentari*, 1(1), 57-97.
- Pacelli, M., (2001). Le amministrazioni delle Camere tra politica e burocrazia. In L. Violante (Ed.), *Il Parlamento. Annali Storia d'Italia* (pp.743-769). Torino: Einaudi.
- Pinto, F. (1983). L'evoluzione dell'apparato camerale: brevi profili storici. In AA. VV. (Ed.), *Burocrazia parlamentare. Funzioni, garanzie e limiti* (pp.256-276). Roma: Camera dei Deputati.
- Posteraro, F. (2009). The Office of Secretary General. Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments. Geneva.
- Ryle, M.T. (1981). The Legislative Staff of the British House of Commons. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 4(4), 497-519.
- Romzek, B.S., & Utter, J.A. (1997). Congressional Legislative Staffs: Political Professional or Clerks? *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(4) 1251-1279.
- Svara, J. (2008). Beyond Dichotomy: Dwight Waldo and the Interwined Politics-Administration Relationship. *Public Administration Review*, 68(1), 46-52.
- Svara, J. (2006a). The Search for Meaning in Political-Administrative Relations in Local Governments. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 29(12), 1065-1090.
- Svara, J. (2006b). Complexity in Political-Administrative Relations and the Limits of the Dichotomy Concept. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 28(1), 121-139.
- Svara, J. (2001). The Myth of Dichotomy: Complementarity of politics and administration in the Past and Future of Public Administration. *Public Administration Review*, 61(2) 51-58.
- Svara, J.H. (1998). The Politics-Administration Dichotomy Model as Aberration. *Public Administration Review*, 58(1), 176-183.
- Svara, J.H. (1985). Dichotomy and duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager-Cities. *Public Administration Review*, 45(1), 221-232.
- Tivelli, L. (1992). L'evoluzione del ruolo del consigliere parlamentare in relazione allo sviluppo delle funzioni parlamentari. In AA. VV. (Ed.), *Il Parlamento della Repubblica. Organi, procedure, apparati, IV*, (pp.73-95). Roma: Camera dei Deputati.
- Tocanne, V. (1993). Les structures administratives des parlements. Perspective comparatives. *Revue française d'administration publique*, 68, 505-519.
- Weber, M. (1922). Bureaucracy. In Shafritz, J. M., Albert C. H., *Classics of public administration*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace Collegers Publishers.
- Wilson, W. (1887). The Study of Administration. *Political Science Quarterly*, 2(2), 197-222.
- Zampetti, U. (2000). The role of the secretary general in the administration of parliament. *Association of General Secretaries of Parliament Review*, 180, 1-14.
- Zuddas, P. (2004). *Amministrazioni parlamentari e procedimento legislativo. Il contributo degli apparati serventi delle Camere al miglioramento della qualità della legislazione*. Milano: Giuffré.