

PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP – PROBLEMS, DILEMMAS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF LEGISLATIVE LEADERS: THE CASE OF SLOVENIA

Drago ZAJC¹

.....

Parliamentary leadership deserves special attention since it is connected with the decision making process in the parliament as the key political institution. Though the parliamentary leadership is bounded by strict rules determined in the constitutions the real power of parliamentary leaders may be different from the formal. Speakers' political and managerial skills are necessary when parliament is exposed to increased government interventions or becomes the scene of unprincipled fights among the politicians. The study of the characteristics of parliamentary leadership in one of the new democratic parliaments in Central Europe, the Slovene National Assembly brings evidence of the importance of outside factors like the process of integration of Slovenia into the EU and the economic crisis, including the recent migrant crisis, demanding quick adaptations to new situations and building broad consensus for the swift passing of new legislation.

Key words: parliament; leadership; speakers; competences and power; outside factors.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL AND PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP

Leadership is not clearly defined and is at the same time a highly contested concept. It resembles other social science concepts related to power, influence, authority and control (Elgie 1995, 2), while it is less associated with cooperation and example. In political science it can be connected with positions of authority that individuals have on different levels of the state structure which may have influence on or even determine the outcome of any decision making process. The study of political leadership in all of its forms deserves special attention since it gives us the answers why political institutions operate in certain way.

¹ Dr. Drago ZAJC, associate professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Among a number of competing definitions of political leadership the most acceptable for an empirical research is the definition of leadership as a process in which leaders exercise control over the decision making process (Edinger 1975, 257). This definition is based on the broad concept of political process, involving the selection of public issues, putting them on the political agenda, processing them in the parliament, taking binding decisions in the form of laws, and controlling the effects of legislative output. We may therefore discern different kinds of leadership exercised in different arenas – head of state leadership, cabinet leadership, legislative leadership, judicial leadership, and leadership of political parties. There are also distinctions among the various types of leadership, such as individual and collective or transactional and transforming leadership, which may be characteristic of particular arenas. While the executive leadership deals mainly with different public policy issues which are being formulated in legislative proposals, the legislative leadership concentrates on the procedural aspects of the decision making process in the parliament in which decisions on policies are made or altered. Legislative leaders, i.e. presiding officers or speakers whose prerogatives are based on specific delineation of powers between the executive and the parliament are ensuring that parliamentary business runs smoothly. Exercising their control, they have to respond to their unique leadership environment consisting of fixed institutional structures, long-term historical conditions like political culture, and even short term political demands (Elgie 1995, 8).

The studies of political leadership have been usually limited to executive leadership, i.e. leadership of heads of states and prime ministers, and have dealt with the role of presiding officers or parliamentary speakers only occasionally. Our study is a small contribution to this rather neglected research area. One of the reasons for such investigation is also the current crisis of political (especially parliamentary) leadership in contemporary states.

2 MODELS OF PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP

Leading the parliament as the central and most sensitive institution of a political system is one of most important leadership positions in any democratic political system and is of extreme importance for the quality of democratic life and political stability of any state. Nevertheless, parliamentary leadership remains one of the less understood aspects of legislative process (Squire in Ham 2005, 100).

There is no definite model of parliamentary leadership since it varies from country to country and is changing with time. It does however have its own characteristics and purposes, such as the promotion of institutional autonomy, the development of internal organization or the interpretation and enforcement of parliamentary rules in the legislative process (Sinclair 1995, 21). Its particular goals are also the development of fairness and good faith among all members of parliament, contributing to the spirit of cooperation and the respect of minority (Grad 2013, 15). Unlike all other leaders, the parliamentary leaders are granted power by the majority of freely elected deputies formed by their co-partisans or coalition allies.

Parliamentary leaders operate within the confines of a system where freedom of action is bounded by strict rules determined in the constitutions and in the parliamentary standing orders (Laundy 1989). Formal power of the speaker reflects the democratic character of the political system and can be measured

by various indicators, which may be combined. The speaker's power index may combine (a) procedural competences or prerogatives (planning parliamentary work and placing matters on the parliamentary agenda, determining the type of procedure, appointing the relevant standing committees which are going to deal with the bills in the first or second reading, fixing the time schedule of readings, etc.), (b) competences connected with presiding the sessions of parliament (determining the manner and the length of discussion, stimulating democratic discourse and maintaining order), (c) the protection of its autonomy against the executive and (d) the representation of the parliament on the outside (Clucas 2001, 327; Grad 2013, 199). While the weak or undefined powers may complicate decision making process and postpone decisions the strong formal powers may have serious consequences for the democratic nature of legislative process, allowing for the curtailment of democratic practices, including shortening of parliamentary debates and acceleration of legislative procedures (Cox 2006, 144). Powerful speakers may direct parliamentary business and win legislative battles more easily, although this is done frequently at the expense of the minority rights. Speaker's individual role in the leadership may be affected by particular collegiate bodies (Bergougnous 1997, 92), composed of the leaders of political party groups and other members with mostly consultative functions.

Researchers are pointing to the fact that the real power of parliamentary leadership may be quite different from the formal: informal power may be greater or smaller, depending on the speaker's personality, his professional background, previous political experiences or the length of time s/he has had this function. The speaker's real power depends primarily on his/her particular political skills to accommodate different interests or make compromises in order to prevent or overcome the blockades of decision-making. At the same time the position requires a lot of organizational abilities and experience. In order to achieve their particular aims, the speakers may use different methods – (a) changing situation, (b) postponing the problems to a later time, (c) providing side benefits to some groups of deputies in order that they ignore the problem, and (d) hiding the problems with rhetoric, personal charm or intimidation. Speaker's political and managerial skills are particularly necessary when the parliament becomes the scene of ideological struggles among the parties or unprincipled fights among politicians without personal or political culture. The role of the speaker is therefore far from routine: s/he may be innovative in agenda setting by giving priority to urgent matters, by solving procedural hurdles or by finding the minimum possible understanding among the fiercely competing sides in order to avoid the complete defeat of one of the sides. S/he may also use innovative approaches when a member violates regulations and require the member to conform to the rule (Sturgis 1993, 88). By innovative interpretation of the rules s/he may also be contributing to the procedural standards (Laundy 1989, 53).

According to parliamentary scholars and members of parliaments parliamentary leadership is always influenced by the environment in which the leaders operate (Richman 2010, 213). There are a number of contextual and other factors like (a) fixed institutional structures and rules determining the power of the parliament vis-a-vis the executive. A new parliament like the Slovene National Assembly may have a stronger role exercising substantial influence in the process of government formation where every candidate for ministerial position has to present her/his views in the relevant standing committee before the government is formally invested. A parliament can also dispose of strong means for the control of the government like interpellations of individual ministers or of the whole government, which may or may not be

supported by the speaker in practice. Though neither constitutional nor procedural rules determined in the standing orders could be an accurate guide to political practice. Another important factor is (b) political culture giving different emphasis to the role of individual. In countries with more individualistic political culture similar levels of powers of the speakers with less formal regulation of behaviour were developed, while others conveyed greater and strict prerogatives to speakers (ibid., 222). The third important factor is (c) the level of professionalization of parliamentary members (Squire 2007, 213). The lack of personal experience has contributed to the conflict behaviour and lower consensus building capacity (Olson 1994, 117). Higher professionalization is diminishing the need for frequent interventions of the speakers into legislative procedures and makes the parliamentary business more expedient. Parliaments with higher professionalization of deputies also tend to have more bills introduced and greater passage rates. Professionalization of the deputies also contributes to the (d) constructive relationship between opposition parties and coalition. Where the constructive relationship has been developed the share of unanimously approved legislation at final readings has increased. In the new democratic countries this relationship frequently became conflictual, preventing realistic and pragmatic approaches to the solving of urgent problems. Opposition parties have been frequently using all ways for delegitimation of coalition governments trying also to block the legislative process by other means, including the demands for extraordinary sessions and calls for referendums (Zajc 2016, 21).

The most decisive factor in the parliamentary environment influencing the behaviour of the speakers has been in the recent time (e) the increase of government intervention. Such intervention, representing continuous pressure on parliaments and their leaders, may greatly increase in the case of economic or other crisis. The outbreak of economic crisis in 2008 has changed the previous agendas of parliaments and demanded more acts to be passed in a shorter time even by extraordinary procedures. The time for discussion of most important matters and acts has become shorter, a number of dilemmas remaining unresolved and questions unanswered. Such circumstances demanded particular abilities and continuous efforts from parliamentary leaders in order to guarantee the swift passage of urgent bills while ensuring the legitimacy of the legislative procedures. They have had to take special care to build consensus among the deputy groups of coalition and opposition.

Every attempt to study the leadership of contemporary parliaments has to take into account the different stages of legislative process. One of the particularly important stages is the first stage of planning parliament's work and agenda setting. The viable legislative programs may be made primarily on the basis of the governments' legislative programs (based on coalition agreements) and timetables, demanding a good cooperation between the speaker and the government and prompt realization of the desired policy changes (Pogorelec 2016, 21). There may also be initiatives for legislative regulation from other proposers, which may be included on the schedule, depending on the time available for additional items. In the second stage the speaker's task is to ensure democratic debate on all issues related to the introduced bills and to streamline the legislative processes in order to maximize the likelihood of passing the bills, taking care about the amount of the workload and the determined time limits. The leadership is finally important also in the third stage when final decisions are taken since it depends on the speaker how particular matters will be put to the vote - by direct voting or by ballot vote (Sturgis 1993, 144) and when the voting takes place with regard to other important matters and even how the voting will be recorded.

Scholars of parliamentarism at the same time agree that it is difficult to measure the power of leadership. Various researchers including the institutionally determined rules, the level of legislative professionalization and policy-making challenges or government interventionism, have tested a number of variables. Some additional variables were used like the number of parliamentarians, the size of the population or even the number of non-governmental organizations and lobbyists. Even though these tests were not sufficiently elaborated, some indexes combined various variables, which have not been adequate and applicable in different situations and in different legislatures. They also differed regarding the level of legislating institutions (national or sub-national) and their results have been often contradictory (Clucas 2001, 212). Only partial indications were found in the sense that higher legislative professionalism leads to a weaker leadership or that intensive government interventionism in the periods of economic crisis may be associated to stronger leadership power. A stronger indication found was that a great number of policy making challenges may block the policy making process and the smooth passage of bills by overwhelming the legislative workload. A consequence may be that the speaker resorts to extraordinary procedures and the shortening of the debates. Some of these variables may be tentatively tested also on the example of the leadership of individual parliaments like the Slovene National Assembly.

3 PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF SLOVENIA

In our attempt to study the characteristics of parliamentary leadership in one of the new democratic parliaments in Central Europe we will take into consideration the whole context of parliamentarization and concentrate on several most important variables which have been influencing the behaviour of speakers which were exposed in previous analyses of the Slovene National Assembly. They also correspond to the variables used by the authors of some representative studies of parliamentary leadership (Olson, Cox, Sturgis, etc.). We will later try to analyse whether the behaviour of the speakers has contributed to the efficiency of the legislative process and to the stability of the Slovene parliament.

The institutional variable

The National Assembly of Slovenia is among structurally diversified working parliaments² – besides the speaker, who is elected by majority of votes of all deputies by ballot vote, there are at least two structures taking over a part of the tasks connected with leadership, the working bodies and the deputies' groups. On the top level is the speaker as an individual leader (according to Art. 84 of the Slovene Constitution) bearing complex responsibilities and prerogatives determined in the renewed standing orders of 2002. His main prerogatives correspond to the prerogatives, which constitute the basis of the speaker's Institutional Powers, therefore may be measured in formal way.

The prerogatives of the speaker of the National Assembly determined in the

² The National Assembly (Državni zbor) is the main chamber of the Slovene parliament established by the Slovene Constitution of 1991 (Art. 80), composed of 90 representatives of the citizens elected according to the principle of proportional representation with four-percent threshold. The National Assembly adopts laws and other decisions and ratifies treaties. Laws may be proposed by government, or by any deputy or at least 5.000 citizens (Art. 88).

standing orders are to represent the National Assembly and to convene and chair its sessions. S/he also has to maintain the relationship with the government of RS and the State Council,³ the president of Slovenia and other state bodies, and to take care of the cooperation with the parliaments of other states and international parliamentary institutions. S/he also delivers the matters to be dealt in the relevant standing committees (Art. 19). S/he is responsible for chairing the sessions impartially – determining the order of the discussants taking care that deputies of all deputy groups are represented (Art. 67), allowing speech time for the deputies wanting to speak about the implementation of the Standing Orders (Art. 69) and to deputies who want to replicate previous discussants (Art. 79). He can adjourn the session and determine when it is going to continue (Art. 73). Taking care for the order on the session he may warn the deputies who speak about unrelated matters or insult others, close their discussion or order the removal of an undisciplined deputy from the session (Art. 76).

A number of speaker's prerogatives are being implemented in cooperation with speaker's advisory body – the collegium, which has the power of taking decisions of procedural and organizational character (Kaučič and Grad 2003, 199). The collegium, composed of the speaker, the deputy speakers, the leaders of deputy groups and the representative(s) of national minorities may decide on the number of seats of particular deputy groups in standing committees, on the proposals to pass a bill by urgent procedure or shortened procedure, and on the duration of the sessions of the National Assembly, including the time for debate on individual items on the agenda (Art. 21). The collegium also accepts the working program of the National Assembly for one year and the short-term program for two months, determining the days for the meetings of standing committees and sessions of the National Assembly. When determining these programs, the collegium considers the program of the Government of RS for the current year and proposals of the deputies, deputy groups and standing committees (Art. 23). The time for discussions of the deputies and other participants cannot be shorter than five minutes while the time for debates of deputy groups cannot be shorter than ten minutes unless the collegium does not decide otherwise (Art. 67 of standing orders). These provisions in standing orders referring to the powers of the Speaker may in general be compared to the provisions determining the power of speakers in other parliaments like German Bundestag, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, or Czech *Poslanecká snemovna*, which have similar collegiate organs with advisory functions (Igličar 2011, 235). When making decisions, the number of seats of the deputy groups in favour or against is considered. Although the individual prerogatives seem to be formal or some even shared with the collegium, they give the speaker power to expedite parliamentary business with sufficient efficiency, i.e. to ensure the expediency of the legislative process in due time (the time the government or other proposer considers necessary). Even if they are sometimes unclear or insufficient, his prerogatives are also allowing him to perform his task with determination, and even to choose whether he will behave impartially as 'primus inter pares' or as a representative of own political option (Mozetič 1999, 95).

While the speaker of the National Assembly, together with the collegium, is

³ State Council (Državni svet) is the second chamber established by the Constitution (Art. 96) composed of 40 representatives of economic, professional and local interests. Its powers are to propose to the National Assembly the passing of laws, to convey to the National Assembly its opinions on all matters within the competences of National Assembly, to require the National Assembly to decide again on a given law before the proclamation and to require inquiries on all matters of public importance.

exercising most important part of the leadership function, there are also some other bodies taking over particular leadership tasks. The standing committees composed proportionally with regard to the power relation between the coalition and opposition (Grad 2013, 206) carrying important responsibilities in the legislative process, serving as arenas of practical negotiations among party groups and making amendments to the bills and preparing reports for the plenary. Their leaders act as important decision makers on this level - determining the agendas, the allocation of the time for the discussion and the order of discussants, directing and closing discussion, etc. The standing committees are taking substantial control power over the legislative process in the first part of the second reading, when they prepare the text of the amended bill for the discussion on the plenary (which has been limited to the articles which have been changed). They also prepare the final version of the bills in the third reading of regular procedure when the voting takes place. Regardless of the fact that the leaders are chosen among more experienced members, the efficiency of the committees may be questioned since the average deputy is a member at least three committees. Another important body in the structure of the National Assembly are the deputy groups with the power of directing the work of the National Assembly. The leaders of party groups have taken particular responsibilities to prepare political positions of the groups regarding the matters on the agenda and the strategy of attaining the short time and long time goals of the group (Patzelt 1999, 51). Active participation of the members of deputy groups in the relevant committees when discussing policy matters is of utmost importance for the efficiency of legislative process having a direct impact on the quality of leadership of the whole parliament.

The speaker and leaders of committees and deputy groups have particular competences in the legislative procedure, which may vary. The regular procedure consists of three readings, but the first may be skipped (Art. 121), while the second and the third reading may be joined if in the second reading less than 10% of the articles of the proposed law were amended (Art. 138). A much shorter urgent procedure may be used in the interests of state security and defence, in the case of natural disasters, or to prevent hardly reparable consequences for the functioning of the state (Art. 143). A shortened procedure is applied only when minor changes to the laws or simple adjustment of the laws to other legal norms are required (Art. 142). In the practice of the National Assembly, the speakers have almost regularly accepted the demands of the government to use urgent procedure in order to pass the proposed laws (almost half of the laws were passed by urgent procedure in the previous mandates).

However, these formal competences and prerogatives of the speaker are creating an impression of greater power of the speaker in legislative process as s/he has in reality. In a very divided parliament, where each coalition has had only a small majority and where the relation between coalition and opposition is far from cooperative, the real power of the speakers has been depending to a great extent on their personal characteristics, political skills and longer experience. In fact, a number of speakers from 1990 were elected to this position without previous experiences (with the exception of the first) and with different professional profiles (most of the speakers had a degree in social sciences, two were doctors of medicine two had a degree in law and one in chemistry). Some had even not served as deputies before and speakership was also not the last job in their career.⁴ However they were quick learners and have

⁴ The speakers of Slovene assemblies from 1990 on were dr. France Bučar, mag. Herman Rigelnik, Jožef Školč, dr. Marjan Podobnik, Feri Horvat, Borut Pahor, dr. France Cukjati, dr. Pavel Gantar,

adapted to their position where they tried to act as 'primus inter pares' being at the same time perceived as agents of their political parties' groups. We can find substantial differences among the speakers in their practical behaviour. Some speakers were stronger and others weaker regarding the planning of the work of the assembly, agenda setting, or organizing the legislative process, depending mainly on their legal knowledge. They were also using different means to cope with the problems, like supporting the parliamentary debates on critical issues or ignoring or postponing the problems, depending on their political experience obtained as members and leaders of former or new political parties. Some have been more skilful in chairing the sessions or maintaining order on the plenary sittings. There was also a difference among them regarding the use of different styles of leadership among the speakers belonging to the centre-left and centre-right coalition parties. While the speakers belonging to the centre-left used more often transaction style favouring the consensual decision making, the speakers of the centre-right were inclined to transformative style striving to achieve changes (Brezovšek 1999, 31).

The influence of the outside factors

There have been a number of outside factors having an impact on the functioning of the National Assembly and influencing the activity and behaviour of the speakers. One such factor was certainly the process of democratization of Slovenia, which was connected, with the process of separation from former Yugoslavia. The speaker of the transitional National Assembly, established after the first democratic elections in 1990, was taking enormous responsibilities for the correct and swift procedures and assuring parliamentary debate where all arguments could be heard. The assembly unanimously proclaimed the independence of Slovenia in June 1991 and in December of the same year passed the first Constitution of Slovenia, based on liberal values demanding modernization of the whole national legislation on specific legislative (policy) areas, including the replacement of huge number of previous socialist legislation. The speaker succeeded also to build consensus for the modernization of the 'old' standing orders and for the adoption of the new law on the elections to National Assembly (Zajc 2009, 34).

The second factor was the process of integration of Slovenia into the EU. The accession was the greatest challenge for the National Assembly after the independence of Slovenia, demanding adaptation in various ways – from institutional, organizational and procedural to the harmonization of the huge parts of legislation with the EU law. The speakers of the National Assembly have assured the debates on all-important documents related to the accession, including the proposals for negotiating positions – a fact which contributed greatly to the smoother harmonization of legislation. In the period from 1997 to 2004, almost 319 EU laws' changing regulations on almost all legislative or policy areas were passed in the National Assembly, usually by urgent procedure. This practice, demanding great efforts of the speakers, proved to be successful since all MPs became much better informed about the EU legal framework and also of the role and practices of the National Assembly after the final entry of the country to the EU. The National Assembly has in 2003 also changed constitution (Art. 3a) by great majority, allowing for the transition of the execution of part of the sovereignty to the institutions of the EU. In 2002, the same National Assembly passed new standing orders, stressing the

Ljubo Germič, dr. Gregor Virant and Janko Veber. The actual speaker dr. Milan Brglez, elected in National Assembly in 2014, is professor of International Law. Most of them belonged to the largest parliamentary group.

principles of rationality and economy of the legislative process and giving more power to the leadership (Zajc 2004, 182).

The most important external factor influencing the behaviour of the speakers was the economic crisis, which started in 2008. It demanded quick adaptation to the new situation by passing a number of bills dealing with national economy and financial system, unemployment, social situation of large groups of citizens etc., intended to alleviate its effects. The crisis demanded great efforts of the speakers to build consensus among party groups and to assure swift passage of the bills. The first bills intended to cope with the economic problems were passed in 2010 and 2011, but rejected on referendums in 2011. After the first early elections in 2011, the new National Assembly passed in 2012 the new law on the reform of pension system and the law on the reform of the labour market both without vote against. After the change of the prime minister by constructive no-confidence vote on 27th of February 2013, the National Assembly (under the leadership of the new speaker) continued with the implementation of financial austerity measures. Complying with the demands of the EU, the deputies changed the constitution (Art. 148) on 24th May 2013, determining that the revenues and expenditures of state budgets have to be balanced medium-term without indebtedness. On the same day, the deputies made another change in the constitution (Art. 90, 97 and 99) in order to diminish the possibilities of calling a referendum on any matter - the right to initiate the referendum has also been limited to citizens. Both changes were passed with more than two-third majority. On the basis of this change, it finally passed the law on fiscal regulation with strict financial rules in 2015 (Zajc 2009, 163).

The economic crisis has created additional problems for efficient leadership, since a number of new surprise parties winning a substantial share of the votes on the first early elections in 2011 and also on the second in 2014 entered the National Assembly. A great number of new deputies (only 40% of the deputies were re-elected in 2011 and 35% in 2014) who had no previous experiences with parliamentary work have drastically diminished the efficiency of decision-making and the quality of legislative output. The lack of experiences among the new deputies and deputy groups has been demonstrated by conflictual behaviour, weak argumentation and low capacity to negotiate. In situations where a great deal of new deputies have not had clear ideas of the complexity of their duties and rights, the speakers have had to make additional efforts to streamline the legislative process, to stress the parliamentary norms of behaviour and adjust the dynamics of legislative process to the capacities of the deputies.

An additional external factor was the migrant crisis in 2015, demanding swift assessment of the unexpected wave of migrants directed through the Balkans and Slovenia to Germany and choosing appropriate measures to assure national security like changing the law on defence (allowing the police forces to join the military on the borders in particular situations for a limited time) by urgent procedure and passing a new law on asylum (the passing of the law, which also allowed the migrants coming from 'safe' countries to ask for asylum was fiercely obstructed by right-wing parties in opposition). In some of these cases the speaker could reach basic consensus of opposition parties, while in some other cases the opposition was bitterly attacking the coalition for accepting harmful solutions.

The processes of democratization and entering the EU, altogether with the economic and migrant crisis including the economic and migrant crisis were

characterised by huge government interventionism. The speakers could not resist the interventionism of coalition governments which insisted on quick passing of the introduced bills, a great number of them even by fast track procedure, which has, once an exception, become almost a rule. Being under constant pressure from the coalition governments, the speakers have almost constantly had great difficulties with planning legislative work, making viable working programs and agenda setting, while they could not avoid overloading the deputies with legislative work.

TABLE 1: LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY – TYPE OF THE BILLS AND PROCEDURES BY MANDATES

Procedures	Mandates						
	1992-1996	1996-2000	2000-2004	2004-2008	2008-2011*	2011-2014*	2014-2015**
Changes of constitution	-	2 (0,6%)	4 (0,8%)	1	-	2 (0,8%)	-
Regular	151 (40,4%)	101 (29,4%)	148 (34,2%)	209 (43,6%)	141 (39,4%)	72 (27,8%)	50 (38,2%)
Fast	181 (48,4%)	172 (50,1%)	184 (42,2%)	107 (22,9%)	83 (23,2%)	85 (32,8%)	51 (38,9%)
Shortened	42 (11,2%)	68 (19,9%)	100 (22,8%)	152 (32,5%)	134 (37,4%)	100 (38,6%)	30 (22,9%)
TOTAL	374	343	436	469	358	259	131

Source: Reports on the work of the National Assembly in particular mandates.

* The fifth and sixth mandate were shortened because of early elections.

** The first part of the seventh mandate (until December 2015).

4 CONCLUSION

Considering that the Slovene National Assembly has done an impressive work as a new parliament (a successor to the transitional Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia) in the last 25 years by passing a huge amount of new modern legislation, it would be difficult not to link it to the legislative leadership. The assembly and its speakers were faced by great policy making challenges in all periods - in the first period of intensive replacement of the former 'socialist' legislation and in the second period marked by the adaptation of the legislation to EU laws, as well as in the third period of economic crisis demanding quick adaptations to changing outside circumstances. While their powers as they were designed in Standing Orders were sufficiently strong to allow for efficient work in all stages of legislative process, the leadership has been also depending on the political skills, personal abilities, working styles and methods of the speakers. Lacking experience, the speakers were fast learners, obtaining knowledge from practice.

Though they could hardly plan the work of the National Assembly and assure the legitimacy of legislative process and quality of the legislative output in the constantly changing situations. In our quick review of the factors influencing the behaviour of the speakers we find similar variables, which were detected in previous studies and on the first place the constant government interventionism. Due to the great pressures from the government to pass great number of proposed bills in a short time, the speakers complied allowing for fast track procedures, contributing to the greater passage rate at the expense of the fully argumentative debate.

The second variable having an impact on the leadership in the period of assembly's first 25 years was the diminishing level of professionalization among the deputies due to the emergence of new surprise parties entering the National Assembly in 2011 and 2014 with a great number of inexperienced deputies. Lower professionalization of the deputies has contributed to the slow adaptation to the parliamentary environment demonstrated by poor argumentation, and increase of the conflict behaviour, demanding frequent interventions of the speakers in the course of legislative process. Both variables

could be connected with the existing distance between the National Assembly and the citizens. The public opinion polls do not confirm the expectation that the support to the National Assembly among the citizens would improve.⁵ Our observations have to be certainly tested by more thorough investigation.

Although the parliamentary leaders like any other political leaders can be considered as a reflection of the time and economic or social circumstances in particular countries, or even in the wider European or global context, we could hardly claim that there is no similarity between the parliamentary leaders in the ECE countries or between them and the speakers of parliaments in the countries with longer parliamentary democracy. Needless to say, this is also a challenge for further investigation and research in the future.

REFERENCES

2007. Standing Orders of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. Ljubljana: Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 92/07.
- Brezovšek, Marjan. 1999. Splošna organizacijska in upravljalna načela parlamentarnega vodenja (General Organizational Principles of Parliamentary Leadership). In *Parlamentarno vodenje (Parliamentary Leadership)*, ed. Zajc, Drago, 28–37. Ljubljana: Državni zbor RS.
- Bergounous, Georges. 1997. *Presiding Officers of Parliamentary Assemblies*. Geneva: Interparliamentary Union.
- Cox, Gary. 2006. The Organization of Democratic Legislatures. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, eds. Weingast, Barry R. and Donald A. Wittman. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clucas, A. Richard. 2001. "Principal-Agent Theory and the Power of State House Speakers". *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26 (2): 319–338.
- Edinger, Lewis. 1975. The Comparative Analysis of Political Leadership. *Comparative Politics* 7(2): 253–269.
- Elgie, Robert. 1995. *Political Leadership in Liberal Democracies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Grad, Franc. 2013. *Parlamentarno pravo (Parliamentary Law)*. Ljubljana: Založba GV.
- Igličar, Albin. 2011. *Zakonodajna dejavnost (Legislative activity)*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Law.
- Kaučič, Igor and Franc Grad. 2003. *Ustavna ureditev Slovenije (Constitutional System of Slovenia)*. Ljubljana: Založba GV.
- Laundy, Philip. 1989. *Parliaments in the Modern World*. Aldeshot: Gover.
- Mozetič, Miroslav. 1999. Funkcije predsednika Državnega zbora (Functions of the Speaker of National Assembly). In *Parlamentarno vodenje (Parliamentary Leadership)*, ed. Zajc, Drago. Ljubljana: Državni zbor RS.
- Olson, David. 1994. *Democratic Legislative Institutions. A Comparative View*. New York: M. E. Sharp Inc.
- Patzelt, Werner. 1999. Parlamentarno vodstvo v Nemčiji (Parliamentary Leadership in Germany). In *Parlamentarno vodenje (Parliamentary Leadership)*, ed. Zajc, Drago. Ljubljana: Državni zbor RS.
- Pogorelec, Janez. 2016. Vloga strokovnih služb vlade in parlamenta v zakonodajni dejavnosti (The Role of the Government Services in Legislative Activity). In *Odprta vprašanja zakonodajne dejavnosti (Open Questions of Legislative Activity)*, eds. Štajnpihler, Tilen, Igličar, Albin, Pavčnik, Marijan, Grad, Franc and Drago Zajc. Ljubljana: SAZU.
- Richman, Jesse. 2010. "The Logic of Legislative Leadership: Preferences, Challenges, and the Speaker's Powers". *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 35(2): 211–233.
- Sinclair, Barbara. 1995. *Legislative Leaders and Lawmaking*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

⁵ International research in the Autumn 2015 showed that only 12% of the interviewed citizens supported the National Assembly, while the average level of support to national parliaments in the EU member states was 27% (Source: Public Opinion in the EU, Standard barometer).

- Squire, Peverill and Keith Hamm. 2005. *Chambers: Congress, State Legislatures and the Future of Legislative Studies*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Squire, Peverill. 2007. "Measuring State Legislative Professionalism: The Squire Index Revisited." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 7(2): 211–227.
- Sturgis, Alice. 1993. *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Zajc, Drago. 2004. Razvoj parlamentarizma – funkcije sodobnih parlamentov (Development of Parliamentarism – Functions of Contemporary Parliaments). Ljubljana: FSS Publishing House.
- Zajc, Drago. 2009. *Sodobni parlamentarizem in process zakonodajnega odločanja (Contemporary Parliamentarism and the Process of Legislative Decision Making)*. Ljubljana: FSS Publishing House.
- Zajc, Drago. 2016. "Role of Opposition in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies – The Case of Slovenia." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 9(1): 19–35.