

ASSISTING ITALIAN MPS IN THE PRE-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY

The role played by Chambers' counsellors and legislative advisors in enhancing Italian MPs' knowledge and skills development: the assistance offered to an autonomous and aware collection of information

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Foreword: the importance of being (self-)informed.

The availability of information on the subject matter of a legislative decision corresponds to an essential necessity of all the democratic legislatures. Recently, the amount of information available has considerably grown and its access has become immediate and relatively low cost (Tanfield, 2000). Thus, usually lawmakers have to face not a lack but an information overload, manageable only after a scrupulous work of selection. It becomes therefore indispensable to develop in the MPs the capacity to distinguish between useful pieces of information to the parliamentary activity and useless or marginal ones. For that purpose, it is necessary to adopt a selection criterion that permits to identify the *good* information (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008), which is the one that permits the legislatures to acquire an objective and in depth knowledge consistent with the pieces of draft legislation at issue.

The main characteristics of the *good* information, necessary to the Parliaments' activity, are: its *autonomy* – or rather, its autonomous origin – in the sense that is not provided by the government (Tanfield, 2000). Parliaments (or even, the individual MPs) have to be able to collect information autonomously, avoiding the “information dependence” from the government (Ciaurro, 1983). This necessity arises also to protect the autonomy of the parliament itself within the political system (Zuddas, 2004) and the genuineness of the political representation. Furthermore, it is guaranteed by the activity of the supporting apparatuses, which operate as a kind of “counter-technocracy” *vis-a-vis* the ministerial bureaucracy, rescuing the parliament from the short-circuit deriving from the use of information that comes from the only executive power (Ungari, 1970). A second characteristic of the *good* information is its *objectivity*. In particular, a piece of information and an authoritative analysis (Dietrich-Schulz, 2008) – which can also be provided by supporting apparatuses through external and accredited research centres – become particularly useful for the parliamentary activity as help to the political agreement on shared facts (Robinson, 2002). Other characteristics of the *good* information are its *immediateness* (or its *prompt availability*) and its *conciseness*: both to be intended to safeguard the highly precious resource which is “time” (Tanfield, 2000). Lastly, the *good* information necessary to parliaments needs to be of *actual relevance*, as a result of an adequate activity of selection. At the same time, it has to be not only *precise*, that is connected to a certain specialization (Robinson, 2002), but also *interdisciplinary*, because of the extreme complexity of the problems that contemporary Legislatures face and the multiple sectors on which the consequences of legislative decisions will reverberate.

1. Research of the *good* information and technical assistance to Italian MPs

The present essay aims at analysing the assistance provided to the members of the Italian Parliament by the administrations of the Houses and by their own staff, with specific reference to the activity related to the pre-legislative scrutiny.

Our work is ideally set along the line given by the essay “Professional development programmes for members of Parliament” by K. Coghill et al.¹, but it proposes to broaden the

¹ In *Parliamentary affairs*, issue n. 1, 2008, pp. 73-98.

analysis including not only the one shot training events, organized at the beginning of the parliamentary term, but also the assistance supplied day by day in the concrete deploying of the legislative activities. This choice is linked to two main reasons: firstly, we would like to faithfully report the Italian parliamentary reality, and secondly add some new elements in order to enlarge the scenery. From the first point of view, it should be noted that the Italian Parliament has usually a rather low turnover of its members between one term and the other, which makes the moments dedicated to the newly-elected scarcely populated². From the second point of view, it is now common sense that size and organisation of personnel supporting the parliamentary activities are indexes of the degree of autonomy and independence of the parliamentary institutions (Blondel, 1973; Mezey, 1979). It seemed therefore interesting to widen the perspective of technical assistance to the MPs including not only parliamentary officers, but also tackling the contribution supplied to the MPs by the administrations of the Houses and that provided by the personnel operating as their advisors or assistants.

Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that some moments of training of general contents dedicated to the newly-elected exist. These events normally happen collectively or individually at the beginning of term, of course on a voluntary basis, and they start even prior to the first meeting after the general elections, in coincidence with the administrative practices of registration of the individual MP. Moments of specific training happen also further on, just after the allocation of the MPs in the various committees or after their appointment to particular duties. In these occasions they are provided with a practical guide (“Guida pratica”) in which all the services that are generally available to the MPs are illustrated. Then, each one of the specific bodies is provided with a comprehensive welcome kit (the so-called “Start of term materials”) of the activities that have been done in the previous term. These moments, though, are essentially of passive learning, realized mainly with the transmission of documental elements, such as dossiers, proceedings of the debates of the past years and illustrations of the main procedural requirements. However, the analysis of the present study will not be focused on the abovementioned means, but it will deal with the specific tools to elaborate data for the draft legislation at issue, while the procedural support is provided by the constant presence of the counsellors during the sessions.

2- THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY ADMINISTRATIONS

2.1. Types of activities (a classification proposal)

Parliamentary administrations contribute to the enhancement of the knowledge capacities of the MPs at three levels: supplying *information* useful to the legislative activity; providing the MPs with the *tools* necessary for them to autonomously make a collection and selection of the information; *helping* the MPs with their autonomous collection and selection of information.

2.1.a The provision of information

² For example, in the current parliamentary term, less than one third of the members of both Houses are newcomers: 244 out of 630 at the Chamber of Deputies and 106 out of 315 at the Senate (see statistics at http://nuovo.camera.it/Camera/view/doc_viewer_full?url=http%3A//nuovo.camera.it/564%3Ftposizione%3DC%26sezione%3D1%26tabella%3DC_1_8&back_to=http%3A//nuovo.camera.it/571 and <http://www.senato.it/leg/16/BGT/Schede/Statistiche/Composizione/SenatoriPrimoIncarico.html>, last accessed 20 August 2011). Moreover, many of them had already had previous experience in Regional councils, in other subnational assemblies or even in the European Parliament, so that part of them cannot be considered as “beginners”.

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Parliamentary officers supply information useful to the practice of the legislative activity principally operating as *intermediaries* between the scientific knowledge and the legislator. In this perspective, the parliamentary officer is engaged both in an extensive activity of collection and selection of the information from external sources and in a related but different activity of verification of the information provided by the government.

The activity of *collection* and *selection* of information aims at gathering data of the economic and social reality and scrutinize the legal framework of the piece of draft legislation at issue. Specifically in relation to the latter, the supporting apparatus produces a documentation that is centred on three essential juridical profiles: the relation with the law in force and its evolution (the so-called *diritto vivente*); the compliance with the jurisprudence of the Constitutional court; the main doctrines seconded by the literature. Moreover, if relevant, a presentation of the European and comparative legislation may be attached.

The information is collected by the Studies Services into dossiers of the bill at issue and is made available before opening the debate. In addition to this, documentation papers (“Quaderni”), notes and researches on specific topics may be also requested by parliamentary groups or by single MPs. Besides, the Library Services may undertake independent researches which lead to additional notes and guides. Further informative tools are: the (daily and periodical) reviews of the papers by the Press Offices, dedicated to the principal arguments of political news events and the databases produced by the parliamentary administration (databases on legislation and on EU projects and documents created by the Observatory on Legislation and the EU Office of the Chamber of Deputies).

The *verification* of the information provided by the government concerns mainly the financial effects of bills at issue and is taken up by the Budget services of both Houses. In particular, it is undeniable how important is an autonomous elaboration carried out by the parliamentary administration in this sector.

Strictly-speaking, parliamentary officers participate in the legislative decisions also as “experts”, being “jurists”, that is having knowledge of parliamentary procedures and processes, of legal drafting, of the law in force (Zuddas, 2004). In this role, they traditionally carry out a consulting activity in relation to three profiles: procedural consulting; compilation and editing consulting; general legal consulting. The procedural consulting is composed of two types of tasks: the traditional assistance during deliberations and the filing of procedural precedents. The compilation and editing consulting consists in the technical drafting in compliance with the rules and the usage of the House. Lastly, the legal consultancy consists in helping the evaluation of the legal coherence of the bill at issue, in view of a correct insertion in the national, European and international legal system.

2.1.b The supply of tools for an autonomous selection of information

The most relevant activity in this field consists in caring and enhancing the bibliographic resources, selected in the libraries of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate (recently unified, both “physically” and in their catalogues). This work involves the *acquisition* of bibliographic material by the Library Services of the two Houses and more recently the acquisition of electronic databases of parliamentary interest. In the Chamber of Deputies, in particular, the Library Service have activated the “Servizio Re@l”, a unified platform which facilitates a remote access to all the databases available through the library.

The second aspect of this work covers various forms of *ordering* collected bibliographic material in order to facilitate the autonomous research of information by the MPs. In particular, besides the elaboration of inventories and indexes, this activity entails in substance the counting of journals, the predisposition of bibliographies of parliamentary interest and the alimentation of databases of legislative activity. Above all, the Bibliography of the Italian

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Parliament and of the Electoral Studies³ deserve a special mention because of its remarkable completeness, including every volume, essay or article about Parliament and electoral studies. The IT facilities have particularly developed in these past years, increasing the capacity of autonomous research of information by the MPs. Both Houses hold appropriate informatics services which not only make available personal computers, but also connect them to the electronic documental resources and develop appropriate “applications” aimed at speeding up the electronic search of contents in the parliament libraries. Last but not least, the internet sites activated by each one of the Houses represent the principal gates of access to the organized resources of documentation on parliamentary activity and digitalized documents; their intranet portals personalize the informatics services and integrate the applications one with the other. Finally, multimedia services and the web-TVs allow the fruition of audio-visual contents either live or on demand.

2.1.c. The assistance to the autonomous collection of information

First of all, the work of assistance to the autonomous collection of information consists in a training generally oriented towards the internal users, both for the bibliographic and documental research in using the electronic resources. In particular, at the Chamber of Deputies, the Library Services and the IT Services have made available on the intranet portal an e-learning platform to attend multimedia courses, one of which shows the use of the intranet itself. At the Senate, the IT Services organize e-learning training activities with specific lesson plans on the whole set of IT facilities granted to the Senators (pc, email, portal, internet services, repositories). The online courses are particularly useful and easily accessible, even though they cannot create that atmosphere offered in the libraries of the Danish Parliament which, ten years ago, organised its informatics training activities at its “internet café”.

Secondly, an accurate assistance is provided to the single MPs upon request, aiming both at bibliographic and documental researches (in forms of guides of consulting, activation of reference services and offering specific bibliographic information on request) and at the use of electronic resources.

Thirdly, at the Chamber of Deputies, further specific capacities of the MPs are enhanced by organising in depth trainings on specific aspects of the legal and economic reality on which they are requested to legislate. For instance, the seminars on the fiscal federalism by the Observatory on Public Finances and the seminars organized by the EU Office on the institutional consequences of the Lisbon Treaty.

Finally, the MPs’ capacity to autonomously compile the normative texts is improved also by the collection and classification of rules and practices of legal drafting, constantly updated by the officers.

2.2. Mixing institutional engagements and informal consultancy in everyday activity

The involvement of supporting apparatuses in the abovementioned tasks is persistent and represents the core of parliamentary bureaucracy, while the organization of training activities (i.e. language courses and other seminars) is occasional and marginal.

As shown, the administration can be activated either autonomously or upon request by parliamentary groups or individual MPs. Typically, supporting apparatuses act autonomously with regard to researches, selection of information, verification of the information coming from the government, care of the bibliographic resources and structured initiatives of training. The activation on request, on the other hand, regards the procedural consulting and the assistance to the collection of specific information.

³ Available also on-line at <http://bpr.camera.it> (last accessed 20 August 2011).

However, many of these activities might be accomplished in both ways: the research of information, for example, is a task that is largely structured but which also frequently involves officers in deepening studies upon specific request by single MPs.

Lastly, it should be underlined that most of the contribution of the administration is quite informal and there is no record of such supporting activities in any official document, since the final responsibility of the decision always lays on the political part.

2.3. Effects: valuable outcomes from *ex ante* and *ex post* analysis

The major contribute to the enhancement of MPs' awareness about the expected and the actual consequences of the legislation consists of organizing and presenting information as a support to the legislative activity. This concerns both the *ex ante* analysis (related to the impact of the draft legislation at issue, evaluating its expected effects) and the *ex post* analysis (that includes the effects concretely produced in reality) and the parliamentary administration appears to be engaged in both parts. In particular, the *ex ante* analysis carried out by the supporting apparatuses mainly consists in checking the administrative feasibility (by the Study Services at the Chamber of Deputies and by the Service for the Quality of Legislation) and the financial sustainability (that is cured by the Budget Services in both the Houses). The *ex post* control on the implementation of the passed legislation is made both on the single act and on the more comprehensive public policy. In particular, at the Senate this activity is carried out by the Service for the Quality of Legislation, while at the Chamber of Deputies this function is articulated in three different structures: the Budget Service examines the implementation of the single act, verifying the financial impact produced; the Parliamentary Oversight Service checks the compliance with the commitments assumed by the government; lastly, the Observatory on Legislation develops comprehensive analysis annually resumed in the "Report on the legislation between State, Region, European Union" which also includes the contributions of highly accredited research centres.

2.4. Flaws and margins for improvement: an uncompleted unification...

The principal flaws in the above-described activities are essentially related to professional skills and structures.

Regarding the professional skills, the main limit lays on the education of the officers, which is undoubtedly of top level, but at the same time traditionally or prevalently formal-legalistic (Raiteri and Rebuffa, 1995). This excessive juridical formalism often turns into a low sensitivity towards economic and social facts and becomes an obstacle in reaching a more clearly managerial mentality in the supporting apparatuses. However, it should be observed that in the last years, Budget Services acquired personnel equipped with a solid preparation in Economics and Finance. Moreover, these subjects, along with History and Politics, become more and more popular in the training courses for parliamentary administration careers (De Micheli and Verzichelli, 2004).

At the structures level, the most important flaw is connected to the risk of useless duplication of tasks: the invitation to merge the Study Services of the two Houses had already been put forward in the Seventies (Manzella, 1977). More recently, it was suggested to join the two Budget Services according to the US model of Congressional Budget Office, since the two Italian structures already adopt integral procedures of examination of the main financial documents and use common methodologies and analysis grids (Gianniti, 2007).

Lastly, as regards the margins for improvement, the aspects on which it is still necessary to enhance the capacities of the MPs seem to be predominantly the legislative techniques, informatics and foreign language speaking (De Micheli and Verzichelli, 2004).

3. THE ROLE PLAYED BY MPs' STAFF

3.1. Who are they? A complex galaxy of advisors and assistants

The personnel available to the Italian MPs for getting assistance to their work is extremely various in terms of origin, specialization and type of duty. In order to set the contemporary scene, at least three main categories can be identified:

1. the personnel working for the parliamentary groups;
2. the staff of each single MP;
3. the personnel assigned to those MPs appointed to particular institutional duties (Presidents of committees, Presidents of parliamentary groups etc).

It is necessary to make a distinction between these three categories, not only under a merely structural profile, but also because the activities done by each type of collaborators are different and contribute in dissimilar (but complementary) ways to the technical assistance also, and above all, for the collection of information useful to the pre-legislative scrutiny. Besides, the distinction is necessary also from an administrative-financial point of view.

The establishment of a parliamentary group (according to Rules 15, paragraph 3 of the Chamber of Deputies and 16 of the Senate) gives indeed the right to the allocation of a series of spaces inside the parliamentary buildings as well as to a budget for the constitution of offices to support the group in its activities. Space and personnel are obviously in proportion to the dimension of each group⁴. As with the collaborators of the groups, the members of the staff of those MPs that have specific institutional duties are subject to the budget of the House, under the "operating expenses" of the body they refer to. Differently, the collaborators of the single MPs have a direct employment relationship with them, and their remuneration is not present in the budgets of the Houses. This is also due to the fact that the expenses for the secretariat are included in a lump sum monthly assigned, without report obligation, to the individual MP⁵. This system has often been at the centre of journalistic inquiries and is frequently claimed to be not transparent⁶.

3.2. What staffs do. Not only a follow-up of clerks' work...

The kind of assistance supplied to MPs by these various collaborators is first of all of residual nature if compared to the institutional work done by the administrations of the Houses. In some way, they might thus be considered as 'accessories' to the parliamentary work. And yet, their role is absolutely crucial for the good functioning of the parliament.

In particular, the work done by the offices of the parliamentary groups is indispensable for the coordination of the activities of the assemblies that – in numbers, taken the amount of almost 1,000 MPs – are among the most populated in the world; in the current parliamentary term, for example, the main parliamentary group present in the Chamber of Deputies counts over 220 MPs. Besides, and very significantly, the offices of the parliamentary groups play a

⁴ In order to have an idea of the amount of expenses of the apparatuses of the parliamentary groups, it is enough to say that in the budget of 2010, recently approved by the Chamber of Deputies, the expenses for the parliamentary groups reached over 35 million euros (http://bilancio2010.camera.it/bilancio_bilanciopluriennale/322/schedabase.asp, last accessed 20 August 2011). The expenses are even higher for the Senate (where there are half the number of MPs compared to the Chamber of Deputies, but the same number of groups): 38 million euros (<http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/505659.pdf>, last accessed 20 August 2011).

⁵ The total amount of the expenses for staff for individual MPs, always according to the budget 2010, was over 31 million euros for the Chamber of Deputies and 13 million for the Senate.

⁶ A useful reference for the non-Italian reader is certainly that to the enquiries of two reporters of the 'Corriere della Sera', G.A. Stella e S. Rizzo, developed in particular starting from their best seller "*La casta. Così i politici italiani sono diventati intoccabili*" (trad. "The caste. How Italian politicians became untouchable"), published for Rizzoli in 2007.

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highly important role of ‘pivot’ between the parliamentary administrations and the single MPs: especially in larger groups, their respective offices are often organized in a specular way compared to the organization of the Houses (and of their supporting services), so as to follow the works of each committee, by getting organized in thematic areas and using the services of experts in the field. Usually, in such groups may also participate experts from ministerial administrations (Marvasi, 1998).

The apparatuses of the parliamentary groups are of fundamental importance also for the coordination of the procedural activities and initiatives that are not made available to the single MPs, but yet require their collective action. For example, in most cases, it is the offices of the groups that receive the petitions (and, in reality, that materially prepare) the preliminary questions issued according to the Rule 40, paragraph 1, second sentence of the Chamber of Deputies (in order to ask to the assembly not to debate on a subject); similarly, in relation to the parliamentary oversight, it is always the offices of the groups that prepare the ‘urgent’ interpellations, disciplined by Rule 138-bis at the Chamber and Rule 156-bis at the Senate, which require a collective action of thirty or more MPs.

As for the work related to the pre-legislative scrutiny, the personnel of the parliamentary groups is closely connected with collaborators of the individual MPs, often creating peer groups on specific bills, in order to prepare notes, speeches and amendments for their activity both in the committees and in the plenary sessions.

If one wants to draw a line to distinguish the work done on the same bill by the staffs and by the administration of the Houses, it can be said that the preparatory activity of the latter is *general* (in the sense of covering, at least in the Chamber of Deputies, all the pieces of draft legislation under discussion), *pre-emptive* (in the sense that, often, the discussion in the committee does not start in absence of the dossier prepared by the offices) and *complete* as for the contents of the bill, but *neutral* (that is, it integrally deals with the aspects contained in the single act, however without providing solutions alternative to those included in the bill). On the contrary, the common contribution of the officials of the parliamentary groups and of the staff of the MPs is *potential, subsequent, tailored* and *propositional*, in the sense that (especially for those working in the opposition) they get activated only once the bill has already been put in the agenda of the committee and their involvement is concentrated on specific aspects of the measures of interest for the political actor, eventually omitting other parts of it. Lastly, the activity of these advisors is oriented not really to illustrate the content of the issued piece of legislation but rather to suggest different solutions and complementary policies, also starting from the illustrative notes prepared by the parliamentary administrations. In other words, the supporting personnel of the MPs does not limit its work to the pre-legislative scrutiny strictly intended, but it introduces also elements of impact assessment.

Finally, the activity of the collaborators of those MPs appointed to specific institutional duties like, for example, Presidents of committees, is quite different from what has just been illustrated for the employers of the groups and for the staff of ‘normal’ MPs. In these cases, apart from the normal tasks of secretariat and of ceremonial services, typical of the offices of direct collaboration, those collaborators are working side by side with the parliamentary administration and there are quite frequent meetings for the programming of the activities of the body in which both officials and advisors participate.

3.3. The case of the Presidency of the Committee on Legislation: a “bridge” towards the Academia?

An extremely interesting case on the role of the personnel of direct collaboration is, at least in the current parliamentary term, the staff of the President of the Committee on Legislation in

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the Chamber of Deputies. As for other MPs appointed to a particular institutional role, the Houses recognize in the President of the Committee on Legislation the right to have a personal group of collaborators, in order to assist him or her with the works of the committee. However, because of the specific institutional mission of this body, even the role of the members of the staff of its President is quite different from other cases above discussed.

The Committee on Legislation has an entirely peculiar role, as it has the duty to give opinions on some specific bills with regard to the aspects of the quality of legislation, both in reference to the formal legal drafting and its coherence with the general legal system. In particular, the committee intervenes on those pieces of draft legislation for which the normative competences of the parliament are intertwined with those of the government, such as those of the conversion of decree-laws or those connected to the delegated legislation. Besides, the technical and not political nature of the body is underlined by its non-partisan composition: it is indeed composed of ten MPs, five of which coming from the majority and five coming from the opposition, and the Presidency rotates every ten months in such a way that one representative of the majority alternates with one of the opposition (Murgia and Rizzoni, 2002). As a consequence, the mission of the staff of the President of the Committee cannot be to assist in the formation of policies but to give a more technical contribution, coherent with the mission of the body.

This technical contribution has recently been used in two different ways: on the one hand, through researches and in depth studies on thematic fields of interest at the committee and, on the other hand, through the organization of a series of seminars on further topics that are significant for its institutional mission, involving numerous Italian universities.

The researches focused on topics central to the activities of the committee, related to the quality of legislation and to the system of the sources of law: an integral mapping of the decree-laws in the 15th and 16th terms⁷; a recognition of the tools of implementation of the EU directives; studies on the ordinances adopted by the Civil Protection Department⁸ and on the delegated legislation⁹. All these reports have been elaborated by the staff of the President under his supervision, presented to the committee for a discussion between its members and, finally, sent to the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies in order to stimulate further reflections or solutions to be adopted. In some cases there have been organized public seminars at the Chamber of Deputies, so as to present the findings of these researches.

Furthermore, the promotion of seminars in Italian Universities on similar topics is due to the MP Zaccaria, who chaired the committee from 2010 to 2011. The intention was to schedule a series of “counter-hearings”: instead of inviting studious speakers and experts in the legislation to the parliament, it has been tried to act in an inverted way, proposing external initiatives and bringing the discussion to those centres whose University research urges on those matters that the committee deals with on a daily basis (Zaccaria, 2011).

In these activities the staff of the President of the committee has essentially researched and elaborated autonomously the data available in a scattered form, proposing a basis of reflection that has had an important role of sensitization on themes relative to the quality of

⁷ The research on the decree-laws was then presented in a public seminar, is available at http://www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/camera/file/documenti/Tendenze_e_problemi_della_decretazione_d urgenza.pdf (last accessed 20 August 2011).

⁸ The two researches on the implementation of the directives and on the ordinances have been published as an attachment of the proceedings of the committee meeting on 23 November 2010 (http://nuovo.camera.it/453?shadow_organoparlamentare=1490&bollet=dati/leg16/lavori/bollet/201011/1123/html/48, last accessed 20 August 2011).

⁹ This last research, compiled by the MP Duilio (with the assistance of his staff) was announced by the President of the Committee on Legislation during the session of 27 July 2011.

legislation, which is important not only on a parliamentary level, but also in the more general public sphere.

CONCLUSIONS. EFFECTS ON THE ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENT AND ON REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS

The differences between parliamentary administrations and offices in direct collaboration with them mainly regard, as has been seen, the role and the functions they respectively hold. The distinctive character of the administrations is traditionally related to their condition of impartiality, descending from the function of procedural consulting, which sees in the official the warrantor of the rules of the “parliamentary game” and has found an effective representation in the image, several times presented in the literature, of the supporting apparatus as the “Bench” in the parliament (Ciaurro, 1982). The role of the personal assistants and of the advisors, however, must not be interpreted as necessarily opposed to that of clerks. On the contrary, together with the normal role of support and consulting, the staff of the MPs often assign an important function of “pivot” between the parliamentarians and the administrative structures themselves, mediating between the requests and instances of the ones and the bureaucratic rigidity of the others.

Moreover, going beyond the procedural consulting and looking in particular at the activities that are relative to the pre-legislative scrutiny, the traditional distinction between an impartial supporting apparatus and the partisan nature of the staffs should be integrated with the consideration that the two forms of technical assistance often operate in a quite coordinated and complementary way. In fact, the common work of selection of the information represents, in any case, a form of manipulation, potentially able to influence the contents of the legislation and, in conclusion, the genuineness of the political representation. Lastly, it should not be forgotten that, the technical estimations operated by the parliamentary administrations are inevitably implicated profiles of political nature. These profiles are evident especially in the activities of substantial drafting, evaluation of the necessity of legislating, normative projecting, analysis of feasibility and operational control (Zuddas, 2004).

Therefore, the assistance to the MPs supplied by the two categories must probably be intended in a unitary mode, neither ignoring their reciprocal differences, nor emphasizing them.

In conclusion, it has to be admitted that, if adequately coordinated, without duplications and reciprocal resistances to the interaction, the contribution of the parliamentary administrations and of the support personnel can be of great help to the construction of a aware and pondered legislative decision that is also stable in time and politically “strong”. Both components of the process of assistance to the political decisions can contribute to the reinforcement of the informative base that is free of the influences coming from the government, reinforcing the role of the parliament as an institution and a proper decision maker, and not just a site of mere ratification of decisions already taken elsewhere.

However, the consequences of the current economic crisis should not be underestimated also in this sector, because the public bodies will have to face them in the next future. If in the last years there has been a progressive increase of the number and the functions of supporting personnel, the current moment of containment of public expenses and of cuts on the costs of the politics could drastically lead to an inversion of this trend. A similar reorganization is certainly desirable, first of all because it is doubtless that this is a sector in which the transparency must be at maximum levels and the practices of the past years have often resulted to be rather different. Moreover, because at similar circumstances politics must carry

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out a didactic function, as firstly underlined by Bagehot himself. The challenge created by this process of transformation will be to maintain the best practices of the past, without decreasing the whole quality of assistance offered to the informative support of the legislative decision.

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This essay is the results of a common work of the two authors. Nevertheless, Paolo Zuddas cured the foreword and the paragraph 2, while Giovanni Piccirilli cured paragraphs 1 and 3.