



Still elected dictators? A study of Executive accountability to the Legislature in multi-party democracies across time: Italy (1947-2006), Argentina (1982-2006) and Romania (1992-2007)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the capacity of the Argentine, Italian and Romanian Legislatures to hold the Executive branch of government accountable for its policy initiatives issued by emergency Executive decree, rather than by normal procedure legislative initiatives (NPL).

The major questions the thesis attempts to answer are: what makes Executives prefer to promote their policy views extensively by Decree, rather than NPL, even when the situation is not of emergency and necessity? What explains the capacity of Legislatures to hold the Executive to account by amending or rejecting the Executive decrees that infringe their primary legislative function?

I argue that the issuing of Executive decrees is a rational policy promotion strategy when the Executive faces bargaining problems in the Legislature, while the level of Executive accountability to the Legislature in terms of amending and rejecting Decrees is determined by the constitutional definition of these acts in favour of either one of the two branches of government. Furthermore, when the Decree is constitutionally defined to enable to the Executive to prevail over the Legislature, the former will issue them excessively, namely at a rate that is higher than that required by the bargaining problems that it confronts in the Legislature.

The thesis offers an alternative explanation to the assumption that new democracies are ruled by Executive decree as an outcome of a specific “dictatorial” culture which perpetuates after the collapse of their authoritarian regime. The disciplined comparison of three study cases with three different political systems and radically different experiences with democracy explores the role of institutional and partisan structures in generating a peculiar style of governance and the Legislatures’ capacity to keep it under control.

The thesis provides a novel methodological model for understanding the governance through emergency Executive decrees across political systems (presidential, parliamentary and semi-parliamentary), while offering a thorough exploration of the theoretical relevance of this particular style of governance from the perspective of quality of democracy.



Jury: Wolfgang C. Müller (Univ. Mannheim), László Bruszt (EUI) (Supervisor), Peter Mair (EUI), Leonardo Morlino (SUM, Firenze) (in absentia)

Laurentiu Stinga is of Romanian citizenship. Prior to his PhD studies at the EUI he has completed the Masters programmes in Political Science at McGill University in Montreal, Canada and University of Bucharest, in Romania. He has worked as a Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant at McGill University, Student Research Fellow at the Centre for Developing Areas Studies at McGill University. While a researcher at the EUI, Laurentiu has undertaken extensive field research at the Congress of Argentina, the Parliaments of Italy and Romania, focusing on the legislative production of the Executive branch of government and its treatment in Legislature.

Laurentiu's research bridges the theories of democracy, historical institutionalism, party system literature and the literature focusing on veto players in the policy making process, exploring the institutional and partisan determinants of democratic quality. He has also worked on the theoretical and methodological aspects of comparative politics, particularly disciplined conceptualization of political accountability, models of comparison across political systems, operationalization of empirical information and its relevance for theoretical claims.

Laurentiu also has professional experience working as an adviser to the President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, as well as a consultant for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and different private consultancy companies from Spain, UK and Austria.