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Parliamentary Questions

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1 Foreword

One of the basic functions of parliament in the countries with parliamentary democracy is parliamentary oversight of the executive, while one of the most common oversight mechanisms is Parliamentary question. In a significant number of parliaments – particularly within parliamentary systems – MPs are entitled to regularly put questions to members of government, i.e. representatives of the executive at plenary sittings, as well as to obtain timely and comprehensive responses. As stated in the European Parliament survey conducted in 2010, parliamentary questions “may be by written procedure with the written answer to be published by a specific deadline”. Generally, as the survey additionally states “parliaments also have a public Question Time on the floor of the house, a tradition that originates in the British parliamentary system but is unusual in congresses in presidential systems”.¹

The same document states that each MP is entitled to put questions, while the initial question is usually asked a few days in advance, which enables a minister, i.e. representative of the executive to become acquainted with the subject matter. In addition, 2000 OECD document states that “ministers are notified of the questions in advance (e.g. Austria, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK)”². However, as stated in both documents, a parliamentary question also involves the possibility for an immediate additional question from the same MP, and in some cases questions from other members, contributing to the “element of surprise”, which explains the popularity of this kind of activities of Parliament to the wider public.

Frequency of question time varies from country to country. It may be once a month, as is the case with Slovenia; at the beginning of each sitting, as in Austria; or once a day, like in Canada and Australia. It is very common for MPs to put questions once a week, during the parliamentary session, as is the case with Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Sweden. Time for putting parliamentary questions is usually limited by rules of procedure (for instance half a minute in Canada or a minute in Finland), in order to make sure that the questions are concise and specific, and to avoid situations where parliamentary questions turn into a debate. If questions are submitted in a written form, and they have not been put within the time period envisaged for putting parliamentary questions, ministers are obliged to respond to those questions in writing and in due time.

The document provides a comparative overview of parliamentary questions institute as regulated in parliaments in the region, in a few EU member states, as well as in the European Parliament, which was prepared by the Section of Research, Analysis, Library and Documentation. A comparison was made in regards to the legal framework regulating this issue, involving the following ten countries: Serbia (*Narodna skupština*), Croatia (*Hrvatski sabor*), Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Predstavnički dom*), Macedonia

¹ European Parliament, Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy, 2010, Parliamentary Rules of Procedure – An Overview, p. 42

² OECD, OECD Report on Parliamentary Procedures and Relations, PUMA/LEG (2000)/2/REV1, p. 16

(*Собрание*), Slovenia (*Državni zbor*), Germany (*Bundestag*), Hungary (*Az Országház*), Czech Republic (*Predstavnički dom*), Estonia (*Riigikogu*), Finland (*Eduskunta*), as well as the European parliament.

For the purpose of the research, the following issues were compared:

- Legal basis and the right of putting parliamentary questions
- Types of parliamentary questions and number of parliamentary questions per MP
- Frequency of putting oral parliamentary questions
- The obligation of previously submitting questions/requests/notices for putting parliamentary questions
- Order in which questions are put

With the aim of gathering information on parliamentary questions involving the ten aforementioned countries and the European Parliament, the methods of content analysis and comparative analysis were used. In accordance with the nature of the collected data, the research was divided into two parts. The first part identifies the main similarities and differences related to the parliamentary questions procedure, which led to the main research findings. The second part contains a detailed overview of procedures related to parliamentary questions, as defined in constitutions and rules of procedure of the relevant countries.

The complete document in Montenegrin language can be found at:

<http://www.skupstina.me/images/dokumenti/biblioteka-i-istrazivanje/3%20%202011.pdf>